

OLIVIA MARY

OL

I

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SUSANNAH AND ONE OTHER
THE BLUNDER OF AN INNOCENT
CAPRICIOUS CAROLINE
LOVE AND LOUISA
PETER, A PARASITE
THE BROWN EYES OF MARY
I KNOW A MAIDEN
THE INVINCIBLE AMELIA
THE GLAD HEART

OLIVIA MARY

BY

E. MARIA ALBANESI

TORONTO
BELL & COCKBURN

PR6001

L3

045

1912

P***

First Published in 1912

EMIL]

"Th
his frier
he kno
want n
this?"

1997

TO
EMILE AND ANGELA MOND

“The most I can do for my friend is simply to be his friend. I have no wealth to bestow on him. If he knows that I am happy in loving him he will want no other reward. Is not friendship divine in this?”

THOREAU

C

MRS. A
the
general sitt
named, the
farmhouse ;
the right of
flanked it on
been, Garth
its own ; it
standing on
number of fir
some people
years or so ;
this might ha
uneven in pla
by big strong
it had made
romance whic
kept youth i
brown hair w
grey.

OLIVIA MARY

CHAPTER I

MRS. AMBROSE stood at one of the windows of the long low-roofed apartment that was the general sitting-room in Garth Court. Ambitiously named, the place was in reality nothing more than a farmhouse; a large stockyard, now empty, lay just to the right of the house and the cowsheds and stables flanked it on the left. Still, farmers' habitation as it had been, Garth Court was not without a certain charm of its own; it was solidly built and well proportioned, standing on a slight eminence and surrounded by a number of fine trees. The house was old, according to some people in the village it dated back three hundred years or so; and there were various signs to prove that this might have been the case, for the floors were very uneven in places and most of the roofs were supported by big strong beams. Helen Ambrose loved this house: it had made an instantaneous appeal to the sense of romance which with other fresh and delightful qualities kept youth in her so vividly, although her plentiful brown hair was beginning to be softly touched with grey.

This afternoon, however, romance and dreams in which she frequently indulged were not with her.

She was thinking of what her last guest had said to her just before she took her departure.

Through the mist a faint outline of this guest's spare figure could be seen marching vigorously away in the distance. It was late October and the trees had lost all their leaves. The road to the village beyond the garden could be seen now from the house.

There had been a little gathering that afternoon in this shabby yet delightful old room. A few of the more important people scattered about the neighbourhood had responded to Mrs. Ambrose's suggestion to meet at her house and discuss the usual parochial duties which they shared among them. A pile of rough red flannel cut into various shapes stood on the table, a tangible remembrance of the meeting.

The hostess had cheerfully promised to sew the dismembered portions of this pile of red flannel into garments during the next week. She was always prodigal of her promises to help, though in reality she detested sewing in general and parochial clothing in particular: moreover, as it was she had more than enough employment for her needle in her homework.

Close beside the armchair where she usually sat was a big workbasket simply crammed with socks and other things all with holes in them.

The woman who had lingered for a chat after the others had gone was one of her best friends, although Agnes Dalywood was not popular with the other members of the family at Garth Court. She was too frank and independent to please everybody.

Dick Ambrose got up and we came in.

"I shall tell he said on hideous," the tell me she's got a good heart that look six

It would be considerable that the lady eyes had as li

"It is done it," Miss Daly her home-ma departure.

He's the son Nigel Ambrose certainly we duty, my de about Dick.

"If you Mrs. Ambrose she was no she sighed s

"Dick's nothing bu looking and himself; b

Miss D.

"I am

Dick Ambrose the elder of the step-children always got up and went out of the room when Miss Dalywood came in.

"I shall throw something at her, I know I shall," he said on one occasion. "She is so appallingly hideous," then very quickly he had added, "no, don't tell me she's got a good heart: what's the use of having a good heart if you've got projecting teeth and eyes that look six ways at once."

It would probably have occasioned young Ambrose a considerable amount of surprise if he could have known that the lady with the projecting teeth and disintegrated eyes had as little liking for him as he had for her.

"It is downright abominable! That is what I call it," Miss Dalywood had said, as she had slipped into her home-made tweed coat and had prepared for her departure. "Why don't you make him do *something*? He's the son of a dreamer that's true enough; but Nigel Ambrose hasn't always been a dreamer! He certainly works hard enough now. It is your positive duty, my dear woman, to let his father know the truth about Dick."

"If you only knew all the things I have to do," Mrs. Ambrose had answered plaintively; but really she was not very sorry for herself, and always when she sighed she smiled.

"Dick's all right," she had continued: "he's just nothing but a boy and you know he's awfully good-looking and that makes him perhaps a little bit above himself; but honestly he's all right, Agnes."

Miss Dalywood had grunted and then she had said: "I am disappointed in you."

"Oh! dear! Why? I'm sorry!"

There was something more than a suspicion of an American accent when Helen Ambrose spoke, but this only made her warm voice a little more fascinating.

"I do hate to have you disappointed with me," she said.

"Well, the first time I saw you I took to you. Of course I shall always care for you, but I am disappointed in you all the same. I thought you were going to do such marvels with these children. You seemed to be the very right person to deal with them."

"I get along pretty well, Agnes dear."

"I wish *I* had the handling of them," the other woman had observed a trifle grimly, and then she had given a jerk of her head in the direction of the red flannel. "Who's going to help you with all that—Silvia?"

"I don't want any help. I'll get through it right enough."

Miss Dalywood had sniffed.

"You had better let me take some of it away. Give me a piece of newspaper."

"Really and truly, Agnes," Mrs. Ambrose had protested with some energy, "that won't worry me one little bit."

"I wish something would worry you! Your one great fault is that you won't concentrate. Now have you ever sat down and just looked things straight in the face?"

"No," the other woman had confessed; and then she had laughed. "It wouldn't be much use, because I am horribly short-sighted."

"Well,"
given a peck
tucked the
you won't sa
lad, I shall!"

"Oh! A
now hurried
Nigel, he has
none of us
unhappy I sh
—anything.
pleaded. "I

to manage I
me! He is
confess to y
guess I alwa
with girls."

"You are
said with a s
to do thing
Why didn't
abruptly.

"She's be
yesterday and
early as they
have been ex.

"She will
Miss Dalywo
slapped back

"Well, if
mighty dull
her age, I wa

"Well," Miss Dalywood had remarked as she had given a peck at Mrs. Ambrose's smooth cheek and had tucked the large newspaper parcel under one arm, "if *you* won't say something to your husband about that lad, I shall!"

"Oh! Agnes dear!" The other woman spoke now hurriedly and appealingly: "You mustn't upset Nigel, he has some *very* important work on hand. We none of us disturb him. You don't know how unhappy I shall be if you talk to him about Dick—or—anything. Just give me a little while longer," she pleaded. "You know I kind of believe I shall be able to manage Dick myself. I don't think he really hates me! He isn't as difficult as Silvia. I'm ready to confess to you that Silvia *is* a bit trying; but then I guess I always did get on far better with boys than with girls."

"You are much too easy-going," Miss Dalywood had said with a sniff, "and you are always in such a hurry to do things for other people. Where is Silvia? Why didn't she show up to-day?" she demanded abruptly.

"She's been staying with Isabel Matheson: she went yesterday and stayed the night. They had to get up so early as they were to go cub-hunting this morning. I have been expecting Silvia home for the last hour."

"She will probably stay another night," had been Miss Dalywood's reply and then Mrs. Ambrose had slapped back:

"Well, if she does, can you blame her? This is a mighty dull home, you know. Goodness! when I was her age, I wanted to do just all the things she would

like to do now! It's a bit stale, Agnes, setting a girl like Silvia down to talk over parish things."

"Well, good-night," the practical friend had said, conscious of the futility of further protest. "I'll send you back this lot by the end of the week."

"You are a dear! Come in again soon, Agnes; you do me good. I want whipping up every now and then."

Indeed, she felt a little lonely despite the fact that her friend's plain words rankled a little this afternoon. Helen loved the truth as a rule, but she shrank from it in this particular instance. She wanted to believe that she was not a failure, but facts were against her. Because she had planned to do such wonderful things when first she had come to Garth Court. It had all seemed so easy; she was just bubbling over with a natural spring of warm-hearted and loving sympathy. Circumstances had shut her away from intimate home life, had denied her contact with young growing creatures; she had always wanted a home of her own, and had dreamed dreams of what she would have done with boys and girls had they been given into her care; then, when these things had actually come to pass, the little joys she had pictured to herself faded out one by one, and all those happy, gracious influences which she had promised herself should blossom and bear fruit (such wonderful fruit!) had withered and died.

She left the window with a sigh, and went back to the armchair and to the mending.

"What does Agnes want, anyway?" she asked herself a little impatiently as she threaded her needle and ran her hand into a sock that showed a gaping

hole; "sure thing is! doing this moment an Miss Ambro

"No, ma

"I thou entrance?"

"I feel

"She's peer out in

"I expect," said t

"Oh, v Ambrose?

you, Bessie

"Oh, y know I we

made him

The m work drop

chair. St have to r

expectatio another pe

away, she

First

Was it no made a sp

her courag of a girl

coldly cr

hole; "surely to goodness this is concentration if anything is! Some folk would stare, I think, to see *me* doing this sort of thing." The maid came in at that moment and put some coal on the fire. "I suppose Miss Ambrose isn't in, Bessie?" Mrs. Ambrose asked.

"No, ma'am."

"I thought maybe she had come in through the side entrance?"

"I feel sure she hasn't come in yet, ma'am."

"She's very late," said Mrs. Ambrose, turning to peer out into the dusk a little anxiously.

"I expect Lady Matheson will send her back in the car," said the maid.

"Oh, very likely! Have you been in to Mr. Ambrose? You put the coal on very quietly, didn't you, Bessie?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, as quiet as quiet! He didn't know I went in. He hadn't touched his tea, so cook made him some more."

The maid went away, and Helen Ambrose let her work drop in her lap and sat back in the comfortable chair. She was still worried. It was bad enough to have to realize herself that she had not fulfilled all expectations, it was worse to have this told her by another person. She must start changing things right away, she saw that clearly enough now.

First of all she must get a good grip of herself. Was it not too absurd that she, who had fought and made a splendid way for herself in the past, should let her courage be frozen and her will be stultified by a slip of a girl who possessed no other weapons but a pair of coldly critical eyes and a sneering tongue? Surely,

surely she ought to be more than a match for Silvia ; she ought to be too sensible to let the anger and insolent hate of a child throw definite shadows on her life and destroy all her illusions ?

Mrs. Ambrose flung the socks into the work-basket with something like a passionate gesture. Of course she was weak ; but harshness, ugly words, quarrels were things abhorrent to her. And then she was very proud of Silvia Ambrose.

The girl's delicate, sensitive beauty drew her against herself. Besides this there was in the woman a big measure of justice. She was falling into the trick of putting herself in Silvia's place and seeing things through Silvia's eyes ; and she assured herself quite honestly, that if she were Silvia she would act, and feel, and think, just as Silvia did : in truth she honoured the girl for her unchanging loyalty to her dead mother, even though that loyalty could carry so much hurt to herself.

Silvia Ambrose regarded her stepmother as an intruder, even as a usurper. Her feeling against Helen was something more subtle than mere hatred. It was based on the resentment of a supremely arrogant mind, a mind steeped in the conviction of social superiority. She had it in her to make her stepmother wince and suffer in a way that was almost akin to physical pain. Silvia would not even play at good-fellowship with her father's wife of late.

Mrs. Ambrose had grown to accept this as a fact, and one which probably would never be altered. Tonight, however, she recognized definitely that she was doing very wrong in allowing this state of affairs to last.

For, after all take care of many ways down between. Recently she about Silvia when that li joys and the place, Silvia embittered, in nothing.

Helen h spirit, such most unlikel to her yo Another wo conquering strong and of justice w Nigel Ambr at Silvia by night, when straightforw wholly with in some unf to come to with, there

"By rigl to get away she needs. what I use different all

For, after all, Nigel Ambrose had married her chiefly to take care of his children; and there were so many, many ways in which, if this barrier could be beaten down between them, she could work for his girl's good. Recently she had been more than usually troubled about Silvia; when life was just opening out to her, when that life should have been so full of unconscious joys and the world should have been such a beautiful place, Silvia Ambrose went through her days a morose, embittered, bad-tempered young creature, seeing good in nothing.

Helen herself was blessed with such buoyancy of spirit, such a ready trick of finding happiness in the most unlikely places, that this sullen denial of the girl to her youth's natural inheritance saddened her. Another woman might have set herself the task of conquering the rebellious antagonism to herself by strong and violent measures; but apart from that sense of justice which had such a wonderful significance to Nigel Ambrose's second wife, she had a longing to get at Silvia by other and simpler means. Not even tonight, when she sat trying to forget Miss Dalywood's straightforward remarks, would she let herself part wholly with the hope that one of these days, somehow, in some unforeseen way, she and this girl would be able to come to a sympathetic understanding. To start with, there were many excuses for Sylvia.

"By rights," Mrs. Ambrose mused now, "she ought to get away from here; there's such a load of things she needs. Oh my! if I only had just a little bit of what I used to get in old times, things might be different all round!"

She cuddled back cosily into the chair, and then she started out of it. The sound of a child crying came to her from the distance.

Helen Ambrose ran out of the room and up the stairs two at a time.

"I'm coming," she said. "I'm coming, Spudgins. I'm just here, darling."

She was a good bit out of breath as she reached the top landing and turned into the nursery.

A little boy of about five or six was lying on the floor, kicking his heels and howling vigorously.

"Mr. Dick done that. He boxed the poor child's ears," said the maid. She was only a girl, and she looked hot and angry. "I don't think as Mr. Dick ought to do that, ma'am, and I told him so."

Mrs. Ambrose sat on the floor, picked up the little struggling, howling figure and held him on her lap.

"Poor little ears," she said and she kissed them. "Poor little Spudgins, dear little Spudgins. Helen has come to take care of you. Naughty Dick! I'll punish him!" and then she changed her tone. "Dear, dear darling, *don't* make so much noise! You'll frighten father, he'll think all sorts of dreadful things have happened, and he's got *such* a bad headache to-day. We mustn't upset father must we?"

"I wonder how Mr. Dick 'u'd like to have *his* ears boxed?" the nurse talked on angrily. "Master Spencer he did not but just run up and showed 'is brother 'is boat as he'd got standing in the basin; and what for should he hit the child I should like to know?"

"Show *me* the boat," said Mrs. Ambrose.

It was a tempting offer. With snuffles and the tears

still trembli
up and wen
been allowe
to his heart'

"Dick s
and I didn't
pronounced
devil!" he :

The nur:

"Well,
does Master

Just for
then she sn

"Not y
that yet, h
temper."

"Well, !

"Let's
and down
screams of

Then Sp
found and l
her tea.

Mrs. A
kissed the :

"Say y
they went (

Spudgi
calculating

"Have
this was pr
not say wh

still trembling on his long thick eyelashes Spudgins got up and went to the corner of the room where he had been allowed to splash real waves in a diminutive basin to his heart's content.

"Dick said I wetted him, wetted him froo and froo ; and I didn't—I didn't !" then Spudgins stood erect and pronounced judgment on his absent brother. "He's a devil !" he said with conviction.

The nurse uttered a horrified exclamation.

"Well, I never did," she declared, "whereforever does Master Spencer learn such words."

Just for a moment Helen Ambrose looked disturbed, then she smiled :

"Not yet, Spudgins," she said. "He isn't *quite* that yet, he is only a lazy boy with a bone in his temper."

"Well, I call him a devil beast !" said the child.

"Let's go to America," proposed the stepmother, and down she went on her knees, and splashes and screams of delight echoed through the long room.

Then Spudgins was dried, and a clean overall was found and he was carried downstairs whilst nurse had her tea.

Mrs. Ambrose cuddled the little sturdy body and kissed the soft plump cheek.

"Say you love me," she murmured to the child as they went carefully down the stairs.

Spudgins was a cherub to look at, but he had a calculating disposition.

"Have you got a chocolate ?" he asked ; and when this was promised he demanded two : even then he did not say what was expected of him ; but he generously

bestowed a kiss on the edge of his stepmother's ear with which she had to be satisfied.

When they got down to the sitting-room a long-legged youth was crouched in the armchair with one foot on the mantelpiece.

"Hullo! Here's the cry-baby," he remarked, and merely to avert a scene Mrs. Ambrose spoke sharply to him.

"Now, Dick," she said, "I won't have it. I just won't! You leave Spudgins alone. I think you might know better than to tease the child . . . and hurt him."

"He's my brother," said Dick Ambrose lazily; "and if no one else will smack him when he wants smacking I mean to do it!" But Spudgins had trotted off to the other end of the room, the proud possessor of several chocolate drops and a box of counters with which he would play happily till bed-time, so war was averted for the moment.

"Have I got your chair?" asked the youth languidly after a little pause.

The words were just on Mrs. Ambrose's lips to suggest that he need not move when Miss Dalywood's words flashed to her and she answered "Yes"; and she added "I guess you know that's always where I sit."

Young Ambrose got up with a great effort. He was astonishingly good-looking, a fact which not even his slovenly dress or his roughened hair could hide.

He took a cigarette case out of his pocket, struck a match on his boot and lit a cigarette and then in the same lazy way he paused:

"You don't mind, do you?"

It was on the tip of Helen's tongue to say "No, give

me one"; but she
remarked a little
smoke in her

But Dick
cigarette bet
coat-tails, clo
warmth of th

"Silvia n

"No: I'r
promised she

Dick yav
time and y
hurry."

"It seem
never have a

"Oh! th
stepson, "fu
point?"

"Well, y
of you do n
guess that i
folk's idea!"

Young A

"What's
about the or
temper as a

The wor
of pleasure.
feel that he
played at p
whether he
her.

me one"; but she checked herself and instead she remarked a little weakly: "I don't think you ought to smoke in here."

But Dick apparently did not hear this, for he put the cigarette between his lips, tucked his arms under his coat-tails, closed his eyes and stood luxuriating in the warmth of the fire.

"Silvia not back yet?" he asked, after awhile.

"No: I'm a little anxious. I hope she's well. She promised she would be home at lunch-time."

Dick yawned. "Trust Silvia, she's having a good time and you bet she isn't coming back here in a hurry."

"It seems to me," said Helen Ambrose, "that you never have anything else but a good time you two!"

"Oh! that's how you look at it, is it?" asked her stepson, "funny we aren't quite in sympathy on this point?"

"Well, you're idle enough both of you! The pair of you do nothing except what you choose to do! I guess that is having a good time according to some folk's idea!"

Young Ambrose turned and looked at his stepmother.

"What's gone wrong?" he asked lazily. "You're about the only person in this hole who has a decent temper as a general rule!"

The woman was conscious of a decided little thrill of pleasure. It was the first time that Dick had let her feel that he remarked on anything she did. He never played at pretty manners. She had never understood whether he realized his sister's pronounced dislike for her.

"I'm glad I've got something to me," she said with a little laugh; but Dick seemed half asleep again.

His cigarette hung on to his lip as if even the task of keeping it firm was too much for him. His step-mother looked at him once or twice. The thrill had gone out of her heart and it fell dull and heavy. How was she to start dealing with Dick? How could she rouse him—in what way interest him? She had made light of this difficulty to Agnes Dalywood, but it suddenly oppressed her: it seemed so much beyond her.

Suddenly the hum of an approaching motor-car reached their ears.

"Here's Silvia at last!" Mrs. Ambrose said.

Dick opened his eyes. "I wonder if that's the Matheson's new car," he remarked. "I'll go and have a look at it."

He sauntered out of the room leaving the door open, and from the distance Mrs. Ambrose could hear his voice and the voices of two girls.

Somehow a feeling of extraordinary loneliness came over her as she sat industriously darning away. They were laughing and talking outside. It would have delighted her to have joined them. She was full of eagerness which only required a little spark to flame into gaiety.

Despite her thirty-seven years she was very young: if only Dick and his sister would have given her the smallest encouragement she would have been their constant companion, ready for anything. There was nothing she would not have attempted to give them pleasure.

She put down the sock again and sat looking over

to the other
ing. Her li
overwhelme
thing of her
would find j
her love wi
merely tole
was becomi
in her exis
which had t
never a livin

The voic
carriage doo
down the ro

Dick loun
his sister was

"Has Sil
with an effort

"I suppo
temper!"

Mrs. Aml

"Oh! my
be if Silvia w
hurriedly. "
back?" she s

Dick nod

"Belle sai
couldn't come
Bassett. Tha
leave it seems

"I like Is
is a real sweet

to the other side of the room where Spudgin was playing. Her lips quivered and for a second or so she was overwhelmed with a passionate longing to have something of her own which instinctively would turn to her, would find joy when held in her arms, would give back her love with love; but even this child, this baby merely tolerated her; and the man she had married was becoming every day more and more of a shadow in her existence, something precious and exquisite which had to be guarded; but never human or warm, never a living actual creature.

The voices outside ceased. There was a slam of a carriage door and then the sound of the motor going down the road again.

Dick lounged back to his place in front of the fire but his sister was not visible.

"Has Silvia gone upstairs?" asked Mrs. Ambrose with an effort.

"I suppose so. She seems in a rotten bad temper!"

Mrs. Ambrose laughed a little sharply.

"Oh! my dear Dick," she said, "the wonder would be if Silvia were anything else!" She checked herself hurriedly. "Was it Isabel Matheson who brought her back?" she said.

Dick nodded his head.

"Belle said I was to tell you she was sorry she couldn't come in but she is going to dine at Thorpe Bassett. That stuck-up fellow Cheston's home on short leave it seems."

"I like Isabel Matheson," said Mrs. Ambrose. "She is a real sweet girl!"

"She'll be awfully fat by-and-by," Dick observed in his tired way. "Just like her mother."

"It won't matter if she is fat or thin: she will always have her own place. She'll never be left outside."

Young Ambrose only yawned. He was always yawning. He was so dull, so bored, so indifferent, that unconsciously he bred an atmosphere of irritation.

Mrs. Ambrose found him one of the most active of her housekeeping difficulties. The servants grumbled because he would not get up in the morning, in fact he frequently remained in bed all day: they brought endless tales of his untidiness and his slovenly habits. The cook gave notice periodically because Mr. Dick found such fault with his food, and his sleepy yawny indolent manner not only made his stepmother nervous but anxious.

She had not needed those very straightforward remarks of Miss Dalywood's to let her understand that things were drifting into a very bad case where this young man was concerned, for although she called him a boy Richard Ambrose was in his twentieth year. Time he did do something—thought of shaping his life in some way.

The hardest part of all for Helen Ambrose to bear was Dick's semi-contemptuous attitude where his father was concerned. The reverence she gave to the work that was being done behind the closed doors of the old library had no place in Mr. Ambrose's son. He called his father's literary achievements "rotten stuff" and actually condemned Nigel Ambrose because he had thrown up a diplomatic career for that of a writer.

"He ought
all," he had s
is going to l
place?"

Helen Ar
red glow bec

"I've got
"but how?
question. It
a pretty toug

"He ought to have thought of us before he chucked it all," he had said on one occasion. "What does he think is going to happen to us buried in this God-forsaken place?"

Helen Ambrose sat and stared into the fire till the red glow became a little misty.

"I've got to see this through," she said to herself; "but how? I'd just like someone to answer me that question. It is what old man Jamie would have called a pretty tough proposition!"

CHAPTER II

AFTER she had carried Spudgin up to his nursery, Mrs. Ambrose went a little nervously to her stepdaughter's room. She knocked at the door and turned the handle at the same time.

Silvia was sitting on the end of her bed reading a letter. She had crumpled this up hurriedly and slipped to her feet as the door opened.

"What do you want?" she asked rudely.

Her stepmother paused an instant and then the hot-colour began to fade out of her cheeks.

"Why! I haven't seen you for two days. I thought I'd like to know how you were and if you had had a good time."

She went forward to poke the fire into a blaze. "I've missed you," she said simply.

Silvia's beautifully curved lips sneered.

"Please don't bother yourself about me," she said.

They looked at one another in silence for an instant. What Helen Ambrose saw was a slim, tall girl with an oval face in which the eyes so dark and large seemed to be almost too big.

Silvia was said to be the image of her dead mother. She had the same splendid way of carrying her head, the same superb movements when she walked. Nigel Ambrose had married when he had been an attaché in

Rome one ducal house best. He h to a large fo

The illu and its past self, otherwi been allowec But the ma ceremony; a useless wife seven or eigh kinsman to v died, and in secretly marr for some tim of his marri child, the son Ambrose.

The news was up to his wife and th Italy and liv made some n to something diplomacy.

When they would take up this never came his wife the pc naturally as he her in her de

Rome one of the younger daughters of an illustrious ducal house. At that time his prospects had been of the best. He had been reputed clever and he was the heir to a large fortune.

The illustrious ducal house had little but its name and its past records of grandeurs on which to sustain itself, otherwise the Principessa Cristina would never have been allowed to throw herself away on a mere attaché. But the marriage had been solemnized with great ceremony; and young Ambrose and his lovely but very useless wife led a very contented existence for some seven or eight years. Then the blow had fallen. The kinsman to whose money Nigel Ambrose had been heir died, and in dying revealed the fact that he had been secretly married and as secretly separated from his wife for some time: unfortunately, though he had repented of his marriage, he could not undo the fact that his child, the son of his marriage, took precedence of young Ambrose.

The news came at a most unfortunate time, for Nigel was up to his eyes in debt. It was arranged that his wife and their two children should go back to Italy and live with her family for a time, whilst he made some new move in his career which would lead to something more materially satisfactory than diplomacy.

When they separated they had supposed that they would take up their life together again very soon; but this never came to pass. Ambrose was never able to give his wife the position and the home which she regarded naturally as her proper estate, and her family upheld her in her determination to remain in Italy. From

time to time her husband stayed with her for a few days, but life in the shabby old pallazzo was more than he could endure.

The youngest child was born when they were apart and in giving birth to her second son the mother lost her own life. Then it was that Nigel Ambrose set his will against his wife's people. He carried away his children but not before great harm had been done, especially to Silvia.

The girl's nature had been influenced all for the wrong at the most receptive period of her life. She was wholly undisciplined and amazingly ignorant: even now, though she had had successive governesses, she wrote a very childish and unformed hand and was scornfully indifferent to knowledge of all kinds; but she was very beautiful: and to-night Helen seemed to find a new loveliness in her.

"I must bother about you a little bit, honey," she said wistfully. "Don't you feel that yourself?"

Silvia turned round and tossed off her fur cap. She wore her hair parted on her brows and drawn almost over her ears, being coiled in a large classical knot at the back of her head.

"I don't know what you feel and I don't care either," she said. Then she turned round and her eyes flashed. "Please, *please* don't begin to be sentimental. It won't make a scrap of difference. I should think you ought to know by this time how much value I set on your opinion and feelings."

She looked hardly at her stepmother as she spoke. If her mind had been less narrow and prejudiced she must have been touched by the expression of Helen

Ambrose's
the charm c
attractive in
father's wi
woman, that
most becom
girl's heart.

"Are yo
way.

"I am ge
say, Silvia."

There wa
again in a lo
"Do you kn
been told th
do what is ri

Silvia Ar
don't care," s

"But it's
Helen answe
suppose it's p
things about

Silvia wal
drawer and t
leaned agains

"You can
a sneer, "nob
father would
so unhappy v
you wanted, y
supposed inti
for you I thi

Ambrose's face, just as she must have been attracted by the charm of this woman ; but Silvia could see nothing attractive in her stepmother, the mere fact that her father's wife was considered a very good-looking woman, that she had a splendid figure and always wore most becoming clothes deepened the resentment in the girl's heart.

"Are you going?" she asked in a rude, impatient way.

"I am going when I have said what I have come to say, Silvia."

There was a little pause, and Mrs. Ambrose spoke again in a low voice, a voice that was not quite steady: "Do you know I have been reproached to-day? I've been told that I've failed in my duty and that I don't do what is right by you and Dick?"

Silvia Ambrose gave a shrug of her shoulders. "I don't care," she said. "That's nothing to me."

"But it's got to have something to do with you," Helen answered losing her temper a little. "Do you suppose it's pleasant for me to have people think wrong things about me?"

Silvia walked to the chest of drawers, pulled open a drawer and threw a letter into it, then she stood and leaned against the piece of furniture.

"You came here of your own accord," she said with a sneer, "nobody wanted you. Everybody knows that father would never have married you if he hadn't been so unhappy when he met you. Well, you've got what you wanted, you've got our name, and you live here in supposed intimacy with us! That ought to be enough for you I think! At least," she laughed, "you aren't

going to get any more from me." Then the girl grew pettish. "I don't know why on earth you want to come here and start this sort of thing to-night, worrying and talking such nonsense! I tell you plainly if you don't leave me to myself I sha'n't stay here."

"Of course you hate me, Silvia, but why should you hate me?" asked Helen Ambrose in a low voice. "Have I ever done you any harm—have I——"

The girl broke in hotly, fiercely: "You know quite well," she said, "you had no right to marry my father. Who are you? Where do you come from? You are so mysterious, and keep everything about yourself to yourself; but you can't help people thinking and asking questions; especially when you speak such vulgar American and have so little dignity."

The woman flinched, and her quick temper rose at this, but she kept it under with a great effort.

"There is nothing in my life that I'm ashamed of," she made answer bravely. "Though my mother wasn't born in a palace and I haven't generations of ancestors to my back we——" But there she pulled herself up, and then she smiled. Her face was very charming when she smiled. Her pretty eyes screwed up, and a dimple came in one cheek. "I see you don't want me. Well I'll go; but Silvia dear, you're not a little girl now, you're almost a woman. Don't you think you might just reason things out a bit? Though you hate to have me say it, I worry about you. I would give, well, I guess I hardly know what; but I'd give all to have you feel you can depend on me, to have you let me do things for you."

"Thanks, I don't want you," Silvia answered rudely

and curtly, ' woman, and

Mrs. An turned to g softly:

"You'll has asked fo

The girl mother went darted to the went swiftly the letter: on her bed a eagerly.

Helen A in the lock a

Ruefully blundered o

"I am: impatiently.

And yet same time sent her to felt depressed and was clos

"There's come from T

Mrs. An in a graceful tion of fragr: flitted throug

"Cook as

and curtly, "the less I am of a little girl, the more of a woman, and plainer I understand things."

Mrs. Ambrose hesitated only a moment, and then turned to go; at the door she paused: then she said softly:

"You'll go and see your father, won't you? He has asked for you several times."

The girl made no reply, and this time her step-mother went away. The instant she was alone Silvia darted to the door and turned the key in the lock, then went swiftly to the drawer into which she had tossed the letter and taking it out, she sat down again on her bed and began reading the closely written pages eagerly.

Helen Ambrose heard the sound of the key turning in the lock and she gave a little shiver and a sigh.

Ruefully she had to confess to herself that she had blundered once again.

"I am several kinds of fool," she said to herself impatiently. "Why *did* I speak to-night?"

And yet it had been such a natural and at the same time such a sweet-hearted impulse which had sent her to Silvia. On reaching her own room she felt depressed and tired. The maid had lit the fire and was closing the blinds.

"There's a note for you, ma'am," she said, "it's just come from Thorpe."

Mrs. Ambrose took the note. It was addressed in a graceful hand-writing, and had a delightful suggestion of fragrance about it. A faint feeling of pleasure flitted through Helen Ambrose as she opened it.

"Cook asked me to tell you, ma'am, as Mr. Ambrose

rang to say he'd have some dinner sent in to him : he'd ring when he wanted it."

Her mistress said nothing, and the maid went away. Standing near the mantelshelf on which the candles in the tall old stands had been lit Helen Ambrose read her letter.

"DEAR MRS. AMBROSE," it ran, "I am so sorry not to have been able to have joined your little meeting to-day but my son who arrived unexpectedly refused to let me go out: he was afraid I should catch cold as it has been so damp and raw to-day. I regret this more than I can tell you. It is always such a real pleasure to me to meet you and I do want to be of some use. If there is any sewing to be done will you very kindly send along my share? And if you have a free hour to-morrow will you come and have tea with me? Please do not bother to write, you will find me here: you know I am more or less of a fixture.

"With kindest regards, dear Mrs. Ambrose,

"I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"OLIVIA MARY CHESTON"

Helen Ambrose gave another little sigh as she folded the letter, but the sigh was one of pleasure this time.

"I'll go to-morrow sure," she decided, "it will be a break and do me good."

It flashed across her mind that something more perhaps than mere sympathetic comprehension in her difficulties might be forthcoming from the mistress of

Thorpe Ba that. Like little holid open rudene her nerves occasionally many domes

These s course of co Bassett. Th Silvia Ambr

Isabel M indeed she w as an intima

Mrs. Che social interc grievance in the way of e

Now and few days th new comers v the same. I Miss Mathe and some mot a chance.

They me the very goo such a big fo before.

If Isabel not trouble h never more h

Thorpe Bassett, but in reality she did not dwell on that. Like a child she turned to the thought of a little holiday on the morrow; Silvia's unpleasantly open rudeness had shaken her disagreeably. To keep her nerves in good order she determined she must occasionally separate herself from the monotony of her many domestic problems.

These same problems cropped up casually in the course of conversation at dinner that evening at Thorpe Bassett. There was only one guest; the girl with whom Silvia Ambrose had just been staying.

Isabel Matheson was a great favourite at Thorpe, indeed she was about the only person who was regarded as an intimate friend.

Mrs. Cheston's delicacy of health shut her away from social intercourse and amenities. It was rather a grievance in the neighbourhood that she did so little in the way of entertaining.

Now and then when John Cheston was home for a few days there would be perhaps a dinner or two, but new comers were never invited, the guests were always the same. Many people were inclined to be jealous of Miss Matheson's close friendship with Mrs. Cheston and some mothers openly declared she gave no other girl a chance.

They meant a chance of marrying John Cheston, the very good-looking young man who had come into such a big fortune when his father had died some years before.

If Isabel knew of these little whispers they did not trouble her—she was sensible and very happy, and never more happy than when she was at Thorpe.

"We very nearly came in to see you yesterday," she said brightly to Mrs. Cheston as they sat at dessert in the spacious dining-room.

"Why didn't you?" asked Mrs. Cheston.

Her son interposed. "Who were 'we,' Belle?"

"Silvia Ambrose and myself. Silvia has been staying with us."

"How is she shaping? She promised to be good-looking."

"Good-looking! She is something much more than that: I call her beautiful—quite beautiful."

John Cheston looked at the girl on his right hand and laughed.

"Enthusiastic as ever!"

"Well, Silvia *is* beautiful, isn't she?"

Mrs. Cheston, to whom the query was put, paused a moment, then she said:

"Yes. I suppose she is strictly speaking beautiful, but she is absolutely without charm: at least that is how I find her."

She spoke nervously, almost timidly, and there was something of timidity about her whole person: it was her natural manner.

To Isabel Matheson, this delicate woman was exquisite and rare like a priceless bit of china; her shyness, her detachment were part of her charm.

"Well," Cheston said frankly, "she may be beautiful but unless she has changed a good deal she has no manners. She's a good match for that cub of a brother of hers. What is *he* doing? Loafing about as usual?"

"They want looking after so badly," Miss Matheson said.

Mrs. Ch

"Oh! B
everything s
they were h

"Oh! *pl*
against Mr
darling, so s
but I mean
authority.

course Silvi
she does ha
it weren't a

"Couldn'
Cheston ask

"What c
that thrill in

"Oh! w
ought to be
different to
it might do
then."

"I shoul

The sent

The you
risen from th

Even no
mood she v

surprise: ev

extraordinar

conscious of
lovely woma

such a dull t

Mrs. Cheston spoke here almost in haste.

"Oh! Belle dear. . . . I'm sure Mrs. Ambrose does everything she can! She is as anxious about them as if they were her own children."

"Oh! *please* don't think I want to say anything against Mrs. Ambrose," cried Isabel . . . "she's a darling, so sunny tempered and so nice to look at . . . but I mean they want a man over them or someone in authority. At least Dick does"—she paused—"of course Silvia is only young yet. But oh! dear, how she does hate her stepmother! It would be funny if it weren't a little serious."

"Couldn't you come to the rescue, mother?" John Cheston asked.

"What could I do?" Mrs. Cheston answered, with that thrill in her voice which suggested nervousness.

"Oh! well, I don't know exactly, but after all we ought to be a little decent to the Ambrose lot: they're different to most of the people round and about and it might do you good to have the girl here now and then."

"I should be glad if I could do anything but——"

The sentence was not finished.

The young man looked at his mother. She had just risen from the table.

Even now when he imagined he knew her every mood she was capable of giving him a sensation of surprise: even now when he realized only too well the extraordinary sensitiveness of her nature he was conscious of a touch of impatient regret that this still lovely woman should be content to lead such a secluded, such a dull uneventful life.

For John Cheston was very proud of his mother. As she paused a moment by the table he looked at her with affectionate admiration.

She was of medium height and very slim: in the softened light it might almost have been a girl standing there. Her face was oval and very pale. Isabel always called Mrs. Cheston's eyes pathetic: the soft hair which had been very dark, almost black, was now powdered with white, but despite this white-touched hair and the shadows round the eyes Olivia Mary Cheston looked quite young. She was dressed in black, a thin clinging gown bordered with fur and wore a rope of splendid pearls.

"Isn't that a lamb of a gown, Jack?" enquired Isabel.

She herself was very tall, one of the later type of girls with fine limbs and a charming complexion: without being pretty she was certainly attractive.

The young man laughed. "You look good enough to eat, mother! Really, I feel like a miser keeping you shut away here in this dull old house."

"I am so happy here," his mother answered, "don't take me away, just yet;" and then she laughed. "I've always promised Belle that I will go to London and help her choose her trousseau when the time comes . . . Don't stay in here too long, Jack," she added, as she slipped her hand through Isabel's arm and they moved away.

But John Cheston declared he did not want to smoke so they all went across the hall to the drawing-room, a room fragrant with flowers, dainty and cosy and companionable.

"I won't
our's?" Isabel

She stooped
smells so sweet

"I am going
another plea
across the road

"Come and
man.

He tossed
as she obeyed
deepened in
to feel shy
had been here
remember, Jack
than she did
night she was
as she felt her

"I was sure
she said. "I
leave again so

"I came to
"Thanks,
come straight

He shook

"No: I hope
Angus and I
suppose he has

There was

"Not to
of course he
mother hasn't

"I wonder why this house is so much nicer than our's?" Isabel Matheson queried.

She stood and looked about her gratefully. "It smells so sweetly," she said.

"I am going to write some letters: entertain one another please," remarked Mrs. Cheston, as she went across the room and sat at her writing-table.

"Come and sit here, Belle," commanded the young man.

He tossed away some cushions from the couch, and as she obeyed him and sat at the other corner the colour deepened in the girl's cheeks. It was very silly of her to feel shy and even nervous with Jack Cheston who had been her chum and playfellow ever since she could remember, Jack whom she knew so well and even better than she did her own big brothers: nevertheless tonight she was very shy, and she flushed uncomfortably as she felt he was looking at her steadily.

"I was surprised to hear we were to see you to-day," she said. "I didn't know that you would be getting leave again so soon."

"I came to see you, Belle."

"Thanks, dear, it is awfully sweet of you. Did you come straight from York?"

He shook his head.

"No: I had to go to town. Don't tell mother but Angus and I are having one of our usual rows. I suppose he hasn't been here?"

There was a sharp note in John Cheston's voice.

"Not to my knowledge," the girl answered; "but of course he may have been: if he did come your mother hasn't spoken to me about it."

"I hate to think he should come near her. She takes such a wrong view about Angus and his sister, at least it's what I call a wrong view. She's quite capable of giving him all he asks for."

"But I thought it was practically arranged your cousin was going abroad?" Belle said. They were speaking cautiously, although the room was very wide and the woman at the writing-table could hardly have heard what they said.

Cheston shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, there was some such idea, it crops up periodically, but it's only suggested because Angus knows he can work on my mother's feelings that way and after all why should he go abroad? He has quite a decent income and he could earn a good bit more if he chose but he simply won't work, Belle! The long and the short of it is," John Cheston said hardily, "my father made a great mistake when he did so much for his sister and her children. He put them in a wrong groove as it were. Upon my soul I honestly believe that Angus thinks because his mother was my father's sister he ought to share with me. A queer notion that, isn't it?"

"Very queer," said Isabel with a smile and a frown mingled. "Did you see Mr. Kurtiss to-day?"

"Yes. We met at my lawyer's. He'd got into some hole and came to me to be helped out. It wasn't a very pleasant interview! Honest Injun, Belle, to please her," he nodded his head in the direction of his mother, "I've tried to beat up a kindly feeling for Angus but it won't come . . . I simply can't stick the fellow or his sister."

Isabel m

"Gertrud

"Well, a

I'm not goin
decisively.

mean to sti
is if he gets
out of them l

Then the
where his n
she, Belle?

"I think
I'm afraid yo

"Not she
see you every

The girl la

"If you
she said, "yo

"It's the t
thrilled a lit
There was sc
he was so fr
outspoken.

Isabel had
to-night her f
the old camar
friendship. It
feeling.

"I like to t
after a little p
when I know y

"I don't be

Isabel made a little movement with her shoulders.

"Gertrude Kurtiss is a bit of a trial certainly."

"Well, as long as Angus doesn't worry my mother I'm not going to bother about him," John Cheston said decisively. "I feel I've treated him decently and I mean to stick to what I've told him to-day and that is if he gets into any more difficulties he'll have to get out of them himself."

Then the young man looked across the room to where his mother sat. "She's been all right hasn't she, Belle? I hope you see her pretty often."

"I think I'm in and out here every day. Sometimes I'm afraid your mother may find me a bit of a bore."

"Not she," said John Cheston. "I wish *I* could see you every other day!"

The girl laughed and flushed anew.

"If you say all these sort of nice things to me," she said, "you'll make me fearfully conceited."

"It's the truth," said John Cheston; and her heart thrilled a little because she accepted it as a truth. There was so little of the sentimentalist about him, he was so frank, so uncompromisingly practical and outspoken.

Isabel had always been fond of John Cheston, but to-night her feeling for him was changed. It was not the old camaraderie, the old schoolboy and schoolgirl friendship. It was something new, a very wonderful feeling.

"I like to think of you two being together," he said after a little pause. "I feel happy about my mother when I know you are looking after her."

"I don't believe I do look after her in a real sense I

mean," Isabel said; "but she is awfully sweet and I think she likes to have me here. We talk about you all day long."

"Go on doing that," said John Cheston with a little laugh.

He reached out his hand and laid it on one of the girl's; and at that moment his mother turned and looked at them. She saw them only vaguely, two misty figures, for there was a cloud of unshed tears in her eyes. But her heart gave a leap and her lips quivered with a sensation of pleasure so keen that it was almost pain.

Rising softly she gathered up her letters and began to move towards the door.

"They don't want me," she said to herself.

But Isabel saw her going and got up at once.

"I am afraid it is awfully late," she said. "I expect the car has come for me."

"I'll take you home," the young man said; "and, mother, you'll go to bed, won't you? I'll come in and say good-night to you. That is, I'll be very careful. I won't wake you."

Olivia Mary moved nearer to her son and nestled into the arm he put about her.

"Please wake me," she said, "not that I shall be asleep. I couldn't go to sleep without kissing you, Jack, when you are here."

"Isn't she a baby?" the young man queried of the girl.

They were both so much taller than she was, so much bigger altogether. She seemed just a helpless clinging creature, something to be guarded most

preciously; there was th

Cheston as they were

"I have morrow. Do mean if I sh the girl some

"I am su answered; "I them togethe

I am anxious She is so rest

great fault wa just a second he's always h excitement.

Ambrose! S you?"

"I like her many years," I faintly. "You

friendships, Be and if there is to let me know

Isabel stoop "Good nigh by this time; b

"Come whe Mary. "You l John Chesto

before he escort

preciously ; and in the hearts of the two younger ones there was this unspoken bond holding them together.

Cheston went to fetch Miss Matheson's wrap ; and as they were alone Mrs. Cheston said to the girl :

"I have asked Mrs. Ambrose to come to tea to-morrow. Do you really think I should do any good, I mean if I should really help her, if I asked her to bring the girl sometimes ?"

"I am sure she would be awfully delighted," Isabel answered ; "but if I may make a suggestion, don't have them together. Let Silvia come by herself. Honestly I am anxious about Silvia. I find her changed lately. She is so restless and so bitter. A little while ago her great fault was that one could never rouse her, she was just a second edition of Dick her brother and you know he's always half asleep, but now Silvia seems to be all excitement. I do wish she would be nicer about Mrs. Ambrose ! She's such a dear. You like her don't you ?"

"I like her better than any woman I have met for many years," Mrs. Cheston said ; and then she smiled faintly. "You know I am not very good at making friendships, Belle ; but I feel drawn to Mrs. Ambrose and if there is any way I can help her I shall ask her to let me know."

Isabel stooped and kissed John Cheston's mother.

"Good night, darling," she said. "It is an old story by this time ; but I do love being here with you."

"Come whenever you will, dear child," said Olivia Mary. "You know you are welcome."

John Cheston insisted on taking his mother upstairs before he escorted Isabel home.

It always moved the girl's heart to note the tenderness which he lavished on his mother. Round and about in the neighbourhood young Cheston was not too popular: even her own parents found him matter of fact and hard and perhaps just a little stuck up. Lady Matheson indeed went so far as to declare that it was not possible for the young man to care for anyone but himself. Isabel, however, who saw them together so frequently and who knew John Cheston's character perhaps better than he knew it himself was always glad and touched to remember the love and the care he gave to his mother.

"I'll kiss you now good-night," the young man said when he left his mother in her room, "then you needn't keep awake."

"I'll promise not to keep awake if you promise to come in before you go to bed."

"Well, that's a bargain," he laughed: then he called his mother's maid and handed her over to the care of this maid as if she had been a child.

Mrs. Cheston listened till she heard the sound of the motor humming down the drive, and then she said to her maid:

"Yes, I'm going to bed; but, Payne, I want you to do something for me. This letter must be posted to-morrow morning early. Don't put it in the letter box, take it to the village yourself."

Payne, who was middle-aged and had been for some years with Mrs. Cheston, glanced at the address on the envelope and gave a sniff.

"Oh! that young gentleman again!" she remarked. "Why for ever don't you let Mr. John deal

with him, I did."

"John do slowly, she g
"I've got so

Angus Kurti
Payne sh
for giving as
Angus has an
way he does,

But Mrs. C
remove her g

"There's a
after a little
from Garth C
she'll be very

She's got her h
on. "Such ta

Ambrose shut
long day, whi
seen it with my
but I came acro

the roads after

in these parts b

Olivia Mar
turned in startl

"Do you me

"Her well e

how they came
If you've got M

should think yo

let her know of

with him, ma'am? You'd be a lot wiser if you did."

"John doesn't always understand," said Mrs. Cheston slowly, she gave a little sigh: "besides," she added, "I've got so much, why shouldn't I pass on a little to Angus Kurtiss or to anybody else?"

Payne shrugged her shoulders. "Well, you're one for giving as everybody knows, but I don't think as Mr. Angus has any right to keep on coming to you in the way he does, and that's a fact."

But Mrs. Cheston made no reply and she let her maid remove her gown and put away her jewels in silence.

"There's a message come for you," Payne remarked after a little while. "I near forgot to tell you. It's from Garth Court, Mrs. Ambrose's compliments and she'll be very pleased to have tea with you to-morrow. *She's* got her hands full if anybody has," the maid talked on. "Such tales as they tell about that boy! And Mr. Ambrose shut up in the library working the whole live-long day, whilst his girl! . . . well there, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I wouldn't have spoke of it, but I came across her three days ago sauntering along the roads after dark with some chap as I'd never seen in these parts before."

Olivia Mary's beautiful eyes dilated a little. She turned in startled fashion to her maid.

"Do you mean Silvia Ambrose? That child?"

"Her well enough," said Payne; "and I wondered how they came to let her out by herself at such a time. If you've got Mrs. Ambrose coming here to-morrow I should think you'd be doing a kind action if you was to let her know of this."

Mrs. Cheston shook her head. "Unless she speaks to me how can I say anything to her? And yet;" she brushed back her hair with her hand; "and yet, Payne, she ought to know."

She stood looking into the fire with a little frown knitting her brows, and then she turned to the maid: "Don't speak of this to any of the others."

"Me?" remarked Payne. "I know better. I'm only telling you because if you are going to be friends with Mrs. Ambrose it is likely you might do some good: all the same," the maid added quickly, "you mustn't take on other people's burdens, Mr. John won't stand that you know. You've got to take care of yourself."

Olivia Mary Cheston flung out her hands with a curiously dramatic gesture.

"Oh! Payne," she said. "I am so tired of taking care of myself, so tired, so tired!"

MRS. Th
softly into th
husband who
asleep or da
his head. T
to emerge fr
"Where's
to-day."
"She is s
It's nothing,
added. "Sil
plan she sho
He did n
He only seen
at all from th
Before sh
and asked he
the subject o
but even as s
a sigh she po
of Dick's ver
refused to let
mother had g

speaks
;" she
Payne,

frown
maid :

r. I'm
friends
o some
, "you
1 won't
f your-

with a

taking

CHAPTER III

MRS. AMBROSE walked across the fields to Thorpe Bassett the next day. She had gone softly into the library before she had started to tell her husband where she was going. He had looked up half asleep or dazed from his work and had merely nodded his head. Then just as his wife was going he seemed to emerge from the clouds a little.

"Where's Silvia?" he asked. "I haven't seen her to-day."

"She is staying in her room. She is not very well. It's nothing, only just a headache," Helen Ambrose added. "Silvia is growing, you know, and it's a good plan she should rest now and again."

He did not ask about Dick or even the little boy. He only seemed to remember his girl, when he emerged at all from the spell which his work put upon him.

Before she went out of the room his wife paused and asked herself hurriedly whether she should broach the subject of Dick now or wait for another opportunity, but even as she paused her courage departed, and with a sigh she postponed the unpleasant task. It was one of Dick's very bad days. He had refused to get up, refused to let the maid do his room, and when his step-mother had gone in to see him he had lain with his face

to the wall pretending to be fast asleep. Whether Silvia was really ill or, like her brother, was only pretending, Mrs. Ambrose could not decide, but she had thought it better to leave the girl entirely to herself, for the immediate moment at least. Under her arm the mistress of Garth Court carried a round parcel. She smiled as she had wrapped it up, for it contained some of the rough red flannel. It seemed so absurd to her to picture Mrs. Cheston sewing this same rough red flannel; however, she had been asked to send some of the village sewing to Thorpe, and so she was taking it.

From the fields she passed through a side entrance into the grounds of Thorpe Bassett. The house itself was of no particular period, but there was about it a note of luxury and again of order which made a very strong appeal to Helen Ambrose.

Mrs. Cheston was in the hall when her guest arrived. She had been to the station to see her son off.

Mrs. Ambrose glanced about her appreciatively. She liked this fine square hall with its great big fireplace, and over the wide mantelshelf the full-length portrait of John Cheston's father.

It was the face of a kindly rather than of a handsome man, and in fact there was very little resemblance except in the height between the dead man and his son; but Helen Ambrose found pleasure in looking at the picture. She felt convinced that Anthony Cheston must have been just the type of man she would have liked.

"I think we'll have tea in my own little room," said Olivia Mary. Her manner was as usual nervous, a little timid. She gave the effect to the other woman of

being shy but so much for have the re
"I lead
said.

"Why,
Ambrose said
her hostess
I'm hearing
that you do,
Olivia M

"To give

"Isn't it
long way in
As they
Mrs. Ambro.

"My, ho
English peop
the nicest pla

"Well, we
you are at C
forward a big

Her guest

"Yes, we
are dull, so ve

As she ra
and looked int
her. "I am q
she said and sl

The other

"Why of c
myself. In fa

being shy but this wore off as she thanked Mrs. Ambrose so much for coming and professed herself delighted to have the red flannel to sew.

"I lead such an absolutely useless life as a rule," she said.

"Why, that isn't quite the character I hear," Helen Ambrose said with her pleasant laugh as she followed her hostess up the broad staircase. "Seems to me that I'm hearing all the time of something good and kind that you do, Mrs. Cheston."

Olivia Mary gave a shrug of her shoulders.

"To give money," she said, "isn't to be useful."

"Isn't it? Well, I don't know! I guess it goes a long way in the right direction."

As they passed into a small room on the first landing Mrs. Ambrose exclaimed with pleasure :

"My, how pretty it is here!" she said. "You English people do surely know how to make your homes the nicest places in all the world."

"Well, we are not nearly so old or as picturesque as you are at Garth Court," Mrs. Cheston said, wheeling forward a big cosy chair.

Her guest sat in it with a little sigh.

"Yes, we are old and we're picturesque too but we are dull, so very dull, Mrs. Cheston."

As she rang for tea Olivia Mary stood an instant and looked into the charming face of the woman before her. "I am quite sure the dullness is not your fault," she said and she spoke now without any hesitancy.

The other woman's face lit up.

"Why of course I'm not really a bit down-hearted myself. In fact I'm always ready to believe there's

sunshine somewhere even when the world is wrapped up in a thick, thick fog, but——” She broke off and then she asked a question abruptly. “Did you know my husband well before I came here, Mrs. Cheston?”

Instantly Olivia Mary seemed to shrink back into her former constraint. She spoke hurriedly :

“I—don’t think I—I have known anybody very well. I am afraid I’ve been rather selfish. I live so much alone. Ever—ever since my husband died I haven’t seemed to want other people. That is being selfish you know.”

“Perhaps so,” said Mrs. Ambrose ; “but it’s mighty natural. Why I asked you about Nigel is because I’d like to know whether it is just these last few years he has changed or whether he was getting tired of the world before he married me?”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you that . . . I have never really known Mr. Ambrose . . . I fancy he had only been settled at Garth Court just a little while before you were married.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Helen Ambrose. “I guess he’d never have come here if he hadn’t had the property left him, but——” her voice broke off and then she smiled that delightful infectious smile which wrinkled up her eyes and brought dimples in her cheek. “I don’t suppose it interests you to talk about these things.”

Olivia Mary smiled back at her.

“Everything about you interests me,” she said simply. “I like you so much. If—if I weren’t the most stupid and the shyest person in the world I should have told you that a long time ago.”

The sr
woman’s ey

“Oh ! n
I do wish y
me. I’m k
you. I dor
in the midst
that I’m wa

Tea was
about gene
room. Wh
said :

“I unde
she said halt
Come to me
this. I—I s

There wa
answered :

“Why, t
every day!
times, though
house is, but
thing, home,
sure, I can fe

Helen A
got up and w
her hostess to
looked she sa
pencil sketch
innumerable
fact as she g
but that of th

The smile went and some tears started to the other woman's eyes.

"Oh! my dear," she said. "I wish you had! My! I do wish you had! You don't know what it means to me. I'm kind of getting frightened. See, I'm not like you. I don't want to be alone. I want to feel that I'm in the midst of things, doing a little bit of good, feeling that I'm wanted all the while."

Tea was brought in at that moment and they chatted about general things while the servants were in the room. When they were alone again Mrs. Cheston said :

"I understand." She paused an instant and then she said half shyly: "Please don't be lonely any more. Come to me whenever you feel you would care to do this. I—I should like you to come."

There was a quiver in Helen Ambrose's laugh as she answered :

"Why, then I'm afraid you'll be seeing me most every day! It is so beautiful here, like a bit of old times, though nothing of mine was ever so rich as this house is, but it feels like home and it's such a wonderful thing, home, isn't it? This is where you live mostly I'm sure, I can feel it."

Helen Ambrose was talking very quickly and she got up and walked about the room. She did not want her hostess to see the tears in her eyes. Wherever she looked she saw pictures of John Cheston. There were pencil sketches and three portraits on the walls and innumerable photographs betraying him at all ages: in fact as she glanced round she could see no other face but that of the son about whom she had heard so much.

"All the other rooms are very large," Olivia Mary explained, "and I seem to have grown into this little corner"; then she added with her half nervous laugh: "You are looking at my boy's portraits. He says there are far too many and is always threatening to burn some."

Mrs. Ambrose was standing in front of one of the portraits in which young Cheston had been painted in rough riding dress.

"He was just fifteen when that was done," the mother said.

"Isn't he fine? For all the world as strong looking as a man. I do love boys, nice boys, Mrs. Cheston, don't you? I don't suppose," Helen Ambrose added as she returned to her chair, "that you ever had much difficulty with your boy? There was nothing of the idler or the grouch about him if that picture is anything to go by"; then with a rush of hot colour to her cheeks she said: "I guess people talk us over a good deal so you'll probably know I am not a conspicuous success with my stepchildren?"

"I hear very little gossip," Mrs. Cheston answered; "but I know you must have many difficulties. Won't you tell me about them? I—I am—I may be able to help you a little." The suggestion was made with that strange timidity which in another person less graceful or pretty would have seemed awkwardness.

Helen Ambrose made a little movement with her shoulders.

"Oh! why I suppose it's all very ordinary, but I started out to do things so well," she said; "and I've been up against failure from the very first. I don't

mind fighting
to get even
like! But I
and hit hard
aside, and ju

"Please I
said earnestl
Ambrose op
which she ha
wasted slove
only once dic
any way to bl

"You see,
out in Italy t
but me to tak
them if only t

A change
she had sat lo
the nervousne
look which ha
way to an exq
there was stren

Isabel wou
moment; for
to have fallen
woman full of
compressed the

"You don't
spoken," she sa
to help you, y
am so glad to
for only a few

mind fighting difficulties, I mean sort of having to plan to get even with contrary things, that is just a game I like! But my trouble isn't that sort! I'd rather be hit and hit hard, Mrs. Cheston, than be sneered at, and set aside, and just ignored!"

"Please tell me everything," John Cheston's mother said earnestly; and urged so sympathetically Helen Ambrose opened her heart. She spoke of all with which she had to contend in her daily life; of Dick's wasted slovenly youth, of Silvia's increasing hatred: only once did she even suggest that the father was in any way to blame and that was when she said:

"You see, though they come of such grand folk way out in Italy they really have so little. There's no one but me to take care of them and I'm so ready to love them if only they'd let me do it."

A change had gradually come over Olivia Mary as she had sat looking at the other woman. The timidity, the nervousness, the hesitation, that kind of scared look which had faintly troubled Helen Ambrose gave way to an exquisite sympathy, and with this sympathy there was strength too.

Isabel would have hardly recognized her in that moment; for all that was childish and weak seemed to have fallen away from her: instead she looked a woman full of purpose and in the way her lips were compressed there was even a suggestion of hardness.

"You don't know how glad I am that you have spoken," she said. "Don't think it is I who am going to help you, you are doing a big thing for me. I am so glad to leave this cotton-wool existence if for only a few hours now and then, and I believe I

shall be able to work with you; at least," she added with a very faint smile, "now the ice is broken between us and you know that you can come here whenever you like and tell me everything, perhaps this will help a little, for there is such wonderful relief in feeling that one can speak—dare speak plainly and freely."

Mrs. Ambrose put out her hand impulsively. A little while ago she had been inspired with Isabel Matheson's feeling of protective pity for this other woman: as she had looked from the pictures of that strong proud boy, to the delicate strangely young little creature sitting in the armchair, she had been struck by the helplessness and that note of exquisiteness of fragility which was always so clear to Isabel, but now it seemed to her as if they had changed places and that she was the weak nervous woman, and this little creature with her wonderful eyes and her pathetic loveliness could master her simply by force of will.

"I'll never be able to tell you how grateful I am to you, Mrs. Cheston," she said. "Sometimes I'll confess I have thought of you as one who might help me in a way, you see you are such a big person down here and—and I have felt that Silvia might benefit, if you were to take notice of her, for she needs just someone like you."

"Of course I shall do what I can. She appeals to me, however, through you in the first instance, and also because she is so young." Olivia Mary paused: "Youth can bring such misery on itself if it is allowed to run wild!" she said.

Her voice had a broken note in it: she got up and

moved to
out for qu

The a
to creep o
the fire se

Helen
somehow
that she
character.
little figur
Mrs. Chest

"Has
fighting sc
and dislike
lately, tha
careless of
brother, an
restless, al
the house,
Doesn't thi
influence?"
speak, Olivi
fire, stretchi
pleading.

danger!" sh

"Danger
then very s
what you h
child! Sure

"We m
a quiet firm
thing that ca

moved to the window, and standing there she looked out for quite a long time in silence.

The afternoon was closing in, dusk was beginning to creep over the country. In the room the glow from the fire sent a warm cheery light.

Helen Ambrose waited for Mrs. Cheston to speak: somehow she realized now even more surely than before that she was in the presence of a very remarkable character. There was a strength about that dainty little figure which she felt almost tangibly. Suddenly Mrs. Cheston spoke:

"Has it ever occurred to you that you may be fighting something more than a silly girl's resentment and dislike? You tell me that Silvia is changed just lately, that up to a month ago she was indifferent, careless of her appearance, lazy, almost as bad as her brother, and that now she seems to be so impatient, so restless, always making an excuse to be away from the house, always threatening to leave her home. Doesn't this point almost conclusively to some new influence?" Then before the other woman could speak, Olivia Mary left the window, she went up to the fire, stretching her hands out to it almost as if she were pleading. "Oh! we must stand between her and danger!" she said.

"Danger!" repeated Helen Ambrose: "danger!" then very swiftly: "I see, I know what you think, what you have in your mind, but—but she is such a child! Surely."

"We must protect her," repeated Olivia Mary in a quiet firm voice. "Now I am going to tell you something that came to my knowledge only last night."

She spoke of what her maid had seen and she heard Helen Ambrose catch her breath as one might do who is suddenly face to face with something terrible.

"I never dreamed of this," Mrs. Ambrose said in a low voice. "I guess I'm a fool! But somehow—I'd gotten into my head, you see, the idea that she—that she is so proud and that her pride would keep her above most other people. I've forgiven her for hating me because I've always felt that she really does stand a little above me. Oh! what shall I do! If her father were to know!"

"Perhaps it would be as well to let him know," said Olivia Mary; but the other woman vetoed this.

"No—no! I'm not thinking of him now. I'm thinking of Silvia. You see he—he is such a cypher in her life. He has never taken any share. He has just lived apart—alone—forgetting them. Oh! it hurts me to tell you this; but I must say it now since we are speaking so plainly, and then he is so passionate, he'd just get mad and flare around. Oh! for sure he'd do harm!"

Olivia Mary turned and kissed the other woman and then she said in a clear strong resolute voice:

"Then you must turn to Dick. You must wake him up, Mrs. Ambrose. You must let him see that his sister has need of him! I'm not going to tell you how to do this: you have a heart, and you have brains, you are a woman who must be full of resource."

The butler came in at that moment to take away the tea tray, and he gave his mistress a message.

"Miss Matheson's love, and may she come over this evening?"

"Pleas
with me,"

The co
Ambrose t
they said
gether and

"Remem
Mary. "C

Helen
slowly, inde
at all. The
to have tak
but that pri
in her preser

There w
thought of
that sense of
Supposing sl
she had not
have drifted
reproached h
his children,
Would she
if she had let
from him?

She felt s
almost unequa
Mary had call
was, so she ha
in the past; b
called upon
and so pregna

"Please say that I shall be delighted if she will dine with me," said Mrs. Cheston.

The coming of the servants was the signal for Helen Ambrose to take her departure. As they were alone they said very little more, but their hands clung together and once again they kissed.

"Remember I am here—always here," said Olivia Mary. "Call on me for anything that I can do."

Helen Ambrose walked back to Garth Court very slowly, indeed it was with an effort that she walked at all. The information she had just been given seemed to have taken from her not only her physical strength, but that pride and buoyant spirit which was so valuable in her present life.

There was more to her than definite alarm in the thought of Silvia and what she was doing, there was that sense of personal failure which was so mortifying. Supposing she had not heard this, supposing by chance she had not gone to Thorpe this afternoon, things might have drifted on and then Nigel might so naturally have reproached her. He had married her to be a mother to his children, to work with him, to protect his treasures. Would she not have merited his bitterest reproaches if she had let the greatest of these treasures be stolen from him?

She felt so tired in heart and mind that she was almost unequal to facing the immediate future. Olivia Mary had called her a woman of resource, and so she was, so she had proved herself many and many a time in the past; but then in the old days she had never been called upon to handle a problem at once so delicate and so pregnant with danger. Still, as she drew nearer

and nearer to her home Mrs. Cheston's counsel came to her as the best to follow. To go to her husband with this story was out of all question: to call upon Silvia's brother for help might seem at first glance almost as impossible, but in this lay her only chance of standing between the girl and what might possibly be a tragedy, for what could be more tragic to Silvia than the humiliation which generally follows on a clandestine attachment?

Suddenly there came into the woman's heart a rush of hottest anger. What manner of man could this be who incited a girl of Silvia's class and youth to meet him almost within touch of her home, to expose her to gossip and comment? It could be no one whom she had met in open and honourable fashion; it must be some stray person—probably one of the many men who appeared round and about in the neighbourhood when the hunting season began: some one unworthy, consequently, dangerous.

As she passed into the gateway and approached the house, a great feeling of comfort came over Mrs. Ambrose as she saw that a light was flaring in Silvia's room. She was so shaken, so troubled, that she had prepared herself almost for the very worst in that long walk homewards through the dusk.

The light in that window encouraged her to believe that the girl was still in the house, and, as she crossed the threshold and met one of the maids, she put this question hurriedly.

"Yes, ma'am, Miss Silvia's in. She hasn't been out all the afternoon. Neither has Mr. Dick," added the maid, with a perceptible shrug of her shoulders; but

she had other she said. "I to read. I p got him a f station."

Helen Am she made her which she ent

Her husba closing the tel

"Sorry you it is a great otherwise they

The telegran that her mothe to come at onc

There was r He left no or Ambrose discov his children bef

Her first ser was one of inte in any way th Nigel Ambrose

She ordered and she also gav maid, and told h she was going to

She was a lor she was in her charge to say go

He was very

she had other news to give. "The master's gone away," she said. "He got a telegram, which he's left for you to read. I packed him just a few things in a bag, and got him a fly from Simpson's to take him to the station."

Helen Ambrose's heart was beating in her throat as she made her way to the library, that room of mystery which she entered so rarely, and guarded so jealously.

Her husband had scribbled just a few words, enclosing the telegram he had received.

"Sorry you are out, but I feel I must go, although it is a great nuisance; but I suppose I am wanted, otherwise they would not have sent for me."

The telegram was from a cousin of his, informing him that her mother, his aunt, was very ill, and that he was to come at once.

There was no mention how long he would be away. He left no orders, and by further questioning Mrs. Ambrose discovered that he had not seen any one of his children before he had taken his departure.

Her first sensation after her surprise had vanished was one of intense relief. She would be free to move in any way that she wished, or was necessary, with Nigel Ambrose out of the house.

She ordered dinner to be served at the usual hour, and she also gave the note containing the telegram to a maid, and told her to take it to Miss Ambrose. Dick she was going to interview personally.

She was a long time changing her dress; and while she was in her room the nurse-girl brought her little charge to say good-night.

He was very dirty, but he looked quite happy, and

Helen Ambrose took it as an omen of good that he seemed very pleased to see her. He put his arms round her and gave her a good hug.

"Master Spencer went looking for you, ma'am. He couldn't make out nowheres where you'd gone. He seemed to feel it so queer he couldn't find you downstairs."

"It is good to be missed," said Mrs. Ambrose, with something of her usual buoyant manner.

She kissed the child tenderly, and sent him away with a little packet to be opened when he was in bed.

After some deliberation, she put on one of her prettiest gowns, and when she was dressed she looked at herself critically, and yet with some satisfaction.

"If I could put things on the right road here," she mused, with a scarcely conscious sigh, "and I still find I am not wanted any more, why, I guess I'll go right back home!"

She knocked sharply at Dick's door a moment or so later; without waiting for his voice to answer she turned the handle and entered the room. It was in darkness, and the atmosphere was stuffy.

She groped her way to the mantelpiece, where she knew that she would find matches, and she lit the candles; then stood and looked at the figure lying huddled on the bed.

"Please get up, Dick," she said. "Your father has gone away, and I want you to take the head of the table."

There was no movement or response, and Helen Ambrose walked across to the bed and suddenly pulled the clothes away.

"Get up,"

Dick Am
to pull the cl
out of his half

"For God
kind of fuss.

"Your fat
mother, quietl

"I'm not g
in a slow, sully

"Then I'll
how, I'll give y

She walke
As a strea

room, the you
the edge of the

"How dar
"How dare yo

get up. I tell

"I'm not g
This kind

on sure ground

"If you w
give you the re

said, "well, the
hog!"

Dick Ambro
window, which

with rage.
"If you dar
you out!"

"Do!" reto

"Get up," she said.

Dick Ambrose shivered and stretched out his arm to pull the clothes back again; then he looked at her out of his half-closed eyes, and he said—

"For God's sake, don't come in here making this kind of fuss. Can't you leave me alone?"

"Your father has gone away," repeated his stepmother, quietly; "and I require you to get up."

"I'm not going to get up," answered Dick Ambrose, in a slow, sullen voice.

"Then I'll throw a jug of water over you; and, anyhow, I'll give you some fresh air."

She walked across to the window and flung it open.

As a stream of very cold raw air poured into the room, the young man twisted himself round and sat on the edge of the bed.

"How dare you do that!" he asked, in a fury. "How dare you come in here at all! You tell me to get up. I tell you to get out!"

"I'm not going," Helen Ambrose answered.

This kind of encounter did her good. She felt on sure ground, and her spirit was whipped into action.

"If you want me to treat you as a man, and give you the respect that a decent man commands," she said, "well, then, you'll have to *be* a man, and not a hog!"

Dick Ambrose started to his feet and walked to the window, which he slammed down. He was trembling with rage.

"If you dare to do that again," he said, "I'll throw you out!"

"Do!" retorted his stepmother. "I—I guess you'd

take on more than you can carry, my friend. I'm a fair weight, and, anyhow," she laughed, "if you did throw me out of the window, why, I'd be glad, for it would show me that you had some spunk in you."

Dick stood and looked at her. His feet were bare. He had on a tumbled and tobacco-stained suit of pyjamas. His hair was rough, and he was unshaven and unwashed, and as far as a really handsome boy could look ugly, he looked it.

"I say, what has come to you?" he asked, fretfully. "Have you gone mad?"

"No; I've gotten back my senses, that's all. Things have been going on in this house that I don't mean to have go on any longer. I'm mistress here, and I'm going to show you what that means, Dick Ambrose. Your father isn't here, and you've got to be in his place while he is away. Now dress. I'll go and turn on the hot water; a nice bath will make a new man of you."

But Dick had got back into bed, and he covered himself over once again.

"I don't know what sort of game you think you're playing," he sneered; "but you can go to hell before you'll get me to come and join you."

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Ambrose. "I'm not going to hell just yet awhile; but I *am* going to master you."

She took the key out of the lock from the inside, and when she went out of the room she put it into the door again, and locked him in.

"Now," she said; "he's mighty fond of his food, and if he won't come round any other way, why, perhaps an empty stomach will do the trick!"

I T seemed
sat at d
speak about

Outwardly
her normal
She always s
occasions w
made answer

The fact
that afternoon
and it was no
spoke of what

"I—I can
with you to-n
like to ask yo
hurriedly: "d
forgive me if
It's about Sil

Mrs. Ches
her lips and s

"I had a
explained. "
of it I can har
but one part c

CHAPTER IV

IT seemed only natural that same evening as she sat at dinner with Mrs. Cheston that Isabel should speak about Silvia Ambrose.

Outwardly John Cheston's mother had gone back to her normal state. She never had very much to say. She always sat and listened to Isabel, and as on other occasions when the girl appealed to her directly she made answer in her usual hurried, hesitating way.

The fact that Mrs. Ambrose had been to see her that afternoon was just mentioned by her, nothing more; and it was not until they were quite alone that Isabel spoke of what was on her mind.

"I—I came here not only because I wanted to be with you to-night," she said, "but I thought I should like to ask your advice. Please, darling," the girl added hurriedly: "don't let me worry you. Jack would never forgive me if I did that . . . but I am a bit bothered. It's about Silvia."

Mrs. Cheston looked at her with her usual smile on her lips and said nothing.

"I had a note from Silvia this afternoon," Isabel explained. "It was sent over by hand. A good deal of it I can hardly understand for she does write so badly, but one part of it is very plain."

She took a rather crumpled-looking letter out of her bag and opened it : then she looked across at Mrs. Cheston.

"See wants me to lend her some money."

To Isabel Matheson it seemed as if the other woman winced ; and instantly she began to reproach herself.

"Oh! I am stupid," she said to herself. "Now I am going to upset her, and Jack will be furious with me ;" but before she could speak again openly Mrs. Cheston had spoken :

"Have you ever lent her money before?"

"No," said Isabel.

There was a little pause and then nervously Olivia Mary said : "I wonder—may I see the letter, Belle?"

Isabel hesitated a moment and looked at her very thoughtfully.

"Of course you may see the letter ; but I feel that I ought not to have told you about this."

"You always have the thought of Jack in your mind?" queried Olivia Mary with her faint smile ; and the girl's answer was very frank.

"Yes, because you see he puts you in my care ; and you do need that care, darling."

"You are a dear child, Isabel," Mrs. Cheston said gently : then she held out her hand again for the letter.

"But this is not going to do me any harm. Remember, Jack asked me to do what I could for this girl, you were quite right to speak to me about her."

"Well, I thought of you at once," Isabel hastened to say. "Somehow I didn't want to tell mother. She is always so angry about Mr. Ambrose and the way he neglects his children ; and then mother is awfully

generous and money to Sil might do her

"Great h

She was badly spelt strange riot visions of lonely girl s which are as and light :

Ambrose, ne understandin

"Twenty of money, Be

"Yes ; of my own allow know what : know she fre was with us wants to ge believe that about that. self."

"It is not "There is s you must ser

"That is eagerly. Sh "And yet," want her to I feel touch

generous and she would have wanted to send more money to Silvia than the girl asks for, and that I feel might do harm."

"Great harm!" said Olivia Mary in her quiet way.

She was scanning the letter, that badly written, badly spelt letter, and within her heart there was a strange riot of feeling. Back to her memory came visions of long ago, of a girl's wild passionate nature, a lonely girl shut off as it were from those influences which are as necessary to the young as food and air and light: just such a girl in one sense as Silvia Ambrose, needing so much protective care, so much understanding!

"Twenty pounds," she said. "That is a good deal of money, Belle!"

"Yes; of course I can get it if I ask father for it; my own allowance is not very big; but you see I don't know what Silvia wants this money for. Of course, I know she fretted terribly about being shabby when she was with us; and perhaps that is it. Perhaps she wants to get some clothes . . . but—well, I can't believe that Mrs. Ambrose would make any difficulty about that. She is always so charmingly dressed herself."

"It is not a question of clothes," said Mrs. Cheston. "There is something else. Belle dear, I don't think you must send this money."

"That is just what I feel myself," Isabel said half eagerly. She sat down on the hearthrug near the fire. "And yet," she added, "I hate refusing the child. I want her to feel I'm really her friend. In a sense too I feel touched that she should want me to do this,

because she is a strange girl. I wouldn't show that letter to anyone but you, I should feel as if I had betrayed Silvia's confidence, and that she would never forgive! She is a passionate little soul and so bitter!"

"Yes, I feel that," said Olivia Mary. "It comes out in this sentence where she writes if only she had what belonged to her mother she would not have to ask any one for help. I suppose she means jewellery?"

Isabel Matheson shook her head. "I don't know what she does mean, only I feel anxious about her."

"Suppose you write the answer to this letter from here. Ask her to spend the day with you to-morrow, and bring her to luncheon with me, Belle."

"That will be lovely. I would have been glad to have asked her to stay on; but I am always so anxious not to hurt Mrs. Ambrose and she might imagine that I was taking sides with Silvia if I saw too much of the girl."

"I don't think she would think that," said Mrs. Cheston; and then she put a question to Isabel. "Is Silvia happy with you? Does she seem glad to stay with you?"

Isabel paused an instant before answering, then she said:

"Yes, I think so; at least she used to like to see me, but there is something very different with Silvia just lately. Perhaps it is because she is growing up and she feels that her life is too dull, too narrow."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Cheston: then she smiled. "Go and write your letter," she said. "I should like to meet this girl."

So Isabel scribbled a few affectionate words to

Silvia saying
early the ne
jolly day tog
she said, look
take her into

"It isn't c
but she said r
at the writing
got up very q

"Will you
as she put the
Jack would de

"I don't th
night, thank y
bed later. I'll
Court, and yo
won't you?"

"Yes, I'll g

They kisse
of meeting the

Indeed by 1
travelling swift
home from Ga

Sir Thomas
newspaper und
to see her sta
healthy looking
bristling white

"What's yo

"I am going
lunching at The

"Oh!" said

Silvia saying that she would come over in the car quite early the next morning, and then they would have a jolly day together. "And if she wants any clothes," she said, looking back over her shoulder, "why I can take her into Storchester and help her to choose things."

"It isn't clothes," Olivia Mary said a second time; but she said no more; only she sighed; and as the girl at the writing-table caught the sound of that sigh she got up very quickly and came across the room.

"Will you let me take you upstairs?" She coloured as she put the question. "I want to do all that I know Jack would do if he were here," she added.

"I don't think I shall go to bed quite so early to-night, thank you, dear. I really sleep better if I go to bed later. I'll see that your note is sent over to Garth Court, and you will go quite early to-morrow, Belle, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll go over directly after breakfast."

They kissed affectionately and parted with a promise of meeting the next day.

Indeed by nine o'clock the next morning Isabel was travelling swiftly over the distance which separated her home from Garth Court.

Sir Thomas Matheson had come to the doorway with newspaper under arm and a troop of dogs at his heel to see her start. He was tall and spare but very healthy looking, with a crop of thick white hair and a bristling white monstache.

"What's your hurry, Belle?" he asked.

"I am going over to fetch Silvia Ambrose. We are lunching at Thorpe to-day."

"Oh!" said Sir Thomas. "That's something new,

isn't it? Well, it is about time that pretty soul began to wake up. She has been buried at Thorpe quite long enough. Give her my love and tell her I shall walk across and ask her for a dish of tea one afternoon this week."

Isabel waved her hand and started the car. She drove herself: she was so capable, so quick to learn, as strong and fearless as any one of her numerous brothers.

She reached Garth Court in a quarter of an hour, and turned the car deftly in between the old-fashioned gates, bringing it up in fine style in front of the entrance. As she did so she glanced up at the house and saw that Silvia was waving to her from her bedroom window.

"Shall be down directly," the girl cried, in excited tones.

Mrs. Ambrose had come out into the hall to meet this early visitor and acting on impulse Isabel kissed her.

"I hope I am not an intruder," she cried, "but I am going to borrow Silvia for the day if I may. I want her to come into the town; we are going to do some shopping and then we are lunching at Thorpe with Mrs. Cheston."

"Why, that's *good!*" said Helen Ambrose with her pleasant laugh. "Won't you come right in, Miss Matheson? There's only Spudgin and me. We are rather late this morning."

Isabel tossed off her cap and loosened her coat and followed Mrs. Ambrose into the dining-room.

Spudgin received her kiss of greeting without

evinced any honey.

"He has I haven't you, S

The child took another l

"Won't you these buns?"

"I can't re

"I'll send i

"Oh! she that she would night at Thorpe would send over has had it?"

"Why I thi said Mrs. Am to her face; an think it's just to-day."

At this m hammering so Spudgin put u attention.

"That's Dic his door. He

The colour and then she lo

"It has got down my foot a drifting, drifting account anyh

evincing any emotion. He was eating bread and honey.

"He has promised not to muss himself too much, haven't you, Spudgin?"

The child gave a gulp and said "Yes"; and then took another large mouthful.

"Won't you have something—some coffee—one of these buns?"

"I can't resist a bun," said Isabel.

"I'll send up and let Silvia know you're here."

"Oh! she saw me, Mrs. Ambrose, and called out that she would be down directly. I was dining last night at Thorpe; and Mrs. Cheston told me that she would send over a little note from me. I hope Silvia has had it?"

"Why I think so. Mrs. Cheston sent me one too," said Mrs. Ambrose. There was a little rush of colour to her face; and then she added: "She is so kind! I think it's just lovely of her to ask Silvia over there to-day."

At this moment there was the sound of violent hammering somewhere in the near distance; and Spudgin put up one little fat hand to attract Isabel's attention.

"That's Dick," he said. "He is trying to kick down his door. He has been a bad boy. I 'ate Dick."

The colour had deepened in Helen Ambrose's face and then she looked frankly into Isabel's eyes.

"It has got to be me or Dick! and so I have put down my foot at last. I simply just can't let him go on drifting, drifting—drifting till he gets of no use or no account anyhow. He is kicking the door because

he's hungry and I won't let them take any food to him."

"I don't know how you've stood it as long as you have, Mrs. Ambrose," Isabel said in her frank way. "I've often felt inclined to rag Dick. He ought to have my father after him in a little while!"

"He's breaking the door froo," Spudgin announced solemnly.

"I guess he'll hurt himself a bit first," Mrs. Ambrose remarked.

Isabel noticed when the hot colour died out of her cheeks that she looked tired and pale and anxious, and all at once the girl's heart went out to her.

"Why don't you come with us to-day?" she asked. "It would do you no end of good. Spudgin will let you go, won't you, Spudgin?"

Spudgin licked a piece of honey from his fingers and then said:

"No"; adding with quite a good imitation of his stepmother's accent: "I guess not, because I want her."

Helen Ambrose's lips trembled for an instant and it seemed as if tears had rushed to her eyes, and then she gave him a nod and a laugh.

"Why! that's good, Spudgin," she said; "and we'll have a famous time together. We'll just be as happy as kings."

The noise had ceased upstairs and at that moment Silvia came into the room. She kissed Isabel warmly and began to chatter in a way which was quite new to her stepmother.

"Do you really mean that we are going to have the

car? And t
Belle, you a
lunch at The
know I hav
nobody ever
mother. Wh
all of a sudde

It was on
something of
Ambrose war
only let the
Mrs. Cheston
that she woul

"It doesn't
remains that
lunch with he

Silvia had
mother nor
something to

"Dick's go
food to eat!
beckus nor no

Instantly
looked hard
quite changed.

"I'm sorry,
be here when
shameful way."

"I don't
reminds me of
went to Dartm
cantankerous,

car? And that we are going into Storchester? Oh! Belle, you *are* a dear; and then we are going to have lunch at Thorpe? I can't quite believe it! Do you know I have never been inside Thorpe? I thought nobody ever did go except you and your father and mother. What *has* made Mrs. Cheston remember me all of a sudden?"

It was on the tip of Isabel's tongue to tell Silvia something of the truth; but a quick glance at Mrs. Ambrose warned her that this would be a bad move; only let the other girl realize that her stepmother and Mrs. Cheston had met and it was more than probable that she would refuse to go to Thorpe.

"It doesn't matter how it has come about: the fact remains that Mrs. Cheston has sent you an invitation to lunch with her," Isabel said brightly.

Silvia had not taken the least notice of her stepmother nor her little brother; but Spudgin had something to say to her.

"Dick's got locked up. He isn't going to have any food to eat! I 'spect he'll die because he won't have any beclus nor nothing."

Instantly Silvia's gaiety disappeared. Her face looked hard and fixed and cold, the expression had quite changed.

"I'm sorry, Belle," she said stiffly, "that you should be here when my brother is being humiliated in this shameful way."

"I don't call it humiliation," said Isabel. "It reminds me of what father did to Larry just before he went to Dartmouth. You know Larry got most fearful cantankerous, at one time, mother couldn't do a thing

with him: so we had to bring father on the scene, Mrs. Ambrose, and he soon read the Riot Act!"

"Larry was a boy, Dick's a man," Silvia Ambrose said in a voice of stifled anger.

"Well then, dear child, if he is a man," was Isabel's straightforward reply, "he ought to behave as such! There was some excuse for Larry because he was a boy. I confess I don't see any excuse for Dick."

What Silvia may have said, or what she might have done, cannot be set down, for at that moment there came the sound of something falling and then of a cry; and the next moment Bessie the maid had rushed into the room.

"Oh! ma'am," she said, "Mr. Dick let himself down out of the window; and he slipped and I am afraid he's hurt himself badly."

It was Isabel who put out her hand and gripped Mrs. Ambrose's arm.

"I'll go and see," she said.

Just for a moment she had thought the woman would faint: so white she had grown, so frightened was her expression; but as Isabel and Silvia turned to the door Dick himself lounged in. He was still in his unbecoming pyjamas; but he had put on some socks and a pair of shoes and his hair was brushed. There was a scratch on his face and it was bleeding, and he was supporting his left arm with his right hand.

"I want some breakfast," he said.

"Dick—are you hurt? I'll—I'll tell father. I'll get him to send her away. How dare she do this! How dare she?"

Silvia was trembling not only with rage but with

some other
with a burst

"For Go
testily. "O!
should see n
dress." He

"That's a
off. Ta-ta.

bring you fro

Spudgin g
towards her.

matter was a

Silvia had
a bright smi

Matheson fol
her.

Dick and
another.

Helen An

"The coff

some fresh m
fish over ther

chief and dipp
him. "You

blood away
sorry; but y

myself I'm th
for another re

Dick sat d
"That's al
She stood
it came to her

some other emotion, and her speech came to an end with a burst of tears.

"For God's sake, don't make a scene," said Dick testily. "Oh! is that you, Belle? I'm sorry you should see me like this. But I haven't had time to dress." He grinned as he spoke, and Isabel laughed.

"That's all right," she said. "Silvia and I are going off. Ta-ta. Good-bye, everybody. What shall we bring you from Storchester, Spudgin?"

Spudgin got solemnly down from his chair and came towards her. He had no end of commissions; the matter was a serious one.

Silvia had gone out of the room hurriedly and, with a bright smile and a nod to Mrs. Ambrose, Isabel Matheson followed her and took the little boy with her.

Dick and his stepmother were left facing one another.

Helen Ambrose spoke as firmly as she could.

"The coffee's quite cold, I guess; but I'll soon have some fresh made. There's bacon and eggs and some fish over there": then taking out her pocket-handkerchief and dipping it into some hot water she went up to him. "You are hurt," she said, as she sponged the blood away from his cheek. "Dick, I am awfully sorry; but you see I had to do it. It is not a bit myself I'm thinking about; but I had to wake you up for another reason, a very big one."

Dick sat down suddenly and closed his eyes.

"That's all right," he said; and he spoke faintly.

She stood looking at him a little uncertainly: then it came to her that he was suffering.

She knew something, just a rudimentary something of surgery and medicine ; and a glance at his left arm assured her that Dick had hurt himself in real earnest. She had already rung the bell for the maid and as Bessie came in at that moment she sent the girl to fetch Isabel Matheson back again.

"I want the doctor here," she said, when Isabel came hurrying in. "I suppose you'll just about catch him, for I saw him pass through the village before I came down. Tell him he's got to set a broken limb."

She was holding the damp handkerchief to Dick's cheek as she spoke and he opened his eyes as they were alone and looked at her.

"I say," he said. "I can't be seen like this."

"Doctors see people in all sorts of queer ways," said his stepmother. "Don't you let that worry you one little bit."

"It isn't exactly the clothes," he answered her. "One looks such a d—d fool!"

"Oh ; we have all got to look fools at some time or another."

Helen Ambrose brushed the hair back from his brow and then suddenly she bent and kissed him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Dick, does it hurt you very much?" He made a grimace and shrugged his shoulders.

"I can stand it," he said ; and then he looked at her and he laughed, and he was extremely good to look at when he laughed.

"Last night you said you'd be right pleased if I threw you out of the window because it would show I had some spunk in me. Well, I couldn't throw you, so

I pitched my
he said ; "it
lot of bruises."

"So long
self I don't m
you, Dick. Y
I—I'm just o
for one person
coffee? Dr. S
you must be
no proper foo

She put t
looking on.
swollen wrist
now and then

He wanted
a minute desc
which his bro
very mean, bu
and wholenes
when finally hi
gloating and
very low indee

"You've g
was led out of
and hit you."

"He is a n
with a grimace
strating with
that's one of t
to support I'm
with me, I thi

I pitched myself. It may mean that I've got spunk," he said; "it also means that I've got a confounded lot of bruises."

"So long as you wake up and be your real nice dear self I don't much care how you do it! Because I want you, Dick. You don't know how badly I want you! I—I'm just one alone, you know, and there's such a lot for one person alone. Now, won't you drink some hot coffee? Dr. Sargent will be here directly; and I know you must be feeling mighty bad because you have had no proper food for such a long time."

She put the coffee to his lips and Spudgin stood looking on. He was terribly interested in his brother's swollen wrist; and in the fact that Dick winced every now and then with a sudden throb of pain.

He wanted to know all sorts of things, demanding a minute description in the first place of the sensations which his brother was experiencing. He felt with a very mean, but very natural, sense of his own strength and wholeness that he had Dick at a disadvantage: when finally his nurse came and took him away he went gloating and rejoicing that his enemy had been laid very low indeed.

"You've got to be good, real good," he said as he was led out of the room. "If you aren't I shall come and hit you."

"He is a nice little animal, isn't he?" inquired Dick, with a grimace, as his stepmother returned from remonstrating with Spudgin: then he grinned again. "If that's one of the things that is too much for one person to support I'm with you! When the doctor's through with me, I think I'll go up to the nursery."

If there had ever been a lingering doubt in Helen Ambrose's mind as to the place which Dick had made in her affections this vision of him suffering, yet almost indifferent to his sufferings, quite pluckily calm, would have reassured her. As she had told Miss Dalywood in their last memorable interview she had always got on better with boys than with girls; and she knew now that she cared for this particular boy with just as much love and pride and tenderness as though she had been his own mother.

When the doctor came and suggested that Dick should be taken upstairs to his room she proposed something else.

"I—I am going to have him have my room," she said. "It is much more cheerful there."

She was present when the arm was set. It was a clean break and with such a healthy young person the limb would mend quickly.

She helped the doctor to get him into bed and brought clean pyjamas and made him very smart; and when he was resting back on the pillows looking tired but interesting and very handsome, she went downstairs and with her own hands carried up the breakfast which he had been unable to touch.

"This is heaping coals, isn't it?" queried Dick; and then his real nature began to show that it did exist. "I say, why do you put me in here? You'll be awfully uncomfortable, you know. You have got all your things scattered about. I can easily go back to my own room."

"No!" said Helen Ambrose. "I won't have that!" she laughed. "Now I've got you and I mean to keep

you. I—I g
care for you,

"That's a
afraid that s
know what h
Ambrose had
she was deep
she was also
great chasm
steep and dif
fully than it l

After a w
It gave her at
that he was in
when a teleg
forming her th
another few c
beginning to
go. The kno
Matheson and
move on her
and she went
though a bu
through from l

In the co
looked in to
garments.

The news
village that yo
and odds and
make inquiries

"I guess I

you. I—I guess I'm going to let you see how much I care for you, Dick."

"That's all right," said Dick a little shyly. He was afraid that she was going to cry. He did not quite know what he should do if she were to cry. But Mrs. Ambrose had no intention of shedding tears; although she was deeply touched and both nervous and excited she was also happy. She felt that she had crossed a great chasm; and that the road, though it might be steep and difficult, stretched before her far more hopefully than it had done, Silvia notwithstanding.

After a while she went away and left Dick to sleep. It gave her an extraordinary sense of pleasure to realize that he was in her room, literally now in her hands; and when a telegram was given to her from her husband informing her that he would not be able to return home for another few days, she felt as if everything at last was beginning to move in the way she had hoped it would go. The knowledge that Silvia was safe with Isabel Matheson and that Mrs. Cheston had already begun to move on her side took a great weight from her heart; and she went about her household duties cheerily, as though a burst of unexpected sunshine had broken through from behind dark and gloomy clouds.

In the course of the morning Miss Dalywood looked in to bring back her share of the red flannel garments.

The news had spread very quickly through the village that young Ambrose had met with an accident; and odds and ends of people had already sent up to make inquiries.

"I guess I'm a real wicked woman and I believe

that you are another!" was Helen Ambrose's greeting when the parcel of red flannel had been handed over.

"Well, we are all sinners," said Miss Dalywood; "but wherein have I particularly erred just lately."

"You incited me to go for Dick; and I went."

"Did you knock him down?" inquired Miss Dalywood a little excitedly.

"Something like that;" and then Mrs. Ambrose gave an exact account of what had occurred, and as she listened Agnes Dalywood clapped her hands.

"Good!" she said; "and now I am going to take back all I said the other night. I am *not* disappointed in you; and you are just the woman I hoped you would be."

"Don't go too fast," said Mrs. Ambrose. "It's true I have practically smashed up Dick—and laid him low—but things may pan out differently when he gets well. A man's always very sorry—and mournful when he's sick; but when he's himself again!" she finished with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Well," said Miss Dalywood, "he can't lounge about quite as comfortably as he did with a broken arm, and if he does laze a bit now, at least there's an excuse for him. Look here, you'd better give me the rest of the sewing, you won't have too much time to sit down and work at it with a sick person in the house. Can I be of any use? Would Dick like me to read to him?"

"You are awful sweet, Agnes!" said Mrs. Ambrose quickly; "but I don't think I'll propose anything like that just yet. I'll see how things go. Nigel won't be back maybe for a week: that gives me plenty of time. I always hoped I'd get to good terms with Dick," she

added. "Th like Silvia."

"Oh! do Dalywood p day. This is again you m to some kind

"My! T of profession had his prope Ambrose ad Agnes: he n things are b you stay and

But Miss

"No; it i in again to-n came back. know what y let Master D time—make with a sharp away.

added. "There is something human in him ! He's not like Silvia."

"Oh! don't you fret about the girl," said Miss Dalywood promptly: "besides, Rome wasn't built in a day. This is a splendid chance; and when Dick's well again you must see your way to get him settled down to some kind of profession."

"My! That's not so easy as you think. What sort of profession are you going to give a boy who has never had his proper share of education? All the same," Mrs. Ambrose added in the same breath: "you're right, Agnes: he must be a little changed after this and things are bound to go differently with him. Won't you stay and have some lunch?"

But Miss Dalywood shook her head.

"No; it is my day at the cottage hospital. I'll look in again to-morrow." She was turning away, but she came back. "Now, don't you coddle him too much. I know what you are—you'll be just ready to lie down and let Master Dick walk over you. You've got him this time—make good use of all your opportunities"; and with a sharp nod Miss Dalywood turned and walked away.

CHAPTER V

OLIVIA MARY was out in the garden when her two guests arrived for luncheon. She had been for a walk with her dogs.

The morning had started very fine, with a burst of sunshine but it was now cold and gloomy and grey; and Mrs. Cheston was wrapped about in furs.

She received Silvia Ambrose charmingly and yet shyly; and the girl looked at her with envy, admiration and surprise. Of course, she knew Mrs. Cheston very well by sight; but this was the first time that she had been in close contact with her; and there were elements about Olivia Mary which moved the girl almost against herself.

The drive to the town had not been too pleasant, for when Silvia had discovered that Isabel Matheson was not in sympathy with her in her abuse of her step-mother, when too she had discovered that it was not in Isabel's power to lend her the money she had needed, she had dropped into a sullen mood and nothing the other girl could do would rouse her.

By the time they had reached Thorpe, Isabel was frankly unhappy. It hurt her to feel that she must be reproached by Silvia.

"I did think somehow," the girl had said, "that

you were a
though she
to have bee
forced by c
Silvia her re
have been to
Ambrose w
refuge in sil
was forced t
there was s
up that exc
Silvia's disp
silent and to

As she s
spacious din
look. It w
nevertheless
chosen yet
absolutely
Cheston's, a
red flush of
delicate usel

Olivia M
(and surely
before as sl
herself in h
her younge
once that l
outside Hel
very simpli
womanly ch
always be r

you were a friend, Belle ; I counted on you !” And though she would have given everything in her power to have been able to defend herself, Isabel had been forced by circumstances to remain silent. To give Silvia her real reason for refusing to lend money would have been to make matters worse : to champion Helen Ambrose was simply madness, therefore she took refuge in silence. With Mrs. Cheston, however, Silvia was forced to come out of her bad temper ; and in fact there was so much to interest, to satisfy and to stir up that excitement which was so near the surface in Silvia’s disposition that it was not possible to remain silent and to sulk.

As she sat at the beautifully-appointed table in the spacious dining-room, Silvia felt ashamed of her shabby look. It was a rather bitter reflection ; but it came nevertheless, that her stepmother in her well-cut, well-chosen yet never very costly clothes, would have been absolutely in her right place as a guest of Mrs. Cheston’s, and the thought was sufficient to bring the red flush of anger to her cheek and to make her slim delicate useless hands tremble.

Olivia Mary, whilst she listened to Isabel’s chatter (and surely Isabel had never been so bright and useful before as she was this day!) and made conversation herself in her half-constrained fashion, was looking at her younger guest earnestly, critically. She saw at once that here was material which would always be outside Helen Ambrose’s province to deal with. The very simplicity, the homeliness, the frankness, that womanly charm which appealed to her so much, would always be misunderstood by this sullen, super-arrogant

girl, whilst on the other hand she knew that given proper circumstances it was emphatically in her to master Silvia Ambrose and mould her to whatsoever shape she chose. In this, however, she did not deceive herself. If it was to be permitted to her to stand between Silvia and the kind of folly that would be so possible to such a nature as hers, then Olivia Mary would have to work not through her will but through the appeal which her beauty, her dainty surroundings and her wealth alone could make.

Before luncheon was over she had put forward a suggestion in her pretty shy way.

"I am afraid it is rather dull here," she said hesitatingly; "but I—I have been wondering—" she paused and looked first at Isabel and then at Silvia. "Do you think you might come and stay here for a few days?"

Silvia's face lit up.

"Oh! do you mean that?" she asked: then she amended this. "I mean—it is—it's awfully kind of you, Mrs. Cheston." Then suddenly her brows contracted; "but I am afraid I can't come."

"Oh! Silvia dear!" Isabel said quickly. "It would have given me so much pleasure to have had you here for a little while. Perhaps we might have been able to get up some kind of entertainment."

"Well, I'm sorry," said Silvia in her sullen way; "but I can't come."

She made no attempt to be gracious or to explain why she could not do so: Isabel felt once again how impossible she was: in truth she was so irritated and impatient that she would have liked to have turned her back on Silvia there and then.

Mrs. Che
a strange ex

"Some o
Ambrose ma
bread beside
later she star

"Yes, I'd

Again Ol
she smiled.

"I am so
want this aft
of going bac

To this S
was settled;
into the hall,
Matheson wa
In a way, too,
invitation.

welcomed bu
felt that J
enormous eff
that this eff
it ought to b
wake up and
own hands t
was the mos
Olivia Mary
one (of that
more delight
Isabel that
person who
self was Ger

Mrs. Cheston was looking at her younger guest with a strange expression in her eyes.

"Some other time perhaps," she said ; but Silvia Ambrose made no answer. She was crumbling the bread beside her plate and looking down. A moment later she startled both the others by saying :

"Yes, I'd like to come, if you really want me."

Again Olivia Mary looked at her rather keenly, then she smiled.

"I am so glad. I propose sending over for all you want this afternoon and then you won't have the bother of going back."

To this Silvia said "Thanks" briefly and the matter was settled ; but as they went out of the dining-room into the hall, where coffee was brought to them, Isabel Matheson was conscious of a sense of curious uneasiness. In a way, too, she was greatly surprised by Mrs. Cheston's invitation. It was such a departure, one which she welcomed but yet at the same time regretted, for she felt that John Cheston's mother was making an enormous effort to show friendship and sympathy, and that this effort would not be understood or valued as it ought to be. She could only hope that Silvia would wake up and be pleasant. It was altogether in the girl's own hands to make things agreeable. Thorpe Bassett was the most charming house in which to stay, and if Olivia Mary really meant to come out of her shell no one (of that Isabel was firmly convinced) could be a more delightful companion. But it was all so new to Isabel that she felt a little bewildered. The only person who had ever stayed at Thorpe except herself was Gertrude Kurtiss, sister of that Angus whom

she and John had discussed the night he had been a home.

Silvia would certainly be a change and a pleasant one from Miss Kurtiss, who was a colourless, depressing individual, always either about to be ill, or recovering from an illness, and yet Isabel knew that Mrs. Cheston had made more than one attempt to get Gertrude Kurtiss to live with her and would have carried out this intention, even though her son would have protested against it very strongly, had she been able to induce her niece to fall in with her suggestion. For some reason, however, neither Angus Kurtiss nor his sister ever showed any real deference to Mrs. Cheston's wishes. Isabel went farther than this when she was discussing the matter with her mother. She always declared that it made her blood boil to notice the disagreeable way in which these two people treated Mrs. Cheston.

Lady Matheson had her own view concerning the Kurtiss brother and sister.

"My dear Belle," she would say, "it is as plain as the nose on your face, they, or Angus at least, always thought he was going to have money when his uncle died; and of course he is furiously jealous, because Anthony Cheston didn't leave him a farthing. That's why he's so disagreeable both with Jack and his mother and why they can never do anything right in his eyes."

"But after all, why should he have expected to have had any money, mother?"

"Don't ask me," Lady Matheson would declare. "I am no good at answering riddles. I suppose really

Mr. Cheston
much as he
expensive
head. Per
anybody w

Isabel
invitation
Kurtiss, fo
verifying l
every mov
marked by
surely this
not comm

Silvia
should be
go and ge
car back f
preferred t

When
"I hop
said. "R
She has st
that coul
school."

But M
"Oh!
wants to b
is taking p
bit lovable
that she
unhappine
is here, we

Mr. Cheston was to blame: he brought up Angus very much as he brought up his own son, sent him to an expensive school and put all sorts of ideas into the boy's head. Personally, I don't think one can exactly blame anybody who was treated as he was treated, Belle."

Isabel was thinking in a vague way of how this invitation to Silvia Ambrose would annoy Angus Kurtiss, for she had had plenty of opportunities of verifying her mother's suggestion and to realize that every move in John's or in Mrs. Cheston's life was marked by young Kurtiss and judged resentfully. Very surely this friendship with the Garth Court people would not commend itself to Angus or his sister.

Silvia disposed of the suggestion that a messenger should be sent for her things: she asked permission to go and get them herself; and as Isabel had sent her car back for her mother's use the girl declared that she preferred to walk.

When she had gone Isabel spoke about her frankly.

"I hope she isn't going to be a bother to you," she said. "Really she is a bit of a handful! Poor Silvia! She has such atrocious manners! About the best thing that could happen to her would be to send her to school."

But Mrs. Cheston shook her head.

"Oh! you can't send a girl like that to school. She wants to be influenced without realizing that any change is taking place in her. I don't think she is in the least bit lovable, but I am sorry for her. It seems to me that she has in herself the potentialities for much unhappiness. You'll come over and help me while she is here, won't you, Belle dear?"

"Of course," the girl answered promptly; and then she laughed.

"I shouldn't be surprised if we were to have Jack on the scene again when he hears what is happening. He will be so afraid that you may overdo things."

Mrs. Cheston only smiled faintly and then she said:

"I shall leave it to you, Belle, to suggest anything which you think will please Miss Ambrose."

"Oh! yes, I'll do all I can," said Isabel; "but I don't think I'll come here too often while you have Silvia because the great thing is to leave her alone with you. Just now you said she ought to be influenced unconsciously; well, she can't fail to be influenced by you. Just all the things she wants you can give her. You know," Isabel explained, "Silvia and my mother don't get on. I am afraid mother has a rather downright way of speaking out her opinion at times, and as she does not at all approve of the way Mr. Ambrose neglects his duties, she says this quite frankly. You've heard her on the subject once or twice you know!"

"Yes," said Olivia Mary, "I've heard her."

After chatting a little while longer, Isabel took her departure. She also preferred walking home, and when she was alone Mrs. Cheston sat back in a chair and closed her eyes thinking for a while, then she went upstairs, and she sent for Payne, to whom she imparted the information that Miss Ambrose was going to be her guest for a few days.

"And I want you to tell Mrs. Lockwood to give her one of the nicest rooms; I am particularly anxious that everything should be bright and pretty about her. You

will wait up
without you."

To this Pa

"I'd just
that arranger

On this
sharply:

"Will you
does not rule

And Pay
dryly: "I'd
me!"

Once she
fact that Mi
flung herself
thing as her
came back
taken upstairs
rooms, and r
important pe
to amuse tha
her home, the
and though s
many natura

They dir
coaxing, Sil
Her knowle
So after a w
the accompa
had a natu
evident that

"If you

will wait upon her, Payne. I can manage quite well without you."

To this Payne had her own inevitable remark :

"I'd just like to know what Mr. John would say to that arrangement!"

On this occasion her mistress answered almost sharply :

"Will you please try and understand that Mr. John does not rule the universe?"

And Payne remarked quite sincerely, though a little dryly: "I'd rather you told Mr. John that than me!"

Once she had mastered her surprise, however, at the fact that Miss Ambrose would come to stay, Payne flung herself heartily into the task of arranging everything as her mistress wished; and when, later on, Silvia came back with her few shabby possessions, she was taken upstairs to one of the most charming of the bedrooms, and made to feel that she was in every way an important person. And after all, she was less difficult to amuse than Olivia Mary had expected. Away from her home, the girl expanded. She lost her awkwardness, and though she was undoubtedly very ignorant, she had many natural abilities.

They dined alone; and after dinner, without any coaxing, Silvia went to the piano and tried to sing. Her knowledge of the piano was painfully imperfect. So after a while, Mrs. Cheston displaced her and played the accompaniments. She realized at once that Silvia had a naturally beautiful voice, while it was very evident that she loved singing.

"If you will come to me now and again I will give

you lessons," Mrs. Cheston said ; and just for an instant Silvia Ambrose relapsed into her old ungracious self.

" I'll come if I can," she said.

They avoided all dangerous topics. It was wonderful how many different subjects Olivia Mary found to interest the girl. They talked all the time of things, not of people ; and when bedtime came they parted, feeling drawn to one another. There was, as Mrs. Cheston had said, nothing lovable about Silvia, still her heart went out to the girl. She was so young, such an untamed, untaught creature, so full of temperament, so unequal to understanding the various emotions which could sway her. There was something pathetic about her, and she was undeniably beautiful.

At Garth Court her absence made for peace ; and secure in the knowledge that the girl was being well looked after, Mrs. Ambrose devoted herself entirely to the invalid. She found it a good opportunity in which to write to her husband and tell him that Dick had met with an accident, though of course she hastened to add that it was nothing very serious that had happened. With Dick himself, she almost immediately felt discouraged. Matters had fallen back to where they had been. He seemed absolutely content to remain in bed, and got peevish when his arm was unstrapped and massage was commenced. He accepted all that was done for him as a matter of course, and his stepmother felt that her sacrifice of personal comfort had all been thrown away.

Silvia appeared to have no interest whatever in her brother's condition. She neither wrote nor came over, nor sent to inquire. It was Isabel who spoke of the good time that the girl was having at Thorpe ; and

Mrs. Cheston
note to Mrs. A

So several
taken possessi
concerned had
ever, with a ru
accident, whe
Cheston had a

Without w
in an instant ;

" Somethir
" Oh ! do tell

Olivia Ma
very steadily :

" I am afr
discovered thi

Mrs. Cheston who wrote every now and then a little note to Mrs. Ambrose, giving her news of the girl.

So several days passed, and that fear which had taken possession of Helen Ambrose where Silvia was concerned had almost disappeared. It came back, however, with a rush one afternoon about a week after Dick's accident, when a message was brought to her that Mrs. Cheston had arrived, and was anxious to see her.

Without waiting to greet her guest, Helen Ambrose in an instant guessed trouble was at hand.

"Something has happened to Silvia," she said. "Oh! do tell me! I must know."

Olivia Mary took both her hands, and then said not very steadily :

"I am afraid she has run away. I have only just discovered this ; but I came to you at once."

CHAPTER VI

HELEN AMBROSE drew her hands away slowly from Mrs. Cheston's hold, and sat down rather heavily.

"I guess that was back on her mind when she went away to stay with you," she said; and Olivia Mary agreed to this.

"Yes—I—I feel it must be so, because at first, as perhaps you know, she refused; I expect she saw that she might have more opportunity at Thorpe. And this is just what has happened; there is one good thing, however, she hasn't gone very far, and she has gone alone. I know this," Mrs. Cheston explained, "through my maid. Payne has made it her business to find out all she could; and from what she tells me, it seems that this man, about whom I spoke to you the other afternoon, left the neighbourhood several days ago. Arrangements must have been made for Silvia to follow him."

"She has no money," said Mrs. Ambrose. "Scores of times I have wanted to give her pocket-money, but I haven't dared to interfere; and besides, there is always a lot of money wanted here to keep things going, and I haven't had too much for myself. You don't suppose that he has given her money?"

"I'm not su
will happen is
some odds and
It was stupid o
and I loved giv

"You mean
Ambrose drew
follow her. I've

"Not you,"
work."

"Dick's in t
"I know," s
ill. His arm
recovered from
mant; and he
getting up and

"The perso
sight cleverer
bitterly.

"But you've
brought my c
Olivia Mary he
I want you—to
She pushed an
"Please use the

Helen Amb
she took the er

"Thank yo
it; but you'll g
Mrs. Chesto

"No; the v
to sit still. I'r

"I'm not sure," said Mrs. Cheston. "What I think will happen is that she will get money, for I gave her some odds and ends of things—jewellery, the other day. It was stupid of me, but she seemed to like them . . . and I loved giving them to her."

"You mean she'll sell these things? Oh!" Helen Ambrose drew in her breath sharply. "I've got to follow her. I've got to get her back, Mrs. Cheston."

"Not you," said Olivia Mary. "This is her brother's work."

"Dick's in bed."

"I know," said Olivia Mary; "but he is not really ill. His arm is progressing very well, and he has recovered from his bruises. Dr. Sargent is my informant; and he says that Dick is quite capable of getting up and walking about."

"The person who can rouse Dick Ambrose is a sight cleverer than I am, then," the other woman said bitterly.

"But you've got to do it, and do it quickly. I have brought my car. It is at your disposal, and—" Olivia Mary hesitated and flushed as she spoke, "and—I want you—to let me do anything that is necessary." She pushed an envelope across the table as she spoke: "Please use that," she said.

Helen Ambrose hesitated only an instant, and then she took the envelope.

"Thank you," she said. "I'll use it gladly if I need it; but you'll go back in the car, won't you?"

Mrs. Cheston shook her head.

"No; the walk will do me good. I feel too nervous to sit still. I'm not going to leave you just yet awhile,

however," she said. "Suppose you go up and see Dick."

"What shall I say to him?"

The words came almost in a whisper and Olivia Mary answered quietly:

"Tell him the truth."

Mrs. Ambrose mounted the stairs very slowly, and outside the door where Dick was lying she paused: then with a nervous grip of herself she opened the door and went in.

He had his eyes closed as usual, but she could tell by the fleeting expression of his face that he was annoyed at her coming. Helen Ambrose went straight to the point.

"Dick, you've got to get up," she said. "You've got to get dressed now right away."

He took no notice of her at all except to turn his face on the other side of the pillow.

"You've got to get up," she repeated; and now her voice was a little shrill. "I guess you aren't so fast asleep as to be out of touch of things that matter. There *are* things that matter you know, Dick, sometimes, and somebody's got to do duties even though *you'd* be content to lie there and rot your life away. But we've all of us got to rote up at times and that's what you've got to do now!"

Dick opened his eyes and looked at her with a frown.

"I've got a beastly headache. I wish you'd leave me alone."

"I'd leave you alone, God knows," his stepmother said passionately, "for I am just through with you,

Dick! But t
her breath ar
from Thorpe
her back."

Richard A
speaking, the
closely.

"I don't u

"Well, you
has run away.
at Thorpe Ba
thing's been c
wasn't satisfie
life. It never
didn't say any
it that Silvia
but I was mis
to be your si
your race. Y
shame to your

Dick sat b
of colour.

"I say," he
going too far."

"And I gu
Helen Ambro

"The other n
and hurt your

I had need of
had need of yo

If you'd been
to the idea th

Dick! But that's not the point just now." She caught her breath and then she said: "Silvia has run away from Thorpe and you've got to go after her and bring her back."

Richard Ambrose lay and looked at her without speaking, the frown had caught his brows a little more closely.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Well, you've got to understand! I tell you Silvia has run away. She's been staying these last four days at Thorpe Bassett, I guess you knew that, and everything's been done for her to make her happy; but she wasn't satisfied. There's been a man sneaking in her life. It never came to me till a little while ago and I didn't say anything to you, well, because I held on to it that Silvia was too proud to do mean mad things; but I was mistaken in her! See! She's just worthy to be your sister. You've both of you gone back on your race. You're both nothing more or less than a shame to yourselves and to all who belong to you!"

Dick sat bolt upright now and his face was a blaze of colour.

"I say," he said. "Don't you talk like that! You're going too far."

"And I guess I'll go farther before I'm done," said Helen Ambrose. She was now really in a passion. "The other morning," she said, "when you tumbled and hurt yourself I told you I wanted you, I told you I had need of you. I didn't say what for, I just said I had need of you—well that ought to have been enough! If you'd been a real sort of man you'd have caught on to the idea that there was something that you could

do. You wouldn't have waited till it had to be thrown in your teeth as I'm throwing it now. . . ."

"If you don't mind clearing out," said Dick, "I'll get up. I don't know what you are driving at. I don't know what you mean by Silvia having run away, but I see you're going to worry me, and that you've got some rotten idea of duty and the rest of it, forcing you to make yourself an almighty nuisance; so I'll get up."

"Would you like to have me help you?" asked Mrs. Ambrose, her rage subsiding quickly.

He said "No," only he reiterated his desire to be left alone: so she went away and down the stairs back to where Mrs. Cheston was waiting.

"He's getting up," she said, "but he's mad with me and he looks as if he'd kill me. He hasn't caught on to the notion that it's serious with Silvia and I—hate to have him know this: besides," she added, "what is there for him to do? How is he to set about it? I can't even tell him where to look for her. We don't know what she's got in her mind."

"I am expecting my maid here every moment," said Mrs. Cheston in her quiet way. "It was Payne who saw her you know in the beginning. I have had to take Payne into my confidence. She has a very shrewd mind, and it was essential that the servants should not imagine anything of the truth. As it is, every one at Thorpe believes that Silvia has gone on another visit. I fancy that Payne will bring us some news that will be helpful"; and whilst Dick dressed, stamping about overhead in a violent and an alarming fashion, Payne was announced.

She had gleaned a good deal of information. The

man with whom she had seen Silvia had been staying at the inn (it could hardly be called a hotel) in the next village. He was an actor, by name Charles Derrick, and had evidently come down for the early hunting season, though according to those with whom Payne had talked, he hardly knew one end of a horse from another. But Mr. Derrick had been undoubtedly popular, he was described as a good-looking, rather jolly sort of fellow who had scattered his photographs freely in place of shillings, and gone away owing a little on his bill.

"An actor," said Helen Ambrose. "Why that explains a good deal." Then she added, "I shall let Dick tackle his sister, but *I* shall deal with Mr. Derrick! I know his sort."

Mrs. Cheston had been thinking very quietly, then she said:

"It is my opinion that Silvia will not yet have left Storchester. You know there is no train to London between two o'clock and six. Well, she only went away after lunch—and she had to walk to the town."

Mrs. Ambrose's face lit up.

"Why, that's so," she said. "Well, what do you suggest?"

"I think some one must go into Storchester at once."

To this Helen Ambrose said:

"It has got to be Dick! If you'll be so sweet as to let him go in the car I'll be ever so grateful. I do believe he'll find Silvia, and if he does, why—he'll bring her home. About that I feel pretty safe because I've got him awake at last."

He came stumbling down the stairs at that moment and pulled up with a jerk in the doorway of the dining-room as he saw Mrs. Cheston.

She was so pretty, so exquisitely dressed, and her manner was so charming, that Dick felt awkward and ashamed.

He had got into his clothes somehow: his coat was buttoned over his disabled arm and he had twisted a scarf round his throat in place of a collar: but he had brushed back his hair and there was a resolute and a new expression on his face. His stepmother spoke to him in a subdued way.

"I have been telling Mrs. Cheston you want to go to the station and she wants you to go in her car. You'll go, won't you, Dick?"

"Yes," said the young man, and then he looked from one woman to the other; "but I've got to know a little bit more. I can't find Silvia unless I have some idea where she is."

"I believe you'll find her waiting for the London train at Storchester," said Mrs. Cheston.

"Good," said Dick. He paused a moment and then he said not very easily: "I'm sorry, Mrs. Cheston, I think Silvia must be out of her mind to have treated you so rudely."

He turned round as he spoke and went out to the car; but his stepmother ran after him.

"Dick, Dick," she said; "you'll want some money, take this, and oh! my dear, you *must* put on something warm. You've been in bed for the last four days and you'll be real sick if you don't take care."

"I'm all right," he answered her; he took the money,

thou
he s
got i
'
neve
sat c
whe
just

though not willingly, but he did not put on a coat, he simply snatched a cap from the stand in the hall, got into the car and was driven away.

"If he's bad after this, I'll never forgive myself, never . . . never," said Helen Ambrose; and then she sat down and cried. "Please let me," she said brokenly, when Mrs. Cheston would have consoled her. "I—I just *want* to go to pieces for a little while!"

CHAPTER VII

OLIVIA MARY stayed at Garth Court for nearly an hour. She would not go until she had seen the other woman restored to something like her usual brisk self.

Tea was brought in after a while, and with tea came Spudgin. He went to Olivia Mary like a needle to a magnet.

She lifted him on to her lap, and kissed his curls.

"He reminds me so much of what Jack was," she said; and though there were no tears in her eyes, there was the sound of tears in her voice.

"I envy you," she said to Helen Ambrose. "It is so lovely to have a young thing like this in the house." But for once Mrs. Ambrose was impervious to Spudgin's charms. Her whole mind was concentrated on what would pass between Dick and his sister; somehow, she felt convinced that he would find the girl. Having roused him, she was now a little afraid.

"Maybe it would have been better if I had gone," she said once; but Olivia Mary shook her head.

"No; it is far better that it should be her brother."

"But suppose she won't come back with him, Mrs. Cheston?"

"Well, then, he will stay with her."

"Oh, it all hurts!" Helen Ambrose said, with a cry in her voice; "and, my goodness! what am I to say to her father?"

"Somehow, I fancy there will be no need to speak."

Mrs. Cheston kissed Spudgin again, put him down reluctantly, and got up to go.

"Do you know," she said, "I feel that this is the turning-point with you, and that after to-day things will go ever so much better."

"You have been just too sweet to me, Mrs. Cheston. I'll never, never be able to let you know how much I owe you; but how are you going to get back? You can't walk, anyway."

"Oh, yes, I can!" said Olivia Mary; and she laughed. "I do far more walking than I am supposed to do, and I don't think I ought to be here when they arrive. Remember," she said, as she put out her hand, "that if Silvia feels like coming back to me, I shall be only too happy to have her with me."

"I guess she'll hardly know herself what she wants," said Helen Ambrose, in her subdued way.

It was evident that she was very nervous, very much upset; all her bright charm had vanished for the moment. She looked tired and ill, and it cost Olivia Mary a good deal to leave her.

Mrs. Cheston walked briskly, almost sturdily, back to her home. Payne had preceded her some time. It was quite dark by the time she reached Thorpe; her butler gave her the information that Lady Matheson and Miss Isabel had called, but that they had been unable to wait.

A letter in Isabel's writing was lying on the table in

the hall ; and Mrs. Cheston opened it with half a smile.

"I am so sorry not to have seen you," the girl had scribbled. "I wanted to tell you our news. Mother and I are going to York for a ball to-morrow night. It is all very sudden ; but the invitation only came an hour or so ago by telegram. It is, of course, Jack who had sent the invitation really, though it is sent from Lady Bertha Mynter. How I wish you would come too ! But I know that is out of the question. I shall be able to give Jack all sorts of good news about you. I suppose Silvia is out driving with you. I asked for her, but they told me she was not in. I had such a nice note from her yesterday. It *is* good of you to be so sweet to her ; but, then, you are always sweet to everybody. I shall miss you dreadfully ; but I shall not be away very long.

"Ever yours lovingly,
"BELLE"

The smile faded from Olivia Mary's lips as she read through this letter. Suddenly she had come to a great moment in her life. It was a moment for which she had been preparing herself vaguely for a great many years ; and, perhaps, definitely so for the last six or eight months. From that time, indeed, when she had realized that her boy's friendship for Isabel Matheson had taken to itself deeper, stronger roots. Almost before the young man himself had understood this transformation, his mother had divined how matters stood with him where Isabel was concerned. Over and over again she had warned herself that she must be

ready
asked
was a
realiz
signif
sense
herse
convi
her, t
more
more
feelin
T
signif
for sh
boy I
which
merel
that
symb
most
S
now :
letter
S
shelt
succe
even
whicl
she r
exist
possi

ready to receive his confidence, and to hear that he had asked Isabel Matheson to be his wife. And now this was about to happen, and it dismayed Olivia Mary to realize how utterly unprepared she was for the full significance of what lay in the immediate future. A sense of anger possessed her, at first—anger against herself; yet the chill premonition of separation, the conviction that her son would have his life apart from her, that she would be no longer a necessity, nothing more than an influence that had passed, perhaps hardly more than a memory, carried with it such a desolating feeling that anger had to give way before it.

This revelation of the inevitable carried a far deeper significance to Olivia Mary than to most other women, for she had been no ordinary mother; her love for her boy had been so very far outside the ordinary affection which holds parents and children together. It was not merely that for a long space of time she had been all that her boy possessed for his own, but that he had symbolized for her everything that was most beautiful, most sad, and most precious.

She had come in from her walk feeling warm, but now she shivered; indeed, as she stood twisting Isabel's letter in her fingers, she actually trembled.

She had lived so long in one groove, had been sheltered so long from alien influences, that she had succeeded in cultivating a serenity of heart and mind even against the opposing force of certain circumstances which were built up of disturbing elements; and had she remained on in this placid groove (the cotton wool existence of which she had spoken to Helen Ambrose), possibly the knowledge that she stood on the brink of

the most important, the most vital event in her life, would have been accepted by her with that calmness, that philosophy which had been the keynote of her existence for so many years past. But during the last week she had broken asunder the soft mesh of cotton wool, she had come out of her self-elected isolation, she had intermingled once again with things that were human, moving, penetrating, she had been called upon to counsel, to think, to act; and the advent of Silvia Ambrose had found her unconsciously turning to interests which she had thought long since dead and buried. The result of this was that she was awakened, and could feel almost too acutely. She knew, she, who had turned over so many leaves of life's book, how easily circumstances can change individuals. Up to this time she had been supreme where Isabel was concerned; she had always felt that she dominated the girl, fascinated her, and held her, although at the same time she had perplexed Isabel. Unconsciously, Isabel had set herself the task at times of trying to understand her, to get behind that veil of timidity and nervous restraint. It was that aloofness of hers which had given her so much power over the girl. She could read through the lines of this simple little letter, and she knew that the writer was eager to take from her any sting there might be in the knowledge that John loved her; and Olivia Mary had a twofold translation for this attitude. She did not doubt Isabel's real affectionate sympathy, but neither did she hide from herself the fact that Isabel was nervously anxious, perhaps doubtful, as to how she, the mother, would act in a matter which touched her so closely.

It
Mathe
should
wholly
son ha
mothe
To
highly
and w
no oth
Sh
Thom
side e
"J
time,"
stairs
Ol
"J
down
on; a
Si
"
had a
a goo
"
Chest
H
lookin
that l
out h
"
she s

It struck Olivia Mary as a strange fact that Isabel Matheson, who had only drifted gradually into her life, should have always been conscious that she was not wholly what she represented herself to be; while her son had never once swerved from his conception of his mother's nature and character.

To him she was nothing more than a simple, over-highly strung little creature who needed constant care, and who, outside her peculiarly exquisite femininity, had no other kingdom; could never have any other.

She was still standing in front of the fire when Sir Thomas Matheson was brought into the hall through a side entrance.

"Tell Mrs. Cheston not to hurry. I can wait her time," he said to the footman who was going up the stairs to find his mistress.

Olivia Mary turned and spoke to Sir Thomas:

"I'm here," she said. "Won't you come and sit down?" Then she asked for the light to be turned on; and she stirred the fire into a blaze.

Sir Thomas apologized for his rough clothes.

"I have left the dogs outside," he said. "I have had a long day with young Hallowell. We made quite a good bag."

"And now you would like some tea," said Mrs. Cheston.

He accepted the suggestion eagerly! and she, looking at him, smiled faintly to herself, for she saw that he was a little ill at ease. Suddenly she stretched out her hand to him.

"I think I know why you have come, Sir Thomas," she said. "You have heard from my boy."

Sir Thomas's face cleared on the instant.

"Oh! so you know?" he queried.

"I have always known," she answered with a little laugh. "I have only been waiting."

Sir Thomas was holding her hand and he patted it affectionately. It was such a delicate, slim hand.

"Well, my dear," he said. "I suppose we've been waiting too! Many a time I've thought of speaking to you, and then, well I thought it would be better not. Because after all, you know, sometimes we older people make mistakes."

"In this case there was no possibility of a mistake," said Olivia Mary. She paused an instant and then she said, "You *have* heard from Jack, have you not?"

"Yes. I found the letter when I came home and a message from my wife to say that she and Belle have gone to York for some kick-up to-morrow night; at least that is the reason they gave me; but Jack's letter was enlightening." Sir Thomas took out his pocket-book and then he said: "But of course he has written to you?"

Mrs. Cheston shook her head.

"No, he hasn't written yet; but I shall hear. He—he is very sure of me: he was not so sure of you."

"Well, he might have been," said Sir Thomas in his bluff way. "Apart from the fact that I have known him practically all his life and that he is just the sort of lad to please me or any man, you mus'n't forget how much he can give Isabel."

"I have never even thought of that—yet I suppose it counts?"

Sir Thomas nodded.

"Co
little so
years a
round
cause
sorts o
has be
of late
now!"

Oliv

"I'r

I have

The
sisted u

As!

her out

"Yo

all ver
nature

often t
short v

feeling

She

"I

happy.
know a
Jack."

Sir
kissed
"W
a little
here tl

"Counts? Well, I should say so! You see, dear little soul, you have lived here like a hermit all these years and you've never known what was going on round and about you. Why, your boy has been the cause of many hopes and much disappointment: all sorts of struggles and battles have gone on where he has been concerned; Isabel hasn't been too popular of late, I can tell you, and isn't likely to be more so now!"

Olivia Mary laughed.

"I'm glad," she said, though not very steadily, "that I have lived like a hermit all these years."

The tea was brought at that moment and she insisted upon waiting upon Sir Thomas.

As she stood and gave him a cup of tea he looked at her out of his keen eyes and he spoke softly.

"You are not going to fret about this, are you? It's all very well to call it a natural thing; but sometimes nature is deucedly cruel! Her mother and I have often talked this over; and we have always pulled up short when we came to the question of you and your feelings."

She smiled at him.

"I am going to be happy," she said, "very, very happy. I hardly know any girls, but I don't want to know any other. Isabel—is just the one—I want for Jack."

Sir Thomas took her hand again and this time he kissed it.

"Well, I don't mind confessing that you have taken a little load off my mind," he said. "I came straight here the moment I had read Jack's letter. I felt I

must come. I wanted to see you before I wrote to him. I wanted to be quite, quite sure." Then he drank his tea, and after this he said: "I only hope the young people won't settle to get married all in a hurry."

"If they do," said Olivia Mary, "we musn't stand in their way."

Sir Thomas got up and put down his cup; and as he straightened himself he looked to the portrait over the mantelpiece and then he said:

"I only wish Jack's father had been alive, I believe this would have made him glad. What a good chap Anthony was! Do you know that though he has been dead all these years I miss him still."

Olivia Mary stood looking up at the portrait. She was very white and her face looked drawn. She turned suddenly to the man beside her and she said:

"We—we won't talk about Tony to-night, please."

"God bless me, what a fool I am!" said Sir Thomas; and then, quite naturally, he stooped and kissed her. "Dear little woman," he said. "Do promise me not to fret. Oh! I know you are going to be brave and all that; but your boy's been so much to you and you've only got him. Belle is our only girl too, but then we've got all the boys and that makes a difference!"

Mrs. Cheston nodded her head.

"Yes, that makes a big difference."

The butler came towards them bringing a letter.

"The car has just come back, ma'am," he said; "and Daly asked me to give you this."

"Now you can drive home," said Mrs. Cheston to Sir Thomas. "Yes, of course you may take the dogs in

it. D
day a
"I
you;
"I bel
go to
seen y
in my
Sh
to hin
Dick
It
that h
he hac
her in
"I
wrote
step-n
bility
stirred
childr
ness
she t
her.
Court
Ol
letter
hersel
to Ga
then
looke
been l

it. Do you suppose I mind? You have had a long day and I am sure you are tired."

"I was going to propose that I should dine with you; but on second thoughts," said Isabel's father, "I believe I shall be better at home. I daresay I should go to sleep and disgrace myself; and now that I have seen you, I am going to write to Jack with my heart in my pen."

She went with him to the door and waved her hand to him as the car drove away; and then she opened Dick Ambrose's letter.

It was written in pencil and merely informed her that he had found Silvia waiting at the station and that he had decided to take the girl up to London and put her in charge of his father.

"I expect I shall be doing the wrong thing," he wrote; "but after all it is a little bit rough on my step-mother that she should have so much responsibility; and it is about time too that my father was stirred up and made to know that we are no longer children. I am awfully grateful to you for your kindness to my sister; and Silvia I think is sorry that she treated you so badly. Please try and forgive her. Would you mind sending this note on to Garth Court?"

Olivia Mary sat down at once and enclosed Dick's letter to Mrs. Ambrose with a few very kind words from herself. She gave orders that this should be taken over to Garth Court by one of the footmen immediately, and then she went back and stood in front of the fire and looked up into the pictured face of the man who had been her husband.

"If only you were here," she said, "or—or if I could be with you."

She almost stretched her hands out as though impelled by some magnetic influence: then they dropped to her side again and picking up her furs she went slowly, wearily up to her room.

E
sittin
toget
Mary
"
Ches
her i
"
be al
to ha
upse
"
it ha
It is
you
every
Mr.
That
"
Payr
and
but l
"

ould
ough
they
furs

CHAPTER VIII

EARLY the next morning Mrs. Ambrose was over at Thorpe. She was shown into the little sitting-room where she and Mrs. Cheston had had tea together; but when the door opened it was not Olivia Mary who entered, but her maid.

"I am very sorry, ma'am," said Payne, "but Mrs. Cheston is very unwell this morning; and I'm keeping her in bed."

"Oh! dear," said Helen Ambrose; "and this must be all my fault. She did too much yesterday. I'd like to have you know, Payne, how sorry I am for all the upset."

"I'm sure of that, ma'am," said Payne warmly, "but it hasn't nothing to do with you that has made her ill. It is something very big. I daresay she'll be telling you herself, ma'am; but it will be generally known everywhere to-day so I may as well speak about it. Mr. John is engaged to be married to Miss Matheson. That means a great deal to Mrs. Cheston."

"Why, of course it does," said Mrs. Ambrose. "Oh! Payne, I am sorry. I guess I ought to say I am glad, and I expect the two young people will be very happy; but I *am* sorry! for her I mean!"

"She'll be all right in a day or so," said Payne;

"but you know she's just worshipped Mr. John and that's the simple truth, ma'am, so she's bound to feel this a bit."

"I know. I wish to goodness she had had three or four other children. It comes so hard on the mother when she has only got one and that one a boy; but she is better off than some," said Helen Ambrose, with a wistful little sigh, "after all she *has* got one. Well, I'll be going; but I want you to tell Mrs. Cheston why I came so early. I am going up to London. I heard from Mr. Dick this morning. He is coming back, but Miss Silvia is going to stay on. I've got to see her father and the people she is with. I shan't be at rest about her, Payne, till I know how she's going to be treated, and what sort of life she is going to have. She hasn't been on the level with me; but that doesn't make any difference. I've got to do my best for her."

"And you'll do it, ma'am, that's pretty sure," said Payne, then she added: "Miss Silvia's got a lot of ideas in her head about the stage. She talked pretty free to me. It is my belief that that's more what is at the bottom of everything than the man; and Mrs. Cheston was telling me that, every night after dinner, Miss Silvia would be singing and talking pieces of poetry all the time."

Helen Ambrose's face lit up and her eyes were glowing.

"Why, Payne," she said, "I guess you've hit it! There's more to that than you think; and it makes things easier. Mind now, be sure you say how sorry I am that Mrs. Cheston had all that worry with me yesterday, and see here, Payne, give her these. They are just

noth
mori
to M
see
yest
"
"Wi
"
boy
hims
to h
I
orde
alme
"
"I'll
befo
S
arriv
she
was
Tho
ever
gon
thin
not
sojo
fami
S
with
was
mov

nothing but a few weeds that Spudgin picked this morning ; but he told me I was to be sure to give them to Mrs. Cheston with his love. Maybe she'd like to see the child, he seemed quite taken up with her yesterday."

"I think that will be a splendid thing," said Payne. "Will you be away long, ma'am?"

"No, I'll be back to-night. I couldn't leave the little boy ; and I'm most afraid that Dick won't have done himself much good, rushing about, and I'll have to see to him too."

Mrs. Ambrose had driven over in a fly and she gave orders now to be taken to the station. She felt excited, almost in a pleasurable way.

"Now, if my luck isn't all out," she said to herself, "I'll find Jamie in London ; and I'll catch him just before he sails."

She travelled to town by a quick train and on arrival was driven to one of the very big hotels. As she found herself in the lounge waiting while her name was taken upstairs, her excitement strengthened. Though there was so much to trouble and distress her, even (for the knowledge that Dick and his sister had gone to their father, and that all sorts of upsetting things were happening was a trouble to her) this could not dispel the little thrill of pleasure that this transitory sojourn in an atmosphere which once had been so familiar to her signified.

She found herself rather dangerously in sympathy with the luxury surrounding her. Beyond on her right was stretched the big restaurant where waiters were moving to and fro busily preparing for the advent of

luncheon. There was a scent of flowers in the air : all around her was a sensation of life.

The shabby sitting-room in the farmhouse seemed to fade out of her remembrance, even the joy of cuddling Spudgins seemed unreal and all the one hundred and one little vexations which had been such definite burdens in the country took wings to themselves and flew away now.

She waited for perhaps ten minutes and then there came towards her a round little tub of a man with a short white beard cut in a point. He came forward with both hands outstretched.

"Why, Helen Sabinett, why, if this isn't the best thing I've struck this many a day! Where did you spring from anyway? Was it just a wave-thought or a miracle that brought you along?"

"Why, no," said Mrs. Ambrose. "I came by train and then by taxi; but it is *real* good to see you, Jamie!" she laughed, "I wasn't sure, but I thought maybe you'd forgotten me."

"No: you never thought that. Say, have you lunched? Come right in. We'll talk and eat at the same time." He paused and looked at her again. "My! but it *is* good to see you, Helen, my dear. I'm glad; and there's my hand on it again. If my name isn't James Banister, well, it is queer to me why you should have come along just now."

Mrs. Ambrose laughed. "Well way back, you know, you used to say folk kind of always remembered you when they wanted something. That is my case now, Jamie."

"Same here," said Mr. Banister as he led her into

the
barg
"
dow
"
want
neve
M
mak
look
telli
time
"
hum
Helo
"
not
"
you
S
"
Hav
J
brov
"
look
act
girl
they
Doe
"
the

the restaurant, "so it is up to us to make a fair bargain."

"What do you want of me?" she asked as she sat down and unpinned her veil.

"Well, just a little thing, only just a little thing. I want you to come back home right away. I have never found any one to take your place, Helen."

Mrs. Ambrose laughed. "Well, that is good. It makes me glad. It is a bit selfish, isn't it, Jamie, to look at things that way, yet . . . Well! I don't mind telling you that scores of times I've thought of old times and I've wanted them back again real bad."

"Why, of course you have! It wouldn't be in human nature not to want such things as you had, Helen. Can't I fix it up with you?"

"Why, I don't know, Jamie, maybe later on; but not just now."

"Well, while there's hope there's life. Now what's your drama?"

She paused and looked serious.

"You know most all there is to know about stage folk. Have you ever struck a man called Charles Derrick?"

Mr. Banister pulled his short beard and knitted his brows.

"Derrick . . . Derrick? . . . Why, yes! Good-looking chap. Most nothing to him but looks. Can't act . . . thinks he can . . . rather a nut with the girls . . . came out our side with Sprindler's crew when they ran big melo-drama. But he was soon fired. Does that fill the bill?"

"Yes, I guess it might," said Mrs. Ambrose; "but the fact is I don't know him. I've only heard of him."

"What's he been doing? Foolin' some one you know?"

"Yes, that is just it. You've hit it."

Mr. Banister took a pencil out of his pocket and shot his cuff over his hand. He was ready to take notes.

"What do you want of this guy?"

"It is rather a tall order," said Mrs. Ambrose, "but I want to get him away. Mind," she said, "I don't know much, but—but I'm pretty sure he has been stuffing up a silly little girl with the idea that her proper place is the stage, and it isn't! She's just the last, the *very* last, Jamie, that ought to go back of a theatre."

Mr. Banister still pulled his short beard and frowned.

"Any money?" he asked.

Mrs. Ambrose shook her head.

"Not a cent."

"Why, then, you can lift up your eyes to the hills as far as Derrick is concerned. He is all out for money and what he can get. How did you strike him?"

"I live in the country at a very old farmhouse, Jamie, that dates back ever so far and I'm real busy all the time, got plenty of things to do and on my hands too, what with three step-children."

"Hold up," said Mr. Banister sharply. "You aren't telling me you're married, Helen."

"Why, I thought you knew it."

"Well, I'm tough," said Mr. Banister, "otherwise this is a blow that would about finish me. Why, Helen, I've always dreamed of getting you back and I figured

you
while
I
enjoy
one
appo
the f
illusi
such
"
him.
I
"
with
that
knoc
Helen
"
I ne
"
her :
to ta
"
know
Euro
noth
whil
tong
ther
belo
littl
whe

you out as getting tired of frisking alone this long while. . . . But married, gee !”

Luncheon was served and Mrs. Ambrose thoroughly enjoyed it. She drew her breath once now and again as one does who is inhaling pleasure. The dainty table appointments, the gaiety, for people began to flock in, the food itself all made a charm for her; but it was that illusive charm which belongs to truant joys and lives such a short life.

“Do you know how old I am, Jamie?” she asked him.

He shook his head.

“Don’t want to know. Years have nothing to do with it. It is personality that counts, the sort of thing that you have without knowing it and that used to knock them silly. Don’t tell me you’ve lost your voice, Helen.”

“Well, I don’t know whether I’ve lost it or not, for I never sing.”

“Good lord!” said Mr. Banister; then he looked at her and he laughed. “Must have been a big attraction to take you away from all you had.”

“Well, yes it was,” the woman said softly. “You know when I finished up my last tour and I crossed to Europe, I quite meant to go back, Jamie; there was nothing to keep me. I only wanted to get loose a little while, see fresh places, hear people talk in another tongue. I never dreamed of staying over here, though there wasn’t much to take me back with every one belonging to me in their graves. It’s queer, isn’t it, how little things can change a life. My big chance came when I was in Paris,” she said. “I was there alone and

I met—him. He was staying in the same hotel with his three children, one a baby, just a few months old. My! Jamie, I was sorry for him! He was so helpless, so unhappy. I just had to offer to do what I could, specially when the nurse who had charge of the baby did a bolt one day."

"And you took the nurse's place," suggested Mr. Banister.

A shade passed over Helen Ambrose's charming face: then she said in a subdued sort of way:

"Well, I guess you're about right. That is what I've been doing. That is what I am."

"Seems, then, you married a blind man."

"I think he liked me. I'm pretty sure he did, or he would never have married me."

"And you?" inquired Mr. Banister in his bright way. "What about you?"

"Why, I cared for him, Jamie. My, I never thought I should know what it was to care as I cared. And I'd go on caring," she said passionately, "only I don't count. There is nothing in his life but his work and his children. His work first; and then perhaps his girl; and now you've got my drama, for it is this girl that has hit up against Charles Derrick and who has got to be put square with life again before I'm through."

Mr. Banister asked a few questions as to Silvia's age, character and disposition, and went very closely into the little story of how she had suddenly developed a spirit of independence, and finally had tried to do a bolt.

"I guess I'll get into touch with Derrick this very day," he said. "It won't be difficult; and I'll size him up pretty sharp, and see here, Helen, don't let your

anxi
in m
noth
who
is th
even
he'd
He
wom
ner
to r
this
taki
in th
I
Jam
som
she
You
if I
at h
' Jar
hon
they
Wh

anxiety take you too far. I've hit many strange things in my life and I've learnt one or two facts. Now there's nothing so hard to get even with as a headstrong girl who thinks she can act! That's one point: the second is that men like Derrick are mostly made of swank, and even if he'd been wanting to play the elopement gag he'd have pulled up, because he'd have been afraid. He mightn't have been too particular with a young woman of his own class, for I'm not here to hold a banner for his morals; but you know it takes a brave man to run a girl away from her home, the sort of girl as this is; and actors in a bunch aren't too much given to taking on responsibility of any sort. It's the stage sure in this case, not the man."

Helen Ambrose drew her breath sharply.

"That is just what I think now; but all the same, Jamie, she may have got bitten. I'm told he's handsome and no doubt he's got a way with him; and now she is up in London there is danger still."

"Well, we'll ship the danger across the pond. See! You did right to come to me, Helen, always come to me if I am anywhere near."

Mrs. Ambrose paused a moment and then she looked at him.

"Suppose I took you at your word, supposing I said, 'Jamie, I'm ready to come back.' Do you believe honestly that I've got a hold still on the people? Would they listen to me?"

"Would they eat pie?" asked Mr. Banister.

"But I'm just on forty."

"Well, you might be eighty and you'd still hold them. Why, I'll tell you this much, Helen . . . I've had dealings

with singers all my life ; I've fixed up tours with some of the biggest names the world has ever known ; I've carted round stars and I've stood in the wings because I had to ; but it wasn't that that made me stand in the wings and listen to you, Helen : duty wasn't on in that scene ! It was because you drew me, because there's a human heart beating in every note you utter, and take it from me, my girl, the world wants heart, a little bit of the real thing will always fetch them."

"Very well, then, it is understood. If I get everything put on the lines I want them put ; and I see Silvia in her proper place, and Dick shaken out of his uselessness, why, I'll come back."

"You will ?" said Mr. Banister eagerly. "You mean it ?"

She grew a little pale, but there was a smile on her lips and in her eyes.

"Yes, I mean it."

"Good for you, my girl. Now we'll have coffee and a cigarette. You smoke, don't you ?"

"I used to, but I've forgotten most all of my old habits. Now you mustn't let me take up your time, Jamie. I wish I could let you know how glad I am I found you. It was a way-back chance that you'd be here, but I thought I'd try it. I remembered you always came here about this time."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Banister. "I've struck these shores twice yearly for the last thirty-two years ; and I'll keep on doing the same old game till I hand in my chips. What is mighty queer though, Helen, is that all this week I've had you right in front of my mind. I've wanted to see you real badly. Of course, I caught on

to it a
yourse
sure ;
that
are !"

M
altoge

"
querie
want

St

I'm g
them

You s
just n

I've r
self.

M
ashes

"
living

your c
that.

give it
I'll fix

I tell

"I
can o

I mus
so lon

"I

"but

to it a long time ago that you'd made fresh tracks for yourself when you stopped writing—that was pretty sure ; but somehow I've always hung on to the notion that we should come together again—and here we are !”

Mrs. Ambrose sipped her coffee and liqueur and felt altogether better for this brief visit to old associations.

“You say you never sing now. How's that ?” queried Mr. Banister after a little while. “Don't they want to hear you ? Are they all deaf ?”

She laughed and then she coloured. “Say, Jamie, I'm going to tell you the truth. There isn't one of them who knows I can sing, not even my husband. You see,” she hastened to explain, “when we met, I was just nothing but a traveller. We drifted together—and I've never told any one of them anything about myself. I couldn't !”

Mr. Banister grunted as he broke off some of the ashes of his cigar.

“You come back, my girl,” he said. “You've been living for six years as a nurse ; and I bet you've done your duty well. But you're worth something more than that. I tell you, Helen, if I can go right back now and give it out that you'll be over say six months hence, why I'll fix you up with terms that will make your eyes open. I tell you it's a cinch.”

“I'll come,” Helen repeated. “Yes, I'll come if I can only just put things up all straight here ! And now I must go, Jamie. Seems to me I've been here ever so long.”

“It is only a quarter of two,” said Mr. Banister ; “but I won't keep you, for I've got a few waiting to see

me. See here, give me your address. No: I shan't come scooting round, I know my place, but I—want to keep in touch with you; and look here, Helen, you leave this fellow Derrick to me. I'll work a good stunt."

Mrs. Ambrose went away after this meeting with her old friend cheered, moved, happy and yet sad. It was like a breath of invigorating, fresh air to her to know that though she had dropped out she had not been forgotten. Sometimes when she had sat darning stockings, settling the household difficulties, trying to work her will against Dick's and win her way through Silvia's determined hate, it had all seemed so strange to her; it was all so different that she had almost doubted she could be the same creature as Helen Sabinett, the popular singer, the woman who could move multitudes with the natural beauty of her voice, and the simple sweetness of the songs she used to sing. Times there had been, indeed, when she had been almost tempted to speak of herself as she had been to these arrogant, indifferent young creatures whose lives made her own life's care, whose futures were such a trouble to her; but she had always kept her lips sealed. It would not have been Dick whom she would have feared; but she could picture to herself, so well, the expression that would have come into Silvia's face, the sneers which the girl would have launched so freely at her and the work she had done; and so often when things had been just a little bit too bad, she had said to herself (just as people do say when they get impatient with life) that she would cut herself adrift from all these new ties and go back to her own country and her own people. Not

until
woul
as sh
to fi
whic
with
with
foun
whic
S
in wl
and
After
open
H
his g
The
Sabin
with
Bani
ing
done
her b
and
nay
sweet
man
exist
M
fro th
"
Silvia

until to-day, however, had she realized that such a return would have been made so easy for her; and for a time, as she travelled in a taxi to the house where she expected to find her husband and Silvia, she let the pleasure which this realization brought to her have full sway with her! But all the good effect which her long chat with her old friend had produced, vanished when she found herself in the frigid atmosphere of the house to which Nigel Ambrose had gone.

She was shown into a large gloomy drawing-room, in which the furniture was hidden under holland covers and where all was cheerless, cold and inhospitable! After a very long time of impatient waiting the door opened and Mr. Ambrose appeared.

He greeted his wife peevishly. Of late he had lost his good looks and had grown careless in his dress. The fascination which he had exercised over Helen Sabinett could have been ill accounted for now: in fact with her eyes cleared a little since her contact with Mr. Banister's business-like nature, she found herself wondering what could have induced her to do what she had done, to have sacrificed a splendid career, to have turned her back on all those who had cared for her so much, and have buried herself in an old farmhouse, content, nay even eager, to give the best of herself, all that was sweetest and freshest in her nature and her heart, to a man who hardly seemed to realize that she was in existence.

Mr. Ambrose reproached her as he walked to and fro the length of the big room.

"What on earth induced you to let Dick bring Silvia here? Didn't you understand that my aunt is

dangerously ill : in fact that she is not expected to live. I can make neither head nor tail of the story that Dick gave me. It is all some nonsense, of course ; but surely you could have seen that this nonsense was got rid of without letting the children come here ! ”

“ I guess you’re all wrong there, Nigel,” his wife said quietly. “ I’ve got no power one way or another over Dick or Silvia ; and there is just one other fact you never seem to realize, and that fact is that neither one or the other is a child ! Dick is a man—Silvia is a woman ; and they’ve got to be treated as such.”

Nigel Ambrose pushed back his long hair from his brow nervously. He was still peevish.

“ Still there are two ways of doing things,” he said ; “ and you ought not to have let them come here.”

“ Am I infallible ? ” Helen Ambrose asked him passionately. “ You are not just ; and you always shut your eyes. They never wanted me, Nigel. I guess if they had, things wouldn’t be where they are now.”

He sat down with a heavy sigh and closed his eyes.

“ No man was ever so tormented as I am,” he said : then he looked at his wife. “ I thought you—you cared a little bit about me, Helen,” he said plaintively.

“ Well, don’t you think so now ? ” she asked him.

He shut his eyes again, and tapped the arm of the chair restlessly.

“ It was bad enough to have to come away,” he said, “ and leave everything, but this—is most upsetting.”

“ Do you mind telling me what has happened ? ” his wife asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“ here.”
M:
shiver
“ V
“ You
“ J
She a
A
Mrs. J
“ J
was th
“ I
heedi
daugh
will lo
under
to do
“ V
M
“]
“ Silv
beside
“ She
cousin
H
then :
“ J
broke
It wa
what
waite

"Dick went back this morning; Silvia is to remain here."

Mrs. Ambrose looked about her, and gave a little shiver.

"Who are these people, anyway?" she asked. "You've never told me anything about them."

"This is the house of Lady Henrietta Morgan. She and my mother were sisters."

A little bit of the real American glimpsed out from Mrs. Ambrose at this moment.

"My!" she said. "I—I never supposed your mother was the daughter of an earl."

"Lady Henrietta is very ill," said Mr. Ambrose, not heeding, if even he heard his wife's remark. "Her two daughters are staying here for the time being. They will look after Silvia, although of course you can quite understand they are not particularly pleased to be asked to do this at such a time."

"What sort are they? Will they be kind to Silvia?"

Mr. Ambrose sat up with a jerk.

"I sincerely hope they will *not* be kind," he said. "Silvia wants firm handling; and she wants other things besides," he went on in the same irritable fashion. "She—she is appallingly shabby. My dear Helen, my cousins are horrified!"

Helen Ambrose sat absolutely silent for a moment, then she got up.

"Seems that I'm a big failure all round!" she said brokenly, "and yet, God knows, I've done my best! It was a pity we did things in such a hurry, Nigel, see what a lot of bother we should have been spared if we'd waited."

"Now it is you who are talking nonsense," the man answered, getting up too. "For heaven's sake don't imagine that anybody is blaming you! I only wish I could go home with you now."

The heart of the woman, which had contracted as with sudden pain, expanded once more.

"Well, why can't you?" she asked. "Surely it isn't necessary that you should stay here waiting around for a poor old lady to die. My! why, it's gloomy enough for a goodsized tomb as it is. Come away with me, Nigel."

She saw his face light up, and the peevish expression go out of his eyes.

"I've a good mind to," he said. "It's simply awful here! There isn't a pen fit to use, even if I had the inclination to work, which I haven't." Suddenly he turned to his wife, put his arms about her, and kissed her. "I'll come," he said. "You always do me good. You always understand me. You are such a comforting thing, Helen; and you always look so nice!"

Helen Ambrose clung to him. She was half crying.

"Oh! Nigel," she said. "Is it true? Do you really want me? Am I any use anyway? You don't know how I've fretted, just feeling—I wasn't any bit of good."

"Why, you're the only thing I've got," said Nigel Ambrose. "Look here, Helen, I *will* come. It is going to be pretty awful here with Silvia on the scene. I simply long to get back to my work and my home."

"Shall I ring and ask them to get your things?"

He paused, still with his arm about her shoulder, and then he said:

"I
with y
H
Amb
door,
"I
for su
back
The
instar
"
Don't
she is:
a lot
wome
can't
cut o
H
a littl
"
but
husb
"
angry
she h
There
peopl
and t
"
lightl
young
guess

"No; there'd be a fuss! I'll just go away quietly with you."

He turned towards the door as he spoke; and Mrs. Ambrose went with him; but before they reached the door, she stopped.

"Nigel," she said, "I—I am anxious about Silvia, for sure she won't be happy here. Shall we take her back with us?"

The fretful look came into the man's face on the instant.

"No—no!" he said. "We can't upset things now. Don't worry yourself about Silvia. You are quite right, she isn't a child now. She is growing up, and she wants a lot of looking after. My cousins are just the sort of women to lick her into shape. You are too soft! You can't say 'no.' Besides, you have got all your work cut out as it is."

Helen Ambrose smiled; but her warm heart ached a little for Silvia.

"Do you suppose I might see her?" she asked; but this idea was squashed immediately by her husband.

"No, no," he said. "We mustn't interfere. I was angry with Dick for bringing his sister; but now that she has come, I see that it is a proper arrangement. There is no life for a girl down at Garth Court, and my people are prepared to look after her, and bring her out, and that is just what she wants."

"Yes, yes, Nigel, I know; but they've got to go lightly with her. She is difficult because she is so young. I'm kind of unhappy about her, Nigel. I guess you'll never know how I've fretted about her and

Dick. It just broke my heart that they should have to come to you."

"Well, well, it is all settled," said Nigel Ambrose irritably. "Come along. I've got my hat and coat downstairs. We'll slip away, and then I'll send a telegram saying that I had to go back with you. I can always come up again for the funeral."

He held her by the arm as they went downstairs. It seemed almost as though he were afraid that she might leave him; and they got out of the house quite easily.

There was a strange mixture of feelings jumbled up in Helen Ambrose's heart as they walked away together. She knew that she was very weak; but she could not resist a sense of joy in the thought that she was still necessary to her husband. The touch of his arms about her and his kisses thrilled her. That one vision that had swept her away so completely from everything which had made her life six years before, had possession of her once again; but with it there was mingled a sense of unhappiness. She hated to leave Silvia unprotected as it were; she knew perfectly well that the father was satisfied, that many others would have seen no possibility of harm coming to the girl, placed as she was now; but Helen Ambrose had not studied her stepdaughter so long without realizing the real danger in Silvia's nature. To subject the girl now to rigid conventionality might be very disastrous; to leave her in the gloomy atmosphere of that house with the knowledge that outside she could find freedom, excitement and admiration, might drive the girl to take an even worse step than the one she had taken the day

before
Mrs.
her n
worki
was :

before. The only gleam of consolation that came to Mrs. Ambrose as these thoughts went quickly through her mind, was the certainty that James Banister was working on her behalf, and what Jamie undertook to do was generally carried through very thoroughly.

CHAPTER IX

THE letter which Olivia Mary had waited for arrived at last.

Mrs. Cheston had remained in her room the greater part of the day. She heard with vexation that Mrs. Ambrose had called and had been sent away.

"I wanted to see her," she said to Payne, who replied bluntly enough,

"You weren't fit to see any one."

About tea-time Olivia Mary left her room and went downstairs to the hall. She had a strange disinclination to go to her usual corner in that little room where hung all those portraits of her boy.

His silence hurt her terribly; in fact she could not understand why he had not written to her; but when his letter came he explained everything satisfactorily.

He told her that he did not want to make sure of Isabel till he had spoken to the girl. It was rather strange to John Cheston to suggest even a certain humility; and there was something human in the idea that he was not sure of the place that he held in Isabel Matheson's affections.

The letter was full of affectionate thought for herself, but touched as all his letters were in that tone which suggests an elder and a stronger person writing to some one young and inexperienced. He was anxious

to impress upon his mother that his marriage was to make no difference where they were concerned.

"It only means," he wrote, "that you are going to have two people to take care of you instead of one." At the end of his letter he scribbled that an announcement of his engagement would appear in the papers on the following morning.

There was a little note from Isabel enclosed in his letter, a very loving epistle in which the girl repeated all that her lover had said ; she intreated Mrs. Cheston to try and realize that she was not going to lose John, but that henceforward she would have a daughter as well as a son.

Olivia Mary sat down and wrote out two telegrams to the lovers conveying the tenderest of thoughts. As she gave these telegrams to be despatched she informed the butler of the news which she had received ; and when she sat alone she was conscious of the excitement, the element of festivity which ran through the household when the news was made general.

Payne hovered about her a good deal that evening. Every now and then Olivia Mary would say to her :

"Why don't you go and join the others?"

And the woman would make some evasive answer ; the fact being that she was anxious about her mistress.

"Now I understand why you had a headache," she said on one occasion. "Of course you knew about this ; and you fretted about it. Well, I think you're very foolish if you'll let me say so, ma'am, for it is just the best sort of thing that could happen to Mr. John. He might have picked up with quite a different sort of girl, one who would have been strange to you

and wouldn't have had any consideration for you. Well, that won't be the case with Miss Isabel, for she's fonder of you, I do believe, than she is of her own mother."

"Go downstairs and drink Mr. John's health," said Mrs. Cheston in reply to this speech.

Payne obeyed her; but she was back again almost directly.

"Well, of course, we all knew it was coming," she announced, as she brought her mistress some more letters and the evening papers; "and I've been wondering why they've been such a long time about it, for they haven't nothing really to wait for, have they?"

"No," said Mrs. Cheston, "everything is clear and straight in front of them." She paused a little while, and then she looked round. "You know, Payne, we shall have to be making plans, you and I. Sir Thomas said yesterday that he hoped the young people wouldn't be getting married just yet awhile, but I hope just the contrary; and when they are married, well, I shall have to leave here."

"Oh! but there won't be any hurry about that, surely," said Payne.

It seemed as if she had never thought about this view of the future. Certainly it did not please her. "I can't see you nowhere else but here," she said; and she said the same thing once or twice later on when she had induced her mistress to go upstairs to her room again. "What will you do?" she asked bluntly, as she stood brushing Olivia Mary's hair.

Mrs. Cheston paused an instant, and then she said:

"plans shall"
"
Olivi"
"
expla
afraic
"Not
P
this (
"
it is
Perh
"
V
loose
were
her,
chari
spok
"
she a
"
that
as s
her
up v
can't
"
you
if sh

"I have made no plans. I don't want to make plans. I—but I will tell you one thing, Payne. I shall love my freedom, it will mean new life to me!"

"Law!" said Payne. She looked puzzled, and Olivia Mary laughed.

"It will be so nice to do just what I like," she explained, "to go just where I want to go and not to be afraid of any one." She repeated the last sentence. "Not to be afraid of any one."

Payne really could not understand her, and seeing this Olivia Mary took mercy on her.

"I am talking a lot of nonsense," she said; "but it is because I don't want to have to think too much. Perhaps you understand," and Payne nodded her head.

"Yes, I understand," she said.

When her hair had been plaited into two long loose plaits Mrs. Cheston spoke of other things. There were many matters which Payne attended to for her, people in the village who received individual charity from her; and it was about these she now spoke.

"Did you go to Miss Dalywood this afternoon?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am; and I told her what you said about that girl of Robson's. She is just of your opinion, and as soon as she is well Miss Dalywood is going to get her out of the neighbourhood. The mother's made it up with her and she's looking after her; but the girl can't never go back to her home."

"No; I suppose not," said Mrs. Cheston. "Did you tell Miss Dalywood that she was to let you know if she wanted more money?"

"She says that she has got plenty in hand. She spoke quite sharp like to me. She says you give too much."

"She is a good sort, Payne!"

"Yes, she is that, though she has got a sharp tongue and a hard way with her; but there'd be a lot of people miss her if she was to go. You know she is quite right about you, ma'am, you give much too free; and, after all, though one's sorry for Robson's girl one can't shut one's eyes to the fact that she brought about her own trouble. I saw it coming a long time ago! A flighty bit of a thing she was, so stuck up with her pretty face, that she was bound to go the wrong road."

"She had no chance," said Olivia Mary, and she spoke with a sigh. "After all, if she was flighty, she wasn't very old; and look what a price she has to pay."

Payne sniffed. "Seems to me she is in luck, for she's no sooner in trouble and you hear of it than you stand by her! Of course, I know she's got to be seen through, but she is the sort to do this kind of thing over and over and over again, you mark my words."

"You are a very hard woman, Payne," said Olivia Mary; but she said it with a smile that almost inferred the words were intended as a compliment.

"I shall see Miss Dalywood to-morrow," she added; "the sooner this girl gets away the better."

"Yes, and if *my* advice is asked I say let her take the child with her. Miss Dalywood was for putting it out to nurse round about this place, but it isn't fair on the child. Let it go where nothing will be known about it, and when it grows up it won't have people

point
ma'ar
"
right
"
you'll
quite
blue
have
"
said:
to se
stay
hour
room
P
strar
had:
noth
took

pointing their fingers at it. Don't you think I'm right, ma'am?"

"Quite right," said Mrs. Cheston, "absolutely right!" Then she took her leave.

"Well, I'll say 'good-night,' ma'am; and I hope you'll sleep, not that I think you will, because I am quite convinced that you are going to worry yourself blue about Mr. John; but, all the same, I do hope you'll have a good try to get some sleep."

"Good-night, Payne," said Olivia Mary: then she said: "I forgot to tell you, Mr. Kurtiss is coming here to see me to-morrow. I don't know whether he will stay the night. I expect he will only be down for an hour or so, but you had better tell them to prepare a room in case he should stay."

Payne paused and looked at her mistress, remonstrance was hovering on her lips; but Mrs. Cheston had sat down and had taken up a book; and realizing that nothing she could say would be of any use the maid took her departure.

CHAPTER X

QUITE early the next morning, Mrs. Ambrose sent a message over to Garth Court to ask if Mrs. Cheston would see her. She wrote some very sweet, simple words of congratulation and sympathy about the engagement which was now known all over the neighbourhood.

Olivia Mary replied that of course she would be delighted to see her ; and when she came the guest was taken upstairs to Mrs. Cheston's bedroom.

"I am going to ask you to do something for me," Helen Ambrose said as they kissed and greeted one another. "You'll think I am always asking."

"But, perhaps, it will be my turn soon," said Olivia Mary. "Sit down by the fire and tell me what has happened."

"Well, just for a little while, I was really happy ; but only for a little while. Everything was just the same when I got back last night ; in fact, it is a great deal worse. I guess I'd almost rather have had Dick stay as he was than be as he is ! You see I brought my husband back with me. Poor dear ! He was so wretched, and there wasn't any use letting him just fret himself to fiddle-sticks. I am not quite sure why he was sent for at all ; but when I saw him, there was nothing for it but to bring him home."

"
"
belie
all th
mean
I just
O
to be
was 1
quite
"
mado
had
"I d
and
just t
me."
T
glow
"
can't
some
kept
abso
day
cotte
"
losin
"
Mar
slave
your

"Well?" queried Olivia Mary.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Ambrose. "If you believe me Dick just went for his father last night for all the world like a young tiger cat. It was pretty mean of him to flare out and make things so bad. I—I just don't know what to do to smooth them out."

Olivia Mary smiled. "After all, there is something to be said on Dick's side, you know. Yesterday's work was not agreeable, and from the little I saw of him I am quite sure he can be hot-headed and impetuous."

"Hot-headed!" said Mrs. Ambrose. "Why he was madder than any one I've ever known or seen." She had pushed up her veil and looked tired and pale. "I don't know what is going to be the outcome of it all, and that is why I thought I'd ask you if you'd let me just talk things over with you and see if you can advise me."

There was a little colour in Olivia Mary's face and a glow in her eyes.

"Oh, do let me do something!" she said. "You can't think what it means to me to feel that I may be of some use: real use I mean! The one hope that has kept me alive in what otherwise would have been absolutely stagnation has been the thought, that the day would come when I could break the last shred of cotton wool away from me and be real and alive again!"

"Why, I thought it would hurt you a lot, the idea of losing your boy."

"It is worse than a mere hurt in one sense," Olivia Mary said; "but in another it means the end of a slavery. But don't talk about me now, I want to hear your story."

"You tried to do your best for Silvia," said Mrs. Ambrose; "and you got treated badly; but all the same I'm going to ask you to do what you can for Dick. He'll never stay here now. He is all alive, to be gone, to be independent, to be doing something. He said some cruel words to his father last night; but maybe it was because they were true that they were so cruel. There *has* been neglect. The trouble is how to get even with things now. Dick's most too old to go to school, and yet that is what he wants."

Olivia Mary sat staring into the fire.

"It is a little bit of a conundrum, because the difficulty is that one doesn't know what Dick wants: what he would like to do—or be."

"He doesn't know himself: he just wants to get away; and he has got to go, Mrs. Cheston, or sure there will be something dreadful happening! I wouldn't go through another experience like last night, not for a whole pound of pearls." There was a little break in Mrs. Ambrose's voice as she added in a whisper:

"Seems to me that Dick downright hates his father. I'm—I'm just crazy with trouble because I can't get Silvia out of my mind. I know just as sure as sure that there will be another upset with her. My! I couldn't live a day in that dreary house! It wasn't until yesterday," she went on, "that I realized the sort of people that belong to these children, for we didn't ask any questions when we got married, we just came together naturally; but I see now why it has never been possible for Silvia and me to come together, and I see more too though I've been trying to deceive myself that I was in my proper place right here. I found out

yester
somet
that's
"Wh
help I
"
"Tell
think
"
he is
rouse
grate
But i
worri
M
nephe
don't
but—
tea-ti
"
Amb
must
dares
I'll h
isn't
about
becat
I kn
empt
O
and v
Kurt

yesterday, that what I really want and really love is something, quite, quite different to what I've got; but that's neither here nor there!" Helen Ambrose added. "What's got to be done now is to fix up things so I can help Dick."

"Suppose you send him to me," said Olivia Mary. "Tell him that I want to see him," she smiled. "I don't think he need be afraid of me."

"Oh! he isn't afraid," said Helen Ambrose; "but he is just raw! You know what I mean. He's been roused up so quickly—too quickly, and everything grates on the same spot as it were and hurts horribly! But it's real hard on you that I should bring you all my worries!"

Mrs. Cheston was thinking. "I'm expecting my nephew to-day," she said, after a little pause. "I—I don't suppose he will stay very long. I hope he won't; but—but, in any case, if you send Dick over to me about tea-time I will arrange to be alone."

"I must go up to London to-morrow again," Helen Ambrose said restlessly as she rose to go. "I—I just must know how things are working out with Silvia. I daresay she will rage with me for going; but I guess I'll have to go just the same. It is a bit stupid of me, isn't it?" she asked suddenly, "fussing myself as I do about folk that don't belong to me. I suppose it is because I've always wanted to have children of my own. I know they mean a lot of contrariness; but it is an empty life that hasn't got them."

Olivia Mary went downstairs with Mrs. Ambrose; and when they reached the hall they found that Angus Kurtiss had arrived.

He was a tall young man, with a good figure ; he had deep-set eyes ; and his mouth and chin were very cleanly cut. Probably he would have been considered good-looking by most people ; but Helen Ambrose was not drawn to him. He looked supercilious, and his colourlessness was in a sense repellant.

She had half-stretched out her hand when Mrs. Cheston had introduced her ; but Mr. Kurtiss only bowed ; and though Mrs. Cheston went with her to the door, and kissed her as they parted, there was a little uncomfortable feeling resting with Mrs. Ambrose as she started on her homeward walk.

Mrs. Cheston stood a moment watching her, then turned back from the big door.

"You are earlier than I expected, Angus," she said.

Mr. Kurtiss remarked that he had to go back to London to keep an early appointment that afternoon.

"I suppose that was Nigel Ambrose's wife?" he said. "Queer sort of woman for him to have married. She was a music-hall singer."

Olivia Mary looked at him, and then she winced a little though she did not let him see this.

"Mrs. Ambrose is a charming woman," she remarked. "You would like an early lunch, I suppose, Angus."

"It is immaterial to me," the young man answered.

He was looking about him swiftly, in something of a furtive manner, noting new arrangements, taking in all the luxurious appointments of the house.

"Perhaps we had better go into another room," said Mrs. Cheston. "We shall not be disturbed then."

"I want your permission to use the library a little while. There are one or two books here which will be of

assist
taking
using

"]

H

you h

forbid

"]

Mary

" (

going

"]

Angu

have

to un

" (

Kurti

tion ;

where

O

" Let

talk t

is not

go in

resear

you a

H

minec

"]

let m

haven

hope

assistance to me in a certain literary work I am undertaking. I suppose there will be no objection to my using these books?"

"None whatever. Why should there be?"

He sneered in a pretence of a smile. "Oh! well, you know perfectly well that your son has practically forbidden me to come here at all."

"I think there must be some mistake," said Olivia Mary in a low voice.

"Oh no! He was frankness itself. He said he wasn't going to have me hanging about where you were."

"Please don't let us talk about disagreeable things, Angus," Mrs. Cheston said hurriedly. "You know I have always regretted that you and John will not try to understand one another."

"Oh! I understand him perfectly well," said Angus Kurtiss. "He is a little God Almighty in his own estimation; and there isn't space for any one else to breathe where he is!"

Olivia Mary answered him hurriedly, nervously. "Let us leave John alone. You've come down here to talk to me about yourself. I have told you that there is nothing I won't do if it is in my power. Shall we go into the library now, or would you rather do your research work first; and then we can talk. Is it a book you are writing, Angus?"

He said "Yes." There was something of a determined ungraciousness in his manner.

"Well, when you have finished in the library, please let me know," said Olivia Mary; then she added, "I haven't heard from Gertrude for some little time. I hope she is well."

"I regret to say she is anything but well," Mr. Kurtiss answered. "Will you be so good as to ask them not to disturb me for the next hour or so? I shall have to work rather closely."

"No one shall disturb you," Olivia Mary said.

She caught her breath in a long, tired, pathetic sigh as Angus Kurtiss left her.

"Perhaps, after all," she said to herself, "Jack is right and it would be better never to see this man."

The futility of bringing about anything like a friendship between herself and Kurtiss indeed had never forced itself upon her so definitely as it did this day. His resentful antagonism to her son had never been so openly disclosed. She found herself wishing, in a passionate, yearning sort of way, that a whole world could stand between Angus Kurtiss and all that made her life. The influence about him was so baneful, so chilly, that it penetrated to her very soul. It was wonderfully comforting to hear Sir Thomas Matheson's name announced at this moment, and to turn and have her hands held in his sympathetic grasp.

"I am going to fetch the bride elect," Isabel's father announced; "and thought I would look in on my way. Their train isn't due at the junction till two-thirty; but I'm going to walk to the station; the car will meet me there. Why, how cold you are! You are well, aren't you?"

"I am all right," said Olivia Mary—she smiled up at him. "Angus is here. Don't let Jack know. I sent for him. He"—she gave a little laugh—"he always freezes me. Do stay and have some lunch, Sir Thomas."

"Why, of course," said Isabel's father, cheerily; "as a matter of fact I was going to ask you if you could give me a snack." Then he took on John Cheston's tone. "Why on earth do you have anything to do with this fellow?" he asked. "Of course he rubs you up the wrong way, and enjoys doing it. The best thing that could happen to you would be to get both Kurtiss and his sister shipped off to the other side of the world. Can't this be done?"

Olivia Mary evaded the question. "I am particularly glad to see you to-day," she said, "because I want to speak to you about something important."

"Put on your furs and come out into the grounds," suggested Sir Thomas.

"I won't be two minutes," declared Mrs. Cheston, and she ran up the stairs like a girl; in fact, when she came down again, she looked amazingly young. She wore a sable cap and a loose coat of the same precious fur. "I've been making plans," she told Sir Thomas, as they went out of the big door.

"What sort of plans?"

"Oh! just little ones. I've been trying to sketch out my life, and what I shall do when I go away from here."

Sir Thomas repeated what Payne had said the night before.

"I can't see you anywhere else but here," he told her; but she only laughed.

"Oh! I have always known I should have to abdicate. John has never spoken to me about it; but I am perfectly well aware that he intends that I shall live somewhere near; well, I will make a confession to

you, Sir Thomas. That is just what I *don't* intend to do."

He looked at her with keenest admiration. "Well, my dear," he said, "I, for one, shan't blame you. First of all, young people are always best by themselves. That is what I've got to impress upon my better half. She mustn't get into the habit of trotting round to see Belle on every possible occasion. If we had not taken roots to ourselves in that old house of ours, I should have proposed a move; but that isn't possible where we are concerned. Well, now, you said you had something to ask me. What is it?"

Olivia Mary told him all that had been happening at Garth Court.

"Something has to be done for that boy," she said. "You are such a practical and clever man. What do you advise?"

"Too late for him to go into the army," said Sir Thomas. "Doesn't know enough to be a secretary. I should say make a farmer of him."

Olivia Mary laughed, such a delightful laugh. "A farmer!" she said. "Why, according to Mrs. Ambrose, he hasn't sufficient energy to brush his own clothes."

"Ah! that is as things were, not as they are going to be," said Sir Thomas. "Did you say this young fellow was coming over to see you to-day? Well, you might tell him to come along and have a chat with me. There might be a possibility of sending him out to join my boy Laurie in Canada; that is, if young Ambrose has some of the real stuff in him! But he'd have to learn something about farming before he went; and I

know the very chap to send him to. He's trained two boys, and turned them into really useful members of society. Most boys like an out-door life, you know; and Dick Ambrose wouldn't know himself in a couple of months." As they turned to retrace their steps to the house, Sir Thomas caught sight of Angus Kurtiss standing at the library window looking at them. "What is he doing in there?" he asked quickly.

"He wants to make some notes from some books of reference in the library."

"Keep any money locked in any of the drawers?" inquired Sir Thomas with rather grim facetiousness.

"You are as bad as Jack," said Mrs. Cheston; but all at once it seemed as if a blight had fallen on her. The colour brought by the keen air and exercise into her cheeks faded out.

"I wish Jack would be a little kinder to Angus," she said.

"No use wasting wishes on the impossible. It isn't in Jack to like his cousin; and I understand that so well. You see I knew Angus's father and mother, and I disliked them both. How your husband ever came to have a sister like Lucy Kurtiss is one of those problems that never will be solved. Yes, I know just how Jack feels about this chap; and upon my soul I think he's right! You oughtn't to have Kurtiss hanging about you. If he had an ounce of grit in him he'd leave you alone."

"Well, at any rate, I feel safe to-day," said Olivia Mary; "because you are here."

"That's very nice of you," said Sir Thomas. "And let me tell you I appreciate the compliment."

Luncheon was in fact far from being the uncomfortable meal for which Olivia Mary had prepared herself. Sir Thomas brought with him such a brisk, wholesome atmosphere, and kept the conversation so steadily on general subjects, that there was hardly any opening for Mr. Kurtiss to sneer. Every now and then Mrs. Cheston found herself looking at the younger man and wondering what really was hidden in his heart. There was such a distinct flavour of bitterness in his voice and his words. Once when the subject of Garth Court cropped up he repeated his former remark about Mrs. Ambrose; and quite involuntarily Olivia Mary found herself saying to him:

"How is it, Angus, that you know so much about other people?"

Just for an instant he looked at her, and there was a curious expression in his face.

"I find it useful," he said, "to get to know most of those things which people like to hide."

"God bless me," said Sir Thomas. "What a disagreeable kind of occupation!" Then he took up the cudgels on behalf of Mrs. Ambrose. "Still, somehow I don't believe you are on the right score this time, Kurtiss. She hasn't quite the build of a music-hall lady."

"I think you will find I'm right, all the same," said Angus Kurtiss.

"I don't think it matters one way or another," said Olivia Mary. "Mrs. Ambrose has lived here six years, and every one who knows her loves her. There must be something very nice and good in her to bring that about."

It
nervou
Thom
helple
was pa
"V
our ne
them
good
going
to-day
I sup
this n
H
"I ex
"
Si
offer
"
he as
know
"
mem
"
as he
some
dear
nothi
T
heart
nervo
her

It was a brave little speech ; but it was spoken nervously with that timidity which always made Sir Thomas regard her as something young and almost helpless. He got up to go reluctantly, but the time was passing and the walk to the junction a long one.

"Well, we don't worry ourselves very much about our neighbours down here, Kurtiss," he said. "We take them as we find them. And I fancy that's a pretty good rule to follow throughout life. I hope you aren't going to worry Mrs. Cheston with too much business to-day ? She has lots of things to think about just now. I suppose you saw the announcement in the papers this morning, so you'll understand."

He held Olivia Mary's hand tenderly before leaving. "I expect you will be having Belle here to-night."

"I have asked her to dinner," said Mrs. Cheston.

Sir Thomas gave Mr. Kurtiss a nod ; but he did not offer to shake hands.

"Have you ever thought of going out to Canada ?" he asked. "Plenty of fine openings for young men who know how to use their brains and their hands."

"Thank you," said Angus Kurtiss. "I shall remember that."

"The fellow's a beast!" said Sir Thomas to himself, as he walked briskly away from Thorpe. "There is something clammy and crawly about him. I wish that dear little soul would be strong for once and have nothing to do with him !"

The same wish had possession of Olivia Mary's heart at this very moment. As Sir Thomas left her a nervousness which amounted almost to a fear crept into her face. She felt so defenceless ; long ago she had

exhausted every resource her woman's wit could conjure into existence to build up some sort of good understanding between herself and this young man. Now she made no further effort beyond meeting his wishes wherever and whenever this was possible.

Angus Kurtiss had not spoken immediately following on Sir Thomas's departure. He had paused, and then he had smiled!

"Canada!" he had said; "yes, I suppose that is what is at the back of John's mind! A desire to shoot us anywhere, the further the better! But all the same it isn't going to be Canada not just yet awhile!"

Mrs. Cheston answered him hurriedly. "I have never suggested this to you, Angus."

He shrugged his shoulders. "No; you only let other people do it."

"How strangely unjust you are!" Olivia Mary answered, almost hotly. She took her courage in both hands and looked at him almost steadily for the moment. "You know, don't you, that I have tried to let you and Gertrude understand that I am your friend; that I sympathize with you?"

"Thanks," said Angus Kurtiss. "We are, of course, quite grateful."

She still looked at him. "I asked you to come here to-day, because I want to know just exactly how I can help you. Your letter was so vague. You spoke of wanting some capital. I have only a little loose money at the bank; but what I have is at your disposal."

"A little money won't be of any use," Kurtiss answered. "If you must get rid of what you have you might make it over to my sister."

M
sever
but
comr
John
what
F
appa
"
said,
C
you
"
said,
"It
ward
book
M
"
she :
S
morr
wher
"
as sh
"Wl
S
most
him
into
to h
gone

Mrs. Cheston bit her lip nervously. "I have already several times offered to double Gertrude's allowance; but she refuses to take it. You know I have not command of much money, Angus; all I have is what John gives me: he is very generous, and never asks me what I do with it, but——"

He interrupted her. He had been thinking and apparently had not listened to her last speech.

"If you will let me have a couple of hundreds," he said, "that will be useful for the immediate moment."

Olivia Mary got up almost eagerly. "I will bring you the cheque," she said.

"I want to take away one or two books," the man said, as she was moving across the room to the door. "It isn't convenient or pleasant for me to come backwards and forwards; and yet I have need of these books."

Mrs. Cheston at once agreed to what he asked.

"I will tell Denton to have them packed up for you," she said.

She gave the order to the butler who came in at that moment, and then she went quickly to her own little room where she kept her cheque-book.

"Oh, God, what a coward I am!" she said to herself as she sat down and wrote the cheque for Angus Kurtiss. "What a miserable coward!"

She did all in her power to show consideration to her most unwelcome guest. The car was ordered to take him to the station, and the books he wanted were put into the car; the cheque she had written was given to him unnoticed by any one; and, when at last he had gone, Olivia Mary walked into the rooms where he had

been and flung the windows open widely. The cold raw air was stimulating, health-giving.

In the library the gap made by the removal of the books struck her as unsightly. She called the butler to her and together they rearranged the shelf.

"I don't suppose Mr. Kurtiss will keep these books very long," Mrs. Cheston said; as she spoke she glanced about her, and suddenly she frowned. She waited until the servant had left her, and then she crossed to the corner where there stood an old-fashioned bureau. It was one which her husband had constantly used, a piece of furniture of a very simple and unpretentious character, more so than most of that to be found at Thorpe.

As she approached this Olivia Mary realized that the suggestion that had flashed through her mind was a fact. The lock had been forced. Hurriedly pulling down the lid she saw that the small drawers of the bureau had been hastily searched, for a quantity of old papers was tossed in confusion on the desk, and a little inner cupboard which also had been locked had been forced in the same way.

She sat down in front of the piece of furniture and she looked at it, not with tears in her eyes but with the hottest anger. She had known long ago that there was more behind Kurtiss's churlishness than mere jealousy of her son and herself; indeed, of late she had realized fully that this man was an open enemy to all she held most dear. This act of vandalism proclaimed that there were no ways too small or odious to which he would stoop if by so doing he could discover some real cause for grievance against them.

It was the knowledge of her own weakness, of her

anxio
After
some
had n
unhap
not h
head
was.

U
had c
again
which
to re
well t
in her
she
whetl
same
the b
"
wher
soon
lock
youn
will

cold
the
r to
oks
iced
until
the
It
iece
cter,
that
was
ling
the
old
ttle
een
and
the
was
usy
zed
ield
ere
uld
use
her

anxious desire to temporise, which enraged Olivia Mary. After all, it would have been better to have borrowed some of her boy's arrogance and hard-heartedness : if it had not been that he knew that she would have been unhappy Olivia Mary felt convinced that her son would not have thought twice of putting his heel on the head of a snake such as Angus Kurtiss undoubtedly was.

Upstairs where she had been writing the cheque she had called herself a coward. She called herself that again now with far more bitterness and with a contempt which outweighed all anger ; yet as these feelings began to recede and she grew calm again, she knew perfectly well that cowardly as it might be she would not change in her attitude towards Kurtiss or his sister. Perhaps she had taken the wrong road in the beginning ; but whether that was so or not, she had to walk along the same road now and always. She got up and rang for the butler after awhile.

" I want you to telephone into Storchester," she said when he came. " I must have a cabinet maker here as soon as possible. Something has gone wrong with the lock of this old desk ; and, oh ! Denton, I'm expecting young Mr. Ambrose this afternoon about tea-time. I will have tea in the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XI

HELEN AMBROSE had fully made up her mind to go to London the following day ; but her plans were changed. Her husband, never very strong, had contrived to contract a violent cold ; and like most highly-strung nervous men immediately imagined that he was seriously ill. He had to remain in bed, and his wife had to be in constant attendance.

Spudgins had been sent to spend the day at the Rectory with his nurse, and Dick announced that he had been asked to luncheon with Sir Thomas and Lady Matheson, so the house felt singularly empty and lonely. While her invalid doted Mrs. Ambrose would steal softly downstairs and try to lose her uneasiness and her impatience in doing some little household duty ; but the fact that no news had come from Silvia, that Jamie Banister had not written to her, kept alive the insistent dread that something more would happen where Silvia was concerned. She had tried to put a little of this uneasiness into Dick.

He had come back from Thorpe in a very good temper the night before ; and while she had massaged and bathed and bound up his arm he had given his step-mother an account of all that had passed between himself and Mrs. Cheston ; oddly enough Dick had caught on

to the
alacrit
" F
Ambr
kind c
own f
tough
" V
" and
off to
" S
Mrs. J
" V
inquir
opene
" V
know
preter
amou
when
away
" V
" V
find o
" V
for ne
but sl
grum
" V
inquir
" V
Lady

to the suggestion of being turned into a farmer with alacrity.

"But I know you don't realize all there is to it," Mrs. Ambrose had said. "Now I do know all about this kind of life, for I was brought up on a farm; and my own folk worked hard all their lives, but it will be a bit tough for you, Dick."

"Well, you see, I've got to do something," said Dick; "and I would jolly well like to get out of all this and go off to Canada."

"Seems to me the home's kind of broken up," said Mrs. Ambrose; and she gave a sigh.

"You are surely not fretting after Silvia are you?" inquired Dick with a grin; and then it was that she had opened her heart.

"Why, yes, I am; and I can't help it! Oh! I know Silvia hates me like poison, and there isn't even a pretence of good feeling in her heart, but that don't amount to a row of peas. I tell you, Dick, I get scared when I think of what is likely to happen to her shut away up there in that dreary old place."

"Why, what can happen?" asked Dick, impatiently.

"That's just what I don't know; but I am going to find out. I am going there right away to-morrow."

"Well, I may as well warn you, you'll take a journey for nothing. Of course Silvia will feel strange at first; but she hated the sort of life we had here, so she can't grumble if she gets a change."

"What sort of women are these cousins any way?" inquired Mrs. Ambrose.

"Oh! The younger one's not half bad, I mean Lady Filton. She has lived abroad a good bit you see,

and so she isn't quite so stuffy and stuck up as her sister."

"What's the other sister's name?" inquired Helen Ambrose, a little awed by this revelation of titled connections.

"Hamerton," said Dick. "Her husband's in Parliament. She's got heaps of children, and there is a talk of Silvia going to stay with her indefinitely, which would be about the best thing that could happen, because Silvia wants to be knocked about a bit, and have some of the conceit taken out of her. I did my best to lay her out flat the other day," Dick said frankly, "but she wants more jumping on than I can give."

"Well, I guess if she goes to live in this Lord Hamerton's house——"

"He isn't Lord Hamerton," corrected young Ambrose quickly. "He is just plain William Hamerton. You know Hamerton's biscuits? He's got piles and chunks of money."

"Biscuits!" said Mrs. Ambrose. The word cheered her a little, for it had a homely sound in connection with so many titles. "But is it settled, Dick, that Silvia is to go to these cousins?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. I came away and left them hard at it. *You* ought to know more than I do. You went there the next day."

"I didn't see anybody, and I'm glad I didn't. The house just froze me up. I don't see how any one can live in that kind of place," said Helen Ambrose, with a shiver.

Di
"1
to be
M
sling
"
afraid
be th
"
said
spoke
again
self, ;
when
It
see th
throu
been
had ;
move
"
Amb
to-m
And
been
of S
slipp
"
this,
let n
S

Dick apologized for the gloom.

"Well, you see," he said, "you can't expect things to be very cheery when the old lady is so ill."

Mrs. Ambrose finished her stitching, and slipped the sling over the disabled arm.

"That's just it," she said, "that's what makes me afraid. It isn't good for a young creature like Silvia to be there in the house with the old woman dying."

"Silvia won't fret, you can take your oath on that," said Dick, carelessly. He pulled a wry face as he spoke. "I say, I *shall* be glad when I can get my arm again," he said; and then he began to talk about himself, and what Sir Thomas was likely to say to him, and when it would be possible for him to make a start.

It was useless for his stepmother to try and let him see the position of affairs where his sister was concerned through her eyes. He was so self-engrossed; he had been a long time waking up; but now all sluggishness had gone from him, and he wanted things to move, and move quickly.

"I am not going to worry your father," Mrs. Ambrose said; "but I am just going to steal away to-morrow and satisfy myself that Silvia is all right." And then to-morrow had come, and all her plans had been scattered. Instead of going, she despatched some of Silvia's clothes to London, and in the parcel she slipped a little note:—

"Your father is ill," she wrote, "so I can't bring this, but if there is anything you want will you please let me know?"

She refrained from writing anything affectionate or

tender. That way was not the way to touch Silvia, but though she had learnt this lesson and many other unpleasant little ones where her stepdaughter was concerned, Helen Ambrose was really unhappy about the girl. Of course, it pleased her to feel that she was so necessary to her husband, and to realize that his short sojourn away from her had evidently enhanced the value of his home and of herself; she was a born nurse, and nothing delighted her more than to hover about the sick room; but this day, though she was in a sense concerned about her husband, she was far more troubled about Silvia. She had now got the full bearings of the girl's nature (for character as yet was unformed in Silvia), and she convinced herself that nothing could have been worse under existing circumstances than that this particular girl should have been subjected to the kind of imprisonment which her relation's idea of educational restraint would signify.

When she was downstairs eating her solitary luncheon, Bessie informed her that a messenger boy had come down from London bringing a letter. Excitement ran through Mrs. Ambrose as this letter was brought to her. There was only one person who would have taken this amount of trouble, and she opened the envelope and began reading Mr. Banister's cramped, peculiar writing with a lively sense of gratitude for his kindly thought. It was not a very long letter, but it was very much to the point.

Mr. Banister informed her that he had got in touch with Mr. Charles Derrick, and had fixed up an engagement for him which necessitated an immediate departure for New York; in fact, Mr. Derrick was to sail

within

Banist

goo-g

"E

good t

him, a

ing, w

you f

come

Th

was d

tionat

M

spirit

did n

Sl

fifth c

medic

him s

that

Math

"

T

shut

dowr

"

Amb

you

seed

out,

"

within the week. In his peculiar phraseology, Mr. Banister described Derrick as "a curly-head wop with goo-goo eyes."

"But," he wrote, "he's got his fingers crossed for good this time. . . . Thinks America's just waiting for him, and he is all on. If there is anything more wanting, why you'll let me know, won't you? And don't you forget I'm waiting for you, when you are ready to come back."

The messenger boy was given a good luncheon, and was despatched back to London with a letter of affectionate thanks.

Mrs. Ambrose returned to the sick room with her spirit quite lifted up; with the man out of the way, she did not see what harm could come to Silvia now.

She had taken Mr. Ambrose's temperature for the fifth or sixth time to please him, and administered his medicine, and had read to him, and had been watching him sleeping for some time, when Bessie informed her that Mr. Dick had returned, and that Sir Thomas Matheson had come with him.

"Sir Thomas would like to speak to you, ma'am."

They stole quietly out of the room, and as quietly shut the door, and then Helen Ambrose went downstairs.

"I have come to ask you for a cup of tea, Mrs. Ambrose," said Sir Thomas, "and to have a chat with you about this young fellow. I hear that your husband's seedy; that's a pity; but I dare say we can talk things out, you and I."

"Why, yes, I think we can, Sir Thomas."

"Look here," said Dick, rushing in; "I want to be

off as soon as I can get away. Sir Thomas knows the very place for me. You'll get it through for me, won't you?"

"So soon," said Mrs. Ambrose. "Why, Dick, we can't fix things up without your father knows."

"My father!" said Dick, impatiently. "What's the use of going to him? He doesn't understand things, and he doesn't care. You're the one."

"There is Dr. Sargent just coming up from the gate," said Mrs. Ambrose, quietly. "I know it's the doctor," she added, turning to Sir Thomas, "because his car makes such a queer noise. You'll let him see your arm, Dick, and if he wants me I'll come."

Richard Ambrose went away a little sullenly. He felt that he was being dismissed, and resented this. He was afraid, too, that things were not going to work out just exactly as he wanted them to, and this annoyed him. However, it certainly was the doctor who had come, and as it was necessary that he should get back the use of his arm as quickly as possible, he did as he was bid.

"It is real good of you, Sir Thomas," said Mrs. Ambrose, "to take so much trouble about Dick, and we'll both be very grateful to you; but I'm sure you'll see that this is something that has got to be thought over."

"Of course—of course, Mrs. Ambrose," said Sir Thomas; "as a matter of fact I shall have to get in touch with my man. I know he has a vacancy, because he wrote to me the other day and asked me if I could recommend another pupil; but still there is much to be arranged; in the first place there is a premium to be paid. I believe Barford asks something like a couple of

hundr
would

"I

him,"

maye

was r

togeth

"

Sir T

Dick

most

shoul

possil

There

shall

rig D

been

"

haver

could

"

way.

to m

this a

can j

in It

him

with

he ha

"

thing

have

hundred; but you see he is an A1 man, and Dick would get a splendid start with him."

"I guess he must be good if you recommend him," said Mrs. Ambrose; but she felt a little dismayed, two hundred pounds was a lot of money: she was not quite sure how she would be able to get it together.

"The great thing, you see, in a case like this," said Sir Thomas, "is to strike while the iron is hot; now Dick is all alive to the fact that he has been slacking most terribly, and I think it most desirable that he should be put into harness with as little delay as possible. I'll write to Barford to-night if you like. There can't be any harm in writing anyhow; then I shall get full facts as to terms, etc., and the sort of outrig Dick will want if he goes. He tells me he hasn't been riding for some time."

"Why, no," said Mrs. Ambrose; "because we haven't been able to keep horses: anyhow Dick couldn't ride just now with his arm all fixed up."

"Oh! I don't know," said Sir Thomas in his cheery way. "I've made him promise to come over to-morrow to me: as a matter of fact he has been in the saddle this afternoon. He sticks on all right, and as far as I can judge he'll do. He tells me that he used to ride in Italy when he was a youngster, so it'll come back to him I suppose. You don't anticipate any difficulty with Ambrose? This won't clash with any views that he has about Dick's future?"

"No," said Mrs. Ambrose. "There won't be anything of that sort, because—well, I am afraid there haven't been any views."

"Well, then, I'll join issue with Dick. I think this is a matter that you can bring off if you like."

She smiled at him. "I'll do the best I can, Sir Thomas," she said; "and I hope I'll have things go the way Dick wants."

"It is lucky he has got you to work for him," said Sir Thomas, gallantly; then he gave her a few more facts about the farm to which he proposed Dick should be sent, and after he had had two cups of tea he took his departure.

"Isabel sent her love to you, and she is coming over to see you herself to-morrow."

"Why, that's good!" said Helen Ambrose. "I like her so much! I'm glad you won't be losing her when she marries, Sir Thomas, and I do hope she is going to be very, very happy."

"Thanks. I think that is a pretty sure thing. She and Jack Cheston have grown up together. They know all one another's little faults; and though I say it as shouldn't perhaps, I believe my girl is about the only one who will be able to manage Cheston without letting him know she's 'boss!' He is a nice, straight fellow, but he has been spoilt a bit you know. His mother's always been on her knees to him; and he has got a very fine opinion of himself, which is a right and proper feeling for a man to have of course if it isn't carried too far. Yes," said Sir Thomas, as he buttoned his coat, "I'm pleased about it. You know they're going to be married soon after the New Year."

"Why, no, I didn't know that," said Mrs. Ambrose; "but, after all, I guess they've nothing to wait for."

"Well—give my compliments to your husband, and

tell D
let yo
M
had s
her st
room,
tossir
"
irritat
scare
"
H
and
Altho
quite
movi
faced
"
becau
Sir T
I sup
I've
his br
going
"
on qu
burn
T
nursi
"
said.
for lo

tell Dick he is to be over with me early to-morrow. I'll let you have news of Barford as soon as I hear from him."

Mrs. Ambrose had to interview the doctor after he had seen her husband, and then she made her way to her stepson's room. He had gone back to his own bedroom, and she found him opening his cupboards and tossing his clothes about.

"One thing worse than another," he said to her irritably as she came in. "These things are fit for scarecrows and nothing else."

"Well, a few clothes are easily got, Dick."

Helen Ambrose sat down on the edge of the bed and watched him for a few minutes in silence. Although one arm was disabled he could use the other quite freely. It certainly was a novelty to see Dick moving about so briskly. Suddenly he turned and faced her.

"Look here," he said, "you've got to do this for me because—because I've got nobody else to help me. Sir Thomas tells me there will be money wanted; well, I suppose my father can afford to give me a start? I've never bothered myself one way or another about his business affairs; but I suppose there is *some* money going, isn't there?"

"Why, there has been enough just to carry things on quietly so far; there certainly hasn't been money to burn!"

The young man leaned against the dressing-table nursing his injured arm.

"I'll have to have a straight talk with father," he said. "It is time I had an allowance, sha'n't want it for long because I mean to do things and earn money

for myself! I hope to God he won't make a fuss and put all sorts of difficulties in the way. If Sir Thomas Matheson's son could be a farmer I suppose it's good enough for me: although to hear that lot talking up in town one would think that we Ambrose folk were designed to have special seats in Heaven and nothing else."

Mrs. Ambrose sat frowning a little, and then she looked at her stepson.

"Scores of times," she said, "Silvia has thrown lots of nasty little hints to me about myself. She has kind of flung dirt at me. Last time she spoke, she said I was mysterious, that I hadn't any right to have married your father."

"Oh, hang Silvia!" interrupted Dick, impatiently. "What is the use of harping on what she says or what she thinks? Who cares?"

"I—I care, I care a lot because—I've been feeling for a long time past that perhaps it wasn't the best thing for your father to have done to have married me. I guess I'm going to tell you the whole truth now, Dick. Maybe you haven't thought about it very much; but if you have I dare say you supposed I was just an ordinary female, wandering around alone and fixing my cap, isn't that the right sort of term, at your father? Well, I wasn't quite a nobody. I was a worker—a singer! Away over there I had quite a big name of my own and I earned a lot of money. It is up to me to go back again whenever I like; but I'm not going, not at any rate till I know for sure there's nothing more I can do here."

"You earned a lot of money?" said Dick. "And

you were a celebrated person. Good lord! how dull you must have been here! and what a rotten lot you must have thought us!" He looked at her. "I say," he said. "I don't see why you should study us one way or another. You have done a jolly sight too much already."

She answered him with a smile which brought out all the tender charm of her face.

"But, you see," she said, "I can't change right away. I've lived here six years, and I've grown to care for you all; and just what I want to say to you to-night, Dick, is this. You've got the idea in your head—and I won't say it isn't the right one—that I am the person who can help you to make the start you want to make. Well, then, dear boy, it's up to you to get what you want if you work in a little with me."

Dick turned a chair towards her, and sat astride.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Why, I don't want you to worry your father, not one little bit. I don't want you to make any scenes. Of course he'll have to know; but I want you to leave that to me. I guess I'll fix it all just as you want if you'll leave it all to me."

"It is awfully good of you, dear," said Dick. "Of course, I'll do what you want; though I don't see why my father shouldn't be worried a little bit now and again; but I say," he stopped suddenly and coloured hotly. "Er—it's the money. I can't let you——"

"Oh! just for once," said Helen Ambrose, getting up quickly. "Why, just try and imagine that you belong to me, that you are my own real son; that will make everything quite slick and easy, won't it?"

Dick did not answer at first, then he said :

"You *are* a good sort, Helen!" and getting up he went across to her and he kissed her ; then he turned aside whistling, and Mrs. Ambrose went very quickly out of the room.

J

The
mess
inten
set l
there
of ol
to be
than

L
after
at T
acco
ment

Long

"

laugh

Belle

I'm l

"

with

S

Matl

he
ned
ckly

CHAPTER XII

JUST at first there was a little element of shyness on Isabel Matheson's part when she and Olivia Mary met again ; but this soon melted away. The girl had come back charged with all sorts of tender messages and commissions, and it was evident that she intended to carry out every duty which her lover had set her in the fullest meaning of the word ; indeed, there were moments when Olivia Mary felt that instead of obtaining freedom with her son's marriage she was to be more securely fettered by affectionate attentions than heretofore.

Lady Matheson let her girl go alone the first night after their return ; but the following day she was over at Thorpe, and she made a little fuss on her own account of Olivia Mary ; then she made the announcement that there was to be an immediate migration to London.

"And it seems," she said with her good-humoured laugh, "that there was some sort of a promise made to Belle that you would help her choose her frocks. Now I'm here to ask for the fulfilment of that promise."

"What do you want me to do ?" asked Olivia Mary, with a smile.

She had a great liking for Isabel's mother, for Lady Matheson was delightfully conventional, a comfortable

person in the literal sense of the word ; one saw at a glance that Isabel resembled her mother a little in colouring, but not in physique, for the girl belonged to that new, strong, fine athletic race which distinguishes the English girl of to-day, whereas Lady Matheson had been small and rather short, and now was growing decidedly fat.

"Well, we want you to come to London, too, Jack has commissioned us to choose a house for you. He says we are to take one furnished till Christmas, then of course we shall all come back here. What do you say to this proposal?"

Olivia Mary paused only an instant, and then she smiled again.

"Why, what can I say?" she asked. "Of course I will do what Jack wants."

"Of course you will," said Lady Matheson. "You dear thing ; you have never done anything else, have you? Well, we're off very soon, in a couple of days' time. My sister has lent me her house in Sloane Street, and the first thing I shall do is to run round to an agent and get a list, so that I can settle on a house for you. I suppose——" she paused, "what part do you like best?"

"I really don't care," said Olivia Mary. "One street means just as much to me as another."

"Yes, I understand," said Lady Matheson. "You haven't been in town for such a long time ; but you must be in the centre of things, dear. Of course you'll bring up all your servants." Then Lady Matheson paused again. "You're sure—you are quite sure you don't mind."

"I shall like it," said Olivia Mary. "I feel unsettled ;

everything is just a little strange. I—I don't believe I could stay down here—while you are all away."

"Well, that is quite natural," said Lady Matheson; "and I'm glad that you have come to feel like that. I've always wanted to dig you out of Thorpe. It is a beautiful old house, but the best of us get tired of seeing the same things, even good and valuable things all the time. Perhaps you won't mind scribbling a few lines to Jack yourself, and telling him that you agree to our finding you a house."

"Of course," said Mrs. Cheston. "I'll write at once." But she made no haste to send this letter; in fact she had a strange disinclination to write to her son these days; in other times she had been wont to fill sheets of paper, whilst there had been no news of any sort to give him; but now there was a little barrier; so much was being arranged for her, that she felt it was preferable to drift, not to take any action, or move one way or another, just to drift. Therefore it was Isabel and her mother who chose the house for her, and made all the arrangements. So intent was her son on relieving her of every sort of worry and bother in connection with this move, that orders to the establishment of Thorpe were written by him, and Payne received any number of private instructions all dealing on the question of Mrs. Cheston's comfort.

"Marriage don't seem as if it were going to make much difference with Mr. John, do it?" Payne said to the housekeeper at Thorpe.

This departure to London was a matter of great excitement to the household. Mrs. Ambrose came over once or twice to see if she could be of any use.

"I guess there isn't much that I can do when you have got such a lot of servants; but I'd like to help if I can."

"What you shall do," said Olivia Mary, in her quiet way, "is to promise to come and be my guest in London for a little while."

"Why, I should just love to, Mrs. Cheston. There is nothing I'd like better; but—well, I can't make any plans for the moment. Everything will depend on circumstances. I'm crazy to have you see Silvia if you can. That poor old lady is dead at last, and Nigel and Dick have to go up for the funeral. Then there's such a lot to fix up for Dick before he goes away—things I just have to see to myself."

"Of course, I quite understand; but when Dick has gone, and Mr. Ambrose has settled down to his work again, won't you bring Spudgins and come to me for a little while?"

But Helen Ambrose could give no definite promise. She only reiterated again her desire that Mrs. Cheston should see Silvia, if possible.

"I guess it won't be so dull for her if she stays in London, with you there, and Miss Matheson, too; but I don't quite know what they're going to do with Silvia. I'm not mighty keen on her going to her cousin, Mrs. Hamerton. From what Dick tells me, I don't think Silvia and she will get on together. I guess I'm a fool; but I can't help worrying about the girl."

"I will send you news of her," said Olivia Mary, "if she is still in town when I get there."

Just two days before she left for London, Mrs. Cheston heard from Angus Kurtiss. He returned the

books
that
neces
of all
invite
O
letter
forth
an af
in to
plans
"
clima
this;
Lond
Jo
the c
wante
satisf
he co
fusse
about
fact,
quiet
T
were
Payn
L
the r
decla
Is
cond

books he had borrowed, and he wrote to inform her that his sister was seriously unwell, and that it was necessary that she should have an immediate change of air; in fact, he asked point blank that she might be invited to stay at Thorpe.

Olivia Mary scarcely paused before answering this letter. She wrote to Miss Kurtiss, telling her of the forthcoming visit to London; and she gave the girl an affectionate and pressing invitation to stay with her in town for a week or two, where they could make plans.

"I should like to send you to some warm, sunny climate," Olivia Mary wrote. "Perhaps we can arrange this; anyhow, I shall expect you, and we will meet in London."

John Cheston managed to obtain another short leave the day that his mother was to arrive in town. He wanted to see her installed in the house himself, and to satisfy himself that everything was as it should be; but he could not arrive till just before dinner time. He fussed as much about the journey as if his mother were about to start for the North Pole; and, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Cheston herself took the migration very quietly.

The servants—such of them as were going away—were despatched early in the morning; and she and Payne travelled up an hour or so later.

Lady Matheson had chosen one of the prettiest of the many houses she had seen, and Mrs. Cheston declared herself delighted with it.

Isabel was at the station to meet her, and personally conducted her over the house. There were flowers

everywhere, and portraits of John Cheston just in the right places to meet his mother's eye.

It struck Isabel that Mrs. Cheston was a little more nervous than usual. She seemed so out of her element; indeed, the girl reproached herself not a little for having broached the question of this coming to London.

"I'm a little worried about you, you know," she said, as they sat at luncheon. "It is very nice here; but it isn't Thorpe."

"I'm going to ask you a great favour, Belle, dear," Olivia Mary said. "Don't think about me so much. Just leave me to myself for a little while."

"You would rather not come out this afternoon; you would like to rest."

"Yes, I should like to rest," said Olivia Mary.

So Isabel went away, and when she had despatched Payne to meet Miss Kurtiss on her arrival from the country, Olivia Mary had several hours all to herself.

Just before she had left Thorpe, a telegram had been handed to her. She had opened it with a little smile, telling herself that, of course, it was from her boy, with some new order or suggestion. The signature at the end of the message, however, was not that of John Cheston. It was one at sight of which the blood ran hotly in her face for an instant, and then receded, leaving her very white. It was so long since she had seen that name, so long since she had heard it spoken. The message itself was simple enough.

"Am back in England for a little while. Will it be possible for me to see you? You are the first person to know of my arrival. Please try and see me. I am as ever your devoted and unchanged friend."

She was informed that the telegraph-boy was waiting to see if there was any answer; but Mrs. Cheston shook her head.

"No, there is no answer," she said.

She had travelled to London repeating the words of that short message to herself. The nervousness, the new constraint which Isabel Matheson had remarked so quickly, were born, not of the sensations which travel and contact with noise and confusion might naturally have produced, but were the outcome of an emotion which had to be kept in, buried with other secrets in her heart. When she was alone, however, safe from intrusion, Olivia Mary took out that telegram and read and re-read it. How strange that such a message should have reached her at such a time! And how wonderful was the spell which those few words laid upon her, "as ever your devoted and unchanged friend."

Had she yielded to impulse, to that sense of hardly conscious joy which came to her at odd intervals, she would have slipped away from the house and travelled as fast as she possibly could to the address given to her in this telegram. But long ago she had learnt the necessity of resisting her impulses, and so, little by little, she conquered that desire to meet once again this old and dear friend, and to feel her hand gripped in his strong one, and she whispered patience to herself.

When Payne returned from escorting Miss Kurtiss, she found her mistress lying down in her room, complaining of a slight headache. She insisted on going downstairs, however, and giving her niece tea; but she was back in her own room again very quickly.

"I want to be dressed before Mr. John comes," she said. "I don't much care what I wear."

It was, however, always a matter of great importance to Payne how her mistress looked, and she brought out that same charming gown which Isabel had so much admired on a former occasion.

When she was dressed, Olivia Mary stood in front of the fire, and she sighed—not a sharp, impatient sigh, but a long, pathetic breath, a tired sound, ending in a little shiver.

Payne caught this sound, and turned quickly.

"You'd best put something round your shoulders as you go downstairs, ma'am," she said. "They may say as they've had fires in all the rooms, but the house seems dreadfully chilly to me. Funny how much colder it always do seem in town to what it is in the country."

Mrs. Cheston smiled faintly.

"You are like me, Payne," she said. "You don't care for London."

"Oh! London's all very well in its way," the maid answered as she brought a gauzy black scarf out of one of the drawers. "But take it year in year out I'd rather be at Thorpe," she added.

Mrs. Cheston took the scarf and some gloves and a fan, but she put them down on a chair close by. "You'll wear your pearls, ma'am?" queried the maid. And Mrs. Cheston answered:

"Yes—I suppose so," half indifferently.

She was conscious now of a sensation of strangeness about her. It was so long, so very long, since she had been in London. The difference in the atmosphere, the

know
walls
ment
first
an ac
there
whic
warr
Olivi
emot
at he
"
she s
be ou
John
shive
up he
"
quick
here,
said
if Mi
early
you c
O
with
again
Sudd
the t
more
the r
Payn

knowledge that she was closed in and about by brick walls and big houses was most oppressive. The excitement which had thrilled her during the journey and the first hours after her arrival had gone now. There was an ache in her head and one in her heart too. Moreover, there was upon her that desolating touch of separation which children feel when they are uprooted from the warmth of home and left to the bleak outlook of school. Olivia Mary always made quick physical response to her emotions, and seeing her shiver again her maid looked at her anxiously.

"It's to be hoped you haven't took cold, ma'am," she said. "The day was a bit too raw-like for you to be out and you're not used to travelling. I expect Mr. John will be in a fine state about you if he sees you shiver. Why not let me order your dinner to be sent up here?"

"Oh! that is quite impossible!" said Mrs. Cheston quickly. "Sir Thomas and Lady Matheson are dining here, you know. Besides I'm all right." Suddenly she said to her maid: "Payne, will you go down and see if Miss Isabel has come? She said she would be here early; and then I think you had better go and see if you can do anything for Miss Kurtiss."

Olivia Mary stood a moment when she was alone with her hands pressed to her eyes, and as they dropped again she looked as though she were very near to tears. Suddenly she turned to her dressing-box, took from it the telegram she had received, read it through once more and then flung it into the fire: then she crossed the room and sat down at the writing-table on which Payne had already arranged all her customary

paraphernalia. Her hand trembled a little as she began :—

“DEAR FRIEND,” she wrote, “It *is* good of you to remember me and to care to see me. I find it very difficult to let you know or understand how glad I should be to meet you again when at the same time I am writing to tell you I cannot do this, at least not just yet. When I got your telegram to-day it was just like a voice from the old days, it awakened so many memories and it is so long since any one or anything has reminded me of all that used to be! Perhaps later on I shall be better able to meet you. My boy is going to be married. He thinks this will not make any difference in my life, but I know better. I love the girl he is going to marry, but she will be his wife and I shall only be his mother, and mothers must go into the background when a wife comes on the scene you know! So I expect to be very lonely, and when I think of the old times and of how loyal and good you were to me, believe me I find an indescribable comfort in the knowledge that your sympathy is unchanged. It may be that I shall make demands on that sympathy before very long, in any case you shall hear from me again.

“Yours gratefully”

She signed this letter with her initials, addressed it to “George Baldwin, Esqre,” and under her signature wrote “I shall be here for some weeks.”

She had scarcely done this when there came the sound of some one rushing up the stairs, and she had just time to slip the letter into one of the drawers

of the writing-table when there was a knock at her door.

"Hallo there, mother! Are you dressed? May I come in?"

Instantly the woman's expression changed and her face was illumined. She turned and ran to the door just like a child.

"Oh! Jack dear!" she said. "Here you are and I didn't expect you for quite another half-hour."

John Cheston took his mother in his arms and kissed her several times.

"Well, I managed to get away an hour or so earlier. And how are you, eh? Tired? You don't feel badly, do you? Have you seen Dr. Lorrie? No?" He held her off at arms' length and frowned on her. "Now isn't that disobeying orders," he queried. "Didn't I tell you that you were to let Dr. Lorrie know the moment you got up to town? As a matter of fact I wrote you two days ago and told you to fix up an appointment with him."

"I felt so well," said Mrs. Cheston, "there really wasn't any need to send for him."

"Felt well, that's good," said the young man, "awfully cheery," but he held her pulse in quite a professional way and looked at her critically. "Just as nervous as ever," he said. "Mother, I don't believe you'll ever grow up. You've got a pulse like a child. But I say, you *are* smart. Turn round and let me look at you."

With a laugh Olivia Mary obeyed, then she said:

"You've seen this dress before several times."

Then she caught her breath.

"Do you know this is the first time I have seen you since you have become an engaged man, Jack? You seem so important, almost bigger, I think."

He laughed a little shyly and then he looked at her seriously.

"I'm just the same, darling," he said, "you won't put stupid, silly ideas into your dear little head, will you?"

"There is only one idea in my little head, and my little heart," she answered him softly, "and that is the longing for you to be happy, Jack, always—always happy."

He kissed her again.

"Belle has written to me that you were awfully sweet to her; but that's like you, dear . . . you couldn't be anything else. You know," he went on hurriedly, "I've been rather anxious about you to-day, mother. It's been so beastly cold and journeys always upset you. I say, can you really imagine that you are in London? That you have actually torn yourself away from your beloved Thorpe at last?"

"I'm beginning to realize it and I'm glad I've come because I know that this is what you have been wanting for such a long time." She took his strong hand in hers and she caressed it with her cheek. "Belle and I lunched together," she said. "She met me when I arrived. Lady Matheson was awfully kind, she wanted me to lunch with her, but as Belle told me there would be some other people I felt I would rather come straight on here."

Her son laughed and pinched her cheek. "Had one of your shy fits, eh?"

"Yes," said his mother. "It's awfully stupid of me, isn't it? I—I'm certainly old enough to know better."

"I don't know that I want you to change," the young man answered her. "You wouldn't be you if you were like other people. All the same, Belle and I have been making plans about you. As soon as we are married and settled down we are going to turn our attention to you, mother. You know you're much too seductive to be left to your own devices! I say, what a lark bringing out one's own mother as a *débutante*!"

He had the most infectious laugh and the mother smiled as she heard it now, but the smile turned to a quiver of her lips as she looked at him with her heart in her eyes.

Certainly John Cheston was good to look at. He stood well over six feet, and though he had eyes rather like his mother's he did not otherwise resemble her, for his hair was crisp and fair, and his skin was fair too. Indeed, it required a considerable effort of imagination to conceive the relationship which existed between these two.

"Yes, we'll give a ball for you," he said. "I believe, you know, mother, you would have no end of a success in society. But," he added, "we'll go quietly at first. Your excitement shall come later after the wedding."

"Yes, we'll make our plans then," said Mrs. Cheston. She kissed his hands again softly as she spoke, "only you and Belle will have far too much to do in your married life to bother about me. Now really, Jack dear, you must run away and dress. Look at the time, and

I believe Belle is coming on before her father and mother."

"Good!" said John Cheston. "I see your meaning." "Well, it won't take me five minutes to change my togs. I say, how do you like the house, mother?" he asked "Belle wrote me that she thought it would just suit you. Of course it's small, but it seems a fairly nice sort of place." He stood with his hands on his hips looking about him in a masterful sort of way. The touch of arrogance in his bearing was so natural to him, however, that it had little offence in it. All his life he had been a kind of "boss" as he would have put it: a certain suggestion of superiority was almost inevitable. "This is a decent-sized room," he said; "but I suppose it's queer to you to feel that you are living with other people's furniture. I can't say that I should like to let a house of mine for strangers to rampage about in it."

"I like this room very much," said Mrs. Cheston. "All this white furniture is pretty and cheerful."

Payne came back at that moment. "Miss Isabel is in the drawing-room, and Miss Kurtiss wishes to know, ma'am, if she can wear a high dress to-night? Her cold seems rather heavy still."

"Oh, of course," said Mrs. Cheston. "Let her wear what she likes."

Her son was frowning now. Payne had disappeared again, and he had crossed the room, but at the door he paused.

"I say, is Gertrude here?" he said. "What a bore! You didn't tell me she was coming."

Mrs. Cheston answered him a little nervously. "It

was arranged rather suddenly. Angus wrote and told me that his sister had been very unwell and that she ought to have a little change, so as I was just leaving Thorpe, I thought I would ask Gertrude to join me here, nurse her for a week or two, and then make some arrangements to send her to the sea."

"I wish I could drum it into you, mother, not to take any notice of what Angus writes," Cheston said sharply. "He's always cadging from you. Why didn't you send me on his letter?"

"I didn't think about it. After all," Olivia Mary said in her nervous way, "there was no need to worry you. If—if you had been staying on here, darling, of course, I would not have asked Gertrude, but as I shall be alone . . ." she broke off—"I—I could not hear she was ill and not do anything, Jack, and besides she will be a companion for me."

"What I feel about it is this, that the more we do for these two, the more they'll want. Why the devil can't Angus look after Gertrude himself if she's ill instead of sponging on you? And I'm not at all pleased that you should be shut up with this girl for weeks. . . . If you want anyone with you, why not have asked someone else? Belle tells me you had that Ambrose girl with you at Thorpe for a time. Why didn't you cart her up? I tell you what it is, mother," John Cheston said firmly, "I don't intend to have Angus or Gertrude in my life when I'm married, and I simply won't let them hang on to you . . . that's flat!"

"I am sorry you are cross, I really didn't think you would care one way or another when I asked Gertrude to come," Mrs. Cheston said in a low voice. "Of course,

I know you and Angus are not very good friends, but Gertrude is not her brother, and really, Jack dear, she *is* ill."

"Oh! well, I'm not cross exactly," the young man said, though his tone contradicted his words, "still, you know I can't endure this girl, and I wanted everything to be so jolly just now. If Gertrude is ill then she ought not to be with you. I know what you are, you will fret yourself to fiddle-strings about her, and I suppose you will have Angus dropping in every day while she's here! A nice state of affairs all round!"

He did not pause to wait for a reply, but went out of the room and shut the door sharply behind him.

His mother's lips quivered as she stood looking at the closed door, then with a little despairing gesture of her hands she went back to the table and wrote some more letters. Payne came back while she was still writing.

"That girl's got a horrid cough," she said. "Doesn't look to me as if she was properly fed or taken care of. She always was puny and she's as shabby, as shabby as can be, ma'am. Seems to me her brother might do better for her than he does. But he's a selfish lot if ever there was one."

Mrs. Cheston finished her letters and got up slowly: she looked pale and a little tired. That suggestion of youth was illusive, it escaped her now.

"We must do what we can for Miss Gertrude while she is here, Payne," she said. "She seems to me to be altogether out of health."

"Well, she takes after her father, I suppose; it's sure she doesn't favour the Cheston family, nor Mr.

Angu
him
sister
stand
his fa
M
rope
fan a
"
goes,
youn
met
room
S
scarl
as P

Angus neither," Payne remarked. "When one looks at him or her it's queer to think that their mother was own sister to the master and he such a fine, splendid, up-standing man! Eh! but Mr. John does remind me of his father at times, doesn't he you, ma'am?"

Mrs. Cheston made no answer, she had coiled the rope of pearls about her throat and had picked up her fan and gloves.

"I think I'll go downstairs when Miss Gertrude goes," she said, and she smiled faintly; "I must give my young people five minutes to themselves. They haven't met for nearly a week. I'll go now to Miss Gertrude's room, she is ready, isn't she?"

She passed out as she spoke, gathering the gauzy scarf closely about her beautiful shoulders, for the house, as Payne had said, was rather chilly.

CHAPTER XIII

ISABEL MATHESON was sitting at the piano humming to herself and playing softly when John Cheston joined her. He went across the room and lifting her bodily up from the music-stool held her in his arms.

"Sweetheart!" he said.

She kissed him frankly and yet with a delicious touch of shyness about her.

"Dear!" she said, "how nice to see you. I didn't know you had come."

"Have you been here long, Belle?"

"Oh! about ten minutes . . . I thought I'd like to slip on ahead, you know what mother's idea of punctuality is!" She laughed as she took herself from his arms and closed the lid of the piano. "Isn't this a pretty room?" she queried. "Of course it can't compare with Thorpe, but it has a dainty countrified look which I felt would just please your mother. I do hope she will like it."

"She seems awfully pleased," Cheston said. A certain shyness rested on him also. Their new bond, though it held them so sweetly, yet put each of them in a new light in the eyes of the other. Their lives had intermingled ever since they could remember, so it was such a natural thing for them to drift into being lovers ;

yet it
long
ship
touch
somet
had b
of phy
peopl
links,
some
the re
them
vast
capac
throu
refute
adora
was,
in the
eyes
primi
man's
well
T
fire t
up h
"
"
E
"
thing
gene

yet it was just because they had been "chums" for so long that the sentiments aroused by their new relationship encircled them about with a restraint that was touched with romance and born of emotions which had something almost of a religious quality about them. It had been more than mere propinquity or the magnetism of physical attraction which had drawn these two young people to one another; there were a thousand little links, innumerable remembrances, some happy and some a little grey, at least to the girl. For just to mark the real significance of the sympathy which had made of them such splendid friends in the beginning there was a vast difference in their natures, and John had a special capacity for making those who cared for him suffer through their love. Isabel herself would have stoutly refuted this, but the fact remained that her schoolgirl adoration had paid a heavy toll in this respect. She was, however, so sensible, so free from nervousness in the modern significance of the word that she shut her eyes to a great deal. Perhaps there was enough of the primitive woman in her to make her homage to the man's attractive strength a reasonable and inevitable as well as a delightful matter.

They crossed the room together and stood by the fire talking nonsense for a little while, then the girl put up her hand and touched his brow with her fingers.

"What's that frown for?" she asked.

"Not for you, that's certain sure!"

He bent and caressed her hair with his lips.

"I don't want a frown for anybody. I want everything to be gloriously, beautifully happy," Isabel said generously.

He laughed. "You are not hard to please, are you?"

He gave her no explanation for the annoyance, instead he began speaking of a recent interview he had had with his colonel. He was in a Hussar regiment, but for some time past he had confided to Isabel that he intended leaving the army.

"The old chap was awfully decent about it," he said, "and tried to persuade me to stay on; but I told him that I couldn't go out to India with our fellows when they go in the spring, and I didn't care about changing into another regiment, and so, as I'd such an awful lot of other interests, I had decided to send in my papers. *You think I am right, don't you, Belle?*"

"Yes, dear," the girl answered thoughtfully. "Of course it would have been a different thing if you could have gone abroad, because then there is at least the possibility of doing something; but all the same," Isabel added quickly, "I should hate to think that I had stopped your career as a soldier."

"You haven't stopped me," John Cheston said. "Even if I hadn't been going to marry I should have chucked the army. I know it was my father's great wish that I should be a soldier, but it is a small life, rottenly small at least as far as my experience of it goes. Tell me, what have you been doing this week?"

"I have spent my time chiefly in answering letters," said Isabel with a laugh. "It would appear that our friends are unanimous on the point that we are an absolutely ideal couple!"

"Our friends!" repeated the young man, stooping to caress her cheek softly. "What about ourselves?"

"I
just w
mean,
of exc
all the
hedge
it and
"A
becau
"A
"I
Sh
"I
wheth
marbl
head c
said,
a lett
sore t
this l
he en
Of co
It is
opinic
"I
much,
Th
in fol
notice
itself
Cl
he jus

"I don't want to be ideal," the girl answered. "I just want to be happy, just to go on being happy, I mean, as I am now. I've got the most ridiculous sense of excitement bobbing up and down inside me, Jack, all the time. I feel I must go out into the highway and hedges and make everybody else see life as I am seeing it and feel the sunshine as I am feeling it!"

"And this," said John Cheston with a smile, "is all because of me."

"All because of you," she answered.

"I didn't know you were half so sentimental, Belle."

She answered him in her characteristic, frank way.

"Neither did I. As a matter of fact I don't know whether I *am* really sentimental"; she stood on the marble surrounding the hearth and this brought her head on a level with his. "According to Freddie," she said, "we're doing the thing in the proper spirit. I got a letter from him yesterday. He was in bed with a sore throat. Freddie is always ill at Eton. Well, in this letter he was pleased to approve of you, Jack, and he ended by saying 'What I like about you two is this. Of course you're spoons but you aren't sickly spoons.' It is a great thing, isn't it, to have Freddie's good opinion?"

"Especially on a subject about which he knows so much," laughed Cheston.

The door opened as he spoke and his mother came in followed by a girl. The frown which Isabel had noticed and which had practically disappeared showed itself very distinctly now.

Cheston made no suggestion of greeting his cousin, he just nodded his head to her.

"Hallo, Gertrude!" he said.

Miss Matheson went forward almost with eagerness as though anxious to atone for his shortcomings. She shook hands with the other girl and gave her a smile.

Gertrude Kurtiss's thin cold hand seemed lost in Isabel's firm strong one; and her voice was tired. In her high-necked black dress she had a shrunken look. But for Isabel's cheery presence there would have been a disagreeable silence, for Mrs. Cheston was not endowed with any conversational ease. There were times indeed when her shyness was absolutely painful. Of course, Isabel was now fully enlightened as to why her lover was annoyed. It was an old story this antipathy of his for these two cousins. She herself was surprised to see Gertrude, for Mrs. Cheston had said nothing to her about the coming of Miss Kurtiss, and in a sense Isabel felt a little annoyed and disappointed. She had looked forward so much to this first evening with Jack and she knew that this arrangement would have upset him. She could not really blame the man very much, for it was always uphill work trying to get on with the girl, whose presence always cast a definite blight whenever and wherever she appeared. To-night, indeed, Gertrude seemed harder to approach than ever, and the arrival of Sir Thomas and Lady Matheson made a welcome diversion. Lady Matheson embraced Mrs. Cheston warmly.

"My dear," she said, "how perfectly sweet you look. Ah!" she sighed, "what a joy to have a figure like yours!"

Her geniality and the grip of Sir Thomas's strong hand put warmth and courage into Olivia Mary.

La
Chesto
"N
should
She t
hersel
"This
back a
to Mr
certain
up so
you.
"I'm
seen t
"C
husba
and h
Walk
here t
"A
"The
delic
"I
Math
"V
thing
and t
dear,
when
G
was ;
pathy

Lady Matheson rejected the chair which John Cheston pushed forward for her.

"No, thank you, that's much too low for me. I should require all your household to pull me out of it." She tried half a dozen chairs and finally ensconced herself in a tall high-backed one. "Ah!" she said. "This is the very thing." Sighing comfortably she sat back and looked about her. "Well, my dear," she said to Mrs. Cheston, "I hope you like this house? It certainly is very pretty and looks clean, just been done up so the agents told me, I thought it would please you. But I've been here before," she decided suddenly. "I'm *sure* I've been here before. If not, then I have seen this room in my dreams!"

"Of course you have been here before," said her husband, who was standing with his back to the fire and his coat-tails through his arms. "The Laurence-Walkers had this house three seasons ago. We dined here twice."

"Ah! Now I remember," said Lady Matheson. "They had an oyster soufflé at the first dinner. It was delicious!"

"Mother dear!" said Isabel with a laugh, but Lady Matheson only laughed back.

"When you are my age you will know that the one thing worth living for is food, good food," she added; and then she turned to Gertrude Kurtiss. "Well, my dear, and how are you? I hope you are stronger than when we last met?"

Gertrude coughed to show in what condition she was; and Lady Matheson was immediately full of sympathy; she prided herself on her medical knowledge

and nursing capabilities and at once pronounced the names of endless remedies.

"She oughtn't to be out of her bed," she said, turning to her hostess, and Mrs. Cheston coloured nervously as she answered:

"That is what I was telling her just now. Tomorrow, Gertrude dear, I shall insist on keeping you in bed, whatever you say, and Dr. Lorrie shall see you."

"It's the fog," said Sir Thomas from the fireplace, "beastly fog. That's the worst of London at this time of the year. I was reading in some paper the other day that we had done with fogs. But that's all rubbish! The old sort of fog may have gone but we get another kind, that's all!"

He gave Mrs. Cheston a cheery nod and a smile; his strong bluff personality was a valuable asset on this occasion.

"I've fixed up things for you with young Ambrose at Barford's. The boy goes there next week," he said; "and he's putting in some riding at my place before he goes. I've promised to run down once or twice and see how he gets on."

"Ah! I thought you would never stay in town longer than you could help, daddy," said Isabel.

Her father pinched her cheek. "Well, you don't want me to choose your frocks and fal-lals, do you?"

Then he drifted into political talk with John Cheston and Lady Matheson chatted on vivaciously, passing from Miss Kurtiss's ailments to news of her various boys. Isabel was her only girl, but she had five sons and she was very proud of the fact.

W
carefu
stairs
" J
" P
H
perha
" V
dinner
briskl
like to
" J
may r
" C
when
away.
Jack,
sulky
" J
John
" C
hands
dismi
room
" J
Thom
table.
" J
answe
" C
up y
Thon

When dinner was announced and John Cheston was carefully piloting his future mother-in-law down the stairs he said to her :

"I've got something to tell you."

"Have you? Is it something nice, Jack?"

He laughed lightly. "Well, I don't know; perhaps it isn't."

"Well, please don't tell me anything till after dinner if it is at all upsetting," said Lady Matheson briskly, "because I shan't enjoy myself; and I always like to enjoy my dinner."

"I don't suppose it will upset you," he said, "it may make a difference to Sir Thomas."

"Oh! well, there is one good thing about Tom when he's angry, he flares out and gets it all over right away. That's where he is a little better than you, Jack, you're so horribly sulky when you are cross, and a sulky tempered man is an abomination in my opinion."

"It's a good job Belle doesn't think as you do," John Cheston said, just a little nettled.

"Oh! Belle!" said Lady Matheson, washing her hands metaphorically of her daughter, and then she dismissed the subject for they had reached the dining-room and she had to study the *menu*.

"How do you feel now you're here?" inquired Sir Thomas of his hostess as they seated themselves at the table.

"It is like a dream to be away from Thorpe," she answered.

"Of course it must be a bit strange, but if you make up your mind to like it, it will do you good," said Sir Thomas.

He ranged himself on the side of his hostess. Though he was just a simple every-day sort of man, he had a fair share of tact and he had seen at a glance that something had happened to upset his daughter's young man and that Olivia Mary was troubled in consequence. The tender admiration he had always felt for John Cheston's mother took to itself new strength at this time. To him she seemed scarcely a day older than when he had first met her in the days when he had bought a country home for himself and his family of youngsters; a property which adjoined that of Thorpe Bassett, the house of his old friend Anthony Cheston. She was still shy, delicate, reserved, but although her hair had whitened and it was a good many years since first they had been friends, her beauty in Sir Thomas's opinion had scarcely been touched.

"You must let me take you about, when I'm up," he said gallantly. "There are so many things you ought to see and hear. I know you are fond of music."

"Go to all the concerts you want to, my dear," cried Lady Matheson cheerfully, overhearing his invitation; "but don't include me in the party; and don't imagine Tom understands anything about music, for I can assure you he doesn't know a drum from a banjo! I love going to the theatre where there are dancing and fun and a lot of pretty girls to look at," Lady Matheson chattered on; "but I can't stand classical music, it always sends me to sleep."

"I am afraid I get sleepy too," said Isabel. "I don't expect you feel like that, do you, Gertrude?"

"No," said Gertrude Kurtiss in her dull, tired way.

"I can
ever I

"V
speaki
hear a

John
little i
him to
soul ha
but fo
require
presen

Lac
she fou
spirits.

"O
wise!
maids
still it
Well,
They a
us."

"An

"I
packag
have b
your th

"I
skates,
Mirand
Bromer
bride el

"I can't often manage to go to concerts, but I go whenever I get the chance."

"When you are well, dear," said Mrs. Cheston, speaking to her hurriedly, affectionately, "you shall hear all the music you want to."

John Cheston was frowning again. Isabel felt a little irritated with him. It was really rather foolish of him to be so bad tempered just because this poor dull soul had come among them. No one wanted Gertrude, but for that very reason Isabel felt a little effort was required not to let the girl grasp the fact that her presence was unwelcome.

Lady Matheson unconsciously aided her daughter, she found the dinner excellent and was in very good spirits.

"Of course you brought up most of the servants—so wise! And yet," she added, "I don't know, country maids generally get spoilt when they come to town, still it starts you comfortably, that's the great thing. Well, John, how many presents have *you* had? They are beginning to come in very rapidly with us."

"Anything arrived, mother?" asked Cheston.

"I don't know, dear. I fancy there were some packages put into your study at Thorpe. Perhaps they have been brought up. Marshall always looks after your things."

"I have had a silver tea-service, and a pair of roller-skates, two pickle forks, an Indian shawl from Aunt Miranda and a charming Jade bangle from young Bromer, all in this little short time," enumerated the bride elect.

"I think it very sweet of George Bromer to have sent you anything," said Lady Matheson.

John Cheston looked quickly at the girl he was going to marry. This time he was frowning in another fashion; and Isabel was colouring a little sharply.

"Oh! mother dear," she said. "Isn't that rather ridiculous? After all George is just like one of the family."

"But he isn't one of the family," said Cheston quickly.

"He always declares he ought to belong to me," said Lady Matheson, "because my boy Sholto gave him measles when they were at school together. But if that stood good," she added, laughing at Gertrude Kurtiss, "we should have a great many more relations than we want, shouldn't we?"

Isabel sat through the dinner conscious of a little uneasiness. It was no new story to her to know that John could be jealous; and more than once he had taken a nasty tone about one or another of her admirers. But it was not the suggestion that he was really upset because a nice boy, one of her brother's chums, had sent her a bangle that hurt her now, it was something quite different, something indefinable, a something which hung nevertheless like a shadow over this cosy little party. Perhaps it centred in that cold, weary, sickly-looking girl. Perhaps for an instant Isabel Matheson shared her lover's feeling where this girl was concerned and regretted Mrs. Cheston's hospitality. She hardly knew; but one thing was certain, she was disappointed and even in a curiously

vagu
when
to b
some
heart
spok
seem
moth
the
carry
inapt
natu
evid
nerv
surel
her
Ever
have
irrita
met
irrita
sym
stop
motl
quit
falle
and
won
had
of t
she
the

vague way uneasy. A little while ago she had said when they had been alone that she wanted everybody to be happy, that she wanted to go round and put some of the sunshine that flooded her heart into the hearts of others, but that excitement of which she had spoken and which had thrilled her so deliciously seemed to have faded out quickly. Despite her mother's knack of talking and her father's cheeriness the evening was dull. It was rather up-hill work carrying on the conversation. Mrs. Cheston's curious inaptitude for those trivial things which came so naturally to most women had never been more in evidence than to-night. Her reticence, her visible nervousness were in a sense infectious. There was surely no reason why she should not be natural and at her ease with people whom she had known all her life? Even if John had been cross with her surely she might have made an effort? Just for a little while the girl felt irritated and annoyed with the woman, but as their eyes met once and Olivia Mary sent her a smile this irritation disappeared on the instant and the old sympathy came back with a rush. Isabel had never stopped to qualify her feelings where John Cheston's mother was concerned. Even when she had been quite a little girl she had felt herself the stronger; she had fallen into John's trick of taking care of Olivia Mary and had constituted herself a kind of protectress of the woman who fascinated her so much. Naturally she had been magnetically influenced by the unusual beauty of this fragile and most dearly cherished creature, yet she had never understood Olivia Mary. Though from the beginning she had run in and out of Thorpe freely,

knowing that she was most welcome, yet something had always stood between anything like real intimacy with Mrs. Cheston. At first Isabel regarded this barrier as a natural one; it was the expression of diffidence on the part of one so much younger and especially one so different in every way. What could such a dainty person as Mrs. Cheston have in sympathy with a great strong girl who could walk for miles, ride for miles, golf for hours, who never had an ache nor pain, and was never so happy as when she was permitted to be the companion of the boy she had worshipped ever since she could remember? But somehow as time had passed Isabel had felt that this barrier did not arise from natural and reasonable causes, but that it was a deliberate effort on the part of the older woman which kept them apart. And since her engagement to John there had been many moments when Isabel Matheson had felt a yearning desire to beat down that barrier, to be indeed something near and dear to her lover's mother! Both she and John in discussing the future had allotted her her proper place. She was to be more than the son's wife, she was to be a daughter in a real sense of the word. In her letters and in his letters this tender thought had been set down in words, yet when she would have spoken on this subject the curious elusiveness about Mrs. Cheston had checked her.

To-night for the first time a strange thought came to Isabel. It was that John's mother was pre-destined to be alone, that something stronger than an ultra-sensitive nature shut this woman away from co-mingling with her fellow kind as other women did. The idea hurt the girl chiefly because she did not know how

she co
so mu
Mary
relief
mothe
of my
As s
squee

“(
laugh
back
with l

U
piano
her s
night
niece
mothe

“(

Isabe
“(

is a li

all rig

“(

then

was a

depre

her u

Then

over

table

eaten

she could change matters, and yet to feel that she had so much in her life and was in a sense robbing Olivia Mary of all she had was almost unendurable. It was a relief to turn from Mrs. Cheston and look at her own mother, so comely, so comfortable, so prosaic, so devoid of mystery. Isabel was glad when the dinner was over. As she left the dining-room she gave John's arm a squeeze.

"Come soon," she said, and then she coloured and laughed. "Look here, if it would please you I'll send back the jade bangle," she whispered. He thanked her with his eyes and the girl's heart beat lightly again.

Upstairs in the drawing-room Isabel went to the piano and Lady Matheson chatted on unceasingly. At her suggestion in a little while Miss Kurtiss said good-night and went to bed; Mrs. Cheston accompanied her niece up to her room. When they were alone Isabel's mother shook her head significantly.

"I don't like the look of that girl, Belle," she said. Isabel left the piano and came forward.

"Oh! I don't think she is really ill. All she wants is a little care, and as she is going to stay here she'll be all right in a few days."

"Well, she may be," said Lady Matheson dubiously; then she added with her characteristic frankness: "It was a great pity that she came here just now—she is *so* depressing and John's mother wants some one to liven her up, you know, my dear, not make her miserable." Then she said, "Give me my black silk bag, Belle, it's over there on that chair. There are some digestive tablets in it. I'm rather afraid I ought not to have eaten that ice, but it was so good!"

"Mother, you are as bad as Freddie," Belle said with a laugh.

"Don't interfere with my amusements," said her mother calmly as she swallowed a lozenge. "Has Mrs. Cheston settled who is going to make her gown for the wedding?"

"I haven't asked her," the girl answered as she stood by the fire. "I suppose it will come from the usual people in Paris who make all her things. They know her so well now and never even bother to send over for fittings. There is one thing very sure," Isabel added, "whatever she wears she will look lovely."

"Yes, she keeps her figure so well," said Lady Matheson a little enviously. Olivia Mary came in again at that moment and Lady Matheson turned to her vivaciously. "My dear," she said, "we are discussing you and your gown for the wedding. I think you ought to wear that lovely shade of pinky mauve; and by the way I suppose you'll go to an early Drawing-room. You will have to present Belle on her marriage, you know."

Mrs. Cheston had flushed hotly and then she grew suddenly very pale.

"A Drawing-room," she said. "Oh! I—I haven't thought about it, Lady Matheson. "I—supposed you would take Belle."

"Oh no, that is where my good time comes in! She's your property when she marries John. . . . I'm going to enjoy my liberty."

Olivia Mary looked from Isabel to her mother.

"I hope I shan't upset your plans very much, but I—I—don't—think I shall go to Court this season.

Belle v
believ
I am."

"B
Isabel,

"I

have t

dress a

at by

she so

begin

have l

with y

you w

M

her h

again

"C

"I

then

singin

A

alrea
Ches
went
anno
had
came
throu
pugn
T
that

Belle would much rather go with you and—oh! I don't believe I could do it. You know how stupidly nervous I am."

"Besides it might tire you and make you ill," said Isabel, but her mother quickly disposed of this idea.

"It's all made so easy for us nowadays. We don't have to get up at six o'clock in the morning now and dress and sit in the cold daylight for hours to be stared at by a rude crowd; and the supper is excellent"; then she scolded Mrs. Cheston affectionately. "You must begin to get rid of your nervousness, my dear. You have let yourself get rusty, that's all that is the matter with you. I believe you would really enjoy yourself if you would only let yourself go a little!"

Mrs. Cheston only shook her head and slipping her hand through Isabel's arm led her to the piano again.

"Go on singing, Belle," she said.

"I will if you will sit just there where I can see you," then the girl laughed. "Mother will go to sleep: my singing always sends her off."

As a matter of fact Lady Matheson's eyes were already closed and she slumbered peacefully till John Cheston and her husband came upstairs. Sir Thomas went back to his favourite place in front of the fire and announced to his wife the news that Isabel's young man had determined to leave the army. The girl herself came over from the piano and stood with her hand slipped through her lover's arm as he definitely and a trifle pugnaciously declared his reasons for taking this step.

The girl knew by the expression on her father's face that John's decision had come to him rather in the

nature of a blow ; but Sir Thomas said very little ; on the other hand her mother, being now wide awake again, was full of regrets and exclamations.

"And you do look so nice in your uniform, John," she said, "really it is quite dreadful to think that you won't wear it much longer. There is nothing distinguishing about a landed proprietor or a man who goes in for politics. You'll just be like everybody else."

"If it's a uniform you want, Belle shall design one for me." Then he said in his straightforward way : "I haven't settled to do this without a great deal of thought. I'm a rich man, but I want something more than that. My father left me a great many responsibilities—I want to take these on myself and not get others to act for me. . . ."

"You won't get too good, Jack, will you ? I shan't know you if you become a saint."

John Cheston answered the twinkle in Lady Matheson's eye with a laugh.

"Not much of a prospective saint about me." He changed the conversation. . . . "Would you like some bridge, Lady Matheson ?"

She shook her head. "You all play such a fearfully bad game," she remarked, candidly. "I have been telling your mother she has to make up her mind to go to one of the early Drawing-rooms."

"Why not ?" queried Cheston, turning to his mother. "You're going, aren't you, mother ?"

"I—I don't think so . . . not this year at all events, darling, I—" Olivia Mary laughed, "You must not expect too much of me . . . all at once ; I promise not to—to disappoint you if you let me go slowly."

The
Matheson
ment w
Isabel t

"Th
come fo
should
with me

"I
Cheston

Sir
and hel

"I v
father v
so kee
no long

"I
mind."

"Do y

"O
affectio
sorry I
John is
whethe

He
when
room.

Isa
picked
pressed
by the
reache

The announcement by the butler that Lady Matheson's carriage was at the door brought an argument which promised to be a little heated to an end. Isabel tenderly embraced her future mother-in-law.

"They shan't bully you, darling," she said; "I'll come for you to-morrow about eleven. I told them I should decide on none of my frocks till you had been with me. You have such exquisite taste."

"I am such an old-fashioned person," said Mrs. Cheston, with a little catch in her voice.

Sir Thomas dropped back as the others went away and held her hand closely in his.

"I wasn't prepared for this move. . . . I think his father would have been disappointed," he said; "he was so keen on the lad being a soldier. Still he is a lad no longer, and so I suppose we can't interfere."

"I did not know till to-night that this was in his mind." Olivia Mary looked up suddenly at Sir Thomas. "Do you think—it hurts Tony now?"

"Oh! My dear," said the man, quickly and affectionately, "you mus'n't think such things. I am sorry I said anything. Be sure of one point, my dear, John is the kind of son any father would be proud of, whether he is a soldier or civilian."

He gave her a kindly nod and went away, and when she was alone she walked aimlessly about the room.

Isabel had left her gloves behind, and Mrs. Cheston picked them up and with a quick pathetic gesture pressed them to her lips; then she went back and stood by the fire waiting for her son to come, but as no sound reached her ears she suddenly recollected that of course

he must have gone home with Belle and her parents and that probably he would not return for an hour.

Something of the strained nervous look went out of the woman's eyes as she realized this, and she gave a quick sigh. Then she sat down and wrote a note, and when Denton came she told him that it must be delivered at the doctor's house the first thing in the morning. She was really anxious about Gertrude Kurtiss.

TH
cally ve
she we
so deli
that th
genuine
chaper
more a
people,
seemed
guidin

La
to shi
the tr
asked
her fri
her in
medic
the m
Of co
and to
for th
to Mr
ings
busy

nts and

ent out
e gave
te, and
ust be
ing in
ertrude

CHAPTER XIV

THE words spoken in jest by John Cheston on the first night of his return to London were practically verified in the weeks which followed, for wherever she went his mother made a little sensation. She was so delicate, so quiet, so unusually pretty, and youthful, that the homage paid to her was both spontaneous and genuine. It really was a case of Isabel Matheson chaperoning her chaperone! The girl was so much more at home in London, so frankly at her ease with people, so much bigger and stronger, that it almost seemed as if she were sheltering the other woman and guiding her.

Lady Matheson was frankly delighted to be able to shift the responsibility and the burden of choosing the trousseau on to Mrs. Cheston's shoulders. She asked nothing better than to sit and play bridge with her friends the greater part of the day; openly deploring her increasing stoutness, and dosing herself with patent medicines at intervals to get her weight down, between the meals which were in reality the joy of her existence. Of course every now and then she had to do her duty and to chaperone her girl to a dinner or a theatre; but for the most part she relinquished her duties willingly to Mrs. Cheston; and the strange part of the proceedings was that Olivia Mary found that this new and busy life had a charm which outweighed its terrors.

She still remained shy and silent, but she was absorbing new influences and responding to them unconsciously.

"If you are not careful, Belle," said Lady Matheson one day to her daughter, "you'll have John's mother marrying before you."

Sir Thomas was present on this occasion, and he looked at his wife with a sharp frown.

"I advise you not to say that sort of thing before Olivia Mary," he said.

Lady Matheson only laughed.

"My dear Tom, don't glare at me in that way! You know nothing at all about women. Olivia Mary has been like a dormouse all these years. I don't believe she has realized in the slightest degree how pretty she is; and, after all, she is quite young. Why, she must have been a mere child when John was born."

Sir Thomas did not answer at once: then he said as he folded up his newspaper and put it down:

"I don't think I ever knew two people more devoted to one another than poor Tony Cheston and his wife."

"But Anthony Cheston has been dead ever so many years ago! His wife has been faithful to his memory quite long enough, I consider!"

Sir Thomas snorted, began to say something, then turned and walked out of the room, and Isabel stood looking at her mother with half a smile on her face.

"Surely you don't blame a woman for being faithful, mother?" she asked.

But
 "Oh
 your hea
 in love
 to share
 that all
 out of l
 that sh
 has lost
 and eat
 when I
 I do be
 the Hin
 Mary z
 her and
 "Jol
 quickly.
 "Of
 all you
 your wo
 "I v
 "W
 "I don
 but the
 man wh
 fine ter
 to hear
 your lit
 John's l
 made u
 again, r
 have ar

But Lady Matheson waved her hands at her daughter.

"Oh! La, la, my dear," she said. "You've got your head stuffed up with romance. You are so madly in love with John that of course you are quite prepared to share the same grave with him! I always knew that all that his mother wanted was to be shaken out of herself, and you see how right I am? Now that she is in town she is another woman. She has lost that frightened expression. She can laugh and eat. Wasn't she singing the other day with you when I called? Why shouldn't she live? Poor soul! I do believe Tom would have every widow burnt like the Hindoos! For my part I wish to goodness Olivia Mary *would* marry a nice man who could take care of her and protect her when John wants to bully her."

"John never bullies his mother!" said Isabel, very quickly.

"Oh, doesn't he?" said Lady Matheson. "That's all you know! I've seen her simply shrivel up when your wonderful young man has looked cross."

"I wish you wouldn't say these things, mother."

"Well, my dear child," said Lady Matheson, calmly, "I don't want to take any of the romance from you; but the fact is that you are going to marry a young man who has a nice fine will of his own and also a nice fine temper too. It should be no surprise to you, Belle, to hear this. Why, how many times haven't you cried your little eyes out when you were a girl all because of John's beastly temper? I remember on one occasion I made up my mind that I would never let you see him again, never let you go to Thorpe Bassett, never let you have anything more to do with him or his mother just

because you made yourself so miserable about Master Jack! But, of course, if I had stuck to this idea I should have broken your poor little heart, so things just went on and on till they came to where they are now."

"John is generally right," said Isabel, firmly.

"What you have to do, my dear, is to let him *think* he is always right," said Lady Matheson: "then I shan't be afraid of your future: but I know what you are. You will be just exactly his mother over again. You'll give in to him and you'll call him your king and your master, and you won't even let yourself see that he is chock full of the ordinary faults of the very ordinary man."

"Well, we won't discuss him," said Isabel, a little huffily.

She drove round to Mrs. Cheston's house and was given a little note which Olivia Mary had written in great haste. It was to say that Mrs. Ambrose had telegraphed that she was in London, and that she wanted very much indeed to see Mrs. Cheston.

"I don't quite know what time I shall be back," Olivia Mary had scribbled; "but I shall try and be in at tea-time when I hope to see you."

Miss Matheson determined to do her visits to the dressmakers alone.

"Please tell Mrs. Cheston I shall come back for tea," she said to Denton.

The telegram from Helen Ambrose had at once conveyed to Olivia Mary that something had happened, some new trouble; and when she reached the address given to her this was confirmed.

Mrs. Ambrose was staying in a small hotel out of

Portla
was al
"It
good a
"W
happen
Oli
hand s
"M
nothing
Dick's
whiles
wish I
gratefu
repeate
angry
"old
differen
nearly
Silvia
that a
You k
at Gar
out?
he is j
"B
said O
He
then sl
"V
Silvia'
enough
(

Portland Place. She looked so ill that Olivia Mary was alarmed.

"It is good of you to come; but you are always good and lovely!" said Helen Ambrose.

"Why are you here all by yourself? What has happened?"

Olivia Mary threw off her furs and sat down, her hand still holding Helen Ambrose's hand.

"My!" said the other woman, "seems to me life's nothing but one long miserable tangle! You know Dick's gone? Yes, after rubbering on all this long whiles he started out on his new life yesterday; and I wish I could have Sir Thomas Matheson just know how grateful I am to him: yes, I am grateful to him," she repeated a little defiantly; "though Nigel is terribly angry about the whole thing. You see," she explained, "old Lady Henrietta's death has made a great difference. She has left my husband her house and nearly all she had to leave, except some jewels which Silvia is to have, and, my dear, I wouldn't have believed that a little bit of money would so have changed a man! You know what Nigel has been, shut up in the library at Garth Court, never wanting to see a soul, or to move out? And now—why, he seems to be all on pins, and he is just crazy to come to London to settle."

"But there is something more than this, isn't there?" said Olivia Mary in her soft way.

Helen Ambrose's face contracted for an instant, and then she said:

"Why, yes; and that is why I sent for you. Silvia's run away again! Oh! she went off right enough with Mrs. Hamerton. I guess that was because

she hadn't got things all cut out and fixed as they are now, but she didn't mean to stay. They found a letter saying she would never go back, and that she'd done with all the lot of us."

"How did you hear this?"

"Why, her cousin, Mrs. Hamerton, wrote to me. I'm thankful she did, for I just daren't suppose what would happen if she had written to Nigel! Fortunately he was up in town. You see I had to go back; there was so much to do for Dick, and I wanted just a little quiet. Well, I didn't get it," she said, quaintly, "for I was no sooner through with Dick, then bang comes this dreadful business. I have been out all the morning, trotting round to try and find some trace of the girl; but I am all at sea. I can't think what she has done or where she has gone! . . . But I have got to get her back, Mrs. Cheston; oh! I must get her back. And, oh! my dear, I want you to help me!"

"Of course I will help you," said Olivia Mary, with that quiet strength which came from her at rare times.

Helen Ambrose was almost in tears.

"But what shall we do? Jamie's gone. I kind of felt safe about her while he was here, but he is away across the ocean by this time, and——"

"And Mr. Derrick's gone too, don't forget that," said Olivia Mary. She paused a moment, and then she said: "Did Mrs. Hamerton send you on Silvia's letter?"

For answer Helen Ambrose opened the bag she always carried and took out some correspondence.

"I have it right here," she said. "It was just what I thought and Jamie thought too, it's not the man, it's the stage!"

"M
Oli
The g
decla
hands,
ordere
"Y
said F
on the
Chesto
dreadf
Ol
"S
sion,
whom
find o
"S
"Tha
"J
you v
"J
the t
once
said s
what
the b
adver
Charl
addre
any o
"
Olivi

"May I see the letter?"

Olivia Mary read through carefully Silvia's scrawl. The girl had written defiantly, rudely. She had declared that she was going to take her life in her own hands, and that she had no intention whatever of being ordered and treated as if she were a baby.

"You see there isn't a scrap of anything to go on," said Helen Ambrose. "I guess there isn't a tiny mite on that paper that I haven't examined, and, oh! Mrs. Cheston, just fancy that girl all alone! It's just dreadful!"

Olivia Mary was thinking very deeply.

"She can't have any friends in the theatrical profession, unless there is some one belonging to Derrick to whom she has gone. I think our best plan will be to find out something about his people or his friends."

"Sure!" said Helen Ambrose, her face lighting up. "That's just the one thing to do."

"I suppose Mr. Banister didn't by any chance tell you where Mr. Derrick lived?"

"No—no, he didn't; he only wrote that he'd worked the trick, and that the young man was going out at once to an engagement on the other side. "Wait," she said suddenly, as an idea came to her. "I guess I know what I'll do. I'll go to the office of 'The Era,' that's the big stage paper you know, and I'll look through the advertisements of the last few weeks. A man like Charles Derrick is pretty sure to have had his name and address in the paper, for that's part of the life, in case any one is wanted in a hurry, you know," she explained.

"Put on your things and I'll go with you," said Olivia Mary. "I've got the car at the door."

Mrs. Ambrose was ready almost immediately ; and, when they were driving away, she put her hand on Olivia Mary's arm, and she said :

"If I didn't have you, I don't know what I should have done! But here am I talking all the time about myself, and I've never asked a question about you ; seems to me you look all the better for your change. Sir Thomas told me that you were quite gay, and that every one was falling in love with you. Why, I'm not surprised ! The wonder is they've let you stay in the country all these years."

When they reached the "Era" office they bought several papers dating back through the last few weeks, and Helen Ambrose eagerly scanned the list of names advertised.

"Here it is right away!" she said, after a while, then her face fell, for the address given was that of a theatrical club, not a private one. The next moment, however, she uttered an exultant exclamation. "This was the week he left the country," she said, as she gave the paper to Olivia Mary. "I guess we'd better go there right away and make inquiries."

The address was a street leading out of the Euston Road, and the car took them there very quickly.

It was a rather dingy and an obvious lodging-house, and when they pulled up in front of it Mrs. Cheston suggested that she should get out and ask the necessary questions.

The servant who answered the door could only say that Mr. Charles Derrick had gone to America ; but this did not satisfy Mrs. Cheston. She asked if there was some one else to whom she could speak ; and was

shown
There
graphs
Th
one w
She le
unusu
she p
Derric
" I
" but
ment
perha
"
inquir
" C
and g
O
"
with
very
the s
"
mann
she c
taken
sailec
"
to fi
quest
excep
rema

shown into a front room which was shabbily furnished. There was, however, an abundance of theatrical photographs scattered on mantelshelf and walls.

The woman who came to speak to Mrs. Cheston was one who had the unmistakable air of an old actress. She looked with open envy and admiration at her very unusual visitor. In answer to Mrs. Cheston's questions she professed to have no knowledge whatever of Mr. Derrick's private life.

"He has lodged here from time to time," she said; "but now he has gone to New York on a good engagement; and he doesn't expect to be back for a year, or perhaps two."

"And there are no friends of his staying here?" inquired Mrs. Cheston.

"Oh! Well, Mr. Derrick knew most of my ladies and gentlemen, but there's no one special."

Olivia Mary determined to be frank.

"I want to find a young lady, who I believed studied with Mr. Derrick," she said. "She is quite young, and very pretty, and—I don't think she has yet appeared on the stage."

"Is she dark, tall—rather off-handish in her manner?" inquired the landlady. "Why, then, I believe she came here two days ago. She seemed to be all taken aback when I told her that Mr. Derrick had sailed for America. She wouldn't give her name."

"Yes, that sounds rather like the young lady I want to find," said Olivia Mary. She asked a few more questions, but there was nothing more to be learnt, except that just as she was going, the landlady remarked:

"You might try at No. 17. I had no rooms to let, but I advised her to try over there."

She stood and watched Mrs. Cheston walk across the pavement to the car; such smart people were a novelty to her.

"I've got a clue!" Olivia Mary said to Helen Ambrose; "and it is just possible we may find Silvia at No. 17 in this street; she evidently went to ask Mr. Derrick to help her, and was much upset when she heard that he had gone to America."

"Please get in," said Helen Ambrose. She looked pale and anxious. "I just can't have you doing all this. What do you suppose your son would say if he were to know? It's not the sort of thing you ought to do, but"—she paused an instant,—“I know a good deal about stage people, for I was a singer before I came to Garth Court.”

"We'll leave the car here," said Olivia Mary; "and we will go together to No. 17." As they walked along the street she said: "You must not think that this is altogether new to me, and that I have not known the meaning of struggle. It hasn't always been ermine"—she touched her furs lightly—"and rose leaves with me."

Helen Ambrose scarcely caught the meaning of her words, she was too full of trouble; she was also a little afraid of meeting Silvia.

"If we find her, what can we do with her? She can't go back to her cousin, we can bank on that sure! And she'll never stay with me!"

"There is always another alternative," said Mrs. Cheston, "and one which I have thought would be a

real sc
thing
her ba
me wh
and h
them,
howev
arrang
"I
but v
from
easy!
Sl
Mrs.
When
inqui
to lo
"
supp
is ve
"
and
or w
"
Oliv
wait
we'll
mist
"
and
ing
fam

real solution of a difficult problem. I believe the best thing that could be done for Silvia would be to send her back to her mother's people. From what she told me when she was staying at Thorpe, her grandmother and her aunt have frequently wanted her to go back to them, but Mr. Ambrose has always objected. Now, however, this is what I should strongly advise you to arrange."

"Yes," said Helen Ambrose, "I guess you're right, but we've got to find her first, then to get her away from this, and maybe that's not going to be so easy."

She was so shaken out of her usual brisk self that Mrs. Cheston took matters entirely into her own hands. When the door was opened for them at No. 17, she inquired quite boldly for the young lady who had come to lodge there two days ago.

"I don't know her professional name, and I don't suppose you know her other one," she said; "but she is very young, very pretty, dark, looks like a foreigner."

"I suppose you mean Miss Garth," said the tired and not too clean-looking servant. "Shall I fetch her, or would you like to go up to her room?"

"Oh! I think I'll go up to her room." Then Olivia Mary turned to Mrs. Ambrose. "Go back and wait in the car," she said. "If I have made a mistake we'll try again, but, somehow, I don't think there is a mistake."

Silvia's stepmother turned and did as she was bid; and Olivia Mary stood in the dusty, shabby hall shivering a little. It was all so ugly, so strange and yet so familiar! The very stuffiness of the atmosphere, the

mixture of stale cooking and stale tobacco, eloquent too of unopened windows and unswept floors, brought back to her remembrance certain experiences laid in even more sordid surroundings than these.

The servant came back and reported that Miss Garth was in her room, and did not want to see any one.

"She ain't well," the servant added ; "her throat's awful sore."

That decided Olivia Mary. She slipped half a sovereign into the maid's grimy hand and smiled :

"I am going up to see Miss Garth," she said ; and forthwith she proceeded to climb the shabby staircase. Halfway up she paused. "Which room is it?" she asked.

The maid told her she was to go to the top floor and knock at the door of the room at the back.

It was a long climb, and Mrs. Cheston was a little out of breath when she reached the top floor ; but she was undaunted, and after a little pause she knocked and then opened the door of Miss Garth's room.

At a glance she saw that their quest was ended.

Silvia was lying huddled on the bed. There was practically no furniture in the room except a deal chest of drawers and a chair. The dressing-table was an old box with a cracked looking-glass standing on it ; and on the top of the drawers there was an enamelled basin. The atmosphere of the room was poisonous ; the floor could not have been scrubbed for months. There was no fireplace and no ventilation. As she entered Silvia started up angrily, but almost immediately dropped on the pillows with her hands pressed to her brows.

"C
don't
M
"
ably.
"
broke
O
the h
"
said.
you.
care
S
girl's
to ar
to ca
F
flung
her s
C
a ba
took
the
own
put
I
stair
also
to te
Oliv

"Go away," she said hoarsely. "Go away! I don't want anybody. I won't have anybody in here!"

Mrs. Cheston stood a moment and looked at her.

"You are behaving most foolishly, most unreasonably. You know this can't go on."

"Go away," said the girl again; and this time she broke into a passion of tears.

Olivia Mary went up to her and put her hand on the hot forehead.

"I am going to take you away with me now," she said. "Your stepmother and I have come to find you. My dear, you are ill, and you must be taken care of."

She felt the pulse and wiped away the tears from the girl's flushed cheeks. She saw that Silvia was unable to argue or to struggle, and took advantage of this fact to carry out the task she had set herself.

Fortunately the girl was dressed. She had evidently flung herself down on the bed, too unwell even to remove her shoes.

Olivia Mary found some water and poured it into a basin. She bathed the hot brows and lips: then she took off her long ermine stole and she wrapped it about the girl, covering the mouth most carefully. Silvia's own cap was lying at the foot of the bed and this she put over the tumbled hair.

It was with difficulty that she got the girl down the stairs. The servant was waiting full of curiosity and also greatly excited; and Mrs. Cheston despatched her to tell the motor to come in front of the house.

When she was informed that the "missus" was out Olivia Mary left two pounds in gold and wrote her own

address in case more money should be required ; and then she put her arm round Silvia and she led the girl down the steps across the pavement, and with the aid of her footman got her into the car.

Tears were rolling down Helen Ambrose's cheeks as she saw in what condition Silvia was. The girl, in fact, was suffering so much pain in her head and her throat that she was not in the least conscious that as they drove away from the dingy street her stepmother's arm was round her and her aching head was resting on that stepmother's shoulder.

M
o'clock
upsta
Kurti
broth
but as
out h
"
since
you c
A
"
Is
"
Mrs.
your
"
spok
silen
upor
and
go t
Mr.
ann

and
girl
aid

eks
l, in
her
t as
er's
; on

CHAPTER XV

MISS MATHESON returned to meet Mrs. Cheston as she had promised about five o'clock. One of the maids admitted her and she ran upstairs to the drawing-room. She found Gertrude Kurtiss there; not alone, as usual, but talking to her brother. Isabel drew back as she saw Mr. Kurtiss; but as he turned and bowed she went forward and held out her hand.

"How do you do?" she said. "It's a long time since we met. Mrs. Cheston was so disappointed that you could not dine the other night."

Angus Kurtiss only smiled.

"I was engaged," he said.

Isabel took off her gloves and her fur coat.

"I think we may as well ring for tea. I expect Mrs. Cheston will be in directly. I am sure you want your tea, don't you, Gertrude—why did you wait?"

"I am accustomed to wait," said Gertrude. She spoke promptly yet in a tired voice, and then there was silence, a strained and disagreeable silence. Isabel had upon her the uncomfortable assurance that the brother and sister resented her arrival; she quickly resolved to go to another room and wait for John's mother; but Mr. Kurtiss as if divining what was in her mind announced his departure.

"I only ran up to see how Gertrude was. I have so little opportunity of seeing her."

"I hope you find her very much better. Your aunt has been taking such care of her."

Mr. Kurtiss only smiled again. He did not offer his hand to Miss Matheson, but bowed and went away.

As the two girls were alone Isabel turned to the other.

"You are better, aren't you, Gertrude?"

Gertrude did not answer at once; and then with a little pang at her heart Miss Matheson realized that she was crying quietly.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "what is it? Are you worried? Can I do anything?"

"I am so unhappy about Angus," Gertrude Kurtiss said in a strained voice. "He—he has just been telling me that he has practically made up his mind to leave England at once. Oh! You don't know what that means to me. He is all I've got."

"I think I do understand," said Isabel, quietly. She drew a chair near and sitting down in it put her hand on the other girl's. "Please don't fret," she said, "and don't say you have no one but your brother. Just realize how fond your aunt is of you and how much she worries about you."

Gertrude Kurtiss bit her lip and drew her hand away from Isabel's.

"Angus is all I have," she repeated. "There are only just he and I." Then she got up suddenly. "Oh, I think it was cruel of Uncle Anthony not to have done something for Angus! He promised my mother he

would
Angus
turned
starve

It
out of
uncom
Instinc
burst
though
be har

"It
shrilly
right
mothe
she ha
what

"V
in her
I spea
I thin
with
mean

"Y
bitter
John,
can d
out o

"J
lose h
under
him s

would always take care of us. He practically adopted Angus when he was quite a little boy; and then he turned him out into the world to slave and even to starve! It was shameful!"

It was a revelation to Isabel to see this girl moved out of her usual dull silence. She stood apart a little uncomfortably, not knowing what to do or what to say. Instinctively she felt that she was witnessing an outburst which was in its way significant and ominous, though just how or where this girl's bitterness could be harmful she was not prepared to say.

"It was when he married," said Gertrude Kurtiss, shrilly, "that Uncle Anthony changed. It was only right that he should have done things for Angus. My mother was his only sister, and he had everything while she had nothing. If Angus goes abroad I don't know what I shall do."

"Why should Mr. Kurtiss go abroad?" asked Belle in her quietest way. "Gertrude, will you forgive me if I speak to you quite frankly? I think you are wrong. I think your brother is wrong to be on such bad terms with John. Perhaps you don't understand what I mean?"

"Yes, I do," said the other girl in the same sharp, bitter way. "You mean that we ought to bow down to John, kiss his hand and be grateful for everything he can do for us just because he gives us a little tiny bit out of all the big things he has!"

"No, I didn't mean that," said Isabel, trying not to lose her temper. "I mean that if you had a thorough understanding with John, that if you would try to meet him sympathetically, I am convinced that he would be

willing and glad to be good friends with you both. You won't mind my saying this, will you? You know that I am going to marry John, and what concerns him must now concern me. I am awfully anxious, Gertrude, that we should be good friends, you and I. I don't want you to make it too difficult."

"Thank you," said Gertrude Kurtiss. "What you don't understand is, that we don't want charity or kindness from John. We have been hurt too deeply, we have suffered too much."

Isabel looked at her coldly, the other girl's hysterical tone was not pleasant. Her silence, however depressing, was preferable to this open declaration of her feelings.

"How do you mean you have suffered so much? Please forgive me if I speak plainly, Gertrude; but, you see, I happen to know something about all this, and it seems to me that Mrs. Cheston never loses an opportunity of doing all in her power to make you and your brother happy . . . You don't realize, I am sure, how much she worries about you both."

"Well, she might have done that a little earlier. She was really a stranger in my uncle's life."

Isabel laughed at this.

"Gertrude dear, you are too odd . . . you can't call a man's wife a stranger."

Gertrude Kurtiss gave her a furtive look.

"I mean," she said, "that we were in my uncle's life before she came. If John had not been born then Angus would have had everything."

"But that's a perfectly absurd idea! Really, I never heard anything more ridiculous!" Isabel spoke hotly,

angrily
to Gertrude
about a

"Sun-
able, Gertrude
against
uncle's

father's
Gertrude

"I t
my bro
who co
what is
to be s
makes

She
she wa
fire an
seemed
she m
she sto

"D
like th
in you

Th
was a
this co

"Y
over v
us?"

"I
ought

angrily, then she calmed herself. As she had just said to Gertrude, she wanted to do all she could to bring about a better feeling between John and these cousins.

"Surely you must see that you are not very reasonable, Gertrude. I am sorry for you, but we can't go against natural laws. John *was* born, and as your uncle's son of course he has a full right to what his father had."

Gertrude answered her swiftly.

"I tell you something ought to have been done for my brother! Angus is so clever, so brilliant, a man who could do anything if he had a proper chance, and what is his life? To be shut up as a clerk in an office, to be sneered at, to be called a poor relation! Oh, it makes me mad!"

She moved about the room hardly conscious of what she was doing, and Isabel Matheson went towards the fire and knelt down and stirred it, this homely action seemed to restore her, she realized that above all things she must not get angry. As she put down the poker she stood up, and in her frank way she said:

"Do you know I am awfully glad you have spoken like this, Gertrude? At any rate I know now what is in your heart."

The other girl stopped her and faced her. There was a patch of red colour on her cheeks, oddly enough this colour made her plainer than usual.

"You mean," she said, "that you will talk it all over with John, and probably make things worse for us?"

"No," said Isabel, sharply; "and I don't think you ought to say that to me. I'm not a cat! I've done

my level best to be kind to you so often when I haven't felt very kind ; but I am not a cat," she repeated, "nor am I a sneak. I don't know that I shall ever speak to John about you one way or another ; but I do want you to get one idea out of your mind, and that is, that Mrs. Cheston has done you any harm."

"You'll never take that out of my mind, or out of Angus's," said Gertrude Kurtiss, "because you see we know things just a little better than you do."

The door opened at this moment, and Olivia Mary came in. She paused instantly, realizing with her quick instinct that something disagreeable was passing.

"I am so sorry to be so late, Belle dear," she said to Isabel. "I hope I did not upset your arrangements this afternoon."

Gertrude Kurtiss had sat down quietly in a chair, and had taken up her book.

"Oh! Of course not. I managed everything all right." Isabel spoke hurriedly, and her cheerfulness did not sound quite so spontaneous as usual. "You haven't been really very long, and now you must have some tea."

She took the furs from Mrs. Cheston, put her in a chair, and waiting on her talking the while about the various things she had done, and then she inquired for Mrs. Ambrose.

"Is she going to be in town for long?"

"I think she is not sure, it all depends on certain circumstances," Olivia Mary said ; she was glancing every now and then at Gertrude Kurtiss while she drank her tea. The expression on the girl's face was new to her. In a little while Miss Kurtiss got up

and went
about a
and the
gowns,
two Mr
at the g

"I
"but I
I came
Gertrud

Isabel
"I
rile me
cold ar
and th
found

"O
"It so
"but I
Gertrud
I have
Angus
before

"Y
can't
darlin
she w
much
to fret
but n
you h
and if

and went away ; Isabel chatted on industriously, talking about all sorts of things, the last batch of presents and the alterations that were required to one of her gowns, she hardly knew what, and for a moment or two Mrs. Cheston listened attentively ; then she looked at the girl.

"I thought—perhaps it was silly of me," she said, "but I fancied that you were a little annoyed when I came in, Belle. You—you weren't quarrelling with Gertrude?"

Isabel stooped and kissed her.

"I never quarrel as you know ; but Gertrude does rile me a little bit now and then. She is so fish-like, cold and slippery." Miss Matheson paused an instant, and then she added, almost as an afterthought, "I found Angus with her when I arrived."

"Oh!" said Olivia Mary, and she flushed quickly. "It sounds horridly unkind," she said in a low voice, "but I almost wish Angus would not come and see Gertrude, he always upsets her. Just when I think that I have got to a little better understanding with her, Angus interferes and back we go to where we were before."

"Yes, as I said just now, she is fish-like. You can't hold her. Well, I shouldn't bother about her, darling," said Isabel. Her irritability had passed and she was her normal self again. "I think you make too much fuss about her. I know how easy it is for you to fret about people and to want to take care of them ; but no human being could do more for Gertrude than you have done. You have always been an angel to her, and if she doesn't respond it can't be helped ; she's got

a beastly nature, and that's the truth of the matter! I don't let Jack even imagine that I think these things, because I know you are so keen on keeping a friendly feeling between him and these two, but I don't mind confessing to you that a little bit of Gertrude and her brother goes a very long way with me."

"I know you do all you can, and I am grateful, Belle; for though Jack gets cross with me because I don't think exactly with him where Angus and Gertrude are concerned, I cannot set aside my share of responsibility. "I always feel," said Olivia Mary, and it seemed as if she were speaking with a note of passion in her voice, "that I ought to have taken more care of Angus and his sister years ago. I mean that I ought to have seen that—that my husband made proper provision for Angus. Perhaps if he had not died so suddenly I could have brought this about. But—but I never thought I should lose him and I never interfered with his private matters. Indeed, it was not until he was dead that I realized what the meaning of all this money signified."

"I am quite sure of one thing," said Isabel Matheson; "and that is that you were always the sweetest and dearest creature in the world!" She paused, and then she asked: "But really they are not badly off, are they? I know Gertrude has her own income, and I feel sure John takes care of Angus."

"I don't consider he does quite enough," Mrs. Cheston answered a little wearily; "and when I say this to him he gets awfully angry."

"Oh! we must put our heads together and see what we can arrange. The fact is that Gertrude was crying

just bel
is going
but nev
again."

Oliv

"Go

wish—

said, "

there ar

A p

her lip

said. "

was sta

wanted

insinuat

now yo

"Pl

Mary sa

held it t

I am c

She sat

of these

little w

to take

I am.

"Ye

don't tl

just the

and if s

from yo

are goin

The

just before you came in because her brother says he is going abroad at once; he has often talked about this, but never done it, so perhaps he will change his mind again."

Olivia Mary had turned very pale.

"Going abroad at once! This is news to me—I—I wish——" she broke off suddenly. "Oh, Belle," she said, "how I wish I weren't such a coward! But there are times when I am just a little afraid of John."

A pang went through the girl's heart and she bit her lip sharply. "Oh, darling, don't say that!" she said. "You haven't the least idea how it hurts me. I was standing up for Jack just now with mother, who wanted to say nasty things about his temper, and to insinuate that he domineered over you too much, and now you speak of being afraid, I——"

"Please don't think about what I said," Olivia Mary said quickly; she took Isabel's hand in hers and held it tightly. "I'm not more frightened of John than I am of anybody else. I spoke without thinking." She sat silent for a moment, and then she said: "One of these days when you have been John's wife for a little while I'll tell you what happened to me long ago to take all my courage out of me and make me what I am. I—I shan't be afraid of telling you."

"Yes, do tell me if you want to," said Isabel; "but don't think that I ever want you to change. You are just the dearest, darlingest thing in the world to me; and if something did happen to take your courage away from you, well, I've got enough for both of us! We are going to be such splendid friends, aren't we?"

The older woman did not answer, her lips trembled

too much for words; and then Isabel kissed her—slipped into her fur coat and went away.

She was going to a dance that night with her mother, and John was coming from York on purpose to join her at the dance. He had arranged to leave the regiment just before Christmas.

Mrs. Cheston dined alone. When she went upstairs to her room after Isabel had left her she was given the information that Miss Kurtiss had gone out.

"She said something about dining with Mr. Angus," Payne informed her mistress. "I did go so far as to say that it wasn't the best sort of evening for her to be out in; but she shut me up quite sharp like: can't say that she gets more amiable as time goes on."

"I'm sorry she has gone out," Mrs. Cheston said. "I promised Dr. Lorrie I would keep her indoors while this cold weather lasted."

"Well, you can't do more than you do," Payne said a little truculently. "If she chooses to go against you and get ill, that's her look out! But, there, she'd go to her grave for that precious brother of hers. Did you see this note, ma'am? It come for you by hand."

Mrs. Cheston picked up the letter from her writing table and opened it hurriedly. When she had read it she sat very quietly for a moment, and then she said:

"Payne, do you know what time Mr. John is expected?"

"I'll go and find out, ma'am."

When she was alone Olivia Mary spread the note on the table before her and read it through slowly again:

"I a
but I wa
Englan
like to
more tl
have be
to act
various
Kurtiss
I inter
surprise
He see
before
from y
has be
appear
are co
useful
you co
meetin
would

Pa
had to
up in
little l
"I
M
"V
won't

"I am afraid you will think I am very persistent ; but I want you to know that I am thinking of leaving England in a few weeks' time ; and I should so much like to see you before I go ; as a matter of fact I have more than one reason for asking you to see me. I have been trying for some time to get a young man to act as secretary and companion with me on my various travels ; and a certain man called Angus Kurtiss has been recommended to me as being suitable. I interviewed Mr. Kurtiss this morning and to my surprise I find that he is a nephew of your husband's. He seems exactly the kind of fellow I want ; but before engaging him I thought I should like to know from you just a little bit about him. He tells me he has been a clerk in a commercial office in the city and appears to have unusual capabilities as far as languages are concerned, which of course would be extremely useful to me. When may I come and see you ? If you could know how much I have thought about meeting you and what it means to me I believe you would stretch a point and give me this happiness.

"Always your devoted friend,

"GEORGE BALDWIN"

Payne came back with the information that Mr. John had telephoned through from York, that he would be up in time for dinner, if the dinner could be made a little later.

"Is Miss Isabel coming ?" asked the maid.

Mrs. Cheston shook her head. "No."

"Well, you'll just put on something comfortable, won't you, ma'am ?" said Payne. "There is that white

tea-gown with the Irish lace, that's warm and cosy." The maid talked on as she helped her mistress to take off her walking things; but it struck her after awhile that Mrs. Cheston was very silent, and seemed to be troubled. "Now, I do hope as you're not vexing yourself about that girl, ma'am," said Payne.

Mrs. Cheston gave a little shrug of her shoulders. "I can't help being a little vexed," she said.

"I know what I should like to do to her and to him too! And they're a pair of fools, if you come to think of it, not to see which side their bread's buttered. Why, it isn't likely that Mr. John can have any too kindly feeling for people as behave as they do."

"I'm going to speak to Mr. John about them to-night," said Olivia Mary. Her voice had a curious sound in it, a sound which made Payne look at her anxiously.

"Don't go upsetting yourself, most like you'll do no good. Mr. John he said to me only just the other day — 'Payne,' he said, 'I'll thank you to see and stop your mistress from running about after Miss Kurtiss. I don't like it, Payne, you understand, I don't like it,' he said, and them's his very words, ma'am."

"I must speak to him," Mrs. Cheston repeated. It was as if she did not hear what the maid said, as though she were speaking to herself. She allowed Payne to put her on the couch and throw a wrap over her; but though she lay very still with her eyes closed no rest came to her. She had taught herself how to simulate an outward tranquillity when her heart, her very being itself, was aflame with mental suffering. To-night this old habit was almost beyond her, but Payne, hoping she would

sleep,
couch
tension
the fire
drew f
aside
shiveri
"I'
tired—
Sh
to gat
measu
dreadf

sleep, had stolen softly away so the woman on the couch could open her eyes and let slip the agonizing tension of imposed indifference. She lay staring into the fire, and the fire-glow lit up her pale drawn face and drew fire from her wonderful eyes, and then she flung aside the wrap and went across the room to crouch shivering in front of the cheery blaze.

"I'm so tired," she whispered to herself, "so tired——"

She stretched her hands to the fire as though eager to gather some new spirit from the heat, some fresh measure of strength: her loneliness was always very dreadful to her: to-night it seemed beyond endurance.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN CHESTON greeted his mother when he arrived that evening with his usual anxious inquiry about her health. Isabel had written him glowing accounts of Olivia Mary's social success, and spoke of her being so different, so much better in health, but the young man had scarcely realized all this. He had always looked on his mother as a creature requiring care; he could not change in this feeling all in a hurry. His affection for her was impregnated with that sense of toleration which an older child will bestow on a younger; in fact, his feeling where his mother was concerned was one of those things which he had never stopped to analyse, had never questioned, and about which he did not trouble himself in the least.

Of course he knew that he was loved by his mother in a curiously passionate way; but here, again, the young man had been tolerant. He found an explanation for what was in a sense disagreeable to him in the fact that his mother was a little hysterical, especially so since she had never quite recovered the shock of his father's sudden death.

Had he been told that the love this woman gave him was weighted with the most beautiful qualities, surrounded by memories of sacrifice and suffering, built up indeed on her very heart of hearts, he would most

probab
for suc
theless,
extrao
this ch
from c
pride i
fact th
and wl
mothe
unusua
To
drawin
gown,
"E
kissed
Belle c
but yo
"I
Olivia
caugh
certai
she lc
her a
opinic
did n
less st
had r
conte
differ
woma
havin

probably have laughed, and certainly have frowned, for such things made no special appeal to him. Nevertheless, he was quite alive to the fact that she had an extraordinary charm of her own, and possibly it was this charm which made her so different to, so apart from other women. Had he analysed his undoubted pride in her he would doubtless have stumbled on the fact that as his possession (and she was undoubtedly and wholly his) it pleased his vanity to realize that his mother was a woman who commanded and who merited unusual admiration.

To-night, for instance, as she stood by the fire in the drawing-room, slim, girl-like almost, in her white tea-gown, he found her beautiful.

"Been doing too much as usual," he said, as he kissed her, and held her slender wrist. "I must put Belle on to you! Belle's a giantess, nothing tires her; but you are made of less durable stuff, you know."

"I believe I am every bit as strong as Belle is," Olivia Mary made answer; and her son smiled as he caught the note in her voice, for he realized that at certain moments she was jealous even of Isabel whom she loved. The thought amused him, he looked upon her as undeveloped, everything about her was in his opinion small, delicate, immature. Consequently he did not suppose her capable of comprehending, much less suffering jealousy that had depth in it. His father had made an idol of this woman, and he was quite content to carry on his father's adoration, with this difference, that the father had gone to the heart of this woman's heart; and the son scarcely gave her credit for having a heart at all.

Mrs. Cheston clung to his hand a little.

"You are going to meet Belle later on," she said, "but we are going to have dinner alone, just we two, Jack!"

"Oh! That's all right," said Cheston. He kissed her again, and then put her aside and stood with his back to the fire. "Aren't you going to this dance?"

His mother shook her head.

"No; Lady Matheson is chaperoning Belle to-night."

"I rather think I shall run round there directly after dinner because I want to see Sir Thomas. I want to ask his advice."

"Is anything wrong?"

"Oh!—well, nothing in particular; but there has been a row on up with our fellows." As they went downstairs to the dining-room he said: "It's just possible though that it may get into the papers, as some of the chaps went a little too far unfortunately, and there's always some one knocking round these days who is only too jolly glad to have the chance of writing about things that don't concern him!"

Mrs. Cheston asked no more questions, and, except for a few commonplace remarks, the dinner was eaten practically in silence. When they were alone, her son said:

"After all, I'm not going to blame our men, although I am against ragging on principle; but in this instance the cause of the whole row was the one to blame. It was up to him to have stopped the shindy. He got the tip straight enough to leave the regiment weeks ago."

"H
Mary,
sitive
thing t
"N
too.
to cha
sit up.
he ha
Chest
dislike
trying
like h
my le
him,
we've
himse
this
"The
joined
fair a
we tr
me,
Mane
M
"
F
"
got t
so h
beer
don

"Has he done anything wrong?" asked Olivia Mary, a little nervously. So fine, so exquisitely sensitive was her instinct, that she felt there was something to come which would hurt her to hear.

"No; he's only an out-and-out bounder, and a prig, too. One of those stupid johnnies who think it's clever to change things, you know, and make everybody else sit up. He was christened 'Fussbox Brinting' before he had been in the regiment a week. Silly ass!" said Cheston. "I could have told him he'd only get himself disliked. Mind, I'm not quarrelling with this fellow for trying to do what he thought was his duty. I was like him myself when I first joined, but I soon learnt my lesson. If that had been the only thing against him, one wouldn't have cared; but you see, mother, we've got to keep the standard up." He helped himself to some port. "I always had my doubts about this chap Brinting," he said, as he sipped the wine. "There were all sorts of yarns about him when he first joined, and I believe it's true that he will come into a fair amount of money; but it is only a week ago that we tumbled to the truth about him, and if you'll believe me, mother, he's the son of a confectioner in Manchester—a d——d baker! That's what he is."

Mrs. Cheston sat very, very still.

"Is that—is that very, very dreadful?" she asked.

Her son stared at her.

"Well—oh!—well, he's going," he answered. "He's got to go! I tell you, the chaps have been making it so hot for him, there has been a rumpus. If it hadn't been for me, I believe there would have been murder done."

"It seems to me very, very small," said Olivia Mary Cheston. And she spoke very clearly, and with a note of contempt in her voice. "If—if it hadn't been discovered by chance that he was the son of a baker, no one would have found fault with him."

"Oh! wouldn't they? Well, that's just where you're wrong, my dear mother. When a man's had no beginning, it's bound to come out, sooner or later, and go against him. You can do what you like—send a boy to Eton, put him through Oxford, cram him into a swagger regiment, but the people he comes from and the stuff he's made of tells. Of course, this doesn't touch me so much, as I'm just leaving the regiment; but I'm with the other chaps heart and soul, and I should have been the first to strike if Brinting had remained on. As I said just now, we've got to keep things up, mother," he repeated, irritably—"must have class, you know. By Jove! It isn't what a man's got, it's what a man is, what his father was, or his grandfather was. But, look here, we won't talk about this thing; it doesn't interest you. I only mentioned it because I have been very full of it all to-day."

Mrs. Cheston said nothing in answer to this. She just sat and watched her son.

"Are you going back to-morrow?" she asked.

He nodded his head.

"Yes, I must be off early, too. How are things going? Is Belle pretty nearly ready?"

"Yes; she isn't getting too many frocks. I think she's wise—fashions change so quickly; but she has some pretty things, and useful ones, too. You have settled on your tour, haven't you, dearest?"

"C
awfull
We'll
put up
Have
the w
Thorp
"I
could
old p
but I
direct
"
said
Thorp
away
Man
sort,
"
Mrs.
hurri
Thorp
"
up v
is d
go?
"
spea
cent
shad
all t
it's :

"Oh! We'll start with Switzerland. Belle is awfully keen on doing some climbing sport generally. We'll go straight through, I fancy, but shall probably put up for a night or two in Paris as we come home. Have you made up your mind what you shall do after the wedding? I suppose you'll just toddle back to Thorpe?"

"No," said Mrs. Cheston, very quickly. "No, I couldn't stay there; I don't know"—she paused in her old painfully nervous way—"what I shall do, Jack; but I am going to make my plans for the future now directly, because——"

"Oh! Well, you needn't bother to be in a hurry," said John Cheston. "Belle and I shan't settle in at Thorpe for quite six months, and you mustn't go far away, mother. I was thinking, how would you like the Manor Farm? It is a ripping old house—just your sort, and could be done up any way you fancy."

"I think I should like it very much indeed," said Mrs. Cheston. As he got up from the table, she said, hurriedly: "Oh! are you going round to see Sir Thomas now?"

"Yes, I shall just catch him. I made Denton ring up when I arrived, and he tells me Sir Thomas is dining at home to-night. Do you mind if I go?"

"No, dearest, of course not; but I rather wanted to speak to you." She got up and moved away from the centre light of the table. She wanted to be in the shadows. "Don't be angry, please, darling," she said, all the steadiness gone out of her voice now. "It is—it's about Angus."

Cheston's reply was more emphatic than courteous.

"D——n Angus!" he said.

"Please listen." His mother put out her hand, and then drew it back quickly. "Angus is going to leave England at once, and Gertrude is dreadfully upset about this."

"Going abroad! That old story! He might think out something fresh for a change! Good God! What a sickening cadge the fellow is! And how well he knows how to play you!"

"He hasn't approached me—and I knew nothing of this; but Gertrude was talking to Belle about her brother this afternoon; and it seems that Angus wants to do something better."

"Well, if he can't do that here, he won't do it in any other country, that's pretty sure. But don't fret, he won't go! Not he!"

"I don't know if he means this or not," said Olivia Mary; "but I don't think that we must let him do it, John, without going into the matter thoroughly."

"Now look here, mother, I'm getting just fed up with all this talk about Angus," said the young man, losing his temper. "You know I've told you over and over again, this is not your business. Angus and I understand one another very well indeed. As a matter of fact, I think it would surprise you if you could know how much this gentleman has cost me this year! I wish to God you'd leave him alone. I hate to upset you saying this kind of thing, but I've got to speak out"—he faced her, his eyes hard and angry—"I told you what would happen, didn't I, when you insisted on having Gertrude here? I do wish you had a little

strengtl
lessly, 1
But his
watchin
off!" tl
jolly gl
He wor
fall bac

"I
would l

a little

"O
replied

about
provisi
about t
just en

After a
starve,
every 1

change
simply
for all

every c
doesn't
while

Mr
"Y
this,"

must s
—I ha
that I

strength of character, mother." He moved about restlessly, pushing a chair here and there in his annoyance. But his mother did not move; she stood in the shadow, watching him. "I only wish Angus *would* take himself off!" the young man said, after a slight pause. "I'd be jolly glad to see the back of him—but I know him! He won't go. He's got a soft place here with you to fall back on at every other turn!"

"I do what I do because I always feel your father would like me to do it, Jack." Olivia Mary's voice was a little more steady now.

"Oh! my dear mother, that's all rot!" her son replied impatiently. "If my father had been anxious about Angus I suppose he would have made some provision for him, but if you want to know what I think about that, I tell you it's my belief my father had had just enough of Angus, and washed his hands of him! After all remember he saw to it that Gertrude would not starve, although I suppose her precious brother takes every penny he can from her;" and then John Cheston changed his tone. "Now, mother, it's come to this, I simply *won't* have you worried in this way! Once and for all I shall end this business of Angus crawling to you every other minute! And *do* get rid of that girl! Why doesn't she go? You'll never have a moment's peace while you have her with you."

Mrs. Cheston looked at her son.

"You don't understand. I feel so strongly about this," she said. "No, you must let me speak, Jack! I must say what I have on my mind! You know I had—I had so much influence with your father, I feel now that I perhaps did not do my duty by your cousins.

If I had only thought about it I am sure Anthony would have arranged things differently."

"My father never intended that you should be pestered in this abominable way, that's pretty sure," John Cheston said with a short laugh.

His mother smiled faintly.

He looked so big, so stern, so difficult to convince, she felt the futility of pressing the matter, and yet something more than a mere sense of duty urged her not to fall back.

"We have so much," she said in a low voice. Her son had walked to the door but she did not move. "We have so much, Jack," she repeated. "I want to tell you what I have decided to do. You know you give me far more than I need. I never spend half of what I have, and I want—I want to share my income with Angus and Gertrude."

"No! I'm d——d if I'll let you," John Cheston said hotly, then he added impatiently:

"Oh! Look here, mother, it's absolutely no good talking business with you. You're not fit for it; you don't understand practical things and you've got all sorts of sentimental ideas knocking about in your head. I want to end this matter once and for all. Do as I tell you, get rid of Gertrude and leave Angus to me. Now I'll be off. Don't sit up too late, you look like a ghost as it is. It's a good thing you are not going to this dance."

He bent to kiss her, and she put her arms round his neck and drew his head down and pressed her cheek against his.

"Good-night, dearest," she said. "My dearest!"

Then s
watche
whistle

"P

he turr
outer d
The dr
of the
but we
she wal
do whc

take it.
her be
There
found t
momer
would
gave th
and aft

"H

"Is

"Y

For

little h

"P

"O

God!

"A

"G

it mea

"I

"J

(

Then she went with him into the hall and stood and watched him as he got into his overcoat and the butler whistled a taxi.

"Promise not to worry," John Cheston repeated, as he turned away; but she gave no promise, and as the outer door was shut she turned and mounted the stairs. The drawing-room looked cosy and warm, and the scent of the flowers lured her. She did not pause, however, but went on up the stairs to her own room. Once there she walked to and fro several times just as one might do who meditates a certain action, yet who hesitates to take it. Then she took out the letter which had reached her before dinner and noted the telephone number. There was a telephone in her room, she sounded it and found that she was through to the exchange. For the moment she was quite safe from interruption. Payne would be downstairs having her supper. Mrs. Cheston gave the number she required in a clear steady voice, and after a while another voice answered her:

"Hello!"

"Is that Mr. Baldwin? George Baldwin?"

"Yes," said the voice. "Who are you?"

For an instant she could not speak, then she said a little huskily:

"I'm Olivia Mary."

"Olivia! Is it really Olivia Mary speaking? My God! How wonderful to hear your voice again!"

"Are you glad?"

"Glad!" said the man's voice, "you don't know what it means to me! Are you going to see me?"

"I will see you—I must see you now."

"Just go on talking," said the man's voice, "I want

to feel that I'm really in touch with you! Your voice is just the same, the sweetest voice in the whole world!"

"And I am so changed," said Olivia Mary. "I'm old now and my hair is white."

"You will never be old to me. It is so good of you to let me see you, dear."

She laughed a strained, tired little laugh.

"I don't know if it *is* good. I'm afraid it is just selfishness, for there is something in your letter that makes it necessary I should see you." She caught her breath a little. "I believe," she said, "it is going to bring me trouble and it frightens me."

"Frightens you! Why should you be frightened, Olivia?"

"I have never been without fear all these years," the woman answered. "I only realize that now! I've been frozen or asleep for such a long time and now this is passing and everything is real again."

"Well, you'll let me help you if I can, won't you?"

"Yes, oh! yes," she answered passionately, "for now that I know that you are there, that I can speak out to someone who understands, I'm losing the wonderful courage I have had. Oh! George, you don't know how terrible the strain has been; I have had to change my very nature in my dreadful care. Sometimes I have wondered how I have lived through it all."

"And I have hoped, believed, was even convinced that you were happy."

She laughed again and then she asked him hurriedly:

"Can you see me to-morrow?"

"To-night if you like."

"N
I have
so use!
"T
"Y
mornin
"V
I have
been to
Mr
"V
twelve
mustn
you w
Th
bittern
"V
you la
hear y
upset
better
Sh
"C
thank
"J
night

"No, I can't come to-night. I'm not a free person, I have no independence. I'm supposed to be so delicate, so useless, they take such care of me."

"Then to-morrow," said the man's voice.

"Yes, to-morrow. I think I can manage it in the morning."

"Why not come here? This is a very quiet hotel. I have my own sitting-room and several people have been to see me. My sister lunched here to-day."

Mrs. Cheston paused a moment and then said:

"Very well, to-morrow I will be with you about twelve o'clock. I will try and be punctual, but you mustn't let me upset your arrangements, George, or keep you waiting."

This time the voice laughed and there was a touch of bitterness in the laugh.

"Why, I have been waiting for you ever since I saw you last! But look here, Olivia Mary, I don't like to hear you speak of being afraid, and if this is going to upset you or bring you trouble, why perhaps you had better not come, dear."

She answered him eagerly, very eagerly:

"Oh—oh! I must see you now. Good-night and thank you—To-morrow—to-morrow at twelve."

"To-morrow," answered the man's voice. "Good-night and God bless you!"

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN she heard that Silvia Ambrose was in London Isabel had hurried to call at the hotel. She went on purpose to invite Silvia to be one of her bridesmaids, and was really disappointed when Mrs. Ambrose told her that this would not be possible. Not a word had been spoken by Olivia Mary of Silvia's last escapade; indeed, Isabel Matheson did not realize that the girl had gone away with her aunt; she imagined, when she thought about the matter at all, that the death of old Lady Henrietta Morgan had necessitated the Ambrose family being in town.

Helen Ambrose thanked Isabel warmly.

"I don't suppose there is anything Silvia would like better than to be at your marriage," she said; "but I'm most afraid, Miss Matheson, it won't be possible."

"Oh! I am sorry," said Isabel. "You mean, I suppose, because of the mourning for Lady Henrietta?"

"No, not exactly that, but well, it is just likely that Silvia won't be in England. She is going to Italy almost directly, and I guess she'll stay some time when she gets there."

"Going to Italy," said Isabel; "oh! she'll love that! Still, I'm sorry, so sorry, for Silvia would look so

lovely
pretty

"W

heartily

"B

wedding

disappo

"W

and she

just lo

girl I

in whi

did ge

a coat

me to

Wh

if she

A sligh

"W

"Silvia

to kee

Spudgi

cunnin

one co

As

mothe

"W

next d

The

"It

say it;

Silvia;

lovely as a bridesmaid ; and I want everything to be pretty and beautiful on the great day ! ”

“ Why, of course you do, ” said Helen Ambrose heartily. “ I should think so ! ”

“ But if Silvia goes away you will come to my wedding, dear Mrs. Ambrose, won't you ? Please don't disappoint me. ”

“ Why, yes, I'll come surely, ” said Mrs. Ambrose ; and she added with the smile that dimpled her face, “ I just love weddings ! Many's the time when I was a girl I pictured to myself what I should look like all in white with a wreath and veil ; and then when I did get married, why I wore just an ordinary hat and a coat and skirt. My ! There wasn't anything about me to make me a bride ! ”

When they had talked a little while Isabel asked if she might see Silvia, who was still in her room. A slight shadow passed over Helen Ambrose's face.

“ Why, I don't know, Miss Matheson, ” she said. “ Silvia's been very sick, you know ; and she has got to keep as quiet as quiet. That is why I don't have Spudgins up. Poor little lamb ! He wrote me such a cunning letter yesterday, all dashes and spots. No one could read it but me ! ”

As Isabel rose to go she gave a message from her mother.

“ Won't you come and lunch with us to-morrow or next day ? Do say yes. ”

The colour rushed into Helen Ambrose's face.

“ It is mighty hard to say no ; but I believe I must say it, ” she answered ; “ the fact is I don't like to leave Silvia ; and then my husband comes here to lunch

most days." She laughed a little as she said, "Nigel's so busy! And he has got everybody crazy mad with him, because he's just turning that poor old lady's house inside out."

"Oh! Of course," said Isabel, "you are going to live in London. Why, how will you like that, Mrs. Ambrose?"

"I'm not sure; maybe I shan't try it for long. I've got to go to America in the New Year."

"America!" said Isabel; "but you won't be away more than a few weeks, will you?"

Helen Ambrose evaded the answer to this question. She parted regretfully with Isabel. They were kindred spirits. When she was alone Mrs. Ambrose went back to the writing-table and continued reading a letter which she had received from Mr. Banister. After relating all that had happened in connection with Derrick on the other side, he spoke again of herself.

"Our hero's got a conceit on him that just bristles," he wrote; "and the way he plumes himself on his greatness as an actor just beats the band! He'll bite some hard truths before he is through, and that's sure! But he's fixed up anyway, and so your dear heart can be at rest. What about the girl? Don't you lay yourself up too much with worry about her, and don't you forget your promise. I am just sitting around full of impatience till your news comes; can't hardly believe it is likely to be true! And I'm not going to breathe the whisper of it to a soul in case you change your mind! For if I just played them up saying that Helen Sabinett was coming back, and then had to climb down and agree I'd been mistaken, there

isn't a
in safe
you."

Ac
and w
told h
and th

"Ye
come,"

you a
turnin

a fine
things

especi
doing

it, Di
anoth

he is
boy—

ago.

I don
The

surpri
was t

back
neare

farthe
as to

she v
there,

gratifi
to do

isn't a hole in New York, I believe, I could hide in in safety! So you see, Helen, my girl, it is all up to you."

Acting on impulse Mrs. Ambrose took up her pen and wrote freely and frankly to her old friend. She told him all that had happened since his departure; and then she came to the difficulties of the moment.

"You must not take this letter as certain sure that I'll come," she wrote; "but my heart's way across with you as it is, Jamie; maybe it is my vanity that is turning me in your direction, for let me tell you this, it's a fine thing to feel one is really wanted! In some ways things have panned out much better than I hoped, especially where my stepson is concerned. He is doing fine and, although his father is all up against it, Dick will be off to ranch life in Canada before another year has gone. Dick is a real nice boy and he is so very dear to me. Then there is the little boy—the baby that I took on to nurse six years ago. He has got just right into my heart, Jamie, and I don't know how I'd get along, if I cut him out. The girl, ah! that is quite another matter. It won't surprise you to know that you were right, and that it was the theatre that she was after. Well, I got her back and she's staying with me now, but we are no nearer being friends; indeed, seems to me we're farther apart than we ever were. But I'm working so as to get her to her own people in Italy. I guess she will soon forget all about the stage once she's there, for there will be so much else to amuse her and to gratify her, and I know this is the proper thing for her to do, although it is making very bad feeling between

my husband and me, for he has never cared for his children to have anything to do with their mother's family; and now that he has come into a little bit of money, he hates to have the girl go most terribly. So you see, dear Jamie, there is just a way off chance that you *may* see me! But I'll have to write again, and in any case, whether I go back to my old place or whether I lose it altogether, I have a feeling of longing just to cross the ocean and see some of those folk who used to make life so lovely for me!"

She added a few lines and then she folded up the letter and then she signed it; she had still another letter to write and this was to Olivia Mary.

"I want you to try and forgive Silvia for being so rude to you yesterday. She is still very furious with both of us. I don't mind much what she says to me; but it hurts badly when she speaks to you as she did yesterday. A telegram has come from Rome and Silvia can start right away as soon as she is well enough to travel. When once she has gone I shall feel I dare breathe, and then I'll ask you to let me do what you have so often urged, spend a little while with you before I go back to settle up things in the country. Nigel has quite fixed he will not return to Garth Court. He is making a dandy writing-room for himself here in London, and the whole house will be very beautiful; but somehow I'd rather have stayed at Garth; and it will hurt me a good deal to have it all shut up. Agnes Dalywood, dear kind soul, is looking after things for me while I am here, and they've still got Spudgins at the Rectory, but I'll go down and have a week or so before

I quit
you w
you an
though

TH
and b
early
deligh
Sh

person
conne

La
that S
Mrs. C
would
Mary
the su

"I
paused
Gertru
face
but it
making
at the
was v
but th

"T
when t
share
I thin
can't

I quit the old house for always. It would be nice if you were back home too when I was there. Somehow you are so much to me now. I've grown to love you as though you really were one of my own.

The Cheston-Matheson wedding was to be a grand and big affair. It was fixed to take place in London early in January. Isabel herself took the keenest delight in all the arrangements.

She chose her bridesmaids from her relations and personal friends, and included two of John Cheston's connexions.

Lady Matheson had suggested, when it was known that Silvia Ambrose was not available, that perhaps Mrs. Cheston had someone belonging to her whom she would like invited to act as a bridesmaid, but Olivia Mary had shaken her head when Isabel had broached the subject to her.

"I have no one," she had said; "except—" she paused and then had put forward the proposition that Gertrude Kurtiss might be approached. With a wry face Isabel had taken the hint, simply to please her, but it was a great relief when Miss Kurtiss refused, making her health an excuse. She was still staying on at the pretty little house. Isabel knew that her lover was very eager that Gertrude should take herself off, but the guest showed no inclination to go.

"Thank God!" Lady Matheson had remarked when told that Miss Kurtiss had refused to take any active share in the wedding. "We are spared sometimes! I think it is a great pity that John Cheston's mother can't be a bridesmaid herself," she had added with a

laugh, "for she is quite the youngest and prettiest person I know just now. This trip to town has worked a miracle, Belle, she isn't the same woman."

"It certainly has changed her," her daughter said thoughtfully.

A week had elapsed since the night of the dance which John had come up expressly to attend. He had gone back to Yorkshire very early the following day, summoned by a telegram. It appeared that a commission had been hurriedly instituted to inquire into the ragging case, and he was required to attend this.

The young man had discussed this business with Isabel's father, and had been not a little surprised and annoyed to find that Sir Thomas took a line opposed to his own views.

"You know we live in a new age," the older man had said; "I'm not going to say it is a better one, in lots of ways I think we have changed for the worse, and in my opinion it is very lamentable that certain traditions should be swept away; but that is the penalty of progress! And after all, my dear Jack, there is something rather fine about a man who makes a position for himself and doesn't stand simply on the fact that he had a father and a few ancestors."

"But this fellow's a cad!" young Cheston had said, hotly.

"What is your definition of a cad?" Sir Thomas had asked a little dryly, and Cheston had answered sharply:

"Oh! You know quite well what I mean, sir."

For a little while Sir Thomas had said nothing, then he had remarked:

"
part
comm
need
baker.
that t
tell n
missio
corner
d—
a cad.
"
rolls,"
pokin
"
Thor
"Fro
showi
T
bit su
said,
hot fo
perfec
fellow
S
don't
persc
opini
straig
rump
tends
A

"This spirit of intolerance and arrogance on our part takes an ugly look when the broad light of common sense reasoning is flung upon it. A man need not necessarily be a cad because his father was a baker. It seems to me that the trouble lies in the fact that this fellow Brinting is a crank. From what you tell me he takes himself seriously, believes he has a mission, wants to reform the army, sweep out the dark corners and all that sort of thing. That means he is a d—d nuisance, but it need not necessarily mean he is a cad."

"He should have been carting round loaves and rolls," said John Cheston hardly, "not have come poking his nose into the affairs of gentlemen."

"What is your definition of a gentleman?" Sir Thomas had asked, this time with a twinkle in his eye. "From all accounts these fellows of yours haven't been showing the best of manners in this business."

Then John Cheston had lost his temper. "I am a bit surprised to hear *you* speaking like this, sir," he had said, "for I've always understood that you made it very hot for your men in your day if everything wasn't just perfect. I wonder what you would have thought if a fellow of this class had got into your regiment?"

Sir Thomas had fully appreciated the position. "I don't say that I am judging this by my own personal feelings. I am judging it by the public opinion of the present day; and I'll tell you one thing straight, my dear Jack, and that is, that this kind of rumpus does a lot of harm, it stirs up bad feeling and tends to make the service unpopular."

And in the week that followed John Cheston had

had more than one opportunity of proving that Sir Thomas's very straightforward words were backed up by facts.

He wrote pages to Isabel, but he only sent his mother one letter, and that was dealing with the subject of Angus Kurtiss. He informed her that he had instructed his lawyers to look into his cousin's movements, and he impressed upon his mother once more in the most emphatic way, that henceforward she was not to meddle in Angus's affairs one way or another.

Mrs. Cheston sent no answer to this, nor did she brood over it as she would have done on former occasions. She was, as Lady Matheson had pointed out, so changed. She seemed to be thrilling with a kind of nervous excitement. There was a sparkle in her eyes; her expression of reticence and resigned sadness had left her. She looked less delicate and she went out a great deal.

Miss Kurtiss lunched on an average always by herself. It seemed as if a new life had dawned for Olivia Mary. Payne, her devoted maid, was bewildered by the number of her mistress's engagements, but she rejoiced and that heartily at the fact that this visit to London, about which she had been very anxious, should have turned out so successfully. She felt it her duty, however, every now and then to remind Mrs. Cheston that she was not the most robust person in the world.

"If you are going out again to-night, ma'am," she said on one occasion, "you really ought to rest before dinner. I don't know what Mr. John would say to me if he knew that I was letting you do so much."

"Do you know, Payne," Mrs. Cheston answered,

"I be
a littl
Th
a littl
"I
ma'an
Th
"I
me la
know
settle
think
"I
Mr. J
just d
M
of ren
gowns
"C
Thorp
feelin
piece
cernex
"I
variou
and th
not a
this l
mistre
be ev
the s
woul

"I believe I'm growing up. I shan't require a nurse in a little while."

The maid had looked at her quickly, had hesitated a little and then had said:

"Does that mean that you're going to get rid of me, ma'am?"

The other woman paused too, and then said quietly:

"No. But it's just possible you may want to leave me later on, Payne, for after the wedding I hardly know what I am going to do. Mr. John wants me to settle down at the Manor Farm, and I don't somehow think I shall like that."

"The Manor Farm! No, indeed I should say not! Mr. John's got queer ideas! Why, the Manor Farm's just dropping to pieces."

Mrs. Cheston said nothing about her son's suggestion of renovation. She was trying on one of many new gowns she had ordered lately.

"One thing is very sure, he won't want me at Thorpe," she said half meditatively. "I suppose I'm feeling just as you do when you come to the end of a piece of work, Payne, my 'work' where John is concerned has come to an end."

"Yes, ma'am," agreed Payne. The maid found various little faults in the gown and stuck pins in here and there, but her heart was not in the task. She was not able to define the subtleness which impregnated this later and most unexpected development in her mistress, but she was conscious of something—it might be even tragic, as it certainly was pathetic—lying below the surface of the new moods. That Mrs. Cheston would be quietly brave over the separation from her

son, and her abdication from the place she had filled so long, this woman who waited on her needed no one to tell her.

"She wasn't never one to make a fuss," she had said to herself many times, but the visible and actual change that had demonstrated itself hour by hour of late produced in Payne a "bouleversement" of all ideas and convictions as to what Mrs. Cheston might or might not do. Looking at the slight, graceful figure as it turned round critically in front of the mirror, Payne realized that what had seemed to her when first "Mr. John's" marriage had been arranged as the end of all things where her mistress was concerned might instead be only a new beginning.

Mrs. Cheston broke the silence by asking if certain pretty garments, which she had chosen for Gertrude Kurtiss, had arrived.

"Yes, but she hasn't even opened the boxes. When *is* she going away, ma'am?"

"I don't know, probably not till I go back to the country."

"Well," said Payne, decisively, "*I'll* not cry the day she goes! She's that disagreeable, and that stuck up! There's not one in the house as can abide her. You're never thinking of having her to live with you, are you, ma'am?"

Mrs. Cheston said "No!" quite sharply, then she added more gently: "Poor Gertrude! She has centred everything that is best in her on one object. Even if one does not like her one must admire her devotion."

"I call it pig-headedness with her——" Payne took the delicate new gown off her mistress—"she's that

obstin
man o

"I
cried
hersel
hersel
is to f
Pa
in its
work.'

Bu
softly
evenin
awhile
her ey
asleep
consci
mome
eyelid
a veri
and d
eagerl
colour
shaped
in suc
the th
that t
For y
that v
denied
to th
aband

obstinate and sly too—a real match for her fine gentleman of a brother !”

“ I don’t want to talk about Gertrude or Angus !” cried Olivia Mary, with sudden petulance. She wrapped herself in a loose robe of warmest pink silk and threw herself into a big cushioned chair. “ My new theory is to forget everything that is disagreeable, Payne.”

Payne said “ Um ” a trifle drily. “ It’s good enough in its way,” she said ; “ but I’m wondering how it will work.”

But Olivia Mary made no reply, and the maid went softly about her duties, putting everything ready for the evening, arranging, tidying, sewing now and then. After awhile Mrs. Cheston snuggled into the chair and shut her eyes. She sat so still one might have thought her asleep, but, though in the body she was but semi-conscious, her mind was oppressively busy. It was a moment of brain travel with her. Behind those closed eyelids there passed and repassed a pageant of illusions, a veritable phantasmagoria of ideas, longings, visions and dreams, the pent-up accumulation of a mind always eagerly sensitive to imagery, to movement, to light and colour. The dancing joyousness of an unshadowed life shaped into an illusive reality for the time being. It was in such spells of premonstration that the woman tasted the thrilling delights of freedom, and from such moods that the influence sprang which was transforming her. For years she had put a barrier between herself and all that was sweet to her nature, even dreams had been denied ; she had elected to follow one path, set herself to the upholding of one duty, therefore the gradual abandonment of all that might have constituted her life

was bound inevitably to affect her in a physical as well as a moral sense. The calmness, the self control, the child-like fear of going beyond a certain point, the shy dread of the world were succumbing one by one to the nervous demand of a spirit released and a nature returning to its normal and elementary qualities. Perhaps behind these new emotions, had she paused to analyse, Olivia Mary would have been conscious that the delight was ephemeral, and that the awakening had come too late, but she was sufficiently far away from her old outlook to yield herself unreservedly to the fascinations of the moment. At least in one sense of the word she was alive now, and life was very, very beautiful to her after a long strained spell of cloistered existence.

T
amoun
momei
she let
husban
a great
supervi
of irrit

It v
temper
that sh
had ne
betwee
been tl
charact

The
gradua
a great
was m
weepin

"B
said I
differ

CHAPTER XVIII

THE days slipped by far too rapidly according to Lady Matheson's views, from whom a certain amount of unusual energy was inevitable with such a momentous affair as a wedding to arrange ; although she let the heaviest part of the arrangements fall to her husband and her daughter's share, there still remained a great deal to think out and to order and to generally supervise, and Isabel had to contend with a great deal of irritability from her mother.

It was not natural for Lady Matheson to be out of temper, and the girl was naturally fretted by the fact that she appeared to be giving so much trouble. There had never been a very great demonstration of affection between her mother and herself, but they had always been the best of friends as far as their widely different characters would permit.

The fact was that Lady Matheson was waking up gradually to the realization that life would be bereft of a great deal that was pleasant and sunny when Isabel was married, and one day she was found by her girl weeping and refusing to eat any luncheon.

"But you aren't going to lose me, mother dearest," said Isabel, really distressed. "It would have been different if Jack had remained in the army and we had

been obliged to go out to India ; but we are going to live at Thorpe, and you can see me practically every day if you want to."

"Ah!" said Lady Matheson as she dried her eyes. "That is what *you* think ; but wait, my dear, wait ! You are not going to arrange your life as you wish when you are married. Everything will be very, very different for you when John is always on the scene. Oh ! Belle, I feel so uncertain, so—so wretched at times."

"But, dearest mother, why ? Don't you want me to get married ? Don't you trust Jack ? You used to be fond of him."

Lady Matheson put her fat arms round her girl's neck and pressed her damp cheek against Isabel's.

"All I want is to know that you will be happy, Belle," she said. "Of course, I like Jack, and naturally I want you to get married. I'm stupid ! I know ! but——" her lip quivered again ; the trouble was not over. "Your father is so cross," she said. "Honestly, I don't know what to do with him. He is always scratchy when he is in town ; and if I have told him once that he need not stay, and we can get on quite well without him, I have told him this at least a hundred times ; but"—Lady Matheson folded her hands in resignation—"he won't go ! He is just staying on here on purpose to annoy me."

Isabel laughed at this.

"You know quite well daddy doesn't mean to worry you. Of course," Isabel added a little wistfully, "I am giving a great deal of trouble and upsetting things generally. I am so sorry, mother."

Lady Matheson slapped her gently on the cheek.

"I
said ;
little t
aunt (C
"C
was a
mothe
"V
caugh
ting ri
harpir
none
weddi
there
queer
becaus
relatic
it?"
Isa
she ge
Sh
especi
"I
relatio
any, c
"C
everyt
she's a
she's
woma
way sl
last, fo

"I don't suppose anybody wants to worry me," she said; "but as a matter of fact there are a number of little things that are upsetting and disagreeable. Your aunt Clara for one."

"Oh!" said Isabel significantly. Her aunt Clara was an old story. "Why do you let her bother you, mother dear?" the girl said.

"Well, I have done my best to avoid her, but she caught me yesterday afternoon and there was no getting rid of her. And, Belle, what do you think she was harping on yesterday? Why, that it looks so odd that none of Mrs. Cheston's own people are coming to the wedding; and when I tried to explain to Clara that there were no people to come she said that that was so queer; the queerest thing that she had ever known; because that even the very poorest people have some relations, and you know, Belle, that is quite true, isn't it?"

Isabel had been kneeling beside her mother and she got up now and paused a moment before answering.

She was particularly anxious not to lose her temper, especially when her mother was in this mood.

"It is rather unusual, I suppose, not to have many relations, but still if there are none we can't manufacture any, can we?"

"Clara always wants to know everything about everybody," said Lady Matheson pettishly; "and she's always been curious about Olivia Mary. I expect she's jealous because John's mother is such a pretty woman. But the questions she asked, Belle! and the way she kept on! I turned her over to your father at last, for really she wore me out!"

"That was the best thing to do, darling," the girl answered.

She was called out of the room at that moment, but before she answered the summons she paused hesitatingly whether or no to put a certain question to her mother; finally with a hot rush of colour to her cheeks she decided to speak.

"Mother darling, I want to ask you something. Please don't say anything about Aunt Clara to Jack, will you, or to Mrs. Cheston? It might annoy them."

"My dear Belle, I am not quite a fool!" said Lady Matheson. "And really it is no business of Clara's."

Isabel went away with a little sigh and a little frown; a moment later, however, these were both dismissed by a smile. After all, she told herself, she was only going through what most brides have to endure before the wedding-day. There is generally a tension of feeling and a sense of irritation prevailing. It is a moment when relations choose to be more than specially tiresome, wanting to upset arrangements and to give undesired advice: in fact, it is altogether a trying time. Indeed, despite the fact that she was sorry to leave her parents Isabel was longing for everything to be over and done with, and for the time to come when she and John would be alone together. She was distinctly conscious of being glad that he was not in London at this moment. She could suffer most things; but John was not the same, and matters which were trivial and explainable to her would sure to be very annoying to him.

"If Aunt Clara began to ask Jack silly questions I believe he'd box her ears!" the girl said to herself.

She was not herself very amiably disposed to her

mothe
there
Chest
ably.
lover
Chest
more
with
innoc
belong
assure
endow
just as
views
distinc
heritag
would
There
shock
John c
nothin
was be
was so
she she
were i
the ste
trainin
Joh
man (e
who ha
of Scot
unconv

mother's sister at this moment. The suggestion that there was something queer in the fact that Mrs. Cheston lacked family connections hurt Isabel considerably. It seemed somehow to suggest a slight on her lover which the girl resented in a very defined way. John Cheston's pride in all that concerned himself was rather more than normal; and Isabel was quite in sympathy with him in this! It is possible that they were both innocent of conscious snobbishness: although they belonged to a class which assumes that because of an assured place in the world others not so happily endowed must necessarily rank as inferiors. It was just as much a part of their daily existence to hold such views as to breathe, to eat and to drink. Certain distinctions were imposed upon them as a natural heritage; to step aside from this standpoint of arrogance would have been impossible even by condescension. Therefore it came upon Isabel in the nature of a little shock to hear that anything or anybody attached to John could be open to criticism. There was to the girl nothing strange or unusual in the fact that Mrs. Cheston was bereft of all living members of her family, but there was something almost irreverent in the suggestion that she should be judged as ordinary and common people were in this respect. Long ago Isabel had been told the story of Olivia Mary's childhood and of her early training which had about it a savour of romance.

John's mother had been the daughter of a scientific man (a curiously cantankerous person by all accounts), who had lived as a recluse in an out-of-the-way corner of Scotland; and his girl had been reared in a wholly unconventional manner. All that she had known in the

way of learning she had got from her father, who (when he remembered her existence at all) had educated her in spasmodic fashion in a manner more befitting a boy than a girl. Olivia Mary herself had never spoken of her early youth to Isabel; but the girl had learnt what there was to know from her mother, who was very fond of relating how long it took her to win her way into a friendship with Mrs. Cheston.

John had been a sturdy little fellow of five when the Mathesons had come to live as neighbours to the Chestons, and Isabel had been born soon after their arrival.

The curious disposition on the part of Mrs. Cheston to shrink from or to have any contact with the outer world had been made comprehensible to Isabel when she had grown old enough to listen to her mother's chatter! Lady Matheson had always deplored the way in which Olivia Mary had buried herself in the seclusion of her own house.

Anthony Cheston had been a man considerably older than herself: he was stated to have been the only friend with whom Olivia Mary's father had kept in touch and it had been the death of that father which had practically brought about her marriage.

Mr. Cheston was a very wealthy man, and the position he could give his wife was an enviable one; but from the very first Olivia Mary had evinced the greatest reluctance to filling the duties which this position demanded; and in fact, after her husband's death, she had shut herself up as a veritable prisoner at Thorpe, refusing for a time to see any one and only gradually yielding to the friendly importunity of Sir

Thom
fail t
for Is
that i
Olivia
day, t
annoy
hersel
natur
of thi
least
by he
over
agree
havin
his n
little
fact,
the a
see h
I:
been
embr
admi
"
look
S
and
and
"
come
"

Thomas Matheson, and his wife! That others should fail to understand John's mother was an easy matter for Isabel to grasp: indeed, she had long ago realized that it never would be possible for her own mother and Olivia Mary to come any nearer to one another; but to-day, the girl was conscious of being more than a little annoyed with her mother: firstly, for having permitted herself to be cross-questioned on what was such a simple natural subject; and then for having repeated the story of this cross-examination in a manner which implied at least a suggestion of sympathy with the attitude adopted by her sister! However, Isabel was sensible, and moreover possessed a happy knack of throwing aside disagreeables which could be disposed of; and so once having safeguarded the position as far as John and his mother were concerned, she resolved to put this little episode entirely behind her. As a matter of fact, it was driven out of her mind at that moment by the announcement that Miss Ambrose had called to see her.

Isabel ran down from her bedroom where she had been enduring one of the inevitable fittings-on, and embraced her guest warmly; then she exclaimed with admiration:

"Silvia dear, how smart you are! How lovely you look!"

Silvia smiled faintly. She had indeed a very different and a much more grown-up air in her black garments and she wore some beautiful furs.

"I am going to Italy to-morrow," she said. "I have come to say 'good-bye.'"

"To-morrow! That *is* soon. Are you glad?"

Silvia gave a shrug of her shoulders, and then said rather deliberately :

"Yes: I hate England; and everybody, and everything in it!"

"Oh! darling," exclaimed Isabel with a laugh. "That's a fearful sweeping assertion!"

"I don't mean you," said Silvia with her old brusqueness. "I'm speaking of the people I've got to live with. Of course, I shouldn't have left father if he'd been by himself; but he'll never be able to have a proper sort of home with things as they are."

Isabel carefully glissaded away from a dangerous topic.

"So you are going to Rome; and you are going to be a very grand person, and we shan't see or hear anything more of you."

"I hate writing letters," said Silvia in her sullen fashion. She had very little to say, and was so ungracious that Isabel wondered why she had troubled to come at all.

"Are you going to say good-bye to Mrs. Cheston?" she asked.

Silvia said "No," shortly. "You can tell her I've no time," she added; and a moment later she got up and took her departure. She met Lady Matheson on the stairs, who turned her round and exclaimed at her beautiful clothes.

"Your stepmother chose all these, of course," she said. "She has such wonderful taste! I think I shall have to ask her to advise me. I'm hopeless when I get to the dressmakers."

Silvia had nothing to say about this, but marched

away, and
It was
use in t

"Wh
gets wo
Well, th
nice Mr
so good
they'll n
are you
round t

"I h
to see h
been ou

Lad
tell you
wings to

Isab
back in
table, a
Cheston

she disr
as a ma
Mary h
underst
suppose
certainly
ready f
they ha
had con

"I
mother

away, and got into the motor-car which was waiting. It was one hired by Helen Ambrose for the girl's use in town.

"What a bear!" exclaimed Lady Matheson. "She gets worse and worse, Belle. Going to Italy is she? Well, that's the best thing that could happen to that nice Mrs. Ambrose! I liked the boy, he's a dear, and so good looking, but Silvia is detestable. I suppose they'll make up a marriage for her very soon. What are you going to do this afternoon? Are you going round to Mrs. Cheston?"

"I have no appointment," said Isabel; "but I do want to see her. Each time I have gone this week she has been out."

Lady Matheson nodded her head and laughed. "I tell you, you've got to look out! She will be taking wings to herself, and flying off one of these days."

Isabel frowned; then, acting on impulse, she went back into the drawing-room, sat down at the writing-table, and scribbled a few lines. She wrote asking Mrs. Cheston to give her some dinner that night. Of course, she dismissed her mother's words as joking ones; but as a matter of fact, she realized now that she and Olivia Mary had drifted a little apart. She could not quite understand the other woman. It hurt Isabel a little to suppose that John's mother did not want her; but certainly of late there had always been a pretty excuse ready for avoiding those intimate little jaunts which they had made together so frequently when first they had come to London.

"I want to see you so much," she wrote. "My mother has a bridge party to-night, and I have put

off all my other engagements. Please don't say that you are not free."

She sent this note round by hand, but received no answer till quite late that afternoon, when a message came through on the telephone, that Mrs. Cheston would be delighted if Miss Matheson would dine with her.

The message gave Isabel quite an unreasonable sense of pleasure and happiness. And she actually counted the minutes till it was time to dress for dinner. When she reached Mrs. Cheston's house, she ran up to the drawing-room, and found Olivia Mary sitting in an arm-chair in front of the fire. She held out her hands gaily like a child to the girl.

"Well, are you going to scold me?" she said. "Haven't I treated you badly? You must forgive me, Belle dear; but I—I think I shall not stay too long in London, it is demoralizing me, it is going to my head like wine. It is so ridiculous at my age to feel that everything is so exciting, so new, isn't it?"

"What *is* your age?" asked Isabel, as she bent down and kissed her. "To me you are just a baby, a darling lamb of a baby!"

"Sometimes I feel like one, but far more often I don't. Then I feel old, oh! so old, Belle! And so tired."

"Well, you are looking radiant. John won't recognize you when he sees you, and it is too absurd that you should be his mother."

"Yes, it is absurd, isn't it?" Olivia Mary said restlessly, "that big, strong, stern, self-controlled, clever man, the son of a little gadfly like me. We are alone

to-night
sent do

"W

"No

to hear

Isab

for a qu

announ

"I

though

"Q

she spo

Ne

the ball

Isabel

Kurtiss

indispo

Wh

to the

of hers

was an

had kn

"Y

end to

watche

Mi

she sat

then sl

closed

"C

are so

room.

to-night," she added, "Gertrude has a headache. She sent down and asked if she might be excused."

"Well, I'm not sorry," said Isabel in her frank way.

"Now, Belle, tell me about everything. I'm dying to hear all about the presents."

Isabel drew a chair, and they sat and talked merrily for a quarter of an hour, then, just as dinner was being announced, Miss Kurtiss joined them.

"I felt better," she said in her cheerless voice, "I thought I would come down."

"Quite right, dear child," said Mrs. Cheston, although she spoke with an effort.

Nevertheless, at dinner she exerted herself to keep the ball of conversation rolling, and every now and then Isabel looked at her wonderingly and admiringly. Miss Kurtiss had very little to say, but though she professed indisposition, she ate a thoroughly good dinner.

When they went upstairs again, Mrs. Cheston went to the piano and played softly and sang. This singing of hers was a revelation to Isabel; that she loved music was an old story, but it was not until lately that Isabel had known that John's mother possessed a voice.

"You wonderful little creature. Is there to be no end to your fascinations?" she queried, as she sat and watched the other woman.

Miss Kurtiss was quite indifferent to the singing, and she sat near the fire reading a book, but every now and then she glanced at the clock. Suddenly Mrs. Cheston closed the piano and moved away from it.

"Oh!" she said, "I forgot to tell you, Belle, there are some mysterious packets for you upstairs in my room. Wouldn't you like to see what is in them?"

"Oh, presents can wait! I'm being spoilt, you see," said Isabel, "but I am getting so many of them." She slipped her arm through Olivia Mary's, and they sauntered across the room together.

As they did so, the door opened, and the butler announced "Mr. Kurtiss."

Isabel felt Mrs. Cheston wince as if she had been hurt sharply.

Angus Kurtiss paused an instant as he saw Miss Matheson. His sister had closed her book, and was looking at him with a curiously strained look on her face.

Olivia Mary paused only a second, then releasing herself from Isabel's hold, she moved forward and held out her hand.

"Oh! Angus, this is an unexpected honour," she said. "Why didn't you dine with us?"

"I've come on business," the young man answered curtly.

He seemed as if he did not see that pretty outstretched hand.

There was an unmistakable hint in his manner, and Miss Matheson took that hint.

"Where did you say the mysterious parcels were, darling?" she asked.

"They're in my wardrobe, I think; but ring for Payne, she will get them for you."

As the door closed, Olivia Mary felt her heart give one great thud, and then she smiled.

"Well, Angus," she said.

He did not answer her at once, he turned to his sister.

"Go and pack your things," he said. "I've got a cab waiting. You'll come away with me to-night."

She
As th
woman l
front of

"Wh

He l

"Yo

want pl
a fit wo
now wha

Mrs.

smile on

"An

"I a

lied abo
sort of

that I'v
about y
shut yo

was bec
recogniz

know ti
were; a
sister av
you kno

"Th

it is sur

She
wonderr
excitem

tremblin

at him :

She obeyed him instantly.

As they were alone there was a little pause, and the woman looked into the hostile, ugly eyes of the man in front of her.

"Why are you taking Gertrude away?"

He laughed.

"You know," he said almost roughly; "but if you want plain words, here they are! Because you are not a fit woman for my sister to be with, because I know now what I have always suspected is true."

Mrs. Cheston was looking at him with a curious smile on her lips.

"And what have you always suspected, Angus?"

"I always suspected my uncle tricked people, and lied about you. I always felt that you were not the sort of woman he gave out that you were, I tell you that I've always felt that there was something wrong about you! Why, it was plain enough to me why you shut yourself up and lived as you've always lived. It was because you were terrified that someone should recognize you. Yes—I guessed all this, but I didn't know till just lately what class of woman you really were; and I've come here to-night not only to take my sister away, but to tell you some plain truths, and to let you know what I mean to do."

"That is good of you," said Olivia Mary. "Because it is sure to be something unpleasant."

She was quite calm, and he looked at her half in wonderment, half in anger; strung up by an exultant excitement, he had thought to strike her in a crouching, trembling heap at his feet; but she was standing looking at him steadily, proudly, she was even sneering.

"I am going to show you up," he said furiously,—
 "and I am going to show up that precious son of yours
 too, who is nothing but a sham and a fraud and a lie!
 John Cheston indeed! calling himself by my uncle's
 name, and taking the money that should have gone to
 those who have a right to it! I tell you I'm going to
 make it hot for him."

This time Olivia Mary made no answer. She was
 staring at the door. While he had been shouting his
 angry threats, her quick ears had caught the sound of
 footsteps on the stairs, and now the door was opened
 sharply, and someone had come in. It was then, and
 only then, that the woman's heart died within her, for it
 was her son who stood in the doorway; her son who
 most surely must have overheard those dreadful words.
 Just for an instant everything was blotted out about
 her, the terror that clutched her was black, bewildering;
 unconsciously she stretched out her hands, and John
 Cheston came up and gripped them in his.

"What does this mean?" he asked; he spoke to the
 other man. "What are you doing here? Didn't I tell
 you never to come near my mother again?"

They faced one another. Angus Kurtiss was
 quivering from head to foot. There was a cold sweat
 on his face, he was white to the lips.

"And do you think I take orders from you? I
 have just been telling that woman why I am here. It
 is to speak the truth at last, and let her know she can't
 go on fooling people any longer, that the day of
 reckoning has come, and it's got to be met."

Olivia Mary clung to her son's hands.

"John—John," she said wildly.

He p
 the man
 he went

"Go
 is no pla

"I ca
 can't l

John

"Are
 you out,

Angu
 Cheston

other's tl
 dog.

The
 Isabel's
 downsta
 paused

situatio
 in her a

quietly,
 called to

"Joh

It se
 fainted,

stagger

He put her aside quite calmly, and he went up to the man standing with his back to the fire-place. As he went he spoke to her.

"Go away, mother," he said to her. "Go away, this is no place for you."

"I can't go away," she answered him brokenly. "I can't! This is where I must be!"

John Cheston looked into his enemy's face.

"Are you going quietly?" he said, "or shall I put you out, you swine!"

Angus Kurtiss's answer was to spring forward; but Cheston was too quick for him; he had his hands at the other's throat just as a dog goes at the throat of another dog.

The scream that left Olivia Mary's lips reached Isabel's ears in the room above; in her haste to get downstairs, the girl almost fell. Just for an instant she paused in the doorway, but instantly she grasped the situation, and hurrying forward she took Mrs. Cheston in her arms as if she had been a child, and then very quietly, but with a tone of command in her voice; she called to her lover.

"John—John, what are you doing? are you mad?"

It seemed to her that the woman in her arms had fainted, for she hung so heavily upon her, that Isabel staggered a little under her weight.

CHAPTER XIX

AT the sound of Isabel's voice Cheston's hands had fallen mechanically to his sides. He stood staring at the girl as if he did not see her. Angus Kurtiss presented a sorry spectacle, the other man had shaken him as though he had been a mere nothing and he was gasping for breath, but there was such terrible rage in his eyes that Isabel was suddenly frightened.

"Come away, let me take you away, darling," she said to Olivia Mary; but the woman only moaned and did not move, and her son still stood staring with a look in his eyes that sent a pang of physical pain through the heart of the girl who loved him. It was Isabel who spoke:

"What are you doing here, John dear? Why didn't you let us know that you were coming?"

Angus Kurtiss answered her.

"I sent for him," he said, huskily; speech was not easy to him at the moment. "I telegraphed for him. I brought him here on purpose, he's got to have his punishment! He has lorded it over us long enough! Now he is going to know what he really is, a man without a name, a man without a father—just a thing of chance, and shame!"

Isabel Matheson loosened her hold of the woman

who sta
had stoc
"Th
always l
trying t
"Th
an hyste
then he
years.
I never
me the
"Hi
contem
She
wrists.
he was
with a
eyes v
rememl
Oliv
standin
eyes th
"I
voice, v
come h
but unl
is not t
in the
but the
sister.
Kurtis
busines
s

who staggered and fell into a chair and in an instant she had stood strong and upright between the two men.

"This man is mad," she said to her lover. "He has always hated you, always been jealous of you, now he is trying to invent things to hurt you."

"There isn't much need to invent," said Kurtiss with an hysterical laugh, "he's only got to question his mother then he'll know what he ought to have known all these years. I told her just now I've always doubted her, but I never thought the luck would come that would give me the proof of what she is."

"Hadn't you better speak out?" said Isabel contemptuously.

She had her two hands twisted round John Cheston's wrists. In such a moment she was almost as strong as he was, but she could feel him holding himself back with a mighty and terrible effort and the look in his eyes was such that it would never die out of her remembrance.

Olivia Mary had risen out of the chair and was standing calmly, she had herself well in grip, in her eyes there was a great light.

"I am going to speak for Angus," she said in a low voice, which was curiously calm and distinct. "He has come here hoping to take everything away from my son, but unfortunately for himself what he thinks is the truth is not the truth. There *was* a story of shame and sorrow in the beginning of my life, a story that was a tragedy, but the woman of that story is now dead. She was my sister. I know," she went on swiftly turning and facing Kurtiss, "I know you've tried to ferret out this old business by underhand means, you have watched and

spied on me, there is no mean thing you have left undone to find out what was hidden, and just lately when you discovered that the man who was going to engage you as a secretary was one who had known me in my early days you thought the rest was going to be quite, quite easy! Why, you have even tried to get information out of this man and when you failed in that you did not hesitate to attempt to search his papers, as you have searched mine, making your way like a thief into his rooms when he was not there." She paused to take breath and then she laughed. "You were in such a hurry, Angus, so eager to strike, that you did not stop to verify your facts. I gave you credit for being a little more clever! You have made a shocking assertion, and what proof have you to take up what you say? None! None! whereas in repudiating what you have just asserted I am in a very different position."

Isabel's heart was thumping like a wild thing in her breast. She was trembling in unison with her lover. She only heard that low clear voice speaking in a dim, far-off way, was only conscious in that same dim far-off way of the amazement which filled her at this other woman's unexpected display of strength and speech.

Mrs. Cheston advanced a step nearer to Kurtiss; her eyes were now blazing.

"You have come here to insult my son, you've done a mad thing, and in your own interests a very foolish thing, for now there will be nothing for you. Do you understand . . . nothing!" Once more she drew nearer to Kurtiss. "Go!" she said. "Go out of this house this moment, and take your sister with you!—Do you hear me? Go!"

She
spoke
at a dis
he had
facts st
had no
of this,
woman
he had
missing
should
up to l
him av
man w
he had
prove t
money
had sa
situati

"I
ended
the la
take i
with s

"I
Olivia
St
Kurti:
of an
move
he pa:
door a

She pointed to the door: and the man to whom she spoke looked at her furtively. She had him absolutely at a disadvantage. What she had said was the truth; he had built up his facts on circumstantial evidence only; facts supplied largely by his jealous imagination; he had no definite proof. He had, of course, been aware of this, but he had counted altogether in having this woman on her knees at the first whisper of his accusation, he had relied on her to supply those links which were missing in the confession which he had promised himself should be wrung from her lips. That she would stand up to him, laugh at him, sneer at him, and finally send him away defeated was a state of affairs for which the man was utterly unprepared. Convinced as he was that he had not made any mistake he was in no position to prove this. Possibly, if he could have afforded time and money he might have been able to substantiate what he had said; meanwhile he was assuredly not master of the situation as he had so confidently expected.

"If I go now," he said, "perhaps you think you've ended things, but you are greatly mistaken! It is not the last of me. I mean to have this gone into. . . . I'll take it into a court of law, you'll have to satisfy me with something more than words."

"I shall be ready when that time comes," said Olivia Mary calmly.

Straightening his collar with trembling hands Kurtiss moved towards the door. Just for the fraction of an instant he paused beside John Cheston; his lips moved as though he would have said something, then he passed on and went out of the room, slamming the door after him.

Isabel still clutched those two wrists and her eyes were still magnetized by the terrible expression on her lover's face. There was complete silence in the room for a while, broken at last by the man.

"I want you to go away, Belle," he said. "I want you to leave us alone."

Olivia Mary had walked to the farther end of the room where there were no lights, and now she was moving slowly towards them again.

"No," said Isabel quietly. "I am not going! I belong to you and you belong to me, and everything to do with you is my business now. I've heard so much, I must hear more."

"Stay then," Cheston answered the girl.

He drew her to him and kissed her, then he turned, and for a moment he buried his face on his folded arms and leaned against the mantelpiece. A moment later he was himself again.

Standing tall, commanding, cruelly strong, he looked at the little woman with the whitened hair and the beautiful tragic eyes.

"I want the truth," he said, "the whole truth."

Just for an instant Olivia Mary closed her eyes. As she was silent her son repeated his last words almost fiercely.

"The truth," he repeated—"the truth, or is there any truth in you?—Has it always been lies? Oh! my God! I begin to see clearly."

She answered him slowly.

"One thing that has always been true," she said, "is that I have loved you as I know now you will never understand. That for you and your safety, your

happin
suffere
thing
upon r
"D
"Wha
just nc
"T
Mary,
that tl
you'd
but I r
can't f
for th
measu
he hac
will n
down-
Th
"Y
shook
"N
"N
going
what y
"J
hoarse
for m
becau:
that l
along
and t

happiness, to give you all my love wanted, for you I have suffered as I hope few women have suffered. Everything that is contrary to my nature has been forced upon me through my love for my son!"

"Don't let's have any heroics," said Cheston, curtly. "What is the truth? The story you gave Angus just now or the story he gave you?"

"The story I gave Angus was a lie," said Olivia Mary, "a lie spoken with a purpose. Oh! I know that this is the end, I know that you hate me, that you'd like to stamp me out of life, out of remembrance, but I mean to make things safe for you before I go. He can't prove anything! Anthony Cheston was too clever for that. He made things too safe. He took legal measures to secure you his name: he willed everything he had to you, so, though Angus may try and try, he will never succeed in hurting you; he can't drag you down—he can't take anything from you."

The man turned to the girl beside him.

"You must go away, Belle," he said; but she only shook her head.

"No—no, no," she answered with a touch of passion.

"No, let her stay," said Olivia Mary. "She is going to be your wife, it is only right she should share what you are going to know."

"There will be no wife for me," the man said hoarsely, his voice broken. "There will be no place for me. You say—you say you have done all this because you loved me. God! It's a queer sort of love that builds up a man's future on lies, sends him out along a path that he thinks he has every right to tread, and then lets him find himself as—as I find myself

to-night! . . . Everything has been taken from me! Everything that has been sacred to me has just been torn out by the roots! Do you call that love? Why, by to-morrow this may be known by the world—I may be pointed at by everybody. Oh! I can't realize it, I—I—I can't take it in all at once!"

The mother's face worked convulsively, there was such agony in her eyes that Isabel's own eyes filled with tears.

"Don't let us talk any more to-night," the girl said brokenly, "we are all upset, everything seems distorted. I know—I know you've got a good explanation for everything, haven't you, dear?" she said, holding out her hand to the other woman.

"Put your arms round him," answered the mother. "He'll never let me do that again; and hold him very tightly, for you must be mother and wife too. We can't put this off! Now that what I have fought all my life to prevent has happened I've got to go through with it!" She sat down, pushing back the hair from her brows, and was silent for a few seconds. "You have heard about my early childhood? I'm going to make it all very short. I won't go into details. I'll just give you plain, simple facts. Till I was sixteen I was a child, something wild, untamed, untaught almost. My father—I know it now—was not sane. There was a sister, though you have never heard of her. She was a little older, and she died just when we might have been so much to one another, for she was all I had! I don't think my father regarded us as being human, he never cared for us. Well . . . when I was sixteen, just sixteen running wild on the moors, and the world

was black and bleak to me because my sister had been taken from me . . . a man came into my life, he made everything different. Oh! It was so wonderful," her voice quivered, her eyes shone, "even now, though it is so long ago, and I have gone through so much, I feel the wonder of it," she said. "I suppose it was a very ordinary story; he took me away, he couldn't marry me—there was a wife already, but he loved me and I . . . worshipped him. I thought he was the greatest man in the world." She moved forward, sitting in a crouching attitude with her hands gripped together. Isabel could not look at her; tears were blinding her. John Cheston had turned round; he stood with his back to his mother.

"Suddenly I was left all alone," the woman said, and there was an echo of a far-away anguish in her voice now. "He could not be always with me—and once when he went he never came back. He used to take care of me, and after in the days when he did not come I had no money. I nearly died for want of food." She stretched out her hands so small, so lovely in shape and colour—"I have done everything with these hands," she said with a pitiful laugh. "I have scrubbed floors, I have worked in a factory, I have made cheap clothes, I didn't care what I did as long as I could give my baby food and keep him warm in the winter."

Isabel Matheson felt choked and the tears now ran down her cheeks. To speak was beyond her.

"Yes, I worked where and how I could," the mother went on. "Then one day a man spoke to me in the street. He was an artist. He said he had been looking for just such a head and face as mine, and would I sit to him as a model? Oh! he was so good to me, like

a father—the father I never knew. He gave me more money than I had ever earned, so that I could have a decent room to live in, and my baby wanted for nothing. And in those days when I sat to him, I met many others who were kind to me. One of them is in London now, a man called George Baldwin. He cared for me very much, but, except as a dear, dear friend, I never cared for him. And then there was Anthony Cheston. He had known me well in the days when he came to my father, and he had always been so kind, so good to my poor neglected sister and myself. When John died, Mr. Cheston was one of the trustees to the estate, and he found papers telling about me. In his quiet, wise way Anthony kept this secret to himself, so that there should be no harm or hurt to anyone, and in a little while he came to look for me, and that was how it began." She got up and stood again in the old familiar child-like attitude, her hands hanging straight to her sides, her face wistful; but now it was no longer young, it was pinched, it had almost a withered look. "He knew I could never love him, but—he made me care for him in another way. It is wrong to say that the world is full of wicked people, cruel people, there are so many good ones in it. I was alone—quite alone, and this man took care of me, as if I had been his child. For a long, long time I would not listen to Anthony, but at last he made me give way and so I married him. The rest I need not tell you—for it is just—all that you know about me."

Her son had now moved from the fireplace and was pacing the room; he passed quite close to her, she could have touched him had she dared.

"An
"you thi
paltry li

"Ye
care tha
ever any
measure
love you

The

"Oh
got to
future."

He t

"Yc
you mu
like thi
I am ne
marry r

"De
was?"

you eve
want an

"Yc
father a

But

"No
me. I

to-night
story ar

The
she sm
people

"And having told me this," he said, speaking at last, "you think—you have stopped Angus's lips with the paltry lie you gave him to-night?"

"Yes," she answered, "because Anthony took every care that this story I gave could be substantiated if ever any difficulty arose. He did that when he took measures to give you his name, when he had learnt to love you and to be so proud of you."

The man winced.

"Oh! we'll leave all that," he said. "What we've got to look at is the immediate future, the practical future."

He turned to Isabel.

"You know you have got to think this out, Belle, you mustn't take any decision in a moment of emotion like this. I give you back your freedom, my dear. I am not what I thought I was when I asked you to marry me."

"Do you suppose it matters to me who your father was?" Isabel answered. "I love you, I have loved you ever since I can remember. You are the man I want and I won't give you up."

"You will have to put the matter before your father and mother," he answered her almost coldly.

But she shook her head.

"No; this has got to be settled between you and me. I am not going to tell a soul what we have heard to-night. It doesn't belong to us, it is your mother's story and your mother's secret: we stand outside it."

The woman who listened shivered suddenly and then she smiled, but she said nothing. The two young people were clinging hand in hand.

"You know, dearest," the man said hoarsely, "I have got to face things! Angus will be nasty; even if he can't quite destroy me, if he can't prove what he believes, he can throw dirt at me, he can make all . . . all this horrible business public!"

"I am not afraid," said Isabel. "Your mother says he can never prove anything—we know what he is; he can always be bought if necessary. That is the practical future."

"And what about me?" asked the man with that break in his voice again. "Shall I ever be the same again? Won't this go into me like poison? Oh! I have been so proud of myself, so proud of my father and of all that belonged to him. Only this week I've been sitting in judgment upon another man because I thought him my inferior . . . my inferior when he could own his father and I . . ." he stopped, then he said in another voice: "When we have children how shall I feel about it then?"

"They shall be proud of you, for you are a man to be proud of!" answered the girl.

They were looking into each other's eyes, they were thinking wholly of themselves; and the little woman who had loved with such a martyrdom of love, whose love had been so very beautiful even though it had been surrounded by so much that was wrong, misguided sometimes, stood alone.

"All these things will work themselves out, darling," said Isabel, "and nothing will matter, when we are together."

"Suppose there should come a day when you'll hate me and despise me?"

She s
"I co
"Kis
dearest."

He b
face on
tears th
creature

Upst
apprehen
gone qui
a big ro
sister ha

"An
confided
with Mr

Payr
going th
though
privilege
suggesti

Afte
a wrap
go to be
Oliv

"I
night."

"It
"You'll

"I c
Cheston

She shook her head quite gravely.

"I could never do that, for I shall always love you!"

"Kiss me, Belle," said the man. "Kiss me, my dearest."

He bent forward and the mother saw him bury his face on the girl's neck. She felt rather than saw the tears that were scalding his eyes; and like a blind creature she turned and felt her way out of the room.

* * * * *

Upstairs Payne was waiting nervously, a little apprehensively for her mistress to come. The news had gone quickly through the household that there had been a big row of some sort and that Mr. Kurtiss and his sister had been shown the way out of the house at last.

"And not an hour too soon, neither," Denton had confided to the maid; like herself he had been in service with Mrs. Cheston for many years.

Payne at a glance saw that her mistress had been going through a trying time. She asked no questions, though she might have regarded herself as being privileged to do so, but waited on Mrs. Cheston with a suggestion of tenderness in her manner.

After she had removed the dinner gown and brought a wrap she ventured to suggest that her mistress should go to bed at once.

Olivia Mary shook her head.

"I have some writing to do," she said. "Good-night."

"It is very late, ma'am," the maid remarked. "You'll not be very long, will you?"

"I don't know, I don't think so. Good-night," Mrs. Cheston said a second time.

When she was alone she walked to the door and turned the key in the lock, and then she went forward a step or two and stood looking about her almost helplessly. It seemed so strange. The end had come. For years she had been walking so carefully, always conscious that one little false step made and she would tread on danger; and now the worst had happened. It was hardly to be realized all at once. That spell of curiously fantastic happiness which had fallen upon her during the last week or so had brought her away for a time from the old atmosphere; now it was back about her again charged with the chill certain knowledge that she had lost her son. Not for one single instant did she delude herself. She knew every note in his nature; where another might find excuse and even pardon after a time, John would see only the blackness of the wrong, a wrong done to himself and consequently unpardonable; and she understood so well too what was passing in Isabel's mind. It had needed only those few words of hers telling so haltingly the story of her life to sweep away from this girl that beautiful love which she had lavished so freely, a love touched with reverence. Later on, perhaps, when she held her first-born in her arms Isabel might drift back a little to where she had been, but now, now she was conscious only of a repugnance. To her virginal, untried, untempted nature the ugly side and not the pathetic struck fiercely.

"Poor children!" Olivia Mary said to herself. This would be so terrible to them. They had never known any trouble till now.

That was what hurt her, what she had always

dreaded, to suffer. I would up
bruise of t

The w
hot aching
the pain
she calm
sat down
one came
and, findi
time calli
for an i
herself so
her coura
she turne

John
disordere
a fear th

"Wh
shut it b
his motl
then hu
tomfoole

She l

"Dor

"I a
leave yo

"Tha
said. "

what yc
Many a

dreaded, the fact that if he knew the truth her boy must suffer. Isabel's love would comfort, would console, would uphold him ; but it could never take away the bruise of the wound the mother's hand had struck.

The woman pressed her hands to her head and her hot aching eyes. She could have prayed for tears only the pain was too great for relief. Gradually, however, she calmed herself, and going to her writing-table, she sat down and took up her pen. As she did so some one came to her door, some one who tried to open it and, finding it locked, shook it violently, at the same time calling to her for admittance. It was her son. Just for an instant Olivia Mary was frightened, she felt herself so small, so weak, but after that little hesitation, her courage came back, and, hurrying across the room, she turned the key in the lock and opened the door.

John Cheston was breathing heavily, his hair was disordered, and in his eyes there was a new expression, a fear that was almost horror.

"Why did you lock your door?" he asked. He shut it behind him as he spoke, and he suddenly gripped his mother's two hands. "I—I——" he stammered, then huskily he said: "There must be no d——d tomfoolery you understand! No rotten nonsense!"

She looked at him and his meaning came to her.

"Don't be afraid," she said.

"I am afraid," he answered. "I am not going to leave you till you promise to do all I want you to."

"That won't be very difficult," the little woman said. "I swear to do all you want. Perhaps what—what you thought would be an easy way out for me. Many a time I have felt like that, but I always kept

on for two reasons, because I didn't want to spoil all I had done; because I wanted to be here to stand by you, to see that you were safe if—if the truth came out. And there is a third reason," she added, "I am a coward! Yes, I'm a coward; though I'm getting old I don't want death, I want life."

She moved a little away from the door and he moved with her. Suddenly he loosened her hands and he steadied himself by the bed.

"We were afraid," he muttered. "Belle sent me." Then he put his hands suddenly up to his head. "Oh! the pain's awful. I believe I'll go mad."

"Lie down here," said his mother. She heaped the cushions together on the couch and almost easily she pushed him down on it. "Lie still," she said. "I'll get you some bromide."

But he refused this almost roughly.

"No, no; I'm going to keep awake. I've got to watch you. If you lied—if you've been lying all your life you can lie to me even in this."

He remained very still for a few minutes and his mother stood and looked at him.

"You are afraid that I—that I shall make a scandal? Of course it's only natural that you would think like that. How shall I convince you?"

He opened his eyes and he looked at her steadily.

"I'm going to give you a chance," he said. "You don't want me to tell you that this has come between us, changing every feeling I ever had for you. Well, I'm going to give you a chance. Just now you said that all you had done was because—because you loved me. It isn't my idea of love; but I'm going to accept

it as being
me to go
care, then
in the fut
your min
world. Y
that I sh
I can't tr

"If I
mother s
to be qu
few hour
some onc
to take j
of doing
he won't
wanted?
never be
doubt m
forgive n
going to
I am tel
said soft
whatever
I shall
You ha
morrow.

His
he looke

"Yes
him the
round or

it as being the best that you can do, and so if you want me to go on thinking that you cared for me and still care, then you are going to let me order your life entirely in the future. I dare say you've got all sorts of ideas in your mind. You think of going to the other side of the world. Well, I don't intend to let you! It's necessary that I should know what you are doing, because you see I can't trust you. I shall never trust you again."

"If I am to live even in the shadow of your life," his mother said, "that will make my happiness. I'm going to be quite frank with you. A little while ago, only a few hours ago, I thought of a different life. There is some one who loves me, who wants me, who is content to take just the husks if I will go to him. I had thought of doing this. I said to myself, when John has his wife he won't want me. Why should I not go where I am wanted? but to-night has shown me that there could never be any happiness for me away from you. You doubt me, you can't believe in me. I don't ask you to forgive me, for I know that will never come; but I am going to make you realize that when I say I love you—I am telling the truth." She paused a moment, then said softly: "Be content, whatever is your will is mine; whatever can be done to make your happiness secure I shall do it. Now I want you to try and go to sleep. You have been dreadfully upset, you will be ill to-morrow. Won't you let me give you some bromide?"

His eyes had closed and now they opened again and he looked at her.

"Yes," he said half sullenly; and when she brought him the water and the cachet he swallowed it and turned round on the pillows.

"I can't bear my own room to-night," he said. "I'll sleep here."

She took the warm silken cover from her bed and laid it over him. She put out the lights and cautiously made up the fire. The end had come and he was lost to her. Yet for a few more hours she could pretend that he was hers. Just for a few hours she could go back to those old far-away days when she had sat in the firelight and watched her baby sleeping. To-morrow everything would be clear to him—clear and hideous; to-night he would sleep and forget; the thought illumined the woman's heart.

When she was sure he was unconscious of all she did and could not resent it, she went to the couch and bending over him she kissed him farewell.

V
unwilli
messa
"P
night :
It
howev
arrived
tender
Th
a fire v
the gir
tightly
"Y
He
till ab
to my
found
and br
him ar
he mc
"we c
"Y
"I

CHAPTER XX

VERY early the next morning Isabel Matheson was round at the house which she had left so unwillingly the night before. She gave her maid a message to deliver to her mother.

"Please say that Mrs. Cheston was very unwell last night and that I have gone round to see how she is."

It was not Olivia Mary whom she intended to see, however, it was John. He was still upstairs when she arrived and she sent him up a scribbled note, just a few tender words entreating him to see her.

They met in a little room in which, early as it was, a fire was burning cheerily; and when they were alone the girl put her arms round the man and held him very tightly.

"You've slept?" she asked.

He said "Yes. I—I slept on the couch in her room till about three o'clock this morning: then I went back to my own. I thought it would look so strange if they found I hadn't been to bed." He sat down suddenly and buried his face in his hands, and Isabel knelt beside him and put her arms round him once again. Suddenly he moved away from her. "Belle," he said hoarsely, "we can't go through with this."

"You are not going to give me up, Jack?"

"I don't know what to do, what to think!"

"Let me think for you," said Isabel. Then she clung to him again. "Whatever happens, darling, don't send me away. You don't want me to suffer: you don't want me to break my heart?"

And he answered her again.

"I don't know what to do. Don't you see, Belle, this is something which your father ought to know," and when she said: "No! No!" reiterating it almost emphatically, he still repeated the words. "Your father ought to know!"

"I don't want to do anything that is wrong to father, or to make you do anything that is wrong; but I want to be your wife, Jack—now more than ever I want to belong to you; and if we tell father he may——"

Her lips trembled, she could not say any more, only she clung to him with something like despair in her face.

John Cheston turned and took her in his arms for a moment, then he released her.

"Perhaps," he said to her unsteadily, "in a little while I shall see things as you see them; but just now I can only realize the one great truth, the one ugly truth, that I have no proper place, that I am nothing! Oh! every now and then I feel as if I couldn't breathe, Belle!" he said, hoarsely.

"John dear," said the girl, "let us get married at once. There is really nothing to stop us. We can think out some excuse to explain things to mother and to father and we'll stop all the arrangements." Isabel was trembling. "I can't leave you, darling," she said. "I *must* be with you now."

Ho
it go.
seen y
Fi
plea t
"I
Th
that
Belle
must
hide,
to spe
me, de
know-
He
at the
"A
to star
Isa
go to
remen
my fat
me ou
babies
by a fi
She br
Her t
seen h
not le
would
his; a
hand :

He took her hand and he kissed it and then he let it go. "I can do nothing, make no plans till I have seen your father."

Fighting for her love the girl put forward the first plea that came to her mind.

"Is it loyal to—her—Jack?"

The young man stiffened. "Shall I wait and let that beast take his story to Sir Thomas? Oh! Belle dear, there must be always some deceit—we must live, always knowing we've got something to hide, but where it is possible for me to be open and to speak the truth I must do this! Don't argue with me, dearest," he said immediately. "Your father *must* know—that's final!"

He brushed the hair from his brow and he looked at the girl he loved with a mist before his eyes.

"And if he decides against us, Belle, we shall have to stand by that," he added firmly.

Isabel was very pale. "If you feel it is your duty to go to father I must not stop you," she answered; "but remember, Jack, you owe a duty to me as well as to my father. You have chosen me and you cannot put me out of your life! We are a man and a woman, not babies, and our marriage is not a question to be settled by a family conclave—it is life—our life . . . Jack! . . ." She broke off suddenly and sitting down began to cry. Her tears hurt the man most poignantly, he had not seen her cry since she was a little girl; but he dared not let himself comfort her, for he was afraid that she would break down his purpose, urge her will against his; and this he must not let her do! He just let his hand rest on her head for a moment; then he walked

away and gave her time to calm herself; then he turned. "I am coming back with you, Belle. I'll see Sir Thomas at once."

"Please lend me your handkerchief, Jack. Mine is so small it's no use," said Isabel; and as he gave her the handkerchief she dabbed her eyes and then she pinned her veil carefully over her tear-stained face. "You ought to have something to eat before you go out," she said.

It was so strange to hear Isabel speaking in that broken, tremulous voice!

"I can't eat; I can't drink," John Cheston said. "I can do nothing till I have seen your father."

He held out his hand to her and they went together to the door. Just before they left the room Isabel paused.

"You—you don't think you ought to let her know?"

She saw him stiffen again and set his lips in a hard fashion. "Wait a moment, Belle," he said. "I've got to talk to you about her. Last night after you left I went to her room, I don't exactly know what I did say to her, but I insisted that she should not go away, that she should be near me all the time. I wanted her to feel that I did not trust her. I wouldn't budge till I made her swear that she would do all I wanted; but now, now I—I see things differently. It would never be possible for me to live having her near. She can go where she likes; and when she likes. Of course, I shall have to take care of her; but I only hope to God we need never cross each other's paths again."

Isabel winced. She was very far from being capable of understanding the nature of the woman

who
this
possib
how t
TI
Sloan
turne
"Y
know.
father
know
"Y
young
Fc
before
event
was c
but a
his de
and s
"I
to br
impor
Si
looked
veil, a
crying
"I
Is
outdo
a long
to dri

who had given birth to John ; but she was nearer to this comprehension than he was ! Words were not possible to her ; but she felt a little sick as she realized how terrible the man's anger was against his mother !

They had a taxi called and drove in silence to Sloane Street. Just as they alighted at the door Isabel turned to her lover.

"Whatever happens," she said, "mother must not know. I—I see that you are right. We've got to tell father ; but, John dear, if mother is told, I don't exactly know what will happen !"

"We must leave this to Sir Thomas, dearest," the young man answered.

Fortunately, Lady Matheson never left her room before twelve o'clock, so whatever was likely to eventuate they would be safe for a time as far as she was concerned. Sir Thomas would be down directly, but acting on impulse Isabel ran up and knocked at his door. She stood just a moment inside the room and spoke hurriedly, nervously :

"Daddy," she said, "Jack has come back with me to breakfast. He wants to see you. It is—is rather important !"

Sir Thomas turned from his dressing-table and looked at his girl. He saw through the thickness of the veil, and he frowned as he realized that she had been crying.

"All right," he said. "I'll be down directly."

Isabel went on to her own room. She took off her outdoor things and she bathed her face and sat for a long time at the open window to let the air help to drive away the marks on her face. She shivered

more than once as she sat there; but not from cold. She was in the grip of a great emotion. Something had been awakened in her nature which she had never known she possessed till now. In these moments of dreadful suspense and waiting she felt herself unconsciously drifting into comprehensive sympathy with the mother whom during the last few hours she had found herself judging so hardly.

The breakfast gong had sounded some time ago; but Isabel could not bring herself to go downstairs. She knew her father to be a very broad-minded man; but she did not know what attitude he would take in such a strange case as this one. After a while she left the window and began to walk to and fro in her room. It was so unusual for her to feel ill; but all her strength and her calmness had merged into a sickening sense of excitement and fear mingled, and the result was that she trembled and even staggered a little as she walked. Suddenly there was a tap at her door, and as she called out huskily "Come in" the handle was turned and her father entered the room. He took her in his arms and he kissed her, and he patted her as if she had been a child, then he said:

"Go down and have some breakfast. John has gone. By-and-by you and I will have a little chat, Belle."

"Have you had your breakfast, darling?" the girl asked him.

He said "Yes; at least, as much as I want. I have sent a few words round to that poor soul. I am waiting to have a message from her. I hope she will be able to see me."

I:
again
"
Sir T
on b
may
"
are :
want
know
"
quiet
you ;
get :
one's
say,
with
new
howe
up fi
smoc
quen
that
persc
well
fail u
those
cultie
I'll t
perha
"
see—

Isabel kissed her father, and then began to cry again.

"Now come! come!—this is nonsense, Belle," said Sir Thomas. "Why, you have always prided yourself on being a soldier's daughter; and, however badly you may feel, you can't give way, you know."

"I'm crying," Isabel said, brokenly, "because you are such a comfort. Do you know, daddy, I didn't want to tell you anything, but Jack said you must know. I was so afraid!"

"Well, that was natural!" said Sir Thomas, very quietly. "This has knocked you all to little bits, both of you; but, then, you see, trouble is new to you. As you get a little older, Belle, you will realize that to live one's life one has to be a bit of a gambler; that is to say, you've got to cover over all your disappointments with hope—you've always got to believe that there is a new chance just waiting, ready to be snatched, and that however badly you may be knocked about, you'll stand up firm and strong at the end! Things have been too smooth for you and your young man up to now, consequently your unhappiness is the greatest unhappiness that any human being has ever known! And the person through whom your unhappiness has come is—well!"—Sir Thomas shrugged his shoulders—"words fail us to describe her! Now, don't let your mother see those red eyes, or we shall be having no end of difficulties. If you don't feel equal to going downstairs, I'll tell them to send you some breakfast up here; perhaps that would be better?"

"I think it would be better," said Isabel. "You see—I—I do sometimes have my breakfast in my room

just to please mother." She smiled. "She puts it in her head at times that I am doing too much, and that I ought to rest."

"Well, let her prescribe for you this morning," said Sir Thomas, and he kissed her again, and then made her smile into his face. "No more tears," he said, "and just leave everything to me."

As he went down the stairs, Sir Thomas was given a telephone message.

"Mrs. Cheston's kind regards, and she would be very glad if Sir Thomas would call as suggested."

"I'll walk," said Isabel's father to himself.

The distance between Sloane Street and the house where Mrs. Cheston was staying was a short one, and Sir Thomas soon disposed of it.

Acting on his advice, John had gone to his club for breakfast, and had promised to remain there till Sir Thomas communicated with him. As matters were arranged, Cheston ought to return to York that afternoon, and Sir Thomas had every intention of seeing that the young man carried this into effect. When he inquired for Mrs. Cheston, he was asked to wait a few minutes, then Payne came to him.

"My mistress is not very well this morning, sir," she said; "she wants to know, would you mind going up to her room?"

"Why, of course not," said Sir Thomas. "Can I find my way?"

"I'll take you, sir," said Payne.

They found Mrs. Cheston sitting near the fire, wrapped in a dressing-gown. Payne had loosely coiled up her hair. She looked very fragile. The white of

her go
of her
and lo
fear in
fashion
bendin

"I
name
my he
you h
wasn't

Sh
then s

"I
upset

"A
blows
downs
sat do
up, yo
Mary.

Sh
"Y

"I've
when
with r
up my
I have

"Wha
take h

"Y
than t

her gown matched the white of her face and the white of her hair. She gave Sir Thomas no greeting, but sat and looked at him. There was pleading and there was fear in her look. He answered both in his own simple fashion. As Payne left them alone he went across and, bending over her, he kissed her.

"I've only one reproach," he said. "Why in God's name didn't you trust me? I tell you, it goes through my heart when I think of what you have done, how you have stood up to this, all by your lone self! And wasn't I your friend—Anthony's friend?"

She covered her face with her hands a moment, and then she said—

"If you are going to be very kind to me you'll upset me dreadfully. I—I don't want you to be kind."

"All right," said Sir Thomas. "We'll come to blows in a little while." He had left his coat and hat downstairs, and he pulled a chair close beside her and sat down in it. "Now, we are going to fix everything up, you and I," he said. "Give me your hand, Olivia Mary."

She put her small, cold hand into his.

"You don't know how many, many times," she said, "I've been on the verge of telling you. That day, when you came to me so frankly, so straightforwardly with my boy's letter in your hand, I—I tried—to get up my courage—but I was so afraid! Not for myself, I have never been afraid for myself," she said, simply. "What frightened me was the thought that you might take his happiness away."

"You ought to have trusted me a little bit more than that," said Sir Thomas, a trifle gruffly.

"Well, I don't know," she answered. "It is—it is a hard thing to tell, and must be a hard blow to you——"

"Somehow, I don't look on it in that light," said Sir Thomas Matheson. "It might have been different if John had been sprung on me unawares; if he had been some stranger whom Belle had picked up casually and whose character and general disposition had to be guessed at, not known; but here I am face to face with a young fellow whom I have known since he was so high"; and Sir Thomas put his hand a little distance from the ground. "There isn't anything about John I haven't known. I'm not going to endow him with heaven-born qualities, but he is clean, and he is straight, for if ever I had wanted a proof of his honesty, I've had it to-day; and so, my dear, things are going to stand! Now"—he put up his hand protestingly—"now, no tears! I have just told Isabel that she is a soldier's daughter, but you—well, you are something more—you are a soldier all through! I take off my hat to you, Olivia Mary, not because of the deceit, though that seems rather a hard word to use, but because of your pluck, of your strength, and of your quixotic readiness to sacrifice yourself at any moment for the benefit of your boy! I don't know that I am altogether surprised at what I have heard to-day," Sir Thomas went on, as he got up and stood with his back to the fire, "because once or twice before your husband died he spoke to me a trifle ambiguously about you and your future. You know, of course (I told you this at the time), that he had confided to me the fact that he was in bad health, and I attributed his anxiety about you and what would lie

in the
to him
that h
everyt

"I
softly.
was tl
could
all th
on his
Si
of all
St

"I
with
Angu
first
he wa
. . .]
Olivia
cowar
two
sneer
being
witho
and I

"
where
to tel
he di
being
secre

in the future to his uncertainty as to what might happen to him. But I understand him differently now! I feel that he would have liked, if he could, to have told me everything. I wish he had done this!" he added.

"He was thinking of the boy," the woman said, softly. "He was so fond of Jack—so proud of him. It was through that that the deceit grew. . . . Anthony could not do enough for Jack. He—put him before all the world; even before those who had a just claim on him,"

Sir Thomas said: "Ah! and this was at the bottom of all your goodness to that fellow and his sister?"

She corrected him eagerly.

"Not altogether . . . I really wanted to make friends with Angus and his sister because I always dreaded Angus. . . . You see he was just growing up when I first met him and I felt . . . I had an instinct—that he was not sure of me. And of course he was jealous! . . . I have always felt it was so natural that jealousy!" Olivia Mary looked up at Sir Thomas. "It wasn't all cowardice!" she said. "Though I was afraid of those two strange people with their cold eyes and their sneers I was always sorry for them. I couldn't help being sorry. It was a grief to me that Anthony died without doing what he ought to have done for Angus—and I——"

"Ah!" said Sir Thomas a second time, "now this is where I come in! Anthony could not bring himself to tell me anything about you, but there was one thing he did tell me, Olivia Mary, and now that matters are being laid out so plainly I am going to share this secret with you. Do you know why your husband

made no provision in his will for Angus Kurtiss? It was because he had come up against the real nature of his nephew in the ugliest fashion; because he had found out Angus to be most dishonourable, utterly untrustworthy! It would have been a far better business if he had handed this young chap over to his just punishment; but he stuck at that! I believe," Isabel's father added, "he told me about this business because he may have thought it would be useful knowledge. And you see he was right! because this old story clears the air to a certain extent now. Do you take me? . . . No! . . . well, what I mean is this. You can put all ideas out of your mind about your boy having robbed Angus Kurtiss, for I am in a position to tell you that if John had never been in existence Kurtiss would have been no nearer getting any of your husband's money! Anthony refused to prosecute, but from the day that he knew what Angus was he washed his hands of his nephew!"

Olivia Mary's white face was turned upward. Her heart was in her eyes.

"How you help me!" she said. "How you help me!"

Sir Thomas was silent for a moment. His brows were contracted.

"And now, as I've been telling John, the one person to deal with Kurtiss at this moment is myself," he said abruptly when he spoke again. "He will go on the supposition that you will hush this up, and that in all probability I should be the very last person to be told anything: consequently it will take the wind out of his sails a bit when I approach him. There must be no

questi
decisiv
natural
but sha
night:
public
dear (C
ground
wants
proper
self in
put all
know t
happene
that w
fully;
so far
how, y
"It
Mary:
"H
be very
"J
"C
be the
John's
hit in
wonde
differe
by the
sorts
shown

question of a bargain with him," said Sir Thomas decisively. "He has got to be brought to heel naturally. I shall let him bluster as much as he likes, but shall maintain the position that you took up last night: namely, that if he chooses to make this matter public we are perfectly indifferent. Don't you see, my dear Olivia Mary, he hasn't got a case. On what ground could he bring an action against you? If he wants to make out that he has been defrauded of his proper share of his uncle's estate, well, he is putting himself in the fire: because I shan't spare him! I shall put all my cards on the table! I intend to let him know that his uncle gave me the whole story of what happened just six months before he died, and I think that will put the pot on him," said Sir Thomas cheerfully; "but somehow or other I don't think it will get so far as that. His need for money will queer him; anyhow, you leave him to me."

"It is good of you—not—not to hate me," Olivia Mary said.

"Hate you!" said Sir Thomas. "That wouldn't be very easy!"

"John hates me!" she answered.

"Oh! give him time! I don't say that it will ever be the same thing again. I don't think it will. I know John's type too well. He has been hit very hard, and hit in the most vital part of him: still, time works wonders—we all know that, and he'll come to look differently on things a year or so hence. He told me, by the way," said Sir Thomas, "that he enforced all sorts of promises from you last night. Well, I've shown him that what he suggested was not only

impossible but would be in a sense disastrous! I am going to hurt you a bit, my dear; but I've got to tell you the truth."

"Shall I tell it to you instead?" said Olivia Mary. "This truth is that I must never be near him, Sir Thomas. I must as a matter of fact cease to exist." She shrugged her shoulders and she smiled faintly. "I suppose if I had been made of different stuff, I should not be here talking to you now. I should have solved the problem in a very simple fashion, but—I'm not really made of heroic material and though I have lost everything—I don't want to die!"

"Die!" said Sir Thomas in his cheery way. "Good God! I should think not! You've got to live. Why, you haven't lived since Anthony went! You have had nothing but a long spell of imprisonment."

She got up, wrapping the white robe about her, and she moved restlessly to the window. Standing there she said:

"Aren't there any questions you want to ask? I'll tell you everything."

Sir Thomas frowned and bit his lip. He was silent for an instant and then he said brusquely:

"Well, I don't want to ask the question—that I am sure you understand—still, perhaps I had better know—what sort your boy's father was."

She paused a moment, and then caught her breath, then spoke a name almost in a whisper, and the man standing on the hearthrug looked at her in amazement.

"So that's the blood that runs in John's veins! That's the true story of a man I loved and honoured! I knew that he had made a hash of things as far as his

marriage
said g
whole

She
her ha
repeated
before
especial
sake of
factory

She
instead

"H
would
but yo
time .

life was

"I

Thoma

"St

Olivia

two pe

married

faithful

written

has alw

told me

friends

would

Olivia

"becau

Antho

marriage went, but——” Sir Thomas paused, then he said gently: “Do you feel equal to telling me the whole story?”

She came back and sat down in the chair. Folding her hands on her lap and not looking at him, she repeated all that she had told John and Isabel the night before; and the man who listened winced once or twice, especially when she spoke of those days when for the sake of keeping life in her child she had toiled in a factory and slaved as a household drudge.

She had no reproach against the father of her child, instead she had explanations.

“He would have done everything for me . . . he would have made me his wife if that had been possible, but you know he died very suddenly: there was no time . . . I always felt glad he never knew how hard life was for me after he had gone. . . .”

“I don't think I want to hear any more,” said Sir Thomas.

“Still, there is a little more you must hear,” said Olivia Mary. “I've told you that there were one or two people who were such good friends to me before I married Anthony. One of these good friends has been faithful to me all these years. Now and again he has written to me from some far-away place, and the letter has always carried the same message. He has always told me that I was the one woman, and that if I wanted friendship, sympathy or help while life was in him he would come to me. He has asked for nothing,” said Olivia Mary, “because,” she smiled that fugitive smile, “because he knew I had nothing to give him, just as Anthony knew.” Her face was contracted for an

instant, then she went on speaking very quickly. "Sometimes I have wished that I had been differently made, that it might have been possible for me to have cut my heart into little pieces, and to have given these little pieces out here and there as lots of other women do. Perhaps it was because I had such a strange beginning, because my early life was so barren, that made me different. I don't know; I only know that when I learnt what it meant to love—it meant all life to me; and many and many a time after I married Anthony I hated myself because I felt I was disloyal, because it might have seemed that I had forgotten!"

Sir Thomas said nothing, for here he was a little out of his depth, and she, realizing this, smiled at him faintly.

"Now I am going to tell you what I have settled to do."

He looked at her keenly. "Nothing foolish or rash, I hope?"

She shook her head. "Didn't I tell you I'm a coward? well, my dear, dear friend, what I am going to do is very selfish. I'll tell you what I mean. Just now you said that in time John may change; he may even forget all that has just happened; but you don't tell me what my life is to be while I am waiting for this change to come. Oh!" she said, "I'm frightened to stay here and suffer. I—I've been so strong; but that is all over! I know," though her lips were quivering she looked Sir Thomas steadily in the face, "I know that I *could* not stay on near him—only to be outside his life and to realize that he is keeping me outside."

Sir
asked
Jus
colour,
nervou
"I
to cut i
to pro
Englan
As the
and old
good as
keep ou
"I
should
worst
much!
She
"I
John—
Sir
"Suppo
and cal
practica
man m
you kn
thing."
"I'n
care of
such a
more, a
Perhaps
U

Sir Thomas did not speak for a moment ; then he asked her : " Well, what have you settled to do ? "

Just for an instant Olivia Mary's face was hot with colour, and she brushed her hair away from her brow nervously.

" I am going to run away," she said. " I am going to cut myself—right out—from old things—I am going to promise to marry George Baldwin. He is to leave England almost immediately. I shall go with him." As the hot colour receded from her face, it looked worn and old. " Remember," she said, " even you, kind and good as you are, have just suggested to me that I must keep out of John's way."

" I certainly had no thought of suggesting that you should take yourself out of things entirely. That is the worst of you emotional women, you exaggerate so much ! "

She answered this testy speech almost passionately.

" I tell you I *can't* stay on here as things are. John—"

Sir Thomas came and sat down beside her again. " Suppose just for the moment," he said to her kindly and calmly, " suppose we leave John out—and let us be practical. You must not do anything in a hurry. This man may be all you say he is, but it is years since you knew him and—you may be doing the wrong thing."

" I'm not afraid," said Olivia Mary. " He will take care of me, and I want to be cared for. It will be such a different life. I shan't be afraid of people any more, and I needn't play a part. I can be myself. Perhaps you won't quite understand, but it has all been

so cramped, so small—so useless! Now I have a chance of doing something, of being something—” She broke off and steadied her voice, and then she said: “No power on earth would have driven me out of John’s life, if things had remained as they were. You see, don’t you, this will clear the road absolutely?”

Sir Thomas shrugged his shoulders and got up. He did not approve of her suggestion, and he told her so quite frankly.

“At least,” he added, “I repeat you have got to do nothing in a hurry. You have made John the beginning and the end of all things to you, and so of course you are prepared to rush to extremes now that this rupture has come; but if you and your boy are separated for a time, you haven’t got rid of me, Olivia Mary! and I’m not going to be shaken off so easily. And after all, my girl,” Sir Thomas added straightforwardly, “something is owing to me, you know. I’ve dealt fairly by you, and I’ve a right to ask for fair treatment in return. I shall have to go more or less into matters, have a talk to Mr. Baldwin, and see what sort of life he can offer you.”

“He will take care of me,” Olivia Mary repeated.

“Well, he’s not the only one,” retorted Sir Thomas; “there are others, you know!”

“I have nothing of my own,” she answered him very simply. “I daresay, you’ll call it hysterical, emotional and over-sensitiveness on my part, but I want you to know that I *couldn’t* be dependent on John now! Oh! that would hurt me more than anything else!”

“Rubbish!” said Sir Thomas: but he did not say it unkindly. He pushed back the chair and he got

up
up f
“be
don
wou
botl
eye:
just
thin
quit
eve:
you
mac
drif
We
pre:
cor
a v
loul
see
and
wor
thir
for
fron
hea
you

up this time, preparing to leave her; and she got up too.

"I'm not going to try and thank you," she said, "because I can't! You've—you've been an angel! I don't think there is another man in the world who would have been able to forgive me as you have."

"Oh! that's all right," said Sir Thomas. He took both her hands, and he looked down into her beautiful eyes that were full of tears. "It is all a bit of a tangle just now," he said; "but it will clear up. I feel sure things will be better soon. . . Remember if they aren't quite the same, well that is one of the little laws of life; everything changes, you know. I feel pretty sure that you have already realized that his marriage would have made a great difference; and that your boy would have drifted away from you inevitably, when he took a wife! Well, then, why not be philosophical, and look upon this present position as being something that was bound to come? Don't turn it into a tragedy. God bless me! it's a very ordinary story, when all is said and done! And look here, Olivia Mary, don't—rush into any action. I see no earthly reason why you should not marry again, and why you should not go to the other side of the world if you want to. But this kind of thing wants thinking over. So will you promise me to do nothing for the next day or two?"

He saw that she hesitated, and he felt her draw back from him a little, then she smiled and nodded her head.

"Yes, I promise. It is a very little thing to do when you are doing so much."

"Thank you, my dear," said Thomas, and he gave a

sigh of relief. "If I can just keep you all on a sensible level, I shall manage everything most comfortably," he said; "only you mustn't stay here and fret all by yourself. How would you like to go away for a few days?"

She shook her head. "No: honestly, I don't think I feel equal to that."

"Then you must have somebody with you," said Sir Thomas.

"Payne will take care of me," Olivia Mary said; and then she said, speaking on an impulse: "If Helen Ambrose is in London I should like to see her."

"The very thing!" said Sir Thomas. "She is the one woman to be on in this scene! Will you write to her or shall I?"

"Oh! please don't bother. They shall telephone through to the hotel. I am sure if Mrs. Ambrose is able to come she will come, especially when she knows that I am not very well."

"Well, I shall be back again this evening to look you up," said Sir Thomas, "so take care of yourself and 'good-bye' for the moment."

As he was turning away, she clung to his arm. "You—you are going to see John. Teli him—" She leaned her head against Sir Thomas's shoulder for an instant, and then she said not very steadily: "No, don't tell him anything! He wouldn't understand!"

She turned away and went back to the chair, and Sir Thomas, just pausing a moment, hesitatingly said "good-bye" again, and then he left her. When he was in the hall slipping into his coat, he told Denton that Mrs. Cheston was anxious to see Mrs. Ambrose.

"Perhaps you know where she is staying," said Sir Thomas; "and if so, will you ring through, and tell her to come along—this morning if possible."

"I'll get through at once, sir," said Denton. Sir Thomas walked briskly away. He was going back to see his girl first, and then he was going on to the club to have a quiet talk with John Cheston.

CHAPTER XXI

HELEN AMBROSE was just packing up to leave for the country when the message came through from Mrs. Cheston's house.

She had no hesitation, however, in making up her mind what to do.

A few days before she had brought Spudgins and his nurse away from Garth Court, for she had found it so very difficult to divide her time between her husband and the little boy.

The arrangements of his London house absorbed Mr. Ambrose: indeed for the time being he seemed to have forgotten his literary work altogether. He was staying at his club, and his wife still remained at the little hotel to which Silvia had been conveyed on that memorable occasion. It was when Silvia had gone to Italy that Mrs. Ambrose had paid a flying visit to Garth Court, and then Spudgins had been so glad to see her, and had pleaded so hard to go away with her, that she had carried off the child, although she felt quite convinced that her husband would object to the arrangement.

Within an hour of receiving the message that Mrs. Cheston was ill and would like to see her Helen Ambrose was in Olivia Mary's bedroom.

She was very much upset by the change in Mrs.

Cheston's appearance, though she was careful not to say this.

Payne had got her mistress back into bed and she had taken upon herself to deny everybody with the exception of Mrs. Ambrose.

When they were alone and Helen had brought a chair close to the bedside Olivia Mary looked at her and put out her hand.

"You said you would always come to me if I wanted you. I want you to come now," she said. "I want you to stay with me just for a little while."

"Why, my dear, of course. I shall love to be with you if you'll just let me go right back and fix up things? You see, I've got the child with me. The house is way off being finished and Spudgins must go back to the country."

"No," said Olivia Mary quickly. "No; bring him here. There is a big room upstairs where he can shout and jump about to his heart's content; and Payne will simply be in her glory. She adores children!"

"Why," said Helen Ambrose, hesitatingly, "it is awfully sweet of you, but——"

"Go and fetch him," said Olivia Mary, "and come back as soon as you can. I'm very unhappy," she added, "and I want you!"

Helen Ambrose stooped and kissed her.

"I'll stay as long as ever you want to keep me," she said; and though the time seemed long to Olivia Mary as she lay on her pillows waiting, in reality the transit from the hotel to the house was done in very quick time.

Mrs. Cheston had given Payne some very particular orders.

"Lady Matheson will be sure to call and I don't want her to know that Mrs. Ambrose is staying here. She may—think it strange if she knows I have some one with me and refuse to see her."

"That's all right," said Payne.

The maid was really enjoying herself. She knew, of course, that something of a very big nature had happened; but she was not troubled with much curiosity. It was sufficient for her to realize that Angus and Gertrude Kurtiss had gone out of her mistress' life suddenly and probably for ever: that there was also some little upset between Olivia Mary and her son Payne could not deny; but she was not going to trouble about this either! It gave her an immense amount of pleasure to feel that she had her mistress safely in her hands, and she approved warmly of the invitation to Mrs. Ambrose and the child.

When he arrived she carried Spudgins up to the room allotted to him and produced mysterious little bags from her pocket.

"I guess he'll be as sick as sick if he eats all that," said Mrs. Ambrose; then she went back to Olivia Mary's room and installed herself in a chair by the fire. Though neither women spoke much, they were each conscious of an indescribable amount of comfort in the fact that they were together.

After awhile Olivia Mary spoke of the journey to America.

"When you go shall you go alone?" she asked.

"If I go—yes. But it's a far-off chance if I go at all. I told you one time, Mrs. Cheston, that I was a singer. Well, if I go back, it will be to take up my work again.

Jam
from
"I k
thinl
reall

"
"
Mrs.
cold
in N
for l
and
Why
buck

"
"I a
mus'
paus
mys

V
look
The
colo
motl
for h

"
she
the r

S
"Ye
his h

"

Jamie's as keen as mustard about this, I had a cable from him yesterday, but," Helen Ambrose sighed faintly, "I kind of feel I'm doing the wrong thing when I even think about this, and sure I'll never go unless I find I am really not wanted here."

"I shall want you," said Olivia Mary softly.

"I'd just love to have you go out with me, but," Mrs. Ambrose shook her head, "you'd never stand the cold over there this time of the year; it's mighty cold in New York in January; maybe we could fix it up for later." Then Helen Ambrose looked across at her and smiled. "Would you come—you would sure? Why, that would be just lovely! Maybe it would buck you up."

"I am going to surprise you," said Olivia Mary. "I am going to show you how much I can do. You mus'n't judge—by—this. I'm not really ill—I'm just pausing before I start out and make a new life for myself."

When Spudgins came to see her and sat on her bed it looked as if the new life had flashed into her already. The greyness went from her face and the light and colour came into her eyes again, and when his step-mother would have sent the child away she begged for him to remain.

"You can't imagine what it is to me to have him," she said. "You know," she said to Spudgins, "you're the nicest thing I've met for a long, long time."

Spudgins nodded his head quite solemnly and agreed. "Yes, I am," he said, and then he proposed to entertain his hostess. "I'm goin' to sing," he announced.

"Oh! Spudge darling, *do* sing Mrs. Cheston all

about the ponies. He just makes up tunes and words as he goes along, it's the cunningest thing in all the world," Helen Ambrose said, with her delightful laugh.

Spudgins sat still and shut his eyes and he swayed to and fro a little. From his stepmother he had caught the trick of speaking spasmodically at times, rushing his words and then pausing for breath; he sang in the same way. His music was just a whisper, very indistinct and confidential. When each song finished he beamed and then said, "Now I'll give 'splanation."

Then he would talk for a long while, emphasizing his points with a little fat uplifted finger.

These "'splanations" were the most important part of his songs; the child had a quaint imagination, and being one by himself as it were, all the thoughts, the mysteries and the joys which would have been shared with other children in a natural way were embodied in these songs. It was extraordinary how varied were his subjects; there was a little grey pony on which he travelled into unknown lands: there were hills with holes in them in which he hid from some enemy; the smoke from the fire made one song: and the cakes on the daintily spread tea-table provoked quite a lot of poetry.

"If only he need never grow up," said Helen Ambrose with a sigh.

The songs and the explanations came to an end at last and Spudgins, having crawled from the foot of the bed to the pillows and given Mrs. Cheston a big hug and two kisses (a generous measure this!), was taken away for bath and bed. The two women lapsed into silence again when the child was gone. It was a silence pregnant with comprehensive sympathy: it carried healing: it

took a
and l
In
called
with
mess:
Ches
It
later
and i
had l
thro:
"
head:
His
hand
you i
F
upon
night
gone
a litt
"
C
open
frien
do th
"
accid
He c
I th
and

took off the sharp edge of loneliness : it built up a strong and lasting bond of love between them.

In the course of the afternoon Sir Thomas Matheson called again, but when he heard that Mrs. Ambrose was with Mrs. Cheston he did not go up : he only sent a message to say that he left his love and hoped Mrs. Cheston was feeling better.

It was from Payne that Olivia Mary heard much later the news that her son had come back to the house and intended sleeping there. The woman's heart which had been beating in such a dull heavy fashion began to throb unevenly, and she trembled every now and then.

"He said I wasn't to tell you, but he's got an awful headache and he's met with a little accident to-day. His cab ran into another cab. Mr. John's arm and hand are hurt a bit, but he's not badly hurt. I'd tell you if he was," said Payne.

Her mistress said nothing. She let the maid wait upon her, do her hair and generally prepare her for the night, and then she dismissed her ; but after she had gone Payne came back again and she brought with her a little note.

"From Sir Thomas," she said.

Olivia Mary sat a long while with the letter unopened in her hand ; she was frightened to read what her friend had written. When at last she brought herself to do this she found a most matter-of-fact and kindly letter.

"You'll hear, of course, that Jack has had a little accident. It is nothing serious. Don't worry about it. He came on here after he had had the hand dressed and I thought it wiser that he should telegraph to York and say he would not return just for the moment, giving

the accident as a reason. It was his own suggestion that he should stay with you. We have gone into things very carefully and we have come to the conclusion that, as Anthony made the position absolutely secure for John and everything has been set out clearly between us, our wisest course is to let matters go on outwardly as if nothing had happened! Will you fall in with this, and just meet things as naturally as you possibly can? I am delighted to know that Mrs. Ambrose is staying with you and I am at your disposal any time if you want me in any way." Beneath his signature Sir Thomas had added: "I have told your son all that passed between us this morning. I thought it only right that he should know what your intentions were."

Olivia Mary sat a very long time in the chair by the fire and then resolved to go to bed. She was so tired with all the mental strain that she had gone through during the last twenty-four hours that gradually her excitement (and the knowledge that her boy was so near to her had signified great excitement) drifted away from her. As she put off her dressing-gown she knelt down and said the few simple prayers that she had said all her life, and then she got into bed.

Payne had lit a night-light and she lay for a little while looking at the odd shapes cast on the ceiling by the flicker of this light and the glow of the fire till her eyes closed. They opened with a great start an hour or so later and she woke out of a heavy dreamless sleep to see some one standing by her bed. It was her son.

Just for an instant she lay and looked at him and he looked back. Though the light was dim they could see one another plainly. Then John Cheston said:

"I
devil!
"C
thing.'
"T
explai
Sh
the cle
his har
"C
down.'
him in
rapidly
"I'll c
and I
It loo
badly.'
"O
swellin
The Jc
it redr
for me
Th
lamp
brough
soft lin
treasur
a bottl
she hac
bruised
"H
He

"I can't sleep. It is my hand. It hurts like the devil!"

"Oh! darling," said the mother. "Let me do something."

"The bandage is too tight, I think," the young man explained.

She slipped into her dressing-gown and turned on the electric light, then she went up to him and looked at his hand.

"Oh! yes, it's much, much too tight," she said. "Sit down." She led him towards the easy-chair and pushed him into it gently. Having stirred the fire, she moved rapidly to a side table and brought her workbasket. "I'll cut off all this lint and put on a new bandage; and I think you ought to have this bathed, John. It looks awfully inflamed. I'm afraid you've hurt it badly."

"Oh! it isn't anything really much. All this swelling has come because the bandage was so tight. The Johnnie who did it said I was to go back and have it redressed, but one 'go' of hospital was quite enough for me!"

There was always a little kettle standing on a spirit lamp in the fireplace. Olivia Mary lit this lamp, brought a basin, and opening a drawer tore some bits of soft linen from one of the many garments which Payne treasured so preciously. She dropped something from a bottle into the water after the kettle had boiled and she had filled the basin, and then knelt and bathed the bruised and cut wrist and hand very, very gently.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh! it was my chap's fault entirely. He simply barged into the other car. I yelled to him to turn to the left, but the idiot went bang on. Poor chap! He got knocked about a bit. I had to take him to the hospital first—that is where I had my hand dressed."

"When was it?" asked Olivia Mary.

"Just about five o'clock."

She dried the hand and then she began winding the soft linen round it.

Her son watched her almost curiously. It was strange to him to see her being so useful, going about a task which had a certain ugliness about it so composedly. It amazed him that her two small hands which he had always admired and always considered so useless could do such work as this.

When she had put the last stitch in she emptied the basin and tidied away the disorder, and her son watched her in the same curious way all the time. Suddenly he said :

"Thanks so much . . . it feels tons better . . . I hope I shall get to sleep now, only I'm so jolly thirsty." His mother just looked at him.

"I wonder . . . would you like a cup of tea?"

He paused an instant and then he nodded his head.

"My throat's awfully dry, I have got a fearful head. Tea sounds like the one thing; but look here, can't I help you?"

"Oh! no, no; sit still." She gave him a faint smile. "I very often make tea for myself in the early morning hours. It is something to do. One gets so tired of lying awake. Payne has brought some biscuits up here too, I know."

T
seem
watch
home
Some
Thorr
haunt
knew
way ;
such a
could
hated
servat
of rag
emoti
everyt
absolt
H
ate so
this fa
and u
" I
I'm hu
" V
downs
He
wards
" N
" I
Mary.
upsets
" I

The little kettle boiled again almost at once or so it seemed to John Cheston; and once again his eyes watched that delicate little creature going about the homely task in such a natural, such an easy manner. Some very simple, straightforward words which Sir Thomas Matheson had spoken to him a few hours before haunted him now as he watched his mother. He hardly knew how he had brought himself to come to her in this way; it was so contrary to all he had intended doing, such a weakening of his purpose; still, Sir Thomas's words could not be forgotten. And then John, like most men, hated any sort of moral upheaval; he was ultra-conservative and loathed all change. Once the first burst of rage had gone he felt uncomfortable: he resented the emotional element. Sir Thomas's appeal to him to let everything fall into a natural groove met his mood absolutely.

He drank the tea when she gave him the cup and he ate some biscuits with a very real sense of pleasure. In this familiar atmosphere all mental strain seemed foolish and unnecessary.

"I was off my feed to-day," he said; "and now I'm hungry."

"Would you like something else? Shall I go downstairs and see what I can find?"

He almost smiled as he saw her move eagerly towards the door, but he checked her at once.

"No; this will do splendidly—thanks."

"I hope it won't keep you awake," said Olivia Mary. "Tea does do that sometimes, but it never upsets me. I'm used to it."

"I believe I shall sleep like a top now."

He got up. Somehow he did not look so alarming in his dressing-gown. He had brushed his hair straight back from his brows and that gave him a boyish expression.

"You'll go to bed too, won't you?" he said.

She nodded her head.

"Oh! yes, at once."

He paused a little awkwardly.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry I woke you up, you must have been sleeping very heavily, but I—I felt I had to come and have this bandage looked to."

She said nothing, but her hands trembled a little as she put aside the tea-things; then just for an instant she looked at him and she said:

"It was good of you to come."

"It wasn't only my hand. I had to come."

She answered him very quietly: "Don't upset yourself any more to-night. You have gone through so much."

But he lingered.

"Look here," he asked abruptly, "is what Sir Thomas told me true? Are you going to marry this man just because you won't take anything from me? Isabel's father said you'd told him you'd rather die than be dependent on me, and I want to know if that's the truth?"

She passed all at once from the composed, strangely strong little person, into the likeness of the woman he knew so well; she trembled, and her eyes had some fear in them.

"Oh! please, *please* don't let us talk any more just now! Only believe, darling, that whatever I do . . . I

try
she
'
sort,
"I'm
serv
all b
"but
betw
sense
to le
it do
I dic
true.
mon
not
ticult
I've g
C
impa
S
"
d—
H
"But
myse
told y
It
her.
"Y
things
I mu

try . . . I hope. I mean it always to be for the best," she said piteously.

"It can't be for the best if you do a thing of that sort," he answered her, in his old dictatorial fashion. "I'm not going over the whole story again. We don't serve any good purpose, and besides, I want to put it all behind me as fast as I can," he added irritably; "but this part about you has got to be threshed out between us. I'm not going to stand any rotten nonsense! Of course, you know quite well that if I consent to let things go on as Sir Thomas says they must go, it doesn't mean that I like the position any better than I did yesterday, but I've found out what you said was true. I'm fixed up legally with the name, and the money is mine legally also. To go against this would not only mean making everything public for no particularly good reason, but it would spoil Belle's life, and I've got to think of her.

Olivia Mary waited as he paused and took some impatient turns to and fro.

Suddenly he faced her.

"I've got the right to take care of you, and I'm d——d if I'll let anyone else do this! So that's flat."

Her lips quivered and her eyes dilated a little. "But if—if I really *want* to make a fresh life for myself, . . . if I really prefer to do what Sir Thomas told you I intended doing?"

It was the old familiar John Cheston who answered her.

"You can't! You aren't free to make plans or change things; you were left to my charge, and if it stands that I must keep to what I've got, no matter how I feel

about doing this, well, then, everything else stands too ! I said the worst I could say to you last night, and I'm not taking any of it back, all I want to impress on you now is that you've got to play fairly with me now and in the future, and to do what you suggest isn't playing fair. And now you'd better get into bed again."

He turned to go, but she called to him.

"John !"

He paused.

She looked at him pleadingly.

"Let me go . . . oh ! let me go . . . I . . ." she broke off and then went on, "you've got Isabel and she will do everything for you. I understand what you mean. You feel you must do your duty where I am concerned, but this—is just—what—will—kill me ! . . . Let me go ! Believe me, Jack darling, it will be the best thing for me . . . for everybody and everything. . . ."

He came back to where she stood, and he answered her hotly :

"No ! You belong to me and you're going to stay ! I've already written to this chap Baldwin, so you won't have him to go to. Sir Thomas told me I wasn't to do this ; he rubbed it into me that if you wanted to marry again, it was brutally selfish of me to stop your doing this, but Sir Thomas doesn't quite understand. You've meant such a lot to me, mother, and . . . and I don't want you to go. Now I'm off. Good-night."

She stood with her two hands gripped together, watching him as he turned round and moved to the door. He had almost passed out of the room when he looked back.

"So that settles it, doesn't it ?"

He was conscious of an enormous amount of comfort ; he had said all there was to say, and he could now see the value of the advice Isabel's father had urged upon him ; to turn his back on the story which for a brief time had made life so ugly. Seeing his mother standing as he had so often seen her, her beautiful eyes full of passionate devotion to himself, it was perhaps only natural that the young man should dismiss from his mind now that revelation of her true nature and character, and resume once again the rôle of protector to one whom he had always regarded as being weak, delicate and almost foolish. The suggestion that she could cut herself away from him, and let another person take care of her and control her, had brought a hot rush of new anger and resentment into John Cheston's mind.

He was not at all sure of the place he would give his mother in his life's future, but he was absolutely sure now on one point ; he would let her go to no one else. She had always been his possession ; she would remain his !

The events of the day, and particularly Sir Thomas Matheson's straightforward dealing, had brought Olivia Mary's son completely away from that harsh and almost vindictive view he had professed when discussing the situation with Isabel in the early morning. He was not prepared to say he would ever forgive, but he was very eager to forget in an active sense, and as, according to Sir Thomas, all was to go forward just as though nothing had happened, and such an unpleasant individual as Angus Kurtiss was still in existence, why, John's mother would be necessary to him, more necessary indeed than she had ever been before.

It is almost sure that the mother knew what was passing in his mind, but she had grown accustomed to find her joy in such little things, and now the wonder of his last few words overwhelmed her; she neither questioned nor qualified them; they were so beautiful to her, lifting her absolutely out of the dark anguish of the last twenty-four hours, endowing her with a hope she had never imagined she would know again!

John Cheston paused for a moment watching her, then he said "Good-night" for a second time, and at the sound of his voice she woke from the magic of the spell he had put upon her.

She moved forward hurriedly.

"Good-night, my dearest, . . . my dear one," she said; "God bless you always!"

He gave her a short nod of the head, then closed the door and went away.

The dying coals in the grate shifted suddenly, and a strong flame leaped into being for a few seconds; the light fell on the face of the woman standing in the middle of the room, and found there a look of almost radiant youth!