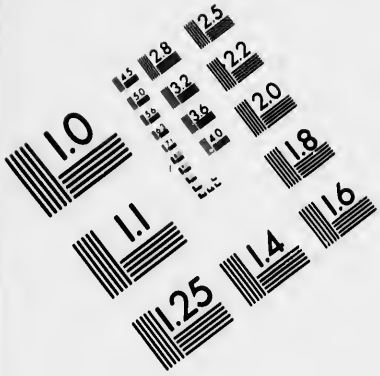

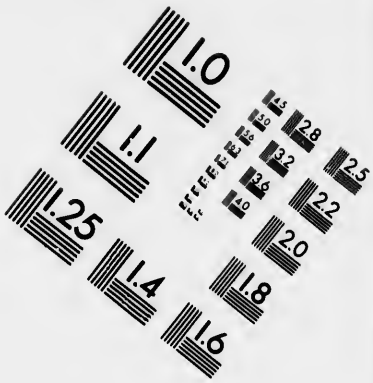

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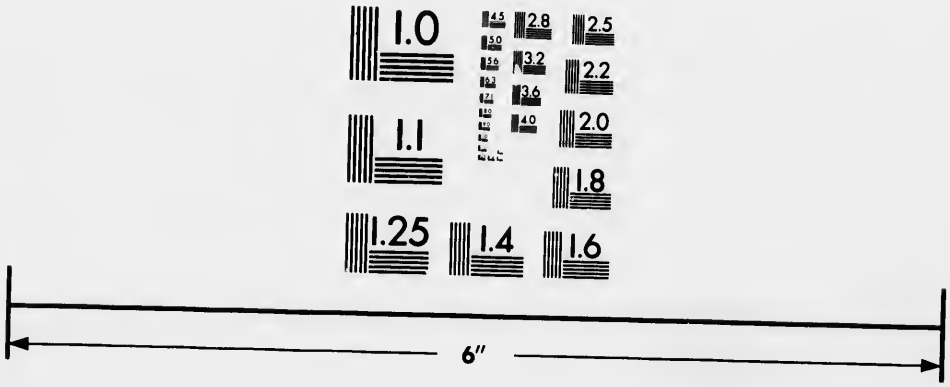

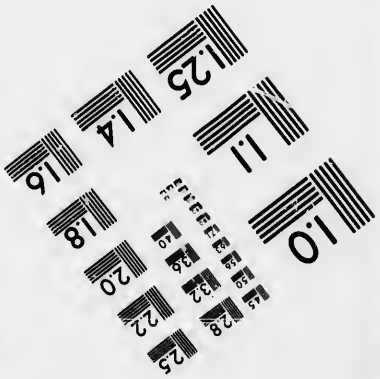

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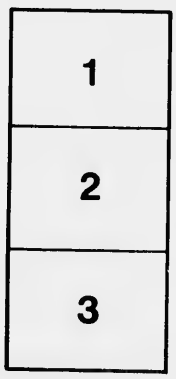

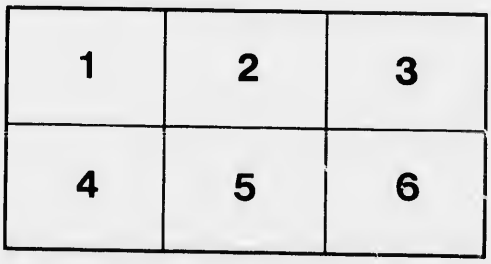

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MARJORIE DEANE.

MARJORIE DEANE.

A Novel.

BY

BERTHA M. CLAY,

AUTHOR OF "DORA THORNE," "THE EARL'S ATONEMENT;" "UNDER A SHADOW," "SET IN DIAMONDS," "HIS PROMISED BRIDE," ETC.

Toronto:
HUNTER, ROSE & COMPANY.
1895.

CONTENTS.

MARJORIE DEANE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME OF THE PARVENU.

IT is late in the afternoon of a bright October day, and a golden flood of sunset light streams through the trees about Harley House and glances blindingly back from the west windows of the great structure. Older and more picturesque houses there may be in Berkshire; but newer or larger—no. Peter Deane knew it, and was proud of it. The thought of it filled his mind always. It filled his mind as he stood now in front of the fire in the drawing-room, his coat tails drawn aside in rather plebeian style. He had intended it to be a large house and a gorgeous house, and it was exactly what he intended it to be. He was expecting his daughter, but he was thinking of his house, and of the effect it would have upon her; for she had not yet seen it.

"I think she will be impressed," he said aloud.

"I wish she would come. The train never is on time," was the response he received, delivered in an impatient tone.

It was Bessie Deane who spoke. She had been standing in an attitude of listening at the open window, but turned to speak to her father, and disclosed a face as sweet and piquant as ever graced a sixteen-year-old maiden.

Almost as she spoke she heard the sound of an approaching carriage, and in an instant she was off, flying around to the front drive, her fiery golden hair streaming out behind her like a comet. She gained the front steps, just as a carriage, resplendent in all the glory of varnish, polished brass, and new liveries, turned the corner and drew up at the front. The long-coated footman swung down from his perch and opened the door, and Bessie dashed forward, with flushed face and dancing eyes.

"Oh, Marjorie, is it you at last?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, dear, what is left of me," answered a light, musical voice, from amidst the silk linings; and the next moment the late arrival stepped out and took the expectant girl to her bosom.

"Oh, Marjorie, I'm so glad you've come; it seems such a long, long while; and how late you are! Was there an accident? How did you like the carriage? and—oh, Marjorie, how beautiful you have grown!"

She stopped suddenly and leaned back with a look of rapt admiration as she gazed into the beautiful face of her sister. Marjorie laughed softly, and stooped to kiss the fair, flushed face.

"And how tall you've grown, dear," she said, lovingly. "Oh, and nearly a long dress! Good gracious! And I have been calling up visions of a little girl in a pinafore and a pig-tail, waiting to see me."

"But I'm almost sure you've grown, too," responds Bessie, clinging to her as they enter the hall. "I'm sure you have! And oh, Marjorie, what do you think of it all?"

Marjorie Deane looked around curiously, and then down at the eager face, with a peculiar smile.

"It's all very grand, dear."

"Grand? I should think so," said Bessie, looking pleased for a moment, and then, turning her eyes on the bright face with a half-troubled expression. "What do you mean by grand, Marjorie? Don't—don't you like it, the avenue——."

"Oh, the avenue is beautiful. They are superb old trees; but, the house—isn't it rather—rather new, dear?"

"New, how could it be anything else?" expostulates Bessie, open-eyed. "Papa pulled down the old place to build this. It was such a poky old place, all corners and no windows. Not a decent room in it. Papa pulled it down, every brick. And, oh, Marjorie, I hope you will be pleased! And—and——"

"Well?" asks Marjorie, with a smile. They have reached the drawing-room by this time, and Marjorie pauses with her hand on the door-knob. "Well, dear?"

"Papa, he's very glad that you are coming, and—and—all that old affair will be forgotten; and—and—oh, Marjorie, you won't begin quarrelling directly, will you?"

Marjorie bends and kisses her for the twentieth time.

"No, dear," she says, with a little short laugh, and a curve of the full mobile lips; "we won't quarrel, papa and I. At least if we do, it shan't be my fault if I can help it. Where is he? In here?"

Bessie nods, and the two girls go into the room. Mr. Deane thrusts a bandanna into his hind pocket, from which it sticks out like a fiery tail, and receives his daughter with a calm, though noisy kiss.

"How are you, Marjorie? Late, ain't you? 'Ad your dinner? Ah, I thought you wouldn't get much more than a snack on the road, so I've had something put ready for you in the dining-room.

Better get it over and then we can talk comfortable. Find the carriage—er easy, eh?" he asked, with a curious little laugh, and a glance of complacent pride around the gay, not to say gaudy room.

"Very," answered Marjorie. "Is it the sheriff's carriage, papa?"

Mr. Deane's face grew suddenly red, and his cheeks began to swell portentously.

"Sheriff's carriage?" he stammered, eying the innocent face, wrathfully. "What on earth do you mean? It's my private carriage, and if you think it's too fine——"

But by this time Bessie had hustled the offender out of the room and half way up the stairs.

"Oh, Marjorie! How could you? The first five minutes, too!" she whispered, reproachfully.

Marjorie laughed, and wound her arm more tightly around the girlish waist.

"I'm awfully sorry, dear; but I didn't mean it. I did think it was the sheriff's carriage; it was so gorgeous and shining, and there was a great coat of arms on the door, I'm sure, or I'm very much mistaken."

Bessie blushed and struggled with a smile.

"So there is, but—but it's ours—our coat of arms, Marjorie."

"Oh, is it?" said Marjorie, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, and looking carelessly around at the elaborately decorated corridor, with its rows of pictures on the wall and its exotics and statuary at the sides. "Is it? I didn't know we had one, dear."

"Nor did I, Bessie, until we got rich—I mean until we came down here. Those are your rooms, dear, and I hope you will like them. I——" but there she stopped, for Marjorie stood in the door-way, staring about her with a look of amazement in her wide open eyes, and a smile, which she vainly strove to check, curving her red lips. "Is anything the matter?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"No-o," answered Marjorie. "The room is beautiful, I'm sure I can say that; but isn't it a trifle—well, grand?"

"Grand!" said Bessie looking around the room for the first time with qualified admiration "Do you think so? Well, maybe it is a little. It hadn't struck me before. It *is* the grandest in the house."

"Is it? Well, I'm glad of that," and she tried to look serious; but when she turned toward her sister and saw her watching her with puzzled expression, she fairly broke into a laugh, and it was such a merry, infectious laugh, that in spite of an incipient pout Bessie was obliged to join her; though she stopped presently and asked:

"But why do you laugh, Marjorie?"

"Because it's all so very funny."

"What is funny? I don't see," said Bessie, in a somewhat injured tone.

"Don't you like me to laugh, Bess? Well, I won't, then. That is, I won't any more than I can help; but you must let me get used to it, and laugh just a little now and then, may I?"

"You may laugh as much as you please, so that you don't let papa see you, and if you won't laugh at me. I'm so glad to have you here, Marjorie," and she threw her arms around her sister and kissed her again and again.

"Dear little Bess!" exclaimed Marjorie, with a sudden transition from mirth to deep feeling. "If you only knew how homesick I've been for you, you would never be afraid that I would laugh at you, or do anything that was not loving and tender."

For some seconds they stood locked in each other's arms, then Marjorie drew herself away and turned to remove some of her garments.

"Let me ring for your maid," said Bessie.

"Is there a maid, too?" ejaculated Marjorie.

Bessie nodded with a conscious air.

"May I laugh again, so soon?" asked Marjorie, with such a twinkle in her eye that Bessie answered her by breaking out into a merry peal herself.

"Yes, there is a maid," she answered, as soon as she could speak. "Shall I send her to you?"

"Not this time, please. I will be down in a very little while. Where shall I find you?"

"I will wait for you in the dining-room."

"I won't be three minutes. Is there a map of the palace hanging up anywhere? I wouldn't like to lose myself," said Marjorie, gravely.

"Oh, Marjorie, the house isn't as big as that," laughed Bessie.

"Anyhow," went on Marjorie, "I could ask one of those giants. They won't hurt me, will they?"

"You mean the footmen?" queried Bessie. "I don't wonder you ask. I'm afraid of them," and, with a laugh she ran from the room.

Marjorie was almost as good as her word, and in little more than three minutes followed Bessie down the grand staircase. And if she had looked pretty before in her travelling wrap, with the dust of a day's journey in her eyes, how much more than pretty she looked now. She *was* more than pretty, she was beautiful.

The poet has said that variety is charming; and in the fair young girl tripping so lightly down the staircase there was variety enough to charm the soul of a man of granite. You did not know where to take her. For a while the clear, oval face would be as demure and grave as a young nun's, the brown eyes hid under their long lashes,

the ripe lips set and formal; the next the vail would lift, the eyes would flash, the mobile lips curve with a smile, and all the face catch light and beam again. And through it all one could discern, peeping out like a shy child through a half-open door, the keen sense of humor and love of fun, the indomitable pride, and the swift scorn for all that was mean, and pretentious, and unworthy.

And as she reached the hall and looked around at the oak paneling—not old, but stained and well varnished, to look like old—at the family portraits (bought in Wardour street) and the suit of armor (also from that interesting locality), at the two huge footmen in blazing liveries, who waited at the foot of the stairs and stood ready to usher her into the dining-room, as if they were two machines wound up and set to perform the task, the quaint look of humor and sly mockery played about her lips and shone dangerously in her eyes. But it threatened to explode altogether as she entered the room and all its splendor burst upon her view; modern oak and sham mediæval furniture, massive plate, gorgeous pictures, and blazing candelabra. It was too much for the girl upon whom it burst for the first time, and who remembered that little villa at Highbury, with its best and second best parlor, its one maid of all work, and its all-pervading air of semi-gentility.

As the two footmen shut the door, Bessie ran forward.

"How quick you have been, dear!" she exclaimed. "See! they have laid the cloth on the little table, and—I thought you would rather we were alone, and so I am going to wait on you. If you would prefer the footmen, though——" she went on roguishly.

"Not for the world," interrupted Marjorie, in pretended alarm. "They must be so very busy."

"Busy?"

"Yes, watching that the men in armor don't get away to where they belong. My dear, I wouldn't have one of those giants about me to-night for the world. Besides, I am dying, simply dying, to hear if all this is real; for at present I am suspicious that it will all vanish suddenly, like the unsubstantial fabric of a dream. That's Shakespeare, isn't it? Sit down there, where I can see your face, and begin. Begin and don't stop until you've told me everything."

"Of course you received my letter."

"Of course I did not. If you wrote one, it is lying hidden at Clapton post-office, no doubt. I did get a letter from papa, to the effect that in consequence of certain changes he had moved down into the country, and that he wished me to come home—that is, if I would consent that a certain—certain subject should be ignored and forgotten."

Marjorie's eyes flashed and her lips quivered as she spoke. She stopped a moment to recover herself, and then continued.

"I would not have come had it not been for you. I wanted to see you so much, Bessie, dear! So I wrote him that I would come, and here I am. But why I am here, or the reason for this gorgeousness, I do not know."

"You know absolutely nothing?" demanded Bessie, with open-eyed astonishment.

"Absolutely nothing. I left home two years ago on account of —well, you know how. Then you were living at Woodbine Villa, Highbury, North. Papa was in the indigo business, and was a happy man when he could pay his bills. You were a rambling, long-legged girl in washed-out cotton frocks and shabby boots. I come back and find—this." She stopped for a moment as if words failed her; then went on again. "Know? I know nothing. I did read that papa had been a sheriff, and when that gorgeous equipage met me at the depot I was certain that it was one of the official equipages. And it really was only papa's private—Bessie, you must explain."

Bessie drew a long breath.

"How strange you must feel!" she exclaimed. "No wonder you stared and seemed surprised. Why, Marjorie, if it had been I, I should have shrieked—positively shrieked."

"I don't doubt it. But don't shriek now or you'll bring those two monsters upon us. And now, how has it all been brought about? Has papa discovered the philosopher's stone, or struck a gold mine in the back garden of Woodbine Villa? Poor old Woodbine Villa!"

"Hush!" said Bessie, looking around. "Don't speak so loud, dear. Papa doesn't like anything about the—the villa, and—and all that—to be known."

Marjorie's red lips curled scornfully, and then she leaned back and laughed long and merrily, but with a touch of scorn running through her merriment like a chord.

"Poor papa! The old days are to be forgotten—wiped out. I see. Done away with, like the old hats and coats he used to wear —how baggy and greasy at the seams they were! All to be forgotten; and we are to make believe we don't know where Highbury is, and that we always had a carriage with a coat of arms and two big footmen to stand in the passage—I beg pardon, I mean hall. You will have to draw up a list of forbidden words, Bess and I shall have to get them by heart. Let me see! Passage, parlor, washhouse. Then hall, drawing-room, and—what do you have in place of a wash-house? Bess, you don't know. Why, of course, we don't know there is such a place. Well, but I don't know yet how it all came about."

Bessie shook her head with a troubled air.

"Don't be so sarcastic, Marjorie dear. I don't know how it

happened, except that papa made the money all of a sudden in stocks—if you know what they are."

"Stocks, stocks," repeated Marjorie, with droll affectation of ignorance. "I did know once, but since we have been rich I have forgotten."

"Oh, Marjorie," laughed Bessie. "Well, after that you can't think how different papa was. He bought this place. There was a dear little house on it; but his architect said it must be taken down, and another and larger house built in its place. That's how this came to be here."

"It looks new," said Marjorie, dryly.

"And then came the furniture and the servants, and the grounds were laid out. You must see the garden and the tennis lawn. Then there were the horses and the carriages—the one you saw isn't the best. And papa wanted to get a governess for me, but I cried and said I would have no one but you. He became angry and blew his nose——"

"Oh, he still blows his nose," murmured Marjorie, sarcastically. "Isn't that rather vulgar?"

"As he used to do when he was put out," went on Bessie, without heeding the interruption. "I was afraid to say any more then; but, oh, Marjorie, I did long for you so much, and I didn't care one bit for it all the while you were away."

Marjorie stroked the golden head, caressingly.

"And then the people began to call," continued Bessie; "and, oh, that was awful, for they all stared about so, and one old lady put up her eye-glass and looked papa up and down as if he were some curious animal; and papa grew red, and puffed, and blew, and waved his pocket-handkerchief——"

"Lucky she wasn't a bull," interjected Marjorie.

"And then they began to ask questions. 'Was I the only daughter?' and when papa said no, there was you, they wanted to know where you were,"

"And what did he answer?"

"That you were on the *continong*. But he never said a word about——".

"Never mind. Go on." interrupted Marjorie, her face flushing and then turning pale. "It is all a very pretty comedy."

"Well, when they kept asking when you were coming, I could see that papa was uncomfortable; and one day, when I was so dull and wanted you so badly, that I said I wouldn't stay if you didn't come back, he said, after a moment, that you could if you liked, and would promise never to mention Sidney's name. Then I wrote, and he wrote, and that's all."

"And the curtain is down on the first act," said Marjorie.

"Yes," said Bessie; "and to-morrow we will go all over the

place. Oh, I long to show you everything. The grounds are so large—run all the way down to the river! And it is all so beautiful. Mrs. Geoffrey Turner says——"

"Who is Mrs. Geoffrey Turner?"

"Oh, she is a lady who has been very kind, telling papa what he ought to do, and helping me about my manners and——"

"Oh, yes, of course you had to have new manners. I wonder if she will help me with mine?"

"Now, Marjorie! But you are such a perfect lady!"

"Thank you, dear! But what was it this nice lady told you? I mustn't lose any of her pearls."

"She said there was only one better place in the whole county—Sir Roland Chesterton's."

CHAPTER II.

"WHO IS SIR ROLAND CHESTERTON?"

"AND who is Sir Roland Chesterton? And where is his place?" asked Marjorie.

"His place is next to ours, and it is called Chesterton Wold. And, oh, isn't Sir Roland handsome! Tall, and distinguished-looking—something like the picture in the hall."

"You mean the portraits of our ancestors?" said Marjorie, her white teeth showing between her red lips.

Bessie colored, and laughed.

"Poor papa! But he says it's what everybody does after getting rich. If they have no family portraits, they have them painted, and nobody knows that they are not really one's great-grandfathers."

Marjorie's face set in a grim look of disgust: but suddenly the absurdity of the situation flashed across her mind, and she leaned back and laughed until the whole room was filled with the delicious music.

"You—you don't remember grandfather, do you, Bessie?" she asked, panting, and wiping her eyes. "He was a dear, funny old man, with a red nose, which used to shine as if it had been polished with beeswax. I can remember him sitting in the back parlor of an evening, drinking gin-and-water, and smoking a long clay pipe. Is his portrait in the hall? Well! well! Dear, go on. And this Sir Roland, is he an old man?"

"Old? No," answered Bessie; "not what you'd call old. He's about—about—oh, about thirty. That is rather old, though, isn't it?"

"Quite ancient," assented Marjorie, smiling.

"Now, Marjorie, you are laughing at me. Anyhow, if he is not old, Lady Roland is, I'm sure."

"His wife?" asked Marjorie, with a little yawn, for the romance, together with the long journey, were beginning to tell upon her.

"No—his mother. And, Marjorie, she is such an awful old woman! So tall, and thin, and upright! and such thick eyelids! And she looks over your head as if she did not see you; and she's as proud as—as Lucifer!"

"Another of your new acquaintances? And how does her ladyship approve of papa?"

"Papa? Oh, I don't know. I suppose she has seen papa, but she hasn't called. The Chestertons never speak to or look at us, although we sit almost in the next pew."

"Charming neighbors!" said Marjorie, with an indifference more marked than the veriest scorn. "So they have not called! And, although you have been almost two years under their very eyes, they have not chanced to see you yet? And what does papa say?"

"Papa doesn't say anything," replied Bessie.

"It is the very wisest thing he could say," exclaimed Marjorie, rising and walking up and down the room in a way that plainly showed how disturbed she was. "The very wisest. Poor papa!" with a pity that is more than half contempt. "How blind he must be! For you, poor child, are still too much of an infant to see it all, but oh, how terribly plain it all is! Poor, dear old Woodbine Villa! How happy we used to be, excepting when the butcher and the baker called for their bills, and the landlord wanted his rent! Poor papa! No wonder he looked uncomfortable and uneasy; and these people, how they must laugh! Oh, Bessie, I could laugh, too, if I didn't feel so much like crying; and to think that if I had been at home, I might have stopped it—at least enough to keep it somewhere within bounds—have held him back from the family portraits and the gorgeous footmen. Oh, Bessie, Bessie, it was bad enough to be poor; but it is a thousand times worse to be snobs!"

"Snobs!" faltered Bessie, staring at the flushed, passionate face aghast.

"Yes, snobs," repeated Marjorie, "purse-proud, ostentatious snobs! The laughing-stock of every decent family in the county, and even of the toadies, who have gathered around for the plunder. Forget the old home! Do you think we shall not carry it about with us every moment of our lives? Do you think that——"

Suddenly she broke off, reminded by the wide-open eyes and

mouth of the listener that it was to a child that she was pouring out her indignant scorn. She stopped with something like a groan.

"There!" she exclaimed, "don't mind, Bessie, I'll—we must make the best of it. I'm tired and overdone, and—what on earth's that?" for suddenly there came the clanging sound of a great bell.

"That's—that's the servants' supper bell," answered Bessie, half laughingly, half deprecatingly. "Everybody has a bell."

Marjorie broke out into a merry peal of laughter, her sense of the ridiculous too keen to permit her to refrain.

"Bessie, my dear," she cried as soon as she could speak, "I give you my word that a delightful thrill ran through me at the sound. I thought that the house was on fire, and that they were ringing for the fire-engines."

"Oh, Marjorie, you don't mean to say——"

"I do. I'd burn it down, from garret to cellar, family portraits, footmen—well, not the footmen, perhaps; but everything else. Nothing but fire can purge us of our snobbery. Oh, why did you send for me when it was too late? Too late to stop this display of ignorance and vulgarity. Hadn't he one friend in the world to tell him that his whole place looks like an upholsterer's shop; that no one drives about country lanes in a carriage that looks like the Lord Mayor's, or keeps a couple of gorgeous footmen standing guard in his hall? It would be bad taste in any one smaller than a nobleman, not very good taste in him, and—and——"

"Hush! Hush!" cried Bessie, springing to her feet. "Papa!"

In fact, as she spoke the door opened, and the little stumpy figure of the indigo merchant—clad in his bran-new evening dress, and glittering with diamonds—entered between the two gorgeous footmen.

At sight of him, embodiment as he was of the vulgarity she had just been inveighing against, Marjorie could not prevent herself giving way to intense, though suppressed mirth. Her scorn and indignation melted before the absurd figure of her father.

"Er—have you finished, my dear?" he asked. "I trust you have enjoyed it. Bessie, er—run into the drawing-room."

With a glance of appeal at Marjorie, which Marjorie answered with a bright smile, Bessie walked slowly instead of ran out of the room. Mr. Deane closed the door, and then, with an air he vainly endeavored to render easy, he turned his back to the grate and cleared his throat.

Marjorie, uncompromising but composed, sat quite still and looked at her father, waiting for him to speak. He, after one or two glances on the red bandanna, over which he eyed her with covert nervousness, began:

"I need not say that I am very glad to see you back, my dear Marjorie."

"Thank you, papa," was the only answer, in a calm, soft voice.

"And I er—hope that you are glad to get back. Your late occupation was—ahem—was scarcely appropriate and suitable to the sphere into which we have moved, and—and—I am glad you are back."

Marjorie smiled sweetly at this feeble conclusion, but said nothing.

"No doubt, Bessie's letter gave you a full account of the changes which have come over our fortunes!"

"It would have done so if I had received it," answered Marjorie, serenely, "but if I did not learn through her letter I have learned everything since. I am pleased that you have prospered, papa."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Deane, complacently, "it was a wonderful change; but er—ahem—I think we have risen to it." He looked over himself and then about the room with such satisfaction that Marjorie bit her lip to restrain a smile that threatened to break out. "Of course," he went on, "I am pleased and—er—gratified. Not so much on my own account as on that of my children."

"Ah!" murmured Marjorie dryly, thinking perhaps of the two years she had been kept in ignorance of the gratifying change.

Mr. Deane sought diversion in his nose at the sound of the little exclamation, and after two or three blasts upon it returned to the charge. That is what Marjorie likened it to, for she knew whither the conversation was tending.

"It is, of course, a great comfort to me to feel that I have raised my children, by my own exertions, to positions—to positions, which—er—which—positions—which will place them in a position—that is to say, in fact, you understand, Marjorie, the old life has gone forever, and all its associations; that what we have to do is to forget it and endeavor to fill the positions which we have made for ourselves in the world. And—and——" He was growing more red and embarrassed each moment, and not being able to look into the scornful brown eyes before him, looked over them in a very bullying fashion—"and that we may thoroughly understand each other, I think it well to remind you of the condition upon which you——"

"Are permitted to return," interjected Marjorie, serenely.

Mr. Deane reddened and puffed, but nodded vigorously.

"Yes, if you choose to put it that way. What I wish to say is that I will not have the old cause of quarrelling and bickering in this new life."

"I understand you," said Marjorie, rising and speaking with a dangerous light in her brown eyes. "You mean that I am to forget Sidney."

"Exactly. And it seems to me it is not much to ask."

"Our ideas differ now, as they have done before. I will tell you

frankly that I will not forget him. If I promise not to speak of him to you, it is all that I will do. If you cannot receive me on such terms, I will return to the honest and independent position from which you called me."

Marjorie's face was white and her red lip was quivering, and her father knew that she meant no less than she said. He grew almost purple in the face, but after waving his red handkerchief in the air as if at a bull, he contrived to say:

"You can please yourself about that. If it is any pleasure to you to remember one who is a disgrace——" Marjorie took a quick step forward and her father was disconcerted for the moment and stammered, "to—to—I know you too well, my dear Marjorie, to think that you will debar yourself that pleasure for my sake." And now he had recovered his courage again and went on: "Think of him as much as you like, but don't let me hear the scoundrel's name."

Marjorie, who for the moment had turned away, faced her father at this, her beautiful eyes blazing with wounded love and indignation.

"Then do not speak to me of him. He is more to me than anybody else in the world, and I will not hear him so spoken of. Let this be our bargain: I will share your—splendor"—she waved her hand with an air of scathing contempt for all the gaudy magnificence—"for Bessie's sake; and I will not offend your ears with a word about Sydney. You must be as careful as I am."

She could not have said more for the tears that choked her utterance. Her father listened to her, turning from red to white, but it was evident that he had some awe of his beautiful daughter, for he did not speak until she had stopped. Then he said doggedly:

"Very well, let it be so. It is understood then, and this is the last of the scenes. We are friends, I suppose?"

"Yes, papa." And perhaps the thought came to her that pompous, vulgar, and ignorant though he was, he was yet her father; and obeying the promptings of her warm and generous heart, she went up to him and putting her arms around his neck, kissed him.

"Well, well," puffed the little man, rather pleased by the demonstration, "I will go now and write some letters."

CHAPTER III.

AN ARISTOCRATIC OPINION.

IT was a lucky chance that intervened to prevent the Indigo merchant cutting down the trees about his place after he had torn down the old house. Not very long after this interview with Marjorie, she and Bessie, both carefully wrapped up, left the house, tempted out by the bright moonlight.

Clinging to Marjorie, and watching her face, Bessie led the way. Before them stretched the long avenue of elms, while around them wound a belt of firs and yews, inclosing velvety lawns and shadowy shrubberies, and all lying softened and mellowed in the tender light of the young moon.

They were on one of the smooth gravel walks which led from the house into a piece of woods which ran like a tongue into the trimly kept lawns. As they entered the woods Marjorie drew a long breath of satisfaction and quickened her pace.

"This is beautiful," she said, the color, never far from the soft, peach-like surface, flushing her face, the flash of delighted admiration lighting her eyes. "Is there much of this, Bessie? The grounds are very pretty—oh, yes—but this wood. Tell me that there are miles of it."

"So there are," answered Bessie, with her little soft laugh, so unlike the quick, spirited one of her sister. "So there are, but they belong to the Wold. This little piece of ours only goes as far as the fence there."

"Ah!" sighed Marjorie. "Well, we must be satisfied. But how lovely it is! Look at the moon on those firs! Oh, Bessie, if I had but seen this when I first came, I would have taken all the gold and silver, even the two monsters, without a grimace! This is the sugar-coating to the pills."

"It was all like this once," said Bessie, "when our grounds were a part of the Wold; but the Chestertons became poor—just as we became rich, I suppose—and had to sell it. Too bad, wasn't it!"

"Which?" demanded Marjorie, with a laugh, "that we became rich, or——"

"Hush!" interrupted Bessie, with a sudden shock and a quick, timid pressure on her sister's arm. "What was that? Did you hear it, Marjorie? There is some one in the wood."

"In our wood," asked Marjorie, looking around. "I don't hear——"

Then she stopped short, for she could hear the sound of footsteps moving on the crisp, fallen leaves, and voices floated towards them through the aisles of fir and oak.

"Let us go!" whispered Bessie in alarm.

"Why? Our name is Deane, and our feet are on our native—well purchased—heath. If they are poachers, I would like to see them. If they are not, we have no reason for undignified flight. Dignity above all things, Bessie. We must not forget that we are Deanes."

And Marjorie, with a pretty air of audacity and a slightly heightened color, looked inquiringly around.

"Oh, Marjorie!" remonstrated Bessie, the color ebbing and flowing on her soft, pretty, childish face. "Hadn't we really better go?"

"Timid little sister!" said Marjorie, patting the round cheek of the other. "Why should we go? I fancy they are a couple of game keepers, and as I have never seen a game-keeper I really owe it to my position in society to remain and see one now. I have—"

A sudden jerk, too powerful to be resisted, drew her behind a tree and cut short her speech, and she followed the line of Bessie's trembling finger as it pointed out three figures which had suddenly but leisurely strolled from the sheltering trunks into a clear patch of moonlight.

Two of the figures are gentlemen; one tall and distinguished looking, and the other shorter and more handsome as to face. Both are in evening dress, and both are smoking, notwithstanding that their companion is a lady. From behind the ambush to which Bessie had dragged her, Marjorie looked out and curiously scrutinized the trio. For a moment she directed her attention to the two men, and then her eyes wandered to the woman. And there they rested, first with indifference, and then with frank admiration.

More swiftly than any man could have done, Marjorie recognized and acknowledged the exquisite beauty of the face, which, all unconscious of scrutiny, was turned up to the revealing moonbeams. It was one of those faces which one sees in the photographer's windows, and in the cartoons of the society papers. Fair, blue-eyed, with soft rippling hair of a reddish hue, with perfectly cut lips, and delicately dark eyebrows, it is the face of a fashionable beauty. Perfectly dressed, her beringed, but ungloved hand just resting like a snow-flake on a tall man's arm, she stood with that peculiar serenity, born of a consciousness of superiority and power, which go so far to win for a woman the worship of men and the dislike of other women.

Yes, even then, at the moment that she was admiring the beautiful creature before her, there was in Marjorie's heart the first vague impulse of opposition if not of positive dislike.

As for Bessie, she leaned forward and drank in the vision, open-mouthed and eyed, forgetting her fright, and forgetting even the impropriety of playing the spy and eavesdropper, in her full admiration.

The trio came down to the fence and stood looking through the tongue of wood now at the moon, and now at a green, velvety strip of lawn, which peeped out in the distance. Then the handsomer of the two men paused, stroked his yellow moustache, with a hand almost as white and beringed as the woman's, and leaning over the fence, said, laughingly:

"Pretty little bit, this, eh, Helen?"

The beauty just raised her pencilled eyebrows in serene acquiescence.

"Quite too pretty. Is it a part of the Wold?" addressing the tall man.

The man by her side, who had been staring moodily at the bit of encroaching lawn, looked down at his cigar, from which he knocked the ashes with slow carefulness before answering with eloquent directness.

"No."

The delicate eyebrows went up again, and there ensued another silence.

"Ah, fence, I see," murmured the other man. "Didn't notice it. Then this is the piece old Roger sold—eh, Roland?"

"The same," answered the deep voice, laconically as before.

"Pity one can't pass an act prohibiting one's grandfather that kind of thing. I remember, now, a widow bought it, didn't she? What sort of a neighbor is she, Roland?"

"She being under ground and I above it, I can't tell you."

"Oh, yes. I remember seeing the house she built; rum little place. People used to make your mother wild by asking her if it was her steward's house."

"My mother has never forgiven my grandfather for selling this land," said Sir Roland, quietly. "People are not likely, however, to make her wild by asking such a question. The place has changed hands; the rum little cottage has been pulled down and a brand-new house, something between the Crystal Palace and the General Post-office has been built in its stead. So they say, at least. I've not seen it," he added, not contemptuously nor angrily, but with a quiet placidity which made the girl behind the tree wince from heel to crown.

"Ah, um, I see," said the other. "New people, I suppose."

"Quite new, I believe," was the reply.

"How dreadful! I can understand how painful it must be. The usual sort of thing, I suppose. Rich sugar-baker or soap-boiler, with the stereotyped vulgar family, who are always hanging about your land, and reminding you of their existence."

"Can't say that," answered the deep voice, dispassionately just. "At present there appear to be only two, the father and the little girl, and they don't annoy us in any way. There is another daughter, I believe, but she has not yet put in an appearance. On the whole, I think we are very lucky. It might have been worse."

"Oh, yes," assented the friend. "And the old fellow keeps to himself, I suppose. What's he like?"

"The usual thing," answered Sir Roland, slowly puffing his cigar. "Self-made man, moderately proud of his own manufacture. Sort of a man you meet pretty often nowadays. The child's a pretty little thing, I think. I never pay much attention to people of that sort. She doesn't seem to be very vulgar. The other is older, I think."

"Ah!" said the beauty; "it is there where the vulgarity will show itself. The little one is too young to give it full scope. I can fancy what the sister will be. How unpleasantly near they are! Poor Lady Chesterton! Of course she does not go near them?"

"No, I think not," answered Sir Roland, evidently wearied of the subject. "No; I fancy not. What's the use? She'd only bore them, and the old fellow'd upset her. No——"

"To say nothing of the daughters," interrupted the beauty, "*Men* of that class one can—one is somehow obliged to endure; but the women—they are quite too dreadful."

"Ah, I suppose so," assented Sir Roland, with an unmistakable yawn, which is intended to, and which does bury the subject. "Shall we go back? The air is rather keen, and this shawl——"

As he spoke he bent his head, with that slow, graceful movement which may be born with a man but can never be acquired, and drew the white, filmy silk close about her. With a softly murmured, "Thanks," she turned—"glided" around, and they all moved slowly off.

The crackling of the leaves under their feet was followed by a silence as profound as the grave. But suddenly it was broken by a cry—a cry of pain from Bessie, whose arm, held in a convulsive grip by Marjorie's fingers, is hurting her.

Marjorie relaxed her hold, but stood, motionless as a statue, staring at the spot where the three had stood, the embodiment of passionate indignation and soul-consuming wrath. Every insolent word that had been uttered was eating its way into her heart. Her eyes burned, her ears tinged, and the color dashed into her face one moment only to leave it deadly white the next. Suddenly, as if the feelings pent up within her must have some vent, she closed her little white teeth with a snap, clenched her little hand, and stamped upon the ground.

Bessie, who had never seen Marjorie so moved, regarded her tremblingly.

"Did you hear?" she whispered.

"Hear?" cried Marjorie. "Do you think if I had been stone deaf I should not have heard? And these are aristocrats! Aristocrats, whom we are now to try to be like! Oh, I can understand the French Revolution now!"

"Oh, Marjorie! They don't mean—they don't know. That tall one was Sir Roland. And did you see the lady's face? Wasn't she beautiful?"

"Beautiful? Yes, she is beautiful. But I can forgive her; she is only a woman. But him, with his cold contempt and insolent sneer, I hate him! I hate him! Don't cry, Bessie. And this comes from pape's attempt to push himself and us where we have no right to be. But we have the right, and I will maintain it! They shall see that I can be as proud as they, with their accident of birth! Come—quickly! Let me get away from here. I seem to breathe their insolence over again. Oh, how I hate him.

And, with flushed face and flushing eyes, she turned, with one swift, expressive gesture towards the abhorred patch of moonlight, and then seized Bessie's little hand, and hurried her rapidly away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROFESSIONAL BEAUTY.

SIR ROLAND was only a baronet, but he might have been anything in the peerage, had he wished, or had any of his ancestors wished; for the Chestertons were one of the most ancient families in England, and held the many broad acres of land, and rejoiced in the enormous income which would have graced a dukedom. But the Chestertons were proud—indeed, "proud as a Chesterton" was a saying in Berkshire—and one matter of pride with them was that they were baronets before many a duchy was created. And if they were proud of themselves, that part of the country was equally proud of them, and was only too ready to bend its head in lowly submission to the tall prim old lady who, clad in the stiff satin and coffee-colored robes of a by-gone age, ruled the local society with a hand of iron, not always covered with the glove of velvet.

But, if Lady Chesterton ruled society, Sir Roland ruled her. Not that he cared for the ruling. No one could be easier to please or to manage, always remembering two things, that he hated a fuss or a scene. Either of those things would send him away, and his return would be problematical.

When he was fifteen years of age his father died, leaving him in possession of twenty-five thousand pounds a year, and one of the oldest and most honored titles in England. Young as he was, Sir Roland set about diminishing his revenues in a manner perfectly enchanting to the money-lenders, but heartrending to the wiseacres. For seven years he kept up the pace, and then, just as it was beginning to look as if he would end by making ducks and drakes of the ancient estate, he pulled up of a sudden, and returned to the home of his ancestors. He returned home as calmly as if he had left it but seven weeks before, instead of seven years.

Notwithstanding something like eighty thousand pounds had taken to themselves wings, my Lady Chesterton was satisfied.

"He might have done so much worse," she said to one of her intimate friends.

"In what way, dear?" said her friend, as she distinctly recalled some of the terrible stories of the past year.

"In what way! Think, my dear, he might have made an—an imprudent marriage!" responded the stately mother, with a shudder. "All else is nothing to that. That would have killed me. The money," and she smiled, and imperceptibly shrugged her shoulders, "that is but a mere bagatelle; but a marriage—that would have been fatal."

"Just so, dear," assented her old friend. "He has left it all to you. He was wise enough to know that you could manage it better for him than he could for himself. You must find a wife for him, my dear, and—and I would do it at once."

Lady Chesterton felt that this was sound advice. Though she had every confidence in her son, she had known cases of a relapse, and she felt that if Sir Roland did go back to the old life he could never be reclaimed from it. He had sowed his wild oats and left them ungarnered, but if he went back he would surely reap that whirlwind which is so sure a harvest to all such sowings.

So she set about making the Wold pleasant. Reminding him that he was master, and she a mere dependent or housekeeper, she repaired the stables, turned one of the dining-rooms into a billiard-room, built an armory, with her own money; declared solemnly that she liked the smell of tobacco—which she had found unendurable seven years ago—and set about finding suitable society for him.

Sir Roland remonstrated at the changes made in his behalf, but Lady Chesterton adhered to the task she had set herself.

"You shall not be dull if I can help it, Roland," she said. "I wish the society were a little more brilliant, but I cannot repopulate Cranford, can I, dear?"

At which Sir Roland laughed in his careless way, as if he were quite content that she could not.

"No, it is not brilliant," continued the old lady, musingly. "Men and manners seem to have changed terribly since I was young. It is bad form now to know anything about any other subject than money or politics. I have sat at this table with seven men on each side of me, and not a dull one among them; but they were the men of the last generation. Now people think they satisfy all requirements if they eat and drink what you give them, and hold their tongues."

"We are in the age of silence, *ma mere*," said Sir Roland.

"Indeed!" retorted the old lady, with that tone of steel-like irony which so often made her friends wince. "Silence is golden. I regret that the golden age should be so intensely disagreeable."

Once again, as in the past days, the Wold threw open its tall doors, and guests were bidden to the feast. Entertainments, which reminded the elders of the days of the Regency, and astounded the young ones by their stately splendour, followed each other in rapid succession. The proud and anxious mother paraded, as it were, all the beauty of the country before her son's eyes. He had but to throw his handkerchief, sultan-like, and make his choice; but Sir Roland did not throw his handkerchief; he scarcely, so to speak, took it from his pocket. The procession of eligible beauties were marched by in vain. The dreadful rumor that he was not a marrying man began to be whispered.

Lady Chesterton was in despair. Then she began to think she had made a mistake. The selection had been too large, too imposing. She thought that she would make it smaller, and, having skimmed the *creme de la creme*, exhibit that for his approval. It happened at that time, just a few months before Marjorie's arrival at Harley House, that society had set up a new goddess, who, unlike many of her kind, possessed in addition to her gift of exceeding loveliness the advantage of good antecedents.

As Lady Chesterton was aware, not a few of the famous beauties had risen from humble, and not always certain, origin.

Helen Montressor was an exception to the too general rule. She was not only beautiful, but was respectable, being the second daughter of a Sir Hugh Montressor, whose respectability was proved by his being a distant, a very distant, relative of the great Chestertons.

When Lady Chesterton heard that Helen Montressor's photograph, in various picturesque attitudes, was being exhibited in the shop windows, that the society papers were full of paragraphs referring to the young lady's nose and eyes, even her feet, that a

prince of the blood had waltzed with her three times in an evening, that people were wearing "Montressor jackets" and carying "Montressor walking-sticks"—when Lady Chesterton heard this, and a great deal more, she was not horrified—that emotion was far too pronounced for her patrician breeding—but simply filled with a cold wonder and contempt.

But as distant rumors of her young kinswoman's exquisite loveliness reached her, and people spoke of her manifold charms and accomplishments, the old noblewoman grew thoughtful.

Ordinary beauty was evidently powerless to produce any effect on Sir Roland; perhaps the extraordinary charms of Helen Montressor would move him.

She remembered that among Helen's brothers there was one named Reginald, whose name she had heard Sir Roland mention as one of his London friends; and, with a promptness which characterized her, she informed Sir Roland that she meant to invite Reginald and his sister to spend a fortnight at the Wold.

Sir Roland—they were at breakfast—looked up from his letters.

"Reginald?" he said, absently. "Very well; he is a good sort of fellow. Tell him to bring his gun; not that there is much to shoot. By the way, what have you done with all the birds, mother?"

"Left them to every poacher in Cranford," said the old lady, with her ever ready sarcasm. "You are the most popular man in the county."

Sir Roland smiled, the smile which was so like her own.

"Well, ask him to bring his gun. And which of his sisters shall you ask?"

"I thought of Helen," she replied, with prettily acted indifference.

"Helen!" he echoed, with a smile. "You are ambitious, good mother. Are you aware the high and mighty ones scheme and plot to obtain her as their guest, and that she declares country houses a mistake?"

Lady Chesterton's delicate nostrils expanded.

"Indeed! I remember when an invitation to spend a day at the Wold would have sent a Montressor mad with delight.

Sir Roland raised his dark brows.

"Times have changed," he said. "Helen Montressor is the queen of the hour. But ask her if you like. She may come. I remember she gave me the tips of her fingers the last time I saw her, and that is more than she usually gives my lord Duke of Riding. She may come.'

A faint pink tinged the old aristocrat's white face, and the lace on her bosom rustled ominously.

"Yes, I think she will come," was all she said. And Sir Roland's evident indifference pleased her. Dukes and earls might bow

down before the new beauty, but her son—Sir Roland Chesterton, of Chesterton Wold—had evidently not done so, and the proud mother was satisfied.

The invitation was sent, and followed Miss Montressor from one nobleman's seat to another, until it found her at the Earl of Brande's, where she reigned paramount queen among the choice of the departed season. At first the fashionable beauty had smiled—she never laughed—had actually smiled the invitation to scorn.

"The Wold?" she said, "I remember it. I think papa took me there once, to see a tall, thin old woman in black satin and lace, who looked at me under her eyelids, as if I were the dirt under her feet. Does she think I am dead, and want to be buried? I would as soon go and stay in a vault."

But Reginald Montressor, her brother, was at her side, and Reginald was no fool.

"Let me look at the letter," he said. "By Jove! She wants you to go. Take my advice and do so, Helen. The Chesterton property is the finest in the shire, and Roland is at home."

"Roland?" echoed the beauty.

"Yes, Roland," said Reginald, with quiet decision. "Come, don't be a fool, Helen. All this is very well, but how long will it last? Just until the next beauty turns up. Let us be reasonable. What good has all this done for you? Nothing at all. The season has gone by, and you are still Helen Montressor. Oh, yes, I know," he said, waving his white hand—the Montressor hand was famous—"but you'll admit it hasn't made a countess of you, nor a baroness even. Accept the old woman's invitation and trust to Providence."

And Helen Montressor, being too sensible to undervalue her brother's worldly wisdom, had sat down there and then, and writting a most charming letter of acceptance.

She came. The Chesterton carry-all, vast as it was, was not large enough to convey her trunks from the station. She came, and old Lady Chesterton never forgot the evening of her arrival.

In the stiff satin lace the old patrician awaited her arrival in the drawing-room—in the room which kings had honored and sanctified by their presence—had awaited her arrival with all that stately old-world courtesy, which had overawed so many, and which she had expected would overawe Miss Helen Montressor—their, so to speak, poor relation.

The old lady never forgot how, when the door opened, the tall, graceful figure, imperial in its beauty and consciousness of power, came sailing, smiling towards her, the exquisite face as calm and royal as her own, the eyes as cold and dominant as a queen's meeting hers—hers, Lady Chesterton's!—with serene, superiority; and the voice, low-pitched and languidly composed, murmuring its stereotyped phrases of polite greeting.

It was as much as the old lady could do to prevent herself gasping. This—this a Montressor! One of Chesterton's poor relations! She was more like a queen of Sheba visiting Solomon's mother.

Sir Roland, whose sense of humor was marked, had a smile behind his moustache as he watched the meeting between these two queens—the empress of the old and the empress of the new world.

With stately fashion and calm hospitality, the old lady welcomed her guest, and with stately patrician coldness the young lady accepted it; then she turned to Sir Ronald and extended her hand.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Sir Roland; I thought you were in Palestine."

And this, notwithstanding Lady Chesterton had expressly mentioned in her note that Sir Ronald was at home!

As for Reginald, he assumed at once the *bon camarade* air. Like all the Montressors, he was extremely well favored. A perfectly oval face, crisp golden hair, blue eyes that expressed just what their owner wished them to express, and a golden moustache that emphasized, rather than concealed, a perfectly shaped mouth. He wrung Sir Roland's hand with a heartiness that set aside for the moment his even-bred languor.

"Awfully glad to come, my dear fellow! Awfully kind of Lady Chesterton to ask us! Decided on the moment. Helen threw up, Lord knows how many engagements!"

"I'm sorry," said Sir Roland; "Miss Montressor has accepted in haste to repent at leisure."

But Lady Chesterton was not afraid. She gave dinner-parties and other entertainments, all of the most exclusive.

"She shall see," she thought, "how high a Chesterton stands, and that there is nothing better than my son Roland."

And, indeed, Sir Roland stood out with sufficient distinctness to warrant a mother's pride. The Chestertons were as famous for their beauty as for their hauteur, and Sir Ronald had inherited not only the Chesterton beauty but the Bentley as well. Above the crowd of Berkshire society his tall figure and dark, patrician face towered pre-eminent.

Helen Montressor saw this. She saw, also, that the Chestertons ruled as a power in the land, and she felt that Reginald was right, and that even a fashionable beauty might consider that she had done well in marrying a Chesterton of the Wold.

But what about Sir Roland? Well, for the first few days he watched the comedy enacted before his eyes with amused indifference. He saw his mother, the great Lady Chesterton, pitted against and overcome by the London beauty; he looked on the scene as if he were a disinterested spectator at a theatre, and noted what powerful sway—the sway which the fashionable goddess exercised over the Berkshire society; and then—and then the subtle

influence of her exquisite loveliness, of her many accomplishments, of her indescribable charms, made themselves felt, and he began to think that if he must choose a mate, he could not do better than choose this beautiful queen, who reigned over all who came within her magic circle, and who seemed fitted to adorn even so exalted a position as that of mistress of Chesterton Wold.

And to him the fashionable beauty was gracious and yielding; however cold and precise she was to others, to him she was always warm and affable. His lightest wish seemed law to her. Once at luncheon he had ventured to criticise a ruffle which she wore round her white, stately neck, and his idle, careless words had been noted by her, his opinion followed.

This, the subtlest kind of flattery, told upon him, and Sir Roland, if not actually in love, was on the borderland thereof. When a woman who is cold to all others, and is warm to you, then beware of her!

But, half-smitten as he was, Sir Roland still remained "lord of himself;" and, often, when some party had been planned by Lady Chesterton, he would, utterly disregarding it, take his gun or his walking-stick, and set off on a shooting or rambling expedition by himself. He never offered any explanation or excuse.

No expostulation or entreaty would force or persuade him from his resolve. With the Chesterton smile he would put the remonstrance aside and go his way.

It happened that on the morning following the evening on which Marjorie and Bessie had seen him and his guests, Helen and Reginald Montresser, he came down to breakfast in his shooting-coat and gaiters, his gun in hand, and his dogs barking and yelping outside the door.

Lady Chesterton had arranged a visit to Lady Dollmore at the Grange—a visit involving a luncheon and, perhaps, an impromptu dinner—and had counted upon Sir Roland's presence. She looked up as he entered, gun in one hand, game-bag and cartridges in the other, and uttered a faint remonstrance.

Have you forgotten that we are going to the Grange, Roland?" she asked.

"Quite," he answered. "Are you? Well, go, and Heaven speed you! I am going to try the spinney. Miss Montressor, you don't shoot, or you would sympathize with the mortification with which a man walks all over his preserves only to find that all his birds have gone to Leadenhall market."

That was all; not a word of apology for spoiling their morning! Without another word he drank his coffee and ate his plover's egg; all the loveliness of Helen Montressor opposite him was lost upon him. And then, with a light word of farewell, he took up his gun and strode out.

Well might his mother say that he had no heart! For almost the first time in her life, her face wore an expression of apology as she turned to the beautiful girl at her side.

"You need not tell me that I am one of those mothers who have spoiled their sons," she said.

Helen Montressor looked up with a smile perfectly free from the faintest suggestion of annoyance or disappointment.

"Do you think that Sir Roland has been spoiled because, instead of accompanying us, he prefers a walk through the woods such a morning as this? I can't agree with you, Lady Chesterton. If I were a man I would do just as he has done—take my gun and walk out without a word. Why should he do that which is disagreeable to him?" and she fixed her calm eyes on the old lady's shrewd gray ones.

"Oh, if you defend him the prosecution fails," was the courtly response. "But perhaps you would prefer a walk to a dull ride with an old woman and a brother."

"I should, if Sir Roland had asked me to go with him," replied the beauty with proud candor; "but as he has not, I will go with you."

Lady Chesterton looked gratified and her cold eyes softened.

"My dear," she said, "that was well said. Most girls would have felt as you do and died rather than admit it. If you are not careful I shall have to love you, Helen."

"It shall not be my fault if you do not," was the simple retort.

"Upon my word," said Reginald, with his musical laugh, "you two ladies are very candid! are we living in the Palace of Truth? If so, permit me to make my escape. I cannot pass the ordeal."

CHAPTER V.

PROUDER THAN A CHESTERTON.

WITH his dogs at his heels, and his gun under his arm, Sir Roland strode through the woods, now all ablaze in russet and orange, and odorous with the fallen pine cones; but, notwithstanding that the dogs started many a pheasant, and sent the hares scudding across the open glades, the gun still remained with its muzzle pointing to the ground, and the game flew by disregarded.

Upon Sir Roland's face sat an air of profound, immovable reverie.

With his hands thrust into the deep pockets of his shooting coat, and his eyes fixed on the ground, he strode along, puffing his pipe, too full of the quiet beauty of the autumn morning to break the charm by the noise of slaughter. Heedless of the direction in which he might be strolling, he wandered along the winding paths, and unconsciously passed out of the woods into the high-road, and would have wandered on into the village of Cranford, which lay in a hollow before him, when, with a chorus of yelps, the dogs, big and small, dashed from behind him and tore down the road in pursuit of a kitten, which had unluckily chosen the road for a promenade.

Sir Roland, roused by the uproar, shouted a recall, but to no purpose. Dogs consider cats fair game at all times, and, having been defrauded of their morning's amusement by their master's torpidity, they had evidently determined not to let this legitimate quarry escape.

With its tail erect, the unfortunate mite fled along the road, too alarmed and confused to turn aside; and a black-and-tan terrier, delighting in the name of Nix, was on the point of running her down, when, with a suddenness that brought the dogs—and not only the dogs, but Sir Roland himself, who had set off running, to a stand-still—a girl darted from a gate on the side of the road, swooped upon the kitten, and, regardless of its claws and of the yelping dogs, whipped it under her jacket.

So sudden and swift had been the race that the dogs were staggered for a moment, the next they were all around her, jumping and yelping, with half-playful, half-angry excitement. Sir Roland, recovering from his momentary surprise, strode forward and was in the midst of the clamoring crew, and knocking them right and left before half a minute had elapsed.

But in that half minute a picture had photographed itself on his mind, which was not likely to fade. It was a vision of a girlish figure, instinct with the grace of youth and beauty, standing with erect head and flashing eyes, and upon a face smitten with beauty.

With blood-red lips half-parted, to allow the panting breath room to escape, a rose-like flush on her cheeks, with soft, golden-brown hair, dishevelled by her rush, she made a picture in the autumn sunlight that an artist would have given ten years of his life to have seen and painted.

So wrapt and absorbed was she in her errand of mercy that she did not know of Sir Roland's nearness, until he was by her side, knocking to right and left, with no sparing hand, the discomfited dogs, who, balked and disappointed, withdrew to a distance and eyed the couple of spoil-sports with an emphatic air of disgust.

When the dispersal had been completed, and not until then, Sir Roland turned to her, and, raising his hat, was about to speak,

when he was struck dumb by meeting point-blank a pair of scornful eyes, which seemed to dare him to utter a word. For a moment he contemplated the angry, passionately angry, stare in profound and puzzled silence; then with an effort that surprised him by its force, he said, in his calm, low-toned bass:

"I am very sorry; I am afraid my dogs have caused you a great deal of alarm. Pray accept my sincere apology."

But to the humble effort at atonement, there was no softening of the dark-brown eyes, which, to Sir Roland's amazement, seemed to grow still more scornful and haughty. Still panting, she stood with the kitten huddled up closely under her jacket, her figure drawn up to its full height, the color coming and going on her face.

Sir Roland, his eyes chained to her, waited a moment that seemed an age, and in which admiration for the proud, beautiful face struggled with a vague perplexity. It was a novel experience for him to sue for pardon and find it denied. The moment passed, and he spoke again.

"Believe me, I am sincerely grieved that my dogs should have caused you so much annoyance. Will you permit me to see if the kitten is injured?"

The brown eyes flashed, and the red lips compressed tightly, then opened to give passage to a decided, haughty:

"It is needless; no."

Sir Roland stared first into her eyes, then dropped his own, and inclined his head with an expression of proud humility.

"I see," he said, "that I have angered you beyond all hope of pardon. At least, let me speak in my defence; the meanest criminal is permitted that much. I have been walking in the woods, and unconsciously wandered into the high road. I say unconsciously. Had I been more attentive to my whereabouts, I should have kept a sharper lookout on my dogs. This accident was caused by my carelessness, which I should have regretted had it merely resulted in harm to the kitten, but as it has worked worse mischief in alarming and annoying a young lady, I hasten to offer her my most heartfelt apology, which I trust she will accept."

"And which she thinks it quite unnecessary to either accept or decline," retorted Marjorie, with a curl of the lip that brought the blood to Sir Roland's cheek.

With a gesture of his hand, eloquent of his surprise and disappointment, he bit his lip, and, raising his hat, was about to leave when a sharp and involuntary exclamation of pain stopped him. The [illegible] had vanished from the face, and left it white and [illegible].

"There!" he cried, appealingly, "you are hurt! Surely one of the dogs——"

"No," she said, the color coming back again. "No, your dogs have not bitten me."

"Then that miserable kitten has scratched you! Let me beg of you to put her down! She will come to no harm. Let me take her."

And in his anxiety he unconsciously put his hand upon her arm.

With a swift gesture of offence and dislike, she shrank back.

"It is nothing," she said, coldly. If you will be good enough to —to go away with your dogs, I will put her down myself. She is merely frightened."

Without obeying the request to depart with his dogs, Sir Roland turned around and shouted "Home!" and the dogs drew together and trotted off, with their tails between their legs and disgust in their hearts.

"Now," he said, turning to Marjorie, "the dogs have gone and will not return, Let me beg of you to put her down."

With an air of not having heard Sir Roland, but as if obeying her own impulse, Marjorie tore the clinging, frightened little thing from its hiding-place and put it on the ground, when it immediately darted into a tree.

With a gravity that was extremely comical if they had but known it, the two human beings stood and watched it; then Marjorie, gathering her skirts together, after the manner of her sex, was walking off; but Sir Roland, moved by a spirit of obstinacy, made one more effort at propitiation.

"The kitten is evidently all right," he said. "It is only you who have suffered. Do you still refuse to receive my apologies?"

She looked at him sideways over her shoulder.

"What do you wish me to say?" she asked, coldly.

"Anything less harsh and unforgiving than that which you have said," he replied, with a grave earnestness that surprised himself.

"Then I am sorry—no, I am not—I cannot gratify you," she retorted. "But for me that poor little thing would have been torn to pieces."

"That is quite true, and I should have been to blame. I have admitted it and expressed my regret. Can mortal man do more?" he asked, with heightened color. "If I had set my dogs at your kitten with *malice prepense*, you can not treat me——"

"It is not my kitten," came unwillingly from the sullen lips.

"Not yours?" said Sir Roland, inwardly delighted at this reluctant prolonging of the conversation. "That at least gives me immense relief. Surely you will not bear malice for so slight a cause?"

"Malice," said Marjorie, unthinkingly.

"It seems like malice, if the word is not too strong to apply to what I humbly venture to hope is but momentary anger for an unintentional offence, At the risk of appearing presumptuously intrusive, I must once more beg you to accept my apology. If you

will permit me, I will do myself the honor of calling and offering a more formal and extended apology——"

With a swift flood of crimson in her face, Marjorie turned on him aggressively.

"You mean that you will call upon us--that you will make this an excuse for patronizing us with a visit——"

She stopped short, smitten to silence by the look of surprise on the handsome face, and, biting her lip, looked down at the ground.

Sir Roland inclined his head.

"I certainly meant that I should like to call. Do you find fresh cause for offence in it? Can you expect a gentleman to rest under a lady's avowed implacability without making an effort to remove it?"

"I—I—" she faltered, with downcast eyes fixed on the little mass of leaves which her restless foot had heaped together, "I do not expect anything. If it will give you any satisfaction to hear me say the meaningless nothings with which one accepts an apology, pray consider them said."

"It would give me greater satisfaction to hear you say them," he said, quietly.

With a sudden flash of her dark eyes she confronted him.

"Why should I give that satisfaction? We are strangers, Sir Roland—"

She stopped and bit her lips with ill-concealed vexation.

"That we are strangers, I regret," he said. "But you have an advantage over me—you know my name while I am in ignorance of yours."

For the first time Marjorie's face relaxed with a wavering smile, which was all it needed to make it beautiful.

"Yes," she said, banishing the smile instantly. "I do know your name. You are Sir Roland Chesterton, and it is because you are Sir Roland Chesterton that I refuse to accept an apology from you. Good-morning."

"Stay!" he said.

And there was in that voice which, wilful and self-reliant as she was, caused her to pause.

"Is it possible that I have given you some cause for offence before the miserable affair of this morning?" he said. Have we met before this. I do not think that is possible. I should have remembered it."

At this thinly veiled compliment, something that would have been a sneer on a plainer face, distorted Marjorie's.

"We have not met before," she said.

"We have not?" he demanded, eagerly. "And yet you know my name, and evidently bear no good will—Is it fair—I appeal to

your sense of justice—is it fair to treat me with such marked discourtesy?"

"Discourtesy!" echoed Marjorie, in a low voice.

"Discourtesy," he retorted, with emphasis, "on the mere shadow of hearsay."

"Hearsay!" she said, with a scornful glance, not at him, but at the sky. "I never heard your name until last night."

"And then heard it from some malicious tongue that so blackened it that, at your first meeting with me, you treat me as if I were the greatest scoundrel unhung."

In his conversation he took a step nearer to her, and gained a full view of her face. There was a moment's silence. A pause in which surely one or both should realize the absurdity of the situation which had resulted in two strangers—a handsome man and a young girl—talking in this intimate way. But in truth they were so absorbed, she by her wounded pride and the remembrance of last night, and he by his desire to conquer this strange repugnance of a pretty girl, that conventionalities were forgotten, and went for nothing.

"Scoundrel!" she said, blushing, "I did not say so."

"But your eyes did," he retorted. "If ever dislike and repugnance were expressed, you have looked them since the moment you set eyes on me, and, yet, until to-day we have never met—you, yourself, say that we have never met."

"And I hope we shall never meet again, she answered, lifting her eyes, in which wounded pride and passionate anger fought for predominance.

"This is extraordinary," he said. "This is a mystery which—" here his voice grew grave and solemn. "Will you tell me how and where I have offended you?" he asked.

"No," she replied, turning upon him. "I will not say anything more. I have said too much. We are strangers, Sir Roland, and you have no right to keep me talking on the—the public road. We are strangers, and I wish we should remain so. Good morning!"

And with a glance that was as much one of defiance and dislike as of farewell, she turned and went swiftly down the road.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNTY BALL.

THE days glided by into weeks. Mrs. Gore-Boothe, a lady whose social position was somewhat in excess of her means of maintaining it, had been so gracious as to chaperon Marjorie, and the result had been that everybody had called upon her and received her. That is everybody but the Chestertons, who were still in the profoundest ignorance of the existence of the young lady.

It must be said that Marjorie did not receive the attentions of the gentry in the spirit in which Mrs. Gore-Boothe had at the outset intended that she should. It was that good lady's intention to patronize Marjorie; but the fact had been that Marjorie had rather patronized her, and not only her, but every body else who had made her acquaintance.

It was not done boldly or presumptuously, but in an indifferent, but queenly fashion which made resistance impossible. It now came about that Mr. Deane and his vulgarities were no longer the topic of Cranford gossip; everybody talked of his beautiful and queenly daughter, who took her place in society as though she had been accustomed to rule there.

When it was announced that the time for the county ball had been set, Mrs. Gore-Booth hurried over to Harley House and plunged at once into the absorbing question of what Marjorie should wear. Marjorie listened and said indifferently that she doubted if she would wear anything there.

Then there were horror and dismay, and it required all the arts of Bessie and Mrs. Gore-Boothe combined to persuade her to change her mind. And when it was changed it was very near driven back to its original position by the discovery that the Chestertons always honored the county ball with their presence. And then, again, with the abrubtness which occasionally characterized Marjorie's decision, she declared, with what seemed an unnecessary warmth, that she would go.

And so, when the time came, she did. But she was not on time. She kept her father pacing the hall and studying alternately his watch and the broad staircase, and she horrified Mrs. Gore-Boothe by declaring that she was in no hurry and did not propose to be. Oh, she could be as capricious as a veritable empress when she chose, and that night she chose.

"My dear," said Mrs. Gore-boothe, "I left your father fuming, literally fuming in the hall."

"Don't let that alarm you," said Marjorie, coolly, "Papa always does fume; he likes it."

However, she was ready at last, and Bessie, who was on her knees before her, a position she had taken the better to arrange the white satin gown, leaned back in speechless admiration. And even Mrs. Gore-Boothe could find no words for the moment.

Pretty and piquant at all times, Marjorite looked her best that night. Dressed merely in white satin, with a simple flower in her hair, she was not only ravishingly beautiful, but was the embodiment of elegance and good taste. Bessie was ecstatic, Mrs. Gore-Boothe was positively awed.

"Come, my dear," she said.

They went down to the fuming Mr. Deane, and the two gorgeous footmen ushered them into the carriage and shut the door with an imposing bang.

They were late, and by the time they reached the Town Hall they found that the staircase was crowded by a noble army of young men, who, not yet being warmed out of their diffidence, preferred to cling about the entrance to entering the mazy dance.

It was Marjorie's first ball; but no one would ever have suspected it; for, delighted and dazzled as she was, she exerted all her self-command to appear indifferent and at ease. In truth, her young soul was in arms against the class into which her father's ambition had thrust her, and she was intent on showing that she was not merely equal to everything that might present itself, but superior to it.

Everybody went to the county ball, but in fact the room was divided into two parts. At the bottom, and by far the coolest and most comfortable part of the room, congregated the nobodies, the farmers and small people, the herd that did not belong to Cranford society. Through this Mrs. Gore-Boothe fought her way, and after a long and arduous struggle, reached the upper end of the room. There, enthroned on velvet fauteuils, sat the elite of Cranford, and to that privileged part Mrs. Gore-Boothe made her way.

Late though it was, the Chestertons, the important people, had not yet arrived. Rumors of the attendance of Miss Montresser had gone forth, and the elite were on the tiptoe of curiosity and expectancy. Could it be possible that she would not come after all.

It was a dread possibility; but for a while it was even forgotten in the sensation which the entrance of Marjorie created. Had Marjorie cared enough for it, she must have been gratified by the triumph of her appearance. The young men fairly flocked about her, besieging her for dances; and she would probably have promised them all, had not Mrs. Gore-Boothe suggested that she reserve some.

As it was, she was engaged for five dances, and was soon whirling in the arms of a languid captain of dragoons. With every sign of success, the ball goes on its way.

The Chestertons had not put in an appearance by midnight, and Marjorie, permitted by their absence to forget herself, entered into the full enjoyment of the occasion, dancing every dance since her arrival. The bright color bloomed on her round cheeks, and a happy light glowed in her brown eyes.

Suddenly, while she was dancing with a county magistrate, who had addressed her but twice during the intricate figures of the Lancers, she was sensible of a marked sensation in the room. Some one had arrived.

She looked around just in time to see an old lady in black satin and lace enter the room. Following her was a tall man with a tawny mustache and dark, piercing eyes; on his arm leaned a beautiful woman, with golden red hair and a pale, fair face.

Marjorie did not need to look twice. In an instant she recognized Sir Roland Chesterton and Miss Montressor.

Behind them came a yellow-haired man, with one of those perfect Anglo-Saxon faces which one sees, say twice in a life-time. Beautiful blue eyes, matching the crisp, wavy hair, and a clean-cut mouth — that feature, which is so generally bad, completing the picture. This was Reginald Montressor, the beauty's brother.

But though nearly every woman's gaze, after scanning the group, returned and became fixed on the beauty, Marjorie scarcely looked at her, passed even the fair perfection of Reginald Montressor, but fixed her eyes on the calm, impassive face of Sir Roland Chesterton, while a swift flush mounted to her own face, and one thought passed through her brain: "Will he see and recognize me?"

As a matter of fact, Sir Roland did not seem to see any one. With that impassive composure for which he was famous, he conducted his stately mother to her place amid the mighty ones, and then looked down at his card with an expression which, if it meant anything, was significant of intense boredom and weariness.

To tell the truth, it had required all Lady Chesterton's persuasive eloquence to bring him, and now that he was there, he saw that the affair was even worse than he had pictured it, and he began to turn about for some excuse for deserting the festive scene and smoking a cigar in quietude and peace somewhere out in the street.

Tall and picturesque, in one of the attitudes which the photographers had rendered so familiar, Helen Montressor stood beside the black-satined old lady, her long, exquisitely gloved hands folded on her fan, her face wearing that smile of amusement, largely tinged with contempt, with which a skilled actress might view the efforts of a company of amateurs; her blue eyes wandering slowly, majestically languid, over the bustling mass.

"What a barbaric horde!" she murmured sweetly to Reginald, who, with his eye-glass, was critically scanning the multitude.

"Yes, slightly mixed," he answered, "but—— By George!" he broke in, interrupting himself. "What a pretty girl! What a regular beauty!"

And, without another word, he dropped his eye-glass and mingled with the crowd.

A few minutes later he was being presented to the delighted Mrs. Gore-Boothe and the steely cold Marjorie. With a well-turned compliment he sent the good lady into the seventh heaven of delight, and then turned to Marjorie with a request for a dance, which Marjorie would have coldly refused had not her chaperon interposed:

"How fortunate! She was just saying that this one was not engaged."

After that there was nothing to do but yield, and before she very well knew what had happened she was whirling with him in a waltz. Dancing was one of the many things which Marjorie could do to perfection. All that there was of her was in harmony with the music, and the supple figure which Reginald Montressor's arm encircled was as lithe and full of life as a Nautch girl's.

A thrill of pleasure, as distinct as any that the exquisite had experienced for many a day, went through him as he recognized this fact. And a half inaudible "By Jove!" of satisfaction and surprise escaped his clear-cut lips.

"What did you say?" asked Marjorie.

"I said you danced beautifully," he promptly answered.

"I didn't think you had said so much as that," she retorted.

"It's the truth," he rejoined, emphatically. "I do hope," he added, with an earnestness that surprised himself, "that I have your step. Am I too fast—too slow?"

His step was perfect, but Marjorie was not to be conciliated.

"It does not matter," she answered, icily; and Reginald Montressor was forced to be contented with a perfect dance without conversation.

And the dance was perfect; so perfect that the majority of the couples on the floor were unnoticed in the general admiration of these two. Even the professional beauty was forgotten, and ere long there were not more than half a dozen couples beside Marjorie and Reginald Montressor on the floor. The latter was enjoying himself as he had not done in many a season, and, for that matter, Marjorie soon entered into the full spirit of the delightful motion and was thinking of nothing else, when, of a sudden, she became aware of the fact that she and her partner were the centre of observation, and, with a swift flood of crimson, she abruptly stopped.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Reginald, dismayed. "Anybody stepped on your dress? Don't say you are tired, Miss Deane."

"Thank you," was the cold answer. "I will sit down now,' and she laid just the tips of her fingers on his arm.

"That *was* a waltz!" he murmured, enthusiastically. "Will you be so kind as to see if you have another open, Miss Deane?"

"I know that I have not," was her chilling answer, without even looking at her card. "And there is Mrs. Gore-Boothe—thank you." and, with the faintest of bows, she slipped from his side.

Reginald Montressor, "the handsomest man of his day," stood, striken motionless. Snubbed! He could hardly believe his senses. But it was so, and the worst of it was that he felt it.

Sir Roland, in the meantime, had entered into a talk on politics with an old gentleman, and was trying to forget where he was, when Lady Chesterton demanded:

"Are you not going to dance, Roland?"

He looked up with an air of resignation, and, then, seeing his cousin near him, said, with a grim smile:

"Will you venture, Helen? I dance like a bear on hot plates—vilely! It is only right that I should warn you."

"At least a bear can help me up," she replied, with her most dangerous smile.

That Helen Montressor was an accomplished dancer was evident from the fact that she could make even Sir Roland's performance seem respectable. For it is quite true that great and all-powerful as he was, he danced execrably. And the proud beauty felt herself growing red and breathless with the effort to maintain something like harmony of motion.

Before the waltz was half over he stopped. He was flushed and hot, but self-possessed as he would be—say in the midst of a charge of cavalry.

"I won't torture you any longer, Helen," he said, in his quiet, deep voice. "You deserve a better performer than I am, and I have seen a score of men scowling vindictively at me. Let us walk around."

"Why do you apologise?" she murmured. "Do you think I care so much for dancing as that? I dislike dancing men as I do beauty men—they trench on our preserves."

"I sha'n't incur your displeasure in either way," he said with a smile. "Here is Barnwell—let me introduce him. He can dance, and is good-looking enough to incur your dislike."

Lord Barnwell was delighted to make the acquaintance of the London beauty, and bore her off, leaving Sir Roland to cool himself.

Wiping his forehead and only half concealing a palpable yawn,

he leaned against the wall with his hands behind his back, and watched the scene with an expression which certainly did not betray either amusement or interest, and which speedily developed into one of utter weariness and irritability as the skirts of the women swept against his legs, and one or two reckless couples bounded against his waistcoat.

He abandoned his position and went in search of the bar, determined to do what he could to quench his thirst, and then go away to some safe and secluded spot until the affair was over.

"Champagne, Sir Roland?" asked the waiter, obsequiously.

Sir Roland nodded, and the man opened a fresh bottle—he knew better than to offer him stale wine—and Sir Roland had tipped the glass to his lips, when he heard a voice behind him saying:

"Can I have some water?"

Setting the champagne glass down, he turned and saw the face which had been haunting him for weeks.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR ROLAND MAKES ANOTHER EFFORT.

FOR a moment surprise—unmitigated surprise—was his predominant feeling. As it had appeared to him, waking—ay, and sleeping, too—it had been a face full of haughtily passionate dismay and anger; now it was flushed with pleasure and excitement, the dark-brown eyes alight—positively alight with enjoyment, a young girl's intense enjoyment of her first ball.

Instead of the dark jacket and straw hat in which he had previously pictured her, she was clad in shimmering white satin, her glorious hair uncovered, one creamy flower nestling in its soft silkiness.

There she stood, a vision of fresh youthfulness and beauty, sufficient to stir the blood of the most lymphatic of men, and Sir Roland's blood was not lymphatic.

Untasted, he put the champagne down on the green baise counter, and stared—positively stared.

For a moment she did not see him, her face being turned to the dumpy little man by her side—a lord of the manor and lieutenant of the county for all his dumpiness—but suddenly she became aware of the tall, stalwart figure by her side, and, turning, saw him.

Face to face they stood, a rich crimson glow springing into her cheeks, the dusky red—which stood with him for a blush—into his; then, before either of them could speak, had either intended to do so, the lord-lieutenant exclaimed:

"How do you do, Sir Roland? Pretty full attendance. Thought you weren't here. Have they any water? Not any water," to his partner. "Will nothing else do? Champagne, for instance?"

Hurriedly, precipitately, Marjorie declared that anything, champagne or anything else would do. But Sir Roland had recovered his wits and was too quick for her.

"Water?" he said. "Certainly. Wait a moment," and utterly ignoring her murmur that champagne would do, he strode away to return a few moments later with a glass of the precious liquid.

"Thanks," said the lord-lieutenant, taking the glass as a matter of course, and handing it to Marjorie. "I'm afraid it's not very wholesome, not the sort of thing to drink when you're hot; but a wish—ahem!"

Marjorie sipped the water, and the two men watched her as if they believed the liquid some magic potion, the drinking of which would result in her sudden disappearance from before their eyes. Suddenly, Sir Roland, who had been turning a little project over in his mind, said to the lord-lieutenant, speaking with the utmost innocence and gravity of expression:

"Ah, Sir Morton, was that somebody calling you? I suppose you stewards are very much in demand. Don't wait. I'll see that your partner wants for nothing."

And Sir Morton, being, as Sir Roland very well knew, a conscientious steward, left his beautiful partner and hurried away to see what was desired of him.

But Marjorie was not so easily deceived as he, and immediately rose with surpassing dignity, the color coming into her face with an indignant flush. Without a word she made a movement to pass Sir Roland and return to the ball-room. He quietly barred her way, saying, politely:

"Since your escort has been called away——"

"I heard no one call," interrupted Marjorie, her dark eyes flashing with the promise of battle.

"Nor did I," answered Sir Roland, with an outward calmness that belied the irregular beating of his heart. "But I am sure he must have been wanted—and I—I want a moment in which to ask if you have forgiven me. Have you?" he asked, in a tone of the deepest reverence and humility.

"Forgiven you?" repeated Marjorie, crimson now to her round throat. "For what?"

"Ah," he said, "you have forgotten, no doubt—that is too probable. But I have not."

"No," she said, suddenly, and with a subtle intensity, which puzzled him, "I have not forgotten."

"Nor forgiven?" he asked, in a low tone of real anxiety.

Marjorie looked down.

"Can it matter to you?" she asked, simply, and with an utter absence of coquetry. "Can it matter whether I have or not?"

"Yes," he said, sincerely, "it matters very much. It matters so much that I have been uneasy ever since you left me so—so—well, so angrily—and all for no fault of mine——" A swift glance of the brown eyes stopped him, but he went on again—"for no fault of mine. Are you still implacable?"

He seemed so sincere—she had been enjoying herself so much—she hesitated before answering; she was lost. She glanced up into the earnest grey eyes, and answered:

"If you lay so much stress upon it, I will say that I have forgiven you."

Then she made an inclination of her lovely head that said plainly enough that the interview was at an end; but at that moment her ball programme, insecurely held, dropped from her hand, and he stooped and picked it up.

"You have taken a load off my mind," he said, seriously, and with that grave look which gave importance to his lightest word. "But you are sure? It was but a reluctant absolution. May I put it to the test!?"

"The test?" murmured Marjorie.

He inclined his head.

"Will you give me the next— any dance?" he asked.

The request brought out all her aggressiveness, and she answered coldly, hardly looking at him:

"I am engaged."

"For all!" he demanded. "I have your card here. May I look at it?"

She put out her hand swiftly, but it was too late.

"I am fortunate," he said. "The next dance is unclaimed. I may have it? If you refuse me I shall think that your forgiveness goes no deeper than your lips."

"If I am not engaged," she faltered, biting her red lips.

"No, look," he answered, and she bent forward until her head was so near his that he could smell the sweet fragrance of the flower in her hair. "You see, you are not," he said. "Will you give it to me? It is a shame to ask you, for I am, I suppose, the worst dancer in the room; but still I ask it as a proof that I have won your forgiveness. I may have it?"

Without a word, she put the merest end of her gloved hand on his outheld arm, and he led her into the crowd. They had just begun a mazurka, an old-fashioned dance one seldom sees on a modern

programme, but which the country balls cling to. It was a dance of which Sir Roland was as ignorant as a Laplander might be expected to be; but he put his arm around Marjorie and started desperately. Of course, they had not gone a quarter way around the room before he had made a dozen—twenty false steps.

"You see," he said, "what your clemency has cost you! I am as ignorant as a bear, and you have lost your dance. I would give the world to be able to dance with you."

There was so much sincerity in his voice that Marjorie was touched.

"Let me show you," she said. "See! You take a step like this—and this—and then like this."

And in her eagerness she illustrated her meaning, standing a little way from him, and forgetting everything—that anybody might be looking, or that he was a hated aristocrat who had offended her beyond pardon.

"I see," he cried, eagerly as herself. Eagerly! when but a quarter of an hour before he had declared the whole thing a bore. "Now, let me try."

"That is a little better," said Marjorie, doubtfully. "Don't take such enormous strides."

"I won't," he said, humbly. "It seems to me that one's legs are rather in the way of executing this extremely Sphinx-like dance; and I have rather long legs," he added, ruefully.

"Never mind," said Marjorie smiling encouragingly. "You are improving."

"Growing shorter, do you mean?" he asked with deep gravity.

"No," she laughed, "dancing more like a ——"

"A civilized being," he finished for her, "thanks to your tuition. You have been very patient with me—more patient than I should have expected—had any right to expect, I mean," he corrected, quickly, an ominous arching of the straight, dark brows warning him that the hot temper was only dozing, and needed but a word to rouse it and—separate them.

And Sir Roland would not for worlds be separated yet from the capricious creature, who in some way had unwittingly raised him from the depths of weariness to the giddy heights of amusement and pleasure.

It was not her beauty, it was not altogether her sweet, young grace, though he saw and appreciated both, as he felt the lithe figure on his arm and looked down at the face, with its blood red lips and softly flashing eyes, all life and youth. It is something more than this—a nameless charm, springing from her sub ime i. difference of conventionalities, her unstained innocence of self-consciousness, and her amazing independence.

"Ill-tempered!" he thought, as he glanced down. "I pity the wretch who dances at the end of the chain she holds!"

But even as the thought entered his mind she raised her eyes, and his pity for her future husband was swallowed up in a sudden irrepressible admiration, overpowering his cold judgment, and making his heart beat quick and fast against hers. So engrossed was he in contemplation, admiration and half a dozen other emotions of the heart and brain, that he had forgotten that they were not the sole possessors of Cranford Town Hall, and that two or three hundred persons were remarking his rapt face and close attention to his partner, and that his lady mother sat upright as a dart in her black satin, and watched him with a set face and eyes that were crystallized with surprise, behind those gold-rimmed glasses.

"Will some one be so good as to tell me with whom my son is dancing?" she asked at last, and in a voice as stony as her stare.

Then the dowagers and countesses raised their glasses and pretended that they noted for the first time that Sir Roland was dancing. They shook their heads. Not one of them knew her.

But Sir Roland was utterly indifferent to the satisfaction or chagrin of the onlookers, and struggled valiantly and happily on. He had forgotten that he had distinctly deserted Helen Montressor, and that she must be watching him and the rival for whom he had deserted her. It did not occur to him that there were at least a score of high born damsels with whom he should have danced before offering himself to this fair unknown, and a civil word to whom he had not yet even spoken.

Nothing of that occurred to him, and if it had it would not have troubled him. It was enough for him at that moment that the sweet young face rested almost on his shoulder; that the fragrance of the flower, lying like a jewel incased in her silken hair, stole over his senses; that the young maiden heart beat so near—so perilously near his own.

And the truth shall be told—Marjorie, too, had been unconsciously enjoying, not the dance, but the situation, until she suddenly realized it, when immediately her step grew slower with the intention of stopping.

"One more turn," pleaded Sir Roland, with an eagerness that surprised himself.

Marjorie yielded, as the easiest way of ending the dance; but it was a fatal request, for they had not made a circuit of the room when his uncertain feet stumbled, and a sharp, tearing sound told the story of a rent gown.

Flushed and panting, Marjorie looked down as she disengaged herself. A slit a yard in length ran along the front of her white satin.

"There!" said Sir Roland ruefully, "I knew I should do some damage! That comes of dancing with an untaught savage. What is to be done?"

From looking ruefully down, Marjorie looked up at his aghast countenance, and she could not but laugh.

"How did you manage to do it?" she mirthfully asked.

"Upon my word I don't know. My foot must have caught in it."

"But how? You haven't spurs on, have you?" and she glanced demurely at his heels.

"How good of you not to be furious with me!" exclaimed Sir Roland, with a gratitude in which there was some wonder.

"It must seem odd in me," said Marjorie, with a twinkle in her brown eyes. "Well," with a sigh, "I suppose I must go home."

"Home? Nonsense!" cried Sir Roland, in positive alarm at the idea. "Why, the ball isn't half over, and I was to have had another dance."

"Another dance?" repeated Marjorie.

"Well," said the unabashed, and yet somewhat fearful Sir Roland, "I was going to beg very hard for one. At any rate you mustn't go yet. Let us go into the gallery, out of the way. Can't something be done? Can't we pin it up?"

"A pin at a ball!" exclaimed Marjorie. "You might as well ask for a battle axe.

They were in the gallery by this time, and Sir Roland was looking round in despair, when he saw one of the female attendants passing near, and called out to her, with a request for pins. Fortunately she had some, and would have set about fixing the rent at once, but Sir Roland would not have it so. He dropped on one knee, and held out his hand for the pins.

"Give me the pins," he said. "That's it. Now another. One more will do it. What's the matter?"

For Marjorie's rippling laughter, which had provided a sort of accompanying music to his millinery performance, died suddenly away, and the satin was jerked so swiftly and unexpectedly that a pin ran into his finger.

"What on earth have I done now?" he demanded, staring up at her. Then, following the direction of her eyes, he, still on his knee, turned his head.

There, close behind them, stood my Lady Chesterton, like a statue of Fate, robed in black satin. Behind her, pale and contemptuous, shone the fair face of Helen Montressor; while, to complete the picture, Mrs. Gore-Boothe sailed in, and, stopping suddenly, stared likewise.

It formed what a stage manager would call an interesting tableau.

But not for even a moment was Sir Roland at a loss. Still kneeling, he very coolly confronted the three pairs of eyes, and even threw a tone of relief into his voice, as he said;

"You have just come in time! Mrs. Gore-Boothe, you may well

stand tranfixed with wrath and dismay. I am the sacrilegious wretch whose barbarous foot has wrought this deed! Show your consideration for a penitent soul by assisting him to repair the wrong he has committed."

This purposely verbose explanation had enabled Marjorie to regain her self-possession, lost in the first moment of dismay.

Mrs. Gore-Boothe, too, grasped the situation, and hurried forward to take Sir Roland's place.

As for Lady Chesterton, she merely stared at Marjorie's face for a moment, then put her hand, firm as adamant, for all her furiously beating heart, upon Helen Montressor's arm, and was about to turn away.

But Sir Roland was not one to let matters go so. With his most courtly air, concealing perhaps a touch of imperiousness, he turned to Lady Chesterton, saying:

"Mother, let me introduce you to this lady, who will perhaps accept your assurance that I am not generally given to this crime——"

There he suddenly stopped, as the fact flashed upon him that he did not even know Marjorie's name. But Mrs. Gore-Boothe had retained her wits, and was quick to comprehend the dilemma. She rose from the floor, and softly, even deprecatingly, said:

"I am sure my young friend has forgiven you long ago, Sir Roland. Lady Chesterton, this is Miss Deane, of Harley House.

But Marjorie raised her eyes with a quick gesture of repudiation, which made Sir Roland's pulse beat with admiration, and the color flashed into her face as she lifted it haughtily and confronted the proud old woman's steel-cold eyes.

For a moment Lady Chesterton looked at her with haughty disdain; but presently—it seemed an age—the steady, defiant pride in the young brown eyes staggered—it is the only word—staggered her, and she bent her head.

But Marjorie did not give the faintest acknowledgment of the salute. She stood statuesque and immovable; and, for the first time in Berkshire history, Lady Chesterton of the Wold received a decided rebuff.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THE BALL.

IN the rigid discharge of her duty, Lady Chesterton remained to the last country dance, fully aware that her departure would be the signal for the flight of the other aristocrats—and, conse-

quently, for the would-be aristocrats also—and when at last the Wold carriage was announced, she went down to it with a still face and stony gaze. Scarcely a word did she speak during the whole drive, and but for Reginald and his sister, silence, supreme and ice-like, would have reigned in the roomy chariot, for Sir Roland sat in his corner apparently asleep, with his eyes hidden beneath the brim of his opera hat, and his arms folded.

And so he remained until the carriage drew up at the door. Then he handed the beauty into the hall.

"Is there any coffee about?" he asked.

"In the drawing-room, Sir Roland," was the answer.

"Oh, well," he said, "send mine into the smoking-room. Of course, you ladies will sit up for another hour talking over the evening. Hope you enjoyed yourself, Helen?"

"I don't think I ever spent a pleasanter evening," she answered. "It was so novel and so hearty, wasn't it?"

"Very," he assented, laughing. "Like a romp on the village green."

"Quite," she responded, laughing her soft, high-bred laugh.

"Well," he said, "I warned you what it would be like, so you went forearmed. Good-night, mother," and he stooped to kiss her. "Reginald, are you coming?"

Lady Chesterton sank into an easy-chair, and as the door closed, looked piteously up to the lovely face above her.

The beauty smiled down upon her with placid serenity.

"I am afraid you are very tired, dear Lady Chesterton," she said, softly.

Lady Chesterton shook her head.

"Tired!" she echoed, with a sigh. "Sit down, my dear Helen. Tired? No, I am not so tired. I am—disgusted!"

Helen Montressor drew her chair up to the fire and looked at her charming Dresden coffee-cup.

"Disgusted!" repeated the baroness, with icy emphasis. I have said once or twice that I would not go to this ball. It has always been a horror to me at the best of times; but to-night!" and she emitted a faint groan.

Helen Montressor leaned back and toyed with her spoon.

"Gatherings of this sort are always—inconvenient," she said, in her softly modulated tones.

"Inconvenient!" echoed the baroness. "Dangerous! Positively dangerous! My dear it would be absurd to attempt to conceal the annoyance which Sir Roland's conduct to-night has caused me. I cannot understand how he could have behaved so abominably."

"Did he do anything very dreadful?" murmured Helen Montressor. "Are you not making—well, the worst of it, dear Lady Chesterton? Men will be—well, men!"

"Ordinary men, perhaps," was the haughty rejoinder. But my son—Sir Roland Chesterton—is not an ordinary man and cannot commit indiscretion with impunity. Surely you did not fail to observe the attention, the marked attention, he paid to that—that girl."

"It was certainly obvious enough to attract notice," asserted the soft voice. "You mean the girl in white satin. She was very pretty—beautiful rather."

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the baroness, with haughty impatience. "If she were as beautiful as Venus, it would be no excuse for Sir Roland's conduct. All the room noticed it. It will be all over the country to-morrow; and that is not the worst of it. If it had been another man it might have passed without remark; but Sir Roland is noted for his indifference and abstention from this sort of thing, and that makes his conduct to-night so noticeable. And this girl, too! One quite out of our own set—a nobody!"

"Is it not rather an advantage?" suggested Helen Montressor. "Sir Roland will not be likely to meet her again. Perhaps she comes from the other side of the county. Dear Lady Chesterton, I think—I really think you are making too much of this, and troubling yourself with too little cause. A mere passing fancy—she was extremely pretty—which he will forget before breakfast to-morrow."

"Forget!—the other end of the county!" was the almost tragic answer. "My dear, the girl lives within a stone's throw of us. She belongs to those miserable new people—the retired sugar boiler, or whatever he is—the Deanes, who have bought the property adjoining the Wold.

A faint flush of surprise—of, well hardly alarm—passed over the pale face of the beauty.

"So near!" she murmured. "Ah, yes, I remember the name. We were talking about them when we were walking through the wood the other night. You do not know them, I suppose?"

"Know them?" exclaimed the baroness, starting. "Certainly not. They are simply too unendurable. The girl is—is the best of them all; but the man, the father, is—oh, quite inadmissible."

"Is he so very bad, then!" asked Helen, quietly.

"Vulgar in the extreme," answered Lady Chesterton. "Surely you must have seen him at church. A short, fat, red-faced little man—in fact, just such a man as you would expect one of his class to be. If I could have foreseen that I should be brought into contact with them! You heard that woman Gore-Boothe introduce the girl?"

"Yes," answered Helen Montressor, musingly; "it was unfortunate, our coming on them just at that time."

"Roland on his knees!" exclaimed the baroness.

The beauty's thin, clear-cut lips compressed.

"He had torn her dress. She is not only pretty, but what is worse—clever. Yes, and the introduction! I am afraid"—slowly—"that Sir Roland will ask you to call upon them."

"Call upon them!" exclaimed the baroness, angrily, but fearfully. Impossible! Roland would know that such a request would not be entertained for a single moment."

"I do not know whether I would not call," murmured the beauty, softly.

"Surely——" broke in the old lady, wonderingly, but Helen Montressor smiled.

"Yes," she said. "I think I would not refuse if Sir Roland should make the request. In fact, if I might presume to make a suggestion, I would say—do not wait for him to ask."

Too astounded and indignant for speech, Lady Chesterton regarded her with a fixed stare. Helen Montressor leaned back and looked at the fire with half closed eyes.

"Yes," she murmured, "I should call on them."

"Call on them! Help to bring them together! Are you aware of what you are saying, Helen Montressor?"

"Can you keep them apart?" Helen asked. "If you are right in supposing that Sir Roland is really—attracted by this Miss Deane, do you think he will not avail himself of their proximity, and you see—I am sure, dear Lady Chesterton—"

The baroness groaned, and a shiver ran through her that set the diamonds in her cap sparkling and flashing.

"This is dreadful," she said. "And Roland! If it were anybody else but Roland! He has been so hard and unyielding. And I did hope, when you came—that is—"

The exquisite face grew fairly crimson.

"Dear Lady Chesterton," murmured the soft voice, "do not let this trouble you too much. It is unfortunate, but it has not gone so very far. Remember he has seen the girl but once."

"But will soon make that twice and thrice," cried the baroness, with emotion. "And you advise me to call, actually to call."

"Yes," the guest replied; "and more than that, I advise you to make the call a pleasant one. If I were in your place I should ask the man—the father—and the daughter to dinner."

"To dinner!" was the horrified exclamation of the baroness.

"To dinner," responded Helen, with an indescribable expression on her face. "If Sir Roland is so smitten with the daughter, it seems only fair to give him an opportunity to study the father in order that he may know where the refinement of the girl comes from and what it is likely to lead to."

The baroness drew a long breath, and her eyes brightened.

"I—I think I see what you mean, my dear," she said. "You think that Roland will be so disgusted with the man that—that—"

"He will think twice before he makes him his father-in-law," interjected the soft voice.

Lady Chesterton arose, and, putting a thin white hand on the soft shoulder, kissed her guest.

"I—I think you are right," she said. "It is a good idea. It is very kind of you, Helen, to take such interest. It is terrible to think of. Fancy a Chesterton being entangled—entangled even—with a sugar-boiler's daughter! And I would rather see my boy in his coffin than disgraced by such a marriage!"

Swiftly, suddenly, Helen Montressor looked up, her face pale almost to the lips, and a passionate, angry light in her cold eyes.

"And I," she exclaimed; and then, as if ashamed of the confession that rose to her lips, she stood up in all the perfection of her beauty, and smiled. "But I think we shall be a match for a soap-boiler's daughter, dear Lady Chesterton."

Lady Chesterton looked at her and nodded her bejewelled head more hopefully.

"My dear," she said, almost piteously, "I rely upon you."

And Helen smiled with serene confidence.

Four and five struck by the stable clock, and Sir Roland was still in the smoking room, a brandy-and-soda before him, and a regalia between his lips; watching, with half-closed eyes, the vision of a fresh girlish face, with soft, brown eyes that seemed to pierce through the clouds of smoke, and beam on him at one moment with serious attention, the next with lightest mockery, and again with rapt attention.

At last he arose, and thrusting his hands into the pockets of the loose shooting-jacket, for which he had exchanged his other coat, he paced up and down the room, his usually grave face relaxed into a half-wistful smile. his white hand restlessly stroking his mustache.

Then he stopped, and, with an expression singularly like a blush, he put his hand inside of his vest and took out a flower. He looked at it as if he had never seen a flower before, and, obeying a sudden impulse, put it to his lips.

Then, with a sudden impatient frown, he turned to the fire and raised the flower as if to fling it in there. But the hand dropped slowly and placed the flower where it had been before.

Just as Marjorie was laying her sweet little head on her white pillow, it came suddenly to her that the flower she had missed from her hair had been in Sir Roland's hand when he handed her into her carriage. And she blushed, but slept no less sweetly for the recollection, even though she "detested" the aristocrat.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR ROLAND'S RUSE.

IT was past noon of the day following the ball before Marjorie ate her breakfast. Bessie then proposed that they should make some calls.

"What!" cried Marjorie. "Waste this glorious afternoon in stuffy drawing-rooms talking nothings to people for whom one doesn't care a button? No, my dear."

"Let us go to the river, then," said Bessie. "You shall take your sketch book and paint, and at the same time tell me all about the ball."

And this, being a proposal after Marjorie's own heart, was assented to eagerly. The sketching materials were gatheyed together, and not many minutes later saw the tw sisters standing by the bank of the river joining their merry voices in an effort to rouse the sleepy ferryman on the opposite side.

"There he is, Marjorie," cried Bessie, "and I know he is swearing by the way he walks; for——. Oh, Marjorie! Who's this?"

For at that moment there came skimming around the bend which the river made at that point a neatly built punt, propelled by a tall, stalwart man, who, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his elbows, was wielding the long punt-pole with both vigor and skill, which sent the light vessel with graceful velocity toward the bank.

Marjorie turned around and looked, but before she could speak the gentleman turned, and with one last push, stood erect and raised his cap.

"It's Sir Roland," whispered Bessy, quickly. "Shall we go?"

But before Marjorie could answer, the end of the punt ran ashore, and Sir Roland leaped out and extended his hand, It was so sudden, so unexpected, that he seemed to have dropped from the clouds; and in Bessie's eyes—to say nothing of Marjorie's—he looked not unlike one of those heroes of Northern legend, who came, stalwart and powerful, at the helpless Maidens' call.

"Good morning," he said. "Was it you I heard calling?" and he took Marjorie's hand and held it rather longer than seemed to her necessary. "Do you want to go across? Will you let me take you?" and then, without waiting for an answer, he turned and shouted, "All right, Thomas." Then to Marjorie, "What a beautiful morning. Are you tired after last night's dissipation?"

"No," answered Marjorie, from whose face the reluctant color had slowly withdrawn. "No, not at all. I need not ask you the same question."

He laughed buoyantly, and looked at Bessie with inquiry and frank admiration.

"This is my sister," said Marjorie. "Bessie, this is Sir Roland Chesterton."

Bessie gravely made her stiff little courtesy—half bow, half courtesy—but Sir Roland, with a smile, put out his hand and took her soft little one in it.

"I was just in time," he said. "I've been fishing, and was so tired of catching nothing that I was about to return home, when I heard your cry for a ferryman. Now I shall earn an honest penny, or two of them."

He arranged seats for them in the punt and pushed it out into the stream exactly as if he intended to act the part of ferryman; but when they were well away from the shore he turned to Marjorie with the question:

"What are you going to do? Sketch?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie.

"You can't get any view on that side; nothing worth speaking of," in a tone he tried to make matter-of-course.

"Oh, it does not matter," answered Marjorie, quickly. "The sketching is only an excuse for a ramble."

"You will find the grass very wet under those trees," he said gravely. "It's October, you know, notwithstanding the sunshine. Now if you want to see a good view for a sketch, there's the weir."

"Thanks," said Marjorie; "we will walk up the towpath towards it."

"H'm!" he said, thoughtfully. "I'm afraid you won't see much that way. What do you say to punting up the river to it? It isn't far. Listen! You can hear it."

He tried to say it as if the idea had but just occurred to him. Marjorie repressed an inclination to smile, and answered:

"Thank you very much, but we could not think of troubling you. We will walk as far as we can."

"Oh, no trouble at all," he said quietly, at the same time turning the head of the punt up the river, as if the question had been decided by Marjorie's assent.

Bessie, who had been wistfully studying Marjorie's face, in hope of a favorable answer, brightened when she saw that Sir Roland had taken the matter into his own hands.

"Isn't this delightful?" she whispered to Marjorie. "You don't mind, do you?—not really?"

"It wouldn't matter much if I did," answered Marjorie, raising her brows and catching her red under-lip in a great effort at a frown. "There's no help for it unless we swim ashore."

"But isn't it beautiful?" urged Bessie. "And it is kind of him, isn't it?"

Marjorie turned her head away with a gesture of indifference. Bessie persisted, whispered deprecatingly:

"He—he doesn't seem so disagreeable. What a pity that you should dislike him so much."

Sir Roland paused for a moment to wipe away the water that was running down his bare arm, and turned to say to Bessie:

"Confess, now, Miss Bessie, that this is better than getting your feet wet on the damp towpath."

Bessie looked up at him and answered, with a frank, joyous laugh.

"We should not have our feet wet. Marjorie and I wear thick boots, But I like this better than walking. Isn't it difficult to keep the boat—it is so long—straight in the stream?"

"Not very. Would you like to try?"

"May I?"

"Certainly; but not just now, for we are in a strong current." He made no attempt to talk to Marjorie, seeming to understand that it would be wiser not to. "You wern't at the ball last night, Miss Bessie."

"No. They said I wasn't old enough. Wasn't it a shame? and Marjorie says it was a beautiful ball, too." Bessie was taking to him with no thought of the awe she had once had of the great Sir Roland. "Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Yes, I did, indeed," he answered, emphatically, just glancing at Marjorie's downcast face. I don't think I ever enjoyed a ball so much before."

"Really? And you have been to very many, of course."

"Very many—too many," he answered. "If they had all been like this! But that would not be possible."

Again he glanced down at Marjorie, but she sat there still looking down, her face gravely set and her whole attitude expressive of protest. Her very silence seemed to say, "I've been entrapped into this, and I resent it,

"Why did you enjoy this one so much?" asked Bessie, who saw none of the by-play. "Was the dancing so good?"

"That for one reason, certainly," he answered.

"Why, of course," cried Bessie, in a tone of conviction. "You danced with Marjorie, didn't you? And she dances beautifully!"

"Beautifully," he acquiesced, with grave intensity, glancing at Marjorie, as she sat in stony silence and seeming unconscious of what was being said.

"I never saw anybody who could dance as Marjorie does," went on Bessie, with a smile of frank admiration at the motionless figure. "Monsieur Longpied, our dancing master, when we lived at—"

She suddenly stopped.

Marjorie looked up icily.

"You may spare Sir Roland any further particulars of our childhood days," she said, and Bessie blushed and shrank within herself, while Sir Roland turned quickly to his pole and drove the boat through the water.

Presently the weir came in sight, and a little later Sir Roland sent the punt right into the midst of the foaming water at the foot of the fall. There he threw out a weight attached to a chain, and so anchored the boat.

"Oh," cried Bessie, in delight, "are you going to stop right here? In the middle of it! Isn't it beautiful? Oh, Marjorie, you must sketch this?"

Marjorie looked up coldly.

"Not now, Bessie; we must not stay. If Sir Roland will kindly put us ashore."

Sir Roland looked as if he would have stopped at nothing to make that set face wear an expression of forgiveness.

"Must you go?" he asked, pleadingly. "To tell the truth, I intended trying my luck with the fish again, while you were sketching. This is a capital place."

"Please don't go," begged Bessie, earnestly. "I do want to see a fish caught."

"I'm sure I could catch one here," said Sir Roland, humbly.

What was Marjorie to do? she assented, but not too graciously.

"Five minutes, then," she said, grudgingly.

"Thank you," he said, as gratefully as if she had done him a great favor at the expense of much personal inconvenience to herself, "I will do my best to catch a fish in that time. But you will want some water for your colors."

Marjorie would have refused, but for the reflection that painting would give her an excuse for silence and for the fact that Sir Roland gave her no opportunity. He filled her little cup with water and put it beside her, opened the case of paints, arranged the sketch-book, all without a word. Then he turned to his line as if his thoughts were all on that.

He put a fresh bait on and cast it into an eddy, and then gave Bessie the rod to hold. She was in a state of extreme delight at the thought of catching a fish and Sir Roland turned his back to Marjorie, and seemed wrapped in the sport.

With grave, almost grim intensity, Marjorie sketched in the outline, firmly resolved that that five minutes should be the extent of their loitering, and as firmly resolved that those five minutes should afford no excuse to Sir Roland for conversation, so far as she was concerned. Profound silence. The outline was completed,

"Bessie," said the grave voice, "are you ready? If you will be so kind as to put us ashore, Sir Roland."

But Sir Roland was too absorbed in his fishing.

"One moment—excuse me! That was a bite, Miss Bessie. Be careful! Pray wait a few moments—I am sure we shall get a fish."

Marjorie bit her lips and bent over her sketch-book. Sir Roland rearranged the line on Bessie's finger, and then, on pretence of resting himself, slipped down behind the silent figure. Marjorie drew on with steady fingers, and finally took up her brush and dashed in some color. The silence was profound. Suddenly, though quietly, Sir Roland broke it.

"I did not know you were an artist, Miss Deane," he said.

"Nor did I," Marjorie retorted, without turning her head.

"But you are. Do you think I do not know the touch! You have seized the salient points of the view in a moment."

"The five minutes are up, Bessie," was Marjorie's only answer to this.

"Oh, do wait a little longer, Marjorie," pleaded Bessie, in a rapt whisper. "I am sure I feel something."

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked Sir Roland, gently. "Are you angry because——"

"Angry!" repeated Marjorie, provoked into speech. "No—yes—you had no right to bring me—us—here, Sir Roland."

"No right," he said, with gentle surprise. "And why shouldn't I bring you here, if I choose, and you are willing?"

"But I am not—was not willing."

"In that case——" he said, rising and catching up the pole as if to send the boat at once to the shore.

"Oh, don't move," cried Bessie. "I am sure I feel something."

He lowered the pole quietly and resumed his place—at her feet, it may be said, for he had thrown himself on the bottom of the punt beside her.

"I am very unfortunate," he said, and there was a sudden grieved intonation in his voice. "I am always offending you. There seems to be a fatality in it. It is almost as if—" he stopped.

"As if—" she said, relentlessly.

"As if I had in some way forfeited your esteem. Have I done so!"

She did not answer.

"For instance," he said—"the first time we met, the first time I had ever seen you, you spoke and looked at me as if I had sinned beyond pardon. And now——"

"And now that you have entrapped me into your boat," interrupted Marjorie, "you expect me to be all affability."

"You are right," he admitted, with a meekness that sat oddly on his haughty face; "I have entrapped you. Well, what then?"

"What then?" she repeated, turning around, and yet scarcely looking at him. "What then? You have no right to do so. Would you entrap Miss Montressor?"

He stared and then smiled.

"No; I certainly would not entrap Miss Montressor."

"You would not dare to do so," she retorted. "Miss Montressor is your equal. I am only Miss Deane, a mere parvenu, a nobody—not entitled to the courtesy which is hers by right."

A warm flush suffused his face at her stinging words, and he rose and confronted her, grave and quiet, but his eyes eloquently eager.

Marjorie flashed a glance at him as haughty as ever shot from the cold eyes of Helen Montressor.

"My equal!" he repeated, as if a doubt of it had never entered his mind—as, in justice to him, it had not.

"Your equal," insisted Marjorie, "and I am not. Do you think I do not know how high Sir Roland Chesterton stands above us—we who are creatures of yesterday? You admire, or profess to admire, my drawing. I ought to draw well. I taught it at a school!"

And her lip curled with a proud defiance of him and his caste.

"Well," he said, quietly.

"Well," she retorted, with flushed cheek and flashing eye, "do you think the assistant at a middle-class boarding school is a fit companion for you, Sir Roland? And if you do—which you do not—others would not." And she raised her face and looked at him steadily.

Sir Roland met her indignant, defiant gaze without flinching. There was a moment's silence, during which he had time to realize that he was being lectured, rebuffed, set aside, and by a girl of twenty. A faint color glowed behind his tan, and the shadow of a frown, not of anger, but of perplexity, hovered over his dark brows.

"You accused me just now, by implication, of pride," he said significantly.

"And you retort that I, too, am proud. You are right," answered Marjorie.

"Too proud to receive so poor and conventional an attention as I have shown this morning, not to you only—not to you only—but to your sister?"

"Yes," she answered, ignoring his reference to Bessie. "I am too proud to accept Sir Roland's acquaintance when——"

"Pray, go on," he said, gravely.

"Yes, I will go on. While his friends do not consider me worthy of it."

CHAPTER X.

THE LOST LOCKET.

SIR ROLAND stood silent for a moment, biting his lip and inwardly cursing the laws of caste which had permitted his mother to ignore the existence of her nearest neighbor for over two years.

"I cannot affect to misunderstand you," he said; "but I will not undertake to answer for the short-comings of others, though I may have to suffer for them."

"You do not misunderstand me in another way, I hope," said Marjorie, with a quick flush. "I am not complaining."

"No," he answered, with a smile; "I can see that though my mother came to you and implored you on her knees for pardon she would not receive it. But if I am frank, it is because you have set me the example. Is there no other reason for this implacability? May I ask you a direct question?"

"To what purpose!" asked Marjorie.

"I will ask it," he said. "Miss Deane, in the whole course of my life I have never met one of your sex who has spoken to me as you have spoken to-day. Your frankness prompts me to go to the bottom of this matter. Will you let me ask you if there is not a stronger reason for your refusing my acquaintance? Do you dislike me?"

It was a strangely straight question, and he put it with a gravity which harmonized with its directness. A crimson glow passed over Marjorie's face, and her eyes were hidden for a moment; then she looked up.

"That is not a proper——"

He raised his eyebrows.

"Do not descend from the lofty pedestal, upon which, like Truth personified, you have been punishing me. I have not said a word in my defence; I have borne all with the utmost humility. Humbly I crave an answer. Am I personally repugnant to you?"

Marjorie looked at the weir and her lips quivered. She would have given the world to be able to answer straight out, "yes," and end the matter at once and forever; but she could not do that. The eloquent eyes fixed on her face seemed to demand the truth and to defy falsehood. Silently she turned her head and looked at him.

"No," she answered; "but——"

"Stop!" he said, holding up his hand with a gesture that was almost one of command. "Do you think I am about to take advantage of your answer? You wrong me. If you had said yes, I should have respectfully endeavored to ascertain the cause of your dislike, and tried to remove it. As it is—as I am not in myself personally repugnant to you, I will say no more, will certainly not endeavor to take advantage of your frankness. More! I beg your pardon. You are right; I have entrapped you this morning to gratify a selfish desire to build into friendship an acquaintance which has brought me——"

Marjorie rose with a pale face. He checked himself and then resumed:

"I will not offend you. I will say no more. I do not wish to lose the slight good-will you bear me."

Then he turned to Bessie, who was too much absorbed to pay any attention to the few words which the noise of the weir permitted her to hear, and, putting his hand lightly on her shoulder, said gently:

"No fish yet?"

"No. I thought I had one," she answered, shaking her head dolefully; "but it must have been only a weed."

"Never mind," he said, consolingly; "I am sorry to say I cannot persuade your sister to remain any longer; but some other time, perhaps, you will be more fortunate. Now land, eh?"

"Some other time? Do you really mean it?" cried Bessie, eagerly, looking from his face to the absent one of her sister. "Oh I hope you do, Marjorie? Sir Roland says we may come in the punt some other day, and——" She stopped, as the consciousness of something wrong in her sister's face came to her, and as she stooped to lay down her rod she whispered confidentially to Sir Roland:

"What have you said to her? Have you been quarrelling?"

Sir Roland shook his head, and smiled into the eager, innocent eyes.

Never mind," he whispered. "It will be all right. Do not fear," and catching the chain, pulled up the weight which served as an anchor. Then he took up the pole, and sent the punt flying down the stream by a vigorous push.

"Oh!" cried Bessie, "you promised to let me try."

"So I did. Come along, then. Take care. That's it. Now push."

But Bessie uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Why, it's as heavy as lead. I don't believe you could manage it, Marjorie. May she try, Sir Roland?"

Marjorie smiled and shook her head, and then, fearful lest he

should think she had taken their conversation to heart and was sullen, she said :

"Shall I try ?" and rising, took the pole.

It had seemed so easy when he was doing it that she had not realized how much strength it required, and now she could but laugh at her own futile and awkward efforts.

"And yet it looked so easy !" she said, breathless and laughing.

"Let me show you," he said. "There ! Take it so—where I hold it—now—push !"

She did as he bade her, not noticing that his hand covered hers ; but he noticed it, and a thrill, strange to his heart, made it throb faster,

"I see !" cried Marjorie. "Like this—there ! Now again, and —oh, my locket ?"

With a prompt movement Sir Roland arrested the progress of the punt, and demanded :

"What is it ? Have you lost anything ?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, staring with a pale, anxious face at the cold, blue water, "my locket. The pole caught and broke the chain—I heard it fall."

"Oh, Marjorie !" cried Bessie in an awed voice. "Roger's locket !"

"Yes," answered Marjorie, despairingly. "I heard it fall into the water. Look ! Here is the rest of the chain. What shall I do ?" and the red lips quivered, while the soft brown eyes grew suddenly dim.

In their dismay and concern the two had forgotten Sir Roland, and had been too absorbed in staring at the water to see the sudden flush and as sudden pallor which swept across his face. For a moment he stood looking at the sorrowful face, torn between love and jealousy. Then he spoke, and his voice was hard and strained.

"Where did you drop it ?" he asked.

"There !"

"Do you value it ?"

"Yes—oh, yes," she answered, eagerly. "It contains the portrait of——" Then she stopped, and there was at once haughtiness and defiance in her face as she continued, "Yes, I do value it."

"I see," he said, in a constrained voice, looking with a hard, set expression at the bank immediately opposite them. "I'm very sorry. You now have some tangible cause to regret this morning's work."

Marjorie sighed, and sank down upon the seat.

"It cannot be helped. It was my fault," she said. "I ought not to have worn it so—so—ca-carelessly," and she suddenly turned her head away.

"For Heaven's sake, don't cry !" he exclaimed, fiercely catching

up the pole and sending the punt to the shore. "All the portraits and lockets in the world are not worth that."

He jumped out and they followed him, and as he took Marjorie's hand he could feel how it trembled.

"Good-morning," she said, "and thank you very much, indeed——"

"Stop!" he said, cutting her short. "Wait there—sit down on that stone for a minute or two," and he abruptly left them and sprang into the punt again.

"Where is he going?" asked Bessie. "How angry he looked. Don't cry, Marjorie."

"I'm not crying," said Marjorie. "I—oh, Bessie! What is he going to do?" and she sprang to her feet, pale and frightened.

With swift strokes, Sir Roland had made his way to the spot where the locket had gone down. He had marked the spot by trees on either bank. As Marjorie spoke he had thrown the weight overboard and then stepped upon the seat. A moment later he had dived into the cold water.

"Oh, Marjorie!" sobbed Bessie, too frightened to say more.

Marjorie stood with her eyes on the bubbling water, as still as marble and as white and silent. A minute, it seemed like an age, passed before Sir Roland reappeared and grasped the side of the punt with his white sinewy hand.

He climbed into the boat, and a few moments later was urging it to where the two girls stood. It grated on the gravel and he stepped out, holding in his palm the locket. He said nothing, and Marjorie looked pleadingly into his hard set face as she tremblingly took the trinket.

"How can I thank you?" she asked, quaveringly.

"No thanks are needed," he answered. "I am glad I found it. Good-morning."

He turned shortly away. Marjorie flushed, and the ready tears started into her brown eyes.

"Will you—will you not shake hands?" she asked, holding her little hand out humbly.

He turned, took her hand, held it in his cold one, which grew suddenly hot, and looked her full in the face with a look that graved itself on her heart. Then he tuched Bessie's cheek with the back of his hand as caressingly as any woman could have done, and was gone.

They stood and watched him as if they could not leave the spot, until his tall, noble figure was lost to view. Then they turned and walked in silence toward home. After a time Bessie spoke.

"Oh, Marjorie, did you ever hear of such a thing? How noble of him! Think of that cold water! Oh, it makes me shudder. I shall never forget seeing him go down, and the water closing over

him and flowing on as if he were dead at the bottom." And child-like, she commenced to sob.

"Hush, hush?" said Marjorie, tremulously. "Yes, it was a noble thing to do," and with all its tremulousness there was a ring of something like triumph in her voice.

"And—and—you dislike him so. You—you were quarrelling with him all—all the time we were in his—his boat, and he was so kind and ge—gentle. I think it was wicked of you, Marjorie!"

And, Marjorie, who would have been quick with an indignant retort but a minute before, hung her head and was silent. She was in a mood fortunate for her father to find her in, for he had that to tell which in another mood she might have resented.

"Where have you been?" demanded Mr. Deane, meeting them in the hall-way, his ordinary air of pomposity being wonderfully magnified. "I wish you would not go out without coming and—ahem!—saying where you are going. I have had visitors—er—important visitors, waiting to see you."

"What visitors?" asked Bessie.

"Ahem! Lady Chesterton and Miss Montressor," and the indigo merchant seemed to swell visibly under the influence of too much names. "And her ladyship has been gracious enough to ask us to dine at the Wold."

"To dine at the Wold!" repeated Marjorie, speaking for the first time. "And did you accept, papa?"

"Did I accept! Did I accept! Well! Accept! Do you think I should be—er—er—mad enough to refuse? Did I accept?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE DINNER AT THE WOLD.

THE night of the dinner party at the Wold had come, and Lady Chesterton, sitting bolt upright in her chair by the drawing-room fire, was looking anything but delighted at the approach of her visitors.

"I hope—I do hope we have not made a mistake, Helen," she said, looking up at the tall, exquisitely clad beauty, who stood warming one small foot at the fire.

"Mistake?"

"Yes," said the old lady, nodding almost pathetically, "I do not

feel at all convinced that we have done the wise thing. I almost wish I had told Roland that we were going to call, and had waited to see how he took it. When I told him that we had called and asked them to dinner, he showed the greatest indifference ; it really seemed as if he didn't care ; and he has been in the most awful——"

"Temper," interjected Helen Montressor, with a smile, "ever since. Yes, I know ; but notwithstanding all that, I do not think we have made a mistake. Where is he now ?"

"Dressing, I suppose," answered Lady Chesterton, but doubtfully. "Of course he has not said that he is going to dine at home, and I have no reason to suppose that he is going out ; but he may not put in an appearance at all."

Helen Montressor shuddered.

"Oh, he would not be so unmerciful as to leave us to bear the brunt alone," she said, with the finest scorn. "Ought they not to be here?"

"Yes," said Lady Chesterton ; "but this sort of people think it is vulgar to be punctual. There is the carriage, I think."

It was the Deane carriage, and it dashed up to the great stone steps as if it were the chariot of some emperor entering a conquered town. A man-servant in subdued, dark-colored livery, contrasting finely with the gorgeous giant who lounged in the hall of Harley House, went forward, and the guests were ushered into the house.

The hall of the Wold was perhaps the most picturesque and imposing part of the mansion. Its oak-paneled sides ran clear up to the bare rafters of the timbered roof. In the centre stood a long, carved table, at which Charles the First, flying from Cromwell and his Roundheads, snatched a hasty meal. High up above the gallery, which ran along the end, hung the torn and tattered banners of the Chestertons ; from the panels scowled, smiled and frowned, according to their respective dispositions, the dead and gone men and women of that haughty race. A dim religious light fell softly from a dozen candles in an ancient candelabra, and from sconces projecting from the wall, lighting up the painted faces in the portraits, and enduing them with a ghostly suggestion of life.

As they entered, a noble Saint Bernard and two slim patrician greyhounds rose from a Persian rug in front of the wood fire, which burned in a huge, dog-ironed chimney-place, and came sniffing inquiringly.

Mr. Deane looked around and felt as if he had entered a cathedral ; Bessie edged close under Marjorie's protecting wing, filled with supreme awe ; and Marjorie, even Marjorie the dauntless, realized that she had passed the boundary of the outer world, and was within the sacred precincts of the aristocrats.

Like a flash of lightning the remembrance of all the crimson and gold in the brand-new hall at home rose before her eyes and made

her flush inwardly. A gulf between the Deanes and the Chestertons! It was not a gulf but an ocean that divided them!

A lady-like young woman, dressed in black, and wearing a plain mob cap, came down stairs and dropped them a courtesy; it was Lady Chesterton's own maid. The two girls followed her up the broad stairs and along the corridors to a large guest room in which every chair, and table, and picture seemed to whisper, haughtily, "I am of the old nobility." And the maid, having relieved them of their cloaks, knelt—actually knelt—and arranged their dresses, and, then, with another courtesy, conducted them down to the hall again, where Mr. Deane awaited them, feeling as if he had just undergone a cold bath. He had been prepared for magnificence and grandeur—a kind of Guildhall splendor—and he could have borne up under it, however splendid it might have been; but this vast, oak-paneled hall, the dim light falling on the portraits, the tattered flags, overwhelmed him. At that moment he wished himself back in his own gorgeous drawing-room. The servant, too, oppressed him fearfully, he stood so still and solemn in his dark livery, his eyes fixed on the ground, his whole bearing eloquent of his surprise at the presence of such a common mortal in the sacred house of the Chestertons.

On the reappearace of Marjorie and Bessie this sombre official led the way to a heavy pair of tapestry curtains, drew them aside, and opening a door, announced, in a subdued tone:

"Mr. and the Misses Deane."

It was a long room filled with a subdued light that harmonized with the furniture of dark oak and ebony: here and there were patches of crimson and gold, but only just sufficient to relieve the warm solemnity of the whole.

The tall, stately, black satin-clad figure of Lady Chesterton rose and came toward them with outstretched hand, on which glittered three hoops of diamonds and emeralds.

"How do you do?" she said, hardly repressing the shudder which ran through her as Mr. Deane's large hand—hot through his glove—inclosed her one thin one. "your eldest daughter and I are already acquainted," giving her hand to Marjorie, who took it and did not inclose it, much to the old lady's relief; "and is this your youngest—Miss—Miss——"

"Bessie," said Mr. Deane, his voice sounding coarse and hard, though it was only half his usual volume. "Christened Elizabeth, my lady, but girls are never satisfied with the names their godfathers and godmothers give 'em."

"Bessie is much prettier than Elizabeth," murmured the old lady, and she fixed her glance on poor Bessie; but as the half-closed eyes rested on the sweet, childish face, downcast and frightened, something of the cold steel dropped from them, and the thin lips

closed with a smile. "You must be cold, my dear," she said; "come to the fire. This is Miss Montressor."

Then the beauty came forward. She was dressed in some material which was neither silk, nor satin, nor velvet, a soft kind of plush, in color neither mauve, nor blue, nor gray, but a neutral tint, composed of all three, which set off her fair, regular loveliness to the fullest advantage, an embodiment of perfect grace and breeding. Placid and serene as a sonata of Shubert's, or a landscape of Canaletto's she seemed part and parcel of the stately room, and fit companion to the patrician old lady who ruled in it.

At a glance Marjorie took it all in—the beauty, the grace, and the patrician air; and then, for the first time, unconsciously perhaps, buckled on her armor, recovered her self-possession, and grew courageous and at her ease, and gave back smile for smile.

For Helen Montressor was too clever to spoil the play by underacting her part, and it was no part of the play to freeze these plebians into good behaviour, and so make them appear passable. No, they must be encouraged to show themselves in their true colors; they must be lured into displaying their vulgarity to the full; Sir Roland must be made to feel clearly and unmistakably, that they were unendurable.

So she smiled and talked as freely and frankly as if she and the Deanes had known each other for years. And Bessie, seated on a low chair beside Lady Chesterton, listened to the brisk conversation between Marjorie and the beauty with ill-concealed surprise and satisfaction. After all, these grand people were not so very terrible.

But Marjorie, while she talked with apparent ease had one ear open—sensitively and acutely open to the other two voices—the thin, subdued one of Lady Chesterton, and the hard, coarse one of Mr. Deane.

"Yes, my lady," he was saying, "I like the place. Can't say I've any fault to find with it. There's everything a man could desire—soil's gravelly, situation 'igh, and the 'unting first class. Does Sir Roland 'unt? Hof course 'e does, 'owever."

"My son has been away from home for some years." answered the old lady, barely suppressing the inevitable shudder. "The hounds were kept here for forty years until his time."

"Pity Sir Roland don't take 'em over again," said Mr. Deane, rubbing his hands. "Shamefully mismanaged now; I—ahem!—thought of putting up for the mastership myself, but hof course, if Sir Roland——" and he made a bow of renunciation.

Lady Chesterton stared and compressed her lips. The present master of the hounds was a baronet, and the office had always been held by men of position. A word of haughty indignation trembled on her lips, but she remembered herself in time, and forced her lips into a smile.

"Yes," she said, "you thoroughly understand the duties, no doubt."

Even Mr. Deane winced under that. He colored and stammered:

"Er—well—er—there dosen't seem much to understand; I suppose it's easily picked up. It seems to me that the principal thing that's wanted is—er—money and I er——"

"And you have that," supplied the old lady, with a sarcasm too fine for him, but cutting Marjorie to the quick.

"Well, I—er—I wouldn't let money stand in the way, my lady. It's not my 'abit to do so. If you mean doing a thing, do it well, says I. Don't spoil the ship for a hextra bucket o' tar, is my motter, my lady, and always has been. And——"

But at this juncture Reginald Montressor mercifully entered, cutting short the harangue which was becoming every moment more terrible to Marjorie. He came in looking like a modern Appollo, his graceful figure clad in evening dress, which bore Poole's unmistakable cut, his shapely golden hair clustering on his white, even forehead, his mustache shining like burnished gold, his blue eyes twinkling with the anticipation of the fun that was to be had out of Deane *pere*; but as he reached the group the twinkle died out, and his eyes as they rested on Marjorie's face, glowed with appreciative admiration.

"Late, as usual," he said, as he shook hands. "'Pon my soul, I ought to be fined! How would it do to deprive me of my soup every time I was five minutes late, and of fish if it got to ten, and so on? Where's Roland?"

As if in answer, the door opened and a servant said in a low voice:

"Sir Roland has come in late, my lady, and begs you will not wait."

With a word of excuse, Lady Chesterton laid the tips of her fingers on Mr. Deane's arm, Reginald took Marjorie upon his, and Helen Montressor and Bessie brought up the rear. They crossed the hall, through another curtained door-way, and entered the dining room.

A portly butler, who looked like a duke to Mr. Deane, and two footmen in dark livery moved noiselessly about, and the soup is on the point of being carried to Lady Chesterton's end of the table, when a white hand thrust the curtain aside, and the stalwart figure of Sir Roland strode into the room.

"Just in time," he said. "Mr. Deane, how do you do? Pray accept my excuses, Miss Deane," and he went up to her chair and held out his hand.

His entrance had been so sudden that Marjorie, whose face was turned to Reginald's was almost guilty of a start; but as she turned she saw that Helen Montressor's eyes were fixed upon her, and

with an effort, she kept back the color that threatened to rush to her face, and silently, coldly gave him her hand.

"And this is,—— ?" said Sir Roland, turning to Bessie.

"My sister Bessie," said Marjorie, as if the two had never met before.

Then he gravely shook hands with Bessie, went to his place, leaned with both hands on the table, said grace, and proceeded to ladle out the soup, and all with grave composure. And it was not until he handed the last plate to the footman, and Mr. Deane's spoon had begun to chink, that he turned to Marjorie, who was seated at his left, and then all he said was :

"Are we going to have any snow before Christmas ?" and that in the most conventional way.

And Marjorie answered in phrase equally set, though she could not help wondering within herself if this whole affair were not a delusive dream, and if the stalwart figure plunging into the cold, blue water was not a part of it.

Not the acutest and most watchful of observers could have detected anything in his voice or face which would have led them to suspect that anything beyond the most ordinary civilities of society had ever passed between them. And yet Marjorie wore the locket which he had recovered from the water, and his eyes had seen and recognized it.

After his original remark respecting the weather, he devoted his attention to his dinner, and relapsed into profound silence. Not so Reginald—Reginald who never could resist a chance of flirtation, who would have made love to the bearded woman if she had happened to be the only female within his reach. He, at least, could appreciate the fresh beauty of the young girl by his side, and, to use his own phrase, culled from the racing track, "makes his running from the start." He took the *menu* and consulted her taste.

"Turbot, filleted soles, oyster patties. Turbot ? Yes, you are right. Oyster patties are good—but they are too good ; they are a banquet in themselves. They ought to be labelled 'Abandon all hope of enjoying anything else, all ye who eat of me.' They are good to look at. I like to see them, but they should be a banquet for the eyes alone. Now, turbot—why do you laugh ? Do you despise the science of gastronomy ?" he asked, with mock solemnity.

"No," answered Marjorie, "that would be too presumptuous. I don't understand it. I don't even know the A B C of it, and I am afraid I sin against the most elementary rules of it. What does it matter what one eats, so that it is nice and wholesome ?"

Reginald pretended to look shocked, hurt, astounded.

"This is dreadful !" he said. "Pray let me be your teacher !"

Marjorie shook her head.

"It will be of no use," she said. "You will tell me I ought

not to like sweet champagne, or, in fact, anything sweet, and I dote on butter-scotch."

He shuddered and Marjorie laughed. Sir Roland looked a thousand miles away.

"Bessie and I eat pounds of it in the course of a year," went on Marjorie; "and, as a rule, we eat it just before dinner. You see I am quite hopeless."

"It is never too late to mend," he retorted; "though yours is really a terrible case. Butter-scotch!"

"Yes, and toffee," said Marjorie, with solemn gravity. "Do you know how to make toffee? I don't wish to appear conceited, but I think—I really think, that if the authorities of South Kensington offered a prize for toffee—toffee with almonds—Bessie and I would carry it off. But perhaps you despise toffee?"

Then they both laughed, and their laughter came in as a sort of chorus to Mr. Deane's remark.

"I never believed in the present liberal government, my lady. We want good blood at the head of affairs. If we are to be ruled at all, let us be ruled by haristocrats, says I!"

And he waved his stubby hand with a gesture of importance, and the huge diamonds on his fat fingers flashed down the table.

Still Sir Roland remained silent. Bessie plucked up courage to answer Helen Montressor's soft interrogations, and all talked after their various moods; but the handsome face at the head of the table was as hard and set as a piece of stone, with an expression which, on the face of a commoner mould, would have been called sullen.

And my Lady Chesterton groaned aloud, as she thought she was undergoing all this torture for nothing, and that this wayward, wilful son of hers did not entertain even a passing fancy for the girl who sat beside him, laughing and talking with Reginald Montressor.

Ah, my Lady Chesterton, be not too sure! It is not given to you to read hearts, nor to know the future—not even so much of the future as is contained within the few hours of a night. Did you but know it, this night contains within its hours the germ of a happiness and of a misery which shall affect not only your son and the girl by his side, but you and the proud beauty whose scheme it is to bring those two together in order to more effectually sunder them

CHAPTER XII.

MR. DEANE BIDS FOR A HUSBAND FOR MARJORIE.

THROUGH the fish, the entrees, the game, the sweets, Sir Roland ate his way in something approaching to absolute silence. Once only he smiled, and that was when he extracted a particularly tempting and indigestible bon-bon from the dainty Sevres dish and gave it across the table to Bessie.

"Sweets to the sweet," he said, and his face softened for a moment.

Mr. Deane, meanwhile, talked as only a self-made man can talk, and Lady Chesterton sat watching him from under her drooped eyelids, and mentally bewailed the hard fate which compelled her to listen to him. At last she looked at Helen Montressor, rose, and the ladies filed out. Even then it was Reginald, not Roland, who opened the door for them.

"Bring your chair nearer the fire, Mr. Deane," said Sir Roland, musingly. "Will you take port or claret? The claret is at your end."

"Port—port, Sir Roland. I'm too old-fashioned to turn to claret," said Mr. Deane, nodding his head. "I've drank port all my life, and have acquired too confirmed a taste to desert it."

Considering that until his great good fortune his acquaintance with port had been limited to an occasional bottle at three shillings apiece, his friendship for that wine was remarkable.

"Try this," said Sir Roland, handing him the bottle. "You can have something drier if you prefer it."

Mr. Deane held up his glass, took a sip, and shook his head in the approved fashion.

"Couldn't improve on this, Sir Roland. I call it perfect!"

Then the butler, having waited for this decision, glided silently from the room, and the three gentlemen were left to amuse themselves until the coffee came.

Sir Roland turned to the fire and stretched out his legs, and Reginald, assured by the expression on his cousin's face that he, Reginald, would have to do the talking, set bravely to work. For ten minutes Sir Roland sat and listened to Mr. Deane's opinion on politics, agriculture, and commerce; and when the latter subject came uppermost, Mr. Deane had a great deal to say.

"I'm a man of commerce myself, Mr. Montressor," he said. "I

owe a great deal to commerce, sir, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. But I'm no radical and revolutionist; I know what is due to the aristocracy of the country, and I'm ready to pay it. I respect birth and blood, Mr. Montressor, and I believe I'm stating a fact when I state that the name of Deane is not one of yesterday."

"Fine old name," said Reginald, stifling a yawn.

"Like some other names, it's been down in the dust for a time," said the owner of the name, "but it's to have a turn now, I hope. Of course, I can't expect to do much for it myself, but I always impress it upon my daughters that they won't forget that they came of good old stock, though their father was in trade."

"Quite right," said Reginald glancing sidewise at Sir Roland, who had moved his legs instantly. "Quite right, Mr. Deane; and if I may be permitted to say so, your charming daughters are not likely to do so."

"No, no, they're good girls—good girls, both of 'em. Marjorie is a bit fond of her own way, and what you might call uppish; but she's young, and as you sporting gentlemen say, we must give a skittish filly her head a bit."

Sir Roland rose and poked the fire viciously. A smile of satiric enjoyment crept over Reginald's face. Mr. Deane was doing his part well. If he had been trying to disgust the haughty, high-bred patrician, he could not have gone more surely to work.

"I like a girl with a spirit of her own, and I don't attempt to break it. No, Mr. Montressor, I know a father's duty, and I shall do it. I'm not one of those who want to force their daughters against their will. When the time comes I shan't stand in the way, and if the man's the right sort I'll do the generous thing."

"Yes," said Reginald, leading him on. "You refer to—matrimony. He will be a good fellow to come within a mile of being worthy of Miss Deane, and a lucky one to win her."

The proud father bowed as if the compliment was as much to him as to Marjorie.

"Thank you, sir—thank you Mr. Montressor. Well, I shan't be particular, and if she chooses in the right quarter, I'll do the generous thing, as I said. I'm not a millionaire, Mr. Montressor, but I ain't so far from it, and my daughters won't go quite empty-handed. I've made provision for 'em. I've never breathed a word to my eldest daughter, Mr. Montressor—perhaps it's best I shouldn't—but if she marries to my liking, there'll be a fifty thousand pounds for her dowry."

Reginald Montressor had turned to reach his wine-glass, with a smile of intense enjoyment at the commencement of the speech, but as its conclusion dropped slowly and portentously from Mr. Deane's lips, he forgot his wine, and turned with a start and stare of astonishment to see if the man was joking.

But Mr. Deane's face was as grave and solemn as a judge's. There was not the glint of a smile lurking in his eye or on his lip, and Reginald Montressor's face flushed. He took up his wine-glass and drank the contents at a draught, glancing all the time at the silent figure beside him. Sir Roland's face was as hard and impassive as ever, but there was a dark frown on his brow, and a deep, dusky red on the tanned cheeks, which showed that he had heard the braggart, foolish declaration.

"That's a generous kind of—of undertaking, Mr. Deane," said Reginald Montressor, and for the first time there was a ring of respect in his voice. "Isn't it rather—rather rash, eh?"

"Why, sir," asked Mr. Deane, pompously, "why should I make a secret of it? I'm not afraid of fortune-hunters, if that's what you mean. No fortune-hunting adventurer will get a penny of my money—my daughter knows that well enough. No, sir, I'm not ashamed of being rich. It's honestly come by, Mr. Montressor, and I'm only doing my duty as a father in helping my children to —to restore the fortunes of our 'ouse. Mind! I say if she chooses to my liking."

"Miss Deane will have no difficulty in making a selection," said Reginald, with a little bow. "She can choose where she will."

"Exactly," assented Mr. Deane, "that's my object. What do you say, Sir Roland?" and for the first time he looked directly at the master of the Wold—directly, for his little eyes had been covertly watching him during the whole of the conversation.

Sir Roland looked up grimly, and with a curl of scorn on his lip.

"Do you ask my opinion?" he asked.

Mr. Deane nodded and sipped his wine.

Sir Roland rose and leaned against the mantel, and looked down on him sternly.

"I should say you were offering a premium to every mercenary scoundrel who might chance to cross Miss Deane's path."

Mr. Deane changed color, and Reginald stared at his kinsman. Never had he heard him speak with such energetic indignation.

"I don't agree with you, Sir Roland," said Mr. Deane.

But all further discussion was stopped by the entrance of the coffee. Almost in silence the three men drank the decoction of the fragrant bean, and then Sir Roland said:

"Shall we join the ladies?" and led the way across the hall.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIR ROLAND WALKS HOME WITH THE DEANES.

THE ladies in the meantime had been conducting themselves something after the manner of a funeral party. Lady Chesterton had made a few icy advances, which Marjorie had met in an equally icy way; Miss Montressor, in the absence of the gentlemen, had not considered it necessary to put herself out to be entertaining, and Marjorie had maintained an utterly indifferent silence, which Bessie would have been happy if she could have imitated; but in default of doing which, she could only gape and look sleepy.

"Well, are you enjoying yourselves," were Sir Roland's first words.

"Very much," answered Miss Montressor, walking instantly and turning her beautiful face with a smile of welcome.

"If I were not afraid of being considered rude, I should say you were half asleep," he remarked. "Miss Deane, will you give us a little music?"

Marjorie looked up, and was about to shake her head negatively, when, as she looked at him, she intercepted a glance from Miss Montressor to Lady Chesterton, which she as a woman understood to mean, "She can't even play!"

"I don't play much, but I will willingly sing," she said quietly.

Miss Montressor heard her with a smile of satisfaction playing about her lips, but no sooner had Marjorie touched a few chords on the piano than the smile hardened into a frown and then passed away to eat into her heart. Marjorie's touch was exquisite, and gave the promise of an execution at once skilful, and full of feeling; but if her touch promised much, her singing was the promise fulfilled. She sang the simple little ballad of "The Minstrel Boy," and she sang it as not one there had ever heard it sung before. And presently Lady Chesterton was looking at the fire with dimmed eyes, while Miss Montressor was pale with mortification and chagrin. Bessie made no secret of her tears, but let them fall frankly. Sir Roland said nothing, but there was something in his eyes as he looked at Marjorie that frightened Miss Montressor. She had never moved him with her music as she saw he now was moved. Reginald was the only one who had voice to speak with when Marjorie turned on the stool.

"Miss Deane," he said, "you have almost wronged me past forgiveness."

"How?" asked Marjorie, smiling.

"You have nearly made me cry. I have heard 'The Minstrel Boy,' oh, a hundred times, but never like that before. Where did you learn to sing like that?"

Marjorie looked at him, and then a smile hovered on her lip as she glanced slowly around the room, as if asking attention to her answer, which she gave with deliberation and distinctness, and yet with child-like simplicity.

"I hardly know. I suppose I sing that so well because I used to sing it to the girls in the school where I taught before papa became wealthy.

A bomb-shell could not have produced more effect in the room. Sir Roland was the only one not actually horrified, and he was obliged to turn his back to smile. He could appreciate the audacity of the girl in thus snatching from her enemies' hands the only weapon they had to employ against her.

Mr. Deane turned a fiery red, and performed a perfect overture on his nose by means of his bandanna. He was beside himself with rage and mortification, and the worst to him was to feel that he was absolutely powerless against his wilful daughter, who sat on the piano-stool enjoying the discomfiture of them all.

Reginald was the first to recover from the shock, and he said:

"I wish I had been educated at that school. Won't you sing us something else?"

"How will 'Jockey to the Fair' do?" she asked, and without waiting for an answer, turned and played the prelude.

When she had finished the ballad there was silence for several moments. No one could trust himself to speak. Then there was a low murmur of applause, and Marjorie rose from her seat, saying:

"I am ashamed of having displayed my musical ignorance. Miss Montressor must dispel my discords with some real music."

Miss Montressor was a finished musician, and she did not fear the result of a comparison, but she knew it was not in her power to touch the hearts of those present as Marjorie had touched them, and she would have refused to play had she dared. To refuse would have been to give a victory to the girl she had invited to the house to humiliate.

She had asked Reginald to find her a sonata of Schubert's, and that being done for her, she played it in her best style. But, alas for her! the first strains of the music were hardly sounding through the room, when Sir Roland crossed over to Bessie, and after a jocular word to her on her moist eyes, said:

"Are you fond of music?"

"I am fond of Marjorie's. I think her singing is simply divine

but she won't always sing. Sometimes she used to sing in the evenings when papa had come home from the city, and before the gas was lighted."

"Oh, she sang for you and your father," said Sir Roland. "No one else?"

"No one else?" repeated Bessie, wonderingly. "Certainly, there was no one else. What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Do you like pictures?"

"Oh, yes; some kinds. I like figure pieces best."

"Would you like to see some now?"

"Oh, yes. In your gallery? May Marjorie come, too!"

"If she would care to," and a gleam of hope lighted up his eye.

Bessie ran over to Marjorie, and whispered to her. He watched eagerly to see what the result would be. Marjorie looked at Bessie doubtfully, then glanced at Lady Chesterton and at Miss Montressor, and with a smile, rose and followed Bessie to where Sir Roland waited.

"She comes because she is angry at the way my mother and Helen have treated her. Never mind, so that she comes I shall find no fault. Then there is no other? But what then is that locket of Roger's?"

With a tight pressure of his lips against each other, as if he would thus shut out from his mind all thoughts of the obnoxious Roger, he lifted the curtain and held it until the two sisters had passed through; then he let it fall, and Helen Montressor, who had seen them all go, felt that she perhaps had overreached herself.

Sir Roland had a rare collection of ancient and modern masters, and there was so much to see that Marjorie speedily forgot the objectionable persons in the other room, and became as natural and merry as Bessie herself. Sir Roland too recovered his tone, and the three wandered through the gallery in utter forgetfulness of anything but the happy present.

Sir Roland was led by Bessie's eager curiosity to tell the stories of the pieces of armor which hung here and there on the walls. One piece was a breast-plate worn by an ancestor in the time of the first Richard, and which was pierced in the side where the sword of the Saracen Saladin had gone through it. Bessie listened breathlessly to the story (for the wearer had given up his own life for his king), and then insisted that Sir Roland should put the piece on. He laughingly did as she wished, and then hung it up again.

They turned away to look at something else, and Sir Roland was a little in advance of Marjorie when he was startled by a cry of alarm from her, and turned only in time to see the breast-plate falling. Marjorie had jumped quickly as she cried, but the movement was not rapid enough, and the mass of metal fell upon her

side, striking her arm and shoulder. She staggered backward, and was falling when he sprang to her, and caught her in his arms.

Bessie wrung her hands and wailed, for Marjorie had fallen as if dead.

"Hush," said Sir Roland, his own face white. "There is some water on that table; bring it to me." She brought it, and he went on, "Don't be frightened. Go ask my mother—only my mother—to come here."

Without a word Bessie flew away, but in her fright and hurry she went out by the wrong door.

Sir Roland tried to pour some of the water through the pale lips, but in vain. White and death-like she lay in his arms, as if life had left forever. With a face that was almost as white as her own, he bent over her, his eyes fixed on her with remorse and sorrow. He felt that his careless hand had brought about this mishap. Wild, passionate pity and tenderness had swept over him; with a shudder he raised the arm that hung limp by his side, and as he saw the blood-red mark which stood out accusingly on its soft whiteness, it was as if a hand had seized his heart and wrung it.

With a low, broken cry, he pressed her to him, and passionately kissed the white lips that a minute ago wore so rich a red; kissed not only her lips, but her closed eyes, and the hair that shone like gold upon his breast.

And as if the kisses possessed some mystic power to call her back to life, she drew a long, labored sigh, and, with a shudder of pain, shrank closer against his heart. And as he felt her nestling of her own will, so to speak, against him, the blood rushed to his face, his heart leaped within him.

"My darling!" he murmured, hoarsely. "Oh, my darling! my darling!"

And it was this word—this passionate cry which assailed Marjorie's ear, as she reluctantly came back to consciousness. Slowly the beautiful eyes opened and looked up vacantly; then presently she recognized the pale, handsome face above her, and in the place of vacancy came a look of startled questioning, followed by a quick, hot flush of maiden shame.

"What—what has happened?" she breathed, striving to raise her hand.

"Hush! hush!" he said, holding her tightly clasped to him. "Do not move."

With a sigh she attempted to raise her hand to her brow, but let it fall with a cry of pain; then, pale again, gently drew away from him.

"It fell on me, did it not?" she asked, with a little woe-begone smile. "That comes of disturbing old institutions!"

And, still gently, she put his arm from her and sank on a chair.

Sir Roland stood over her, his heart beating fast, his eyes drinking in, with a strange mixture of delight and pain, the beautiful face, over which was sweeping the soft red and white. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Yes," she said with an effort, "I remember, I saw it falling, and yet could not move. I was fascinated, I think. Is my arm broken?"

He dropped on his knees and gently raised the white arm with its ugly red mark.

"No," she said, with a smile that cost her an effort, "it isn't broken. It would hurt me a great deal more if it were."

Then she noticed his remorseful face, and smiled kindly.

"Please do not look so concerned. It is a mere scratch. I ought to be ashamed of myself for fainting. I suppose I did faint? I have never done so before, that I remember. Where is Bessie? Did it fall on her, too?"

"No," he answered, still hoarsely; "it fell on none of us but you. It was my fault," he added, with passionate anger; "I did that!" and he pointed to the blood that was trickling down her arm.

"That—that is nonsense," she said with a smile.

"Yes, I did it," he went on, impetuously. "I, who would have given my life to spare you a moment's pain."

A deep crimson suffused her face and neck, and she vainly tried to draw her arm from him.

"Indeed, it was not your fault, nor that of anyone else," she said. "Yes, the bracket gave way, and—and it does not matter. There is no harm done beyond a scratch and a bruise. Please, please do not look so distressed. I am all right. Why should you be so distressed——"

"Why?" he repeated, and his eyes looked into hers with passionate earnestness. "Because I would give a dozen lives, if I had them, to guard you from a mere scratch, as you call it. Because I love you!"

Marjorie stared at him for a moment, as if his words had no sense or meaning, but as their import penetrated her brain, she drew her hand away, and with a pale face looked down at him.

"Sir Roland!" she whispered.

"Yes," he said, with a hopeless vehemence, "I understand. I know that I have no right to say so; I know that you are pledged to another——"

The sudden and unmistakable surprise and bewilderment in her eyes stopped him.

"I—pledged to—another?" she said, faintly.

"Is it not so? You look—do you mean to tell me that it is not so?" and in the revulsion of feeling, he sprang to his feet and stood

over her trembling with hope. "Do you say that I am mistaken, that your heart is free? For Heaven's sake, do not keep me in suspense!"

Marjorie looked up at him, with pale face and quivering eye.

"What—what do you mean? she murmured, brokenly. "Do you mean that I am—am engaged to—marry any one? Indeed you are wrong, quite wrong. I do not understand how——"

No further words were possible, for, with a low cry of relief and delight, he put his arm around her and pressed her to him.

"No?" he cried. "Oh, my darling, what a load you have taken from my heart! Forgive me!" he broke off, for Marjorie had risen, and stood, pale, and breathless, and silent. "Forgive me," he pleaded humbly. "I—Marjorie, my love carried me beyond myself. Say that you forgive me!"

Marjorie looked at him with puzzled eyes; then she turned pale, and looked around.

"Bessie—where is Bessie?"

As if in answer to the call, Bessie ran in.

"Oh, Sir Roland, I can't find the drawing-room—I lost the way. Oh, Marjorie! are you better? What was it? Are you hurt very much?"

"No," said Marjorie, with a tremulous smile, "nothing to speak of, dear. Will you get—get my fur cloak? Stay, we will go up stairs. Sir Roland, will you be kind enough to tell Lady Chesterton that I would like to go home?"

He took a step toward her, but with a quick gesture she repelled him, and putting her hand on Bessie's arm, murmured:

"Come, Bessie—quickly!" and they passed out.

Sir Roland stood for a moment, confused, irresolute, strangely unlike himself. Then he paced up and down the room, struggling to still the wild beating of his heart, and to regain composure; more than that, to realize what he had done. With restless hand he pulled at his mustache, and stared under frowning brows at the accursed breast-plate; then his brow cleared, and a sudden light of joy flashed into his eyes. There had been some mistake, and he was free to love her. But she—— He stopped with his hand on the door. He had held her in his arms; had kissed—a warm glow suffused him as he recalled those passionate kisses unfairly snatched as she lay in his arms—he had kissed her; but she—well, if she had not actually refused him, she had certainly not accepted him. And now she would go, and he would be left in suspense.

With a start, he "pulled himself together," as Reginald would have said, and crossed the hall; but as he did so, he heard light steps on the stairs, and turned back as Marjorie and Bessie descended.

Marjorie looked down, and her face, very pale a moment before,

turned slowly red, and her eloquent eyes were hidden behind their long lashes.

To him her face seemed suddenly, mystically, to have changed. It was as if one of the fairies of old had waved a magic wand over it, and thrown a spell which gave to its beauty a subtle charm.

Utterly regardless of Bessie, forgetting that "little pitchers have long ears," he took Marjorie's uninjured arm within his own, and bending down, said :

"Have you done anything for it? Are you in pain?" "No," she answered softly, and her voice was strangely altered—"no, it does not pain me much. I have bound it up with a wet handkerchief."

"Let me see," he said, as she reluctantly extended her white arm. He touched it tenderly, reverently.

"I shall never forgive myself," he muttered. "You must let my mother bind it up properly before you go——"

Marjorie stopped suddenly, and looked at him for the first time, entreatingly.

"No. Please don't say a word about it in the drawing-room. Promise me that you will not!"

And, in her eagerness, she put her hand beseechingly on his arm. He took it, and with Bessie's eyes full upon him, bent his lips to it.

"Very well," he said. Then, as she drew her hand hurriedly away, he murmured, "May I say no more to-night? Not even ask if you have forgiven me, or will forgive me?"

Marjorie shook her head and her face grew pale.

"No," she murmured, with a short breath, "do not. I do not understand."

"And yet it is so easy," he whispered, in a low, melting tone.

But something in her face prevented his saying more, and the next moment they entered the drawing-room. To tell of the anxiety and curiosity with which three of the occupants of that room had been awaiting the reappearance of the absentees, would require pages. At sight of the two girls, cloaked and hooded—at sight of Marjorie's pale face and heavily drooping eyes—Lady Chesterton almost started from her chair. As it was, she rose with something very different from her usual stateliness, and went toward them with icy surprise.

"Are you ill, Miss Deane?" she began; but Sir Roland cut her short, and in a voice that plainly proclaimed his intention to cut her very short indeed.

"Yes, Miss Deane has had a bad headache, and would like to go if Mr. Deane-——"

"Eh?—what?" exclaimed Mr. Deane, staring at the group. "But the carriage—I—er—," consulting his watch, "ordered it for half-past ten."

"We can walk. I would rather walk," said Marjorie, faintly. "It would do me good, I think," she added, with a forced smile.

"Are you sure?" asked Sir Roland, bending over her with an expression that made Lady Chesterton shudder, and caused Helen Montressor's white hand to clasp passionately around her fan.

"Quite," answered Marjorie, with as commonplace an expresion as she could command.

"Good," said Sir Roland. "I will accompany you if you will allow me—just to keep the wolves at bay, eh, Miss Bessie?"

"I'll join the escort—just to guard against the insidious attacks of the odious lions and tigers in the woods," said Reginald, coming down the room.

But Sir Roland lifted his head and looked at him queerly.

"It will not be necessary, Reginald," he said; and Reginald Montressor, being far too wise to oppose his powerful kinsman, smiled with cheerful assent.

While Mr. Deane was getting into his overcoat—a proceeding that required time—Lady Chesterton produced a smelling bottle, and Helen Montressor stood by murmuring soft expressions of sympathy. At last Mr. Deane appeared, adieus were spoken, and they were free.

Reginald Montressor accompanied them to the very steps, standing watching them for a moment, and then returned to the drawing-room and leaned against the mantel-shelf, looking down upon the two speechless ladies with a smile that spoke volumes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FATHER BLESSED HIS CHILD.

UNDER Marjorie's urgent insistence, Mr. Deane, with his two daughters on his arm, had preceded Sir Roland down the path; but it took but a very few minutes for the latter to overtake them and appropriate Marjorie to himself.

"It is so dark that I had better lead the way," he said, and without more ado he led Marjorie ahead at a pace more rapid than Mr. Deane could keep up.

For some time neither spoke a word, until Marjorie, unable to endure the silence any longer, said, faintly:

"How still it all is!"

"Yes," he answered, and his voice was so low that it did not reach the two plodding on behind. "Are you in pain now?"

"No," she replied; "it does not pain me unless I move it. It is a mere nothing. I have forgotten it."

"Forgotten," he echoed. "You will not forget all that has passed—all that has been said to-night?"

She did not answer, but he felt the little hand tremble on his arm.

"You will not do that," he insisted.

Then she spoke.

"You—you promised to say no more to-night," she said, almost inaudibly.

"Did I—promise?" he demanded. "Then you must let me retract. Why should I not speak to you? Are you angry with me?"

"N-o," faintly.

"I was rough and unmannerly," he went on, contritely; "but I had some excuse. I was so glad to see you come back to life—you do not know how like death you looked!" and he shuddered slightly at the very recollection. "And so glad—so wildly glad to hear that I had made a stupid mistake——"

"Mistake!" she echoed, in a low voice.

"A mistake that has made me wretched for days—so wretched that I might have known that I loved you——"

"Oh, stop," she said. "I—I ought not to listen to you. Please stop."

"Why, why," he demanded, with passionate eagerness; and she felt his eyes searching hers impatiently. "Why should I not tell you that I love you? Is it so unnatural?" and he smiled significantly.

"It is unwise," she answered, "and you should not say it."

He stopped for a moment, then went on at a quicker pace, which instantly carried them out of sight of Mr. Deane.

"Unwise, unwise!" he repeated. "It might be unwise if you were to tell me that I loved you in vain. Is that what you are going to tell me? For heaven's sake, do not!"

He could not see how the beautiful face flushed and paled, nor how hard it was to keep the soft lips firm enough to answer him.

"What does it matter what I—I think?" she said, trying to speak calmly. "It can not matter in the least. You ought not to have said what you have said to me, and I ought not to have listened.'

He did not speak for a moment, and she felt instinctively that he, too, was trying to be calm. At last he looked down at her.

"Marjorie—let me call you Marjorie—are you going to send me away for a whim—a fancy—or some miserable idea? I love you—

I love you with all my heart and soul—will you make me happy and be my wife?"

She looked up at him, and her hand tightened convulsively.

"No," she said, "I should not make you happy. I should make you miserable, all your friends——'

He stopped her with a fierce, sudden gesture.

"Ah," he said, "it is a baseless idea.'

"No, not a baseless idea," she answered. "Do you think it possible for me not to feel that it is not to Marjorie Deane that you, Sir Roland, should say what you have said? If I had been blind, utterly blind before, to-night would have opened my eyes to the distance that divides, not us alone, but ours!"

"I deserve it," he said. "Yes, of course I know what you mean. But because of the cold looks of two women——"

"One is your mother," she breathed.

"One is my mother, with all a mother's weakness, and with the usual mother's pride. Because of this you will sacrifice me. You see how calm I am—I feel that I am pleading for my life's happiness.

"Or misery," she said, with a little catch in her voice. Suppose——"

Then she stopped.

"Go on," he pleaded.

"Suppose then," she said, and the hot blood suffused her face—"suppose I—I were to say—yes——"

"Say it!" he cried, and he seized her hand and held it tightly clasped in his own.

"How would they receive you when you went back with the news? I think I can see them!" and for the first time a smile, bitter and scornful, rose to her lips.

He bit his moustache.

"If I were to walk in and tell my mother that a princess had promised to bestow her hand upon me, she would sigh and say it was a pity it was not an empress, or at the least a queen."

"Ah, I am not a princess! I am a commonplace school-teacher, whose father happens to have made his fortune——"

"Well," he said eagerly, "grant all you say. A lady cannot be more than a lady; and you—" He stopped, with a curt, impatient laugh. "A mere idea! You cannot, you will not wreck me on that! But—" then he hesitated with a sudden, suspicious pause—"but you have not answered my question yet. Perhaps you could make all further argument unnecessary. Marjorie, you have not said you loved me. That is what I want. I care for nothing else. What are all these objections? Nothing to me. Tell me that you love me, and I will show you how much I value these stupid prejudices of my people. By Heaven! if all the world said nay, while

you said yes, I would have you in spite of yourself. Marjorie, I love you—I love you ?" and, utterly regardless of father and sister, he stopped and drew her closer to him.

There was something in the wild force of his passion, in the assertion of his proud, wilful manhood, that broke down all Marjorie's prudent arguments. Trembling and silent, she stood striving for words—stood unable to speak or move, though she saw the two dusky figures that had hitherto followed them approach and innocently pass by.

"Let me go," she pleaded, almost piteously, for by the weakness that seemed to possess her every limb, that made her head feel heavy and long to hide upon his breast, she knew that her heart was betraying her, that her soul was slipping from her, and that, in a minute, he would hold it within the palm of his hand. "Let me go ! Oh, Sir Roland, let me go ! " and who would recognize in the soft, tremulous tones the wonted high-spirited voice of Marjorie.

"No !" he said, almost fiercely, and his arm held her in a vice. "There shall be no more of this. We two stand together alone to-night, with all the world outside. I have given you my love ; will you give me yours in your hand ? When I plead for bread, will you throw me coldly a stony pride ? Marjorie—Marjorie, do not make my name a curse to me ! Heaven ! cannot you see that I love you as I never have, never can love again ? After all, what can you give me that shall weigh a feather-weight in the balance against such love as mine ? But give me what you can—say here, now, with no thought of others, 'I love you,' or—" and his voice grew hoarse—"let me go once for all."

Marjorie trembled. Should she save him in spite of himself ? She had only to say, coldly, "I do not love you," and how much trouble would be saved him ! She struggled for courage—the words faltered on her lips.

"I—do—" then, with a sudden sob, she dropped upon his breast, and her "I do" finished with "I love you !"

He did not speak, but she felt his heart heave as his arm closed around her. With both hands he raised her face, and looked into it tranquilly ; then there fell a rain of passionate kisses on her lips, her eyes, her hair. Panting, breathless, she trembled like a wild fawn caught in a snare. At last she gasped :

"Oh, no, no ! You hurt me !"

With a sudden cry of remorse, he loosened his grasp, but only to hold her arm gently and tenderly. "Forgive me, darling," he pleaded, "it was your fault !"

"Mine ?" she said, with a flickering, shy smile.

"Yours," he said resolutely. "I was mad just now, but you had driven me mad, for I thought I was going to lose you ! Do you remember how you conquered me on the river ? I have not

forgotten, and I feared that your pride would get the better of my love. Marjorie, if I had lost you, I should have gone straight to the——"

"Hush!" she murmured, reprovingly, holding up her hand, which he instantly made prisoner and pressed to his lips.

"Yes," he said, "I thought you were going to punish me for the sins of my people. You are right, Marjorie; they behaved abominably. But, don't you see, they knew I loved you——"

"And wanted to save you," she interrupted.

"Stop!" he said, with a loving sternness; "no more of that. Let there be peace between us, unless you wish me to hate my kind. And what folly it is! You are a princess—they call Mr. Deane a merchant prince, at any rate."

Marjorie sighed even as she smiled.

"Ah, you do not know all," she said, thinking of the one whose very existence was to be ignored.

"My capacity is not very large, darling," he said, with his short laugh—and how full of a strong man's joy and satisfaction it sounded in the girl's ears! One stupendous piece of knowledge is as much as I can master in one night. I have just learned that you love me—you love me! That is enough!"

Marjorie looked up wistfully and tried to tell him all—tried to do her duty; but her heart failed her. Not now. To-morrow would do as well. Poor Roger!

They were walking on by this time, very slowly, with his arm around her, her head resting on his breast. It was well that he was familiar with every inch of the road, for in their present mode of progression a false step would inevitably have brought them to grief.

"Give me your hand, darling," he whispered.

"You have it," said Marjorie, naively.

"Hold it up, I mean. Yes, I thought there was a ring on it. I want that ring, Marjorie; see, I will give you mine."

And he drew it off slowly, with a touch that was a caress in itself, the simple little ring which she wore on her second finger, and tried to slip his ring—a plain, heavy gold band, quite free from ornament—in place of hers.

"Too large," he said, laughing. "You will have to wear it on your thumb."

Marjorie looked at it in the darkness, and her face flushed.

"Why," she exclaimed, involuntarily, "it is like a wedding-ring!"

"Is it?" he replied. "All the better, then. We are as good as married. Now put my ring on for me," and he held out his hand.

Marjorie, blushing and quivering, took the strong hand, white and shapely, as a Chesterton's should be, and tried the ring on one finger after another until she reached the last.

"That's the only one it will fit," she said.

"Poor little ring!" he said. "It is a sad fate for it, but I'll love it better than ever you did."

She turned her face up to his, and perhaps there was a nestling movement of her head as she did so. At any rate, he bent suddenly over her and drew her close to him, and there was a prolonged silence, broken at last by Bessie's voice crying out:

"Marjorie! Marjorie! Where are you?"

"All right!" shouted Sir Roland, and his voice rang through the avenue with a tone of triumph. "We were lost, like the babes in the wood."

"Well, hurry up. It is beginning to rain."

And so it was, but neither of them had noticed it.

"Do not come any farther," whispered Marjorie.

"May I not? Let me go in for just a few minutes. No! Well, it shall be as you say, tyrant!"

"Don't say that."

"It was only a jest; but not even in jest should I say it. You are my sweet Marjorie, and I will be the tyrant. See! You would offer me your hand for a farewell; but I will not have it. Your lips! There, you see now that I shall be a tyrant. What! Would you send me away miserable after making me the happiest man in all the wide world? Yes, the happiest! And yesterday—to-day—this evening, even—I was the most wretched being to be found from Land's End to John o' Groats', possessed of the demon of jealousy. Marjorie!" he exclaimed suddenly, "you haven't told me as yet whose portrait it is that made me suffer such agonies."

Marjorie started and looked down.

"There was no cause for jealousy," she said, in a low tone.

"No?" he said, eagerly, for there had been just pause enough before her words to frighten him. "You are quite sure?"

"Quite," she answered, "and if you would like to know——" she faltered.

"Stop!" he said, with the old ring in his voice. "No, I do not want to know. I am quite satisfied," he went on hurriedly, as if he feared to know that although there was no cause for jealousy now, there might have been in the past. "I am quite satisfied. You shall not tell me—you shall not! If there is some past history—well, it is past! My life begins from to-night—from to-night! And now bid me good-night properly. Shall I teach you how?"

She looked up into his face and smiled.

He went on:

"Then repeat after me, 'Roland, I love you.'"

"Roland—I—I love—you."

"Heaven bless you, my darling!" he cried, and, as he infolded her in his arms, he stooped to kiss her; but before he could reach

her red, ripe lips, she threw her arms around him, and, with a white, rapt face, pressed her lips to his and kissed him. Then as he stood dazed for a moment with the passionate caress, she broke from him and he lost her.

Bessie was waiting in the door-way when Marjorie flew up the steps and passed her into the hall.

"Good gracious, Marjorie! And where's Sir Roland?"

"Ah, yes, Sir Roland, come in," said Mr. Deane, trotting out of the drawing-room with a beaming countenance, which instantly fell as the fact dawned upon him that his titled guest was in fact not a guest at all. "Where is Sir Roland? You haven't let him go back in—I suppose you didn't even ask him to come in."

Marjorie, with an unwonted meekness, followed her irate father back into the drawing-room, and listened to his tirade on her undutifulness and disregard of the decencies and proprieties of life, and then his still angrier lecture on her unseemly conduct in coming away in the manner she had, without a word in her defence.

Bessie, indeed, tried to stem the torrent of her father's wrath by explaining indignantly that Marjorie had been injured, and insisted on Marjorie showing how she had been hurt, taking her hand to throw off the cloak. Then in a sudden tone of surprise she exclaimed:

"Why, Marjorie! What ring is that? Why, Marjorie! It's Sir Roland's ring! I saw him wear it to-night!"

"Hush!" whispered Marjorie; but Mr. Deane's ear had been too quick.

"What's that?" he said. "Whose ring? Sir Roland's? What on earth——"

He stared at Marjorie's face, and his own grew white with hope and anticipatory triumph."

"Why—why—don't you speak? Did Sir Roland give you his ring?"

"Yes," whispered Marjorie.

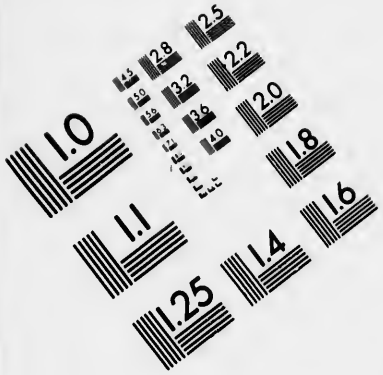
Mr. Deane sank into a chair.

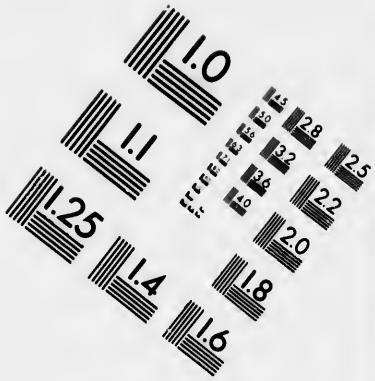
"Marjorie!" gasped Bessie, staring at her with wide open eyes and mouth.

"I am sorry you noticed it dear," said Marjorie, rising and putting her arm around her sister; "but it is true. Sir Roland has asked me to be his wife."

Mr. Deane sprang from his chair and stood gasping like a fish; then slowly his face flushed and he found speech.

"Asked—you—to—marry him! Is it true? This isn't"—with a spasm of fear—"this isn't one of your practical jokes?" Then, seeing that her face was full of earnestness, he took her in his arms and—well not exactly cried—but sobbed and gasped with proud emotion, "Heaven bless you, my child! Heaven bless you! This





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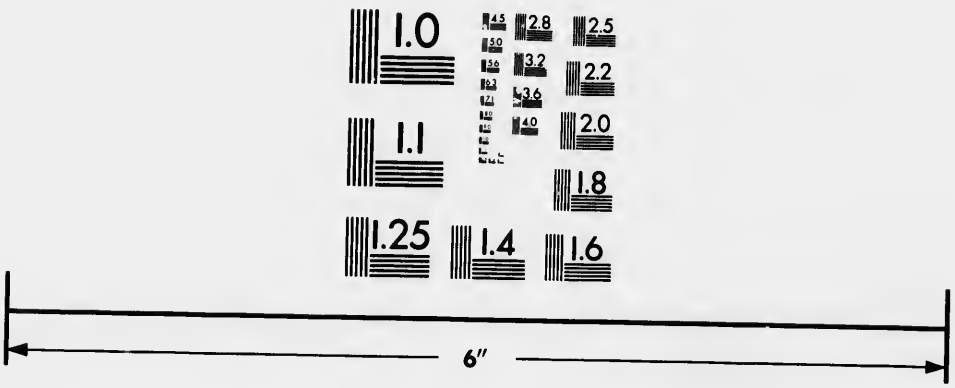

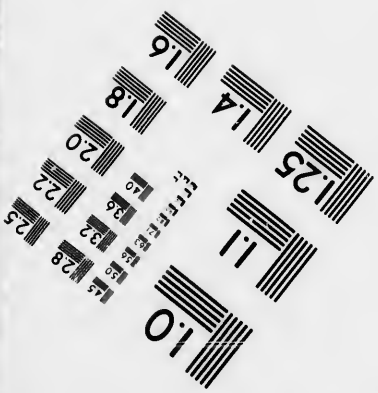

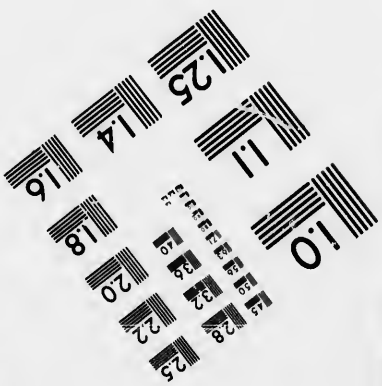

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is the proudest moment of your old father's life! Sir Roland! You—you will be Lady Chesterton, Marjorie. I always knew your heart was in the right place, and that you'd be an honor to your family. Lady Chesterton! Bless my soul! And—and—er—let me look at the ring. Well, well! Bessie, reach me the soda-water and the brandy. Lady Chesterton!" and quite overcome, he sank into his chair and blew his nose.

Pale and proud, fighting hard against the humiliation which her father's vulgar delight forced upon her, Marjorie leaned against the mantel-shelf silently watching her father, as he paced the room, gulping down his brandy and soda, and giving ecstatic expression to his triumphant feelings. But presently he waked a new feeling in her breast.

"Oh, yes, it's a surprise," he said; "but not so much of a surprise as you think. Oh, I saw it coming, I did, and will say that I helped it along a bit. These aristocrats like money as well as anybody, and I know it. I don't mind sayin' I had it from Sir Roland's agent that he was a bit pushed for cash; so while me and his lordship and his cousin was talkin' our case over the wine, I just dropped a plain word that whoever got you, got a tidy fortune too. Oh, I see Sir Roland open his eyes at that, and I knew that the thing was bound to come. But I didn't expect it so soon. You played your cards well, Marjorie. But sit down, my dear. Bessie, why don't you get your sister a chair! Hundreds have set their caps for him. Hundreds if one; but you beat them all—you an' my thousands," and he sank into his chair with a hideous chuckle of triumph.

With her face white and set and her eyes full of anguish, Marjorie looked down at him; then suddenly her hands went up to her face, and she burst into a storm of passionate sobs.

Mr. Deane started to his feet, but, with a gesture of indignant pride, she shrunk back and slowly left the room.

But her tears ceased before she reached her room, and the warm, radiant light glowed in her face and beamed in her eyes again, as Bessie, who had hastily followed her, threw her arms around her neck and kissed her.

"Oh, Marjorie! don't cry—don't think of it. As if Sir Roland cared whether you were worth a penny or a million pounds! Oh, Marjorie! I am so happy, and I do love him so, for loving you! But, indeed, how could he help it? The prettiest, dearest, sweetest girl in all the world. Mayn't I come in to-night? Well, give me a good long kiss! And, oh, Marjorie, I wish it was morning! And, Marjorie, fancy! you said you hated him, not—not many weeks ago!"

"I'm afraid," said Marjorie, as a faint flush stole over her face, "I'm afraid I've been telling a story."

CHAPTER XV.

SIR ROLAND ANNOUNCES HIS ENGAGEMENT.

WHEN Sir Roland reached home he first went to his own room and changed his wet coat for a dry one; then he went to the drawing-room. Lady Chesterton was still sitting upright as a dart in her high-backed chair; Helen Montressor was reclining in an attitude that a sculptor might copy, on a couch before the fire; Reginald, with the shadow of a smile on his handsome face, was lounging on an ottoman.

They all looked up as the tall figure entered, and each made enquiries in his or her own way after the guests Sir Roland had escorted home; then the conversation turned upon those guests, and one after another there followed stinging comments on the parvenu father, the presumptuous daughters, and the vulgarity of them all.

To everything that was said Sir Roland listened in silence, scarcely looking up from the fire, which he seemed to find a fascinating study; but presently, as if every word of scorn or contempt had been exhausted, Lady Chesterton looked at her fair guest, and said:

"If you are ready, Helen."

They rose to go, but Sir Roland arrested them with a motion of his hand, and a word:

"Stop!"

Lady Chesterton sank back and looked up at him; Helen Montressor turned her blue eyes up to his face with sweet, serious attention.

"In case," he said, with a smile that was as sardonic as a frown on the face of another, "you should feel disposed to renew this sort of criticism in my hearing, I had better tell you that I have asked Miss Deane to be my wife."

For a moment Lady Chesterton did not utter a word, Sir Roland's sardonic smile had travelled over all the faces there before she recovered herself.

"Roland!" she exclaimed, at last, and it was in a voice as if she were sinking into her tomb.

"Well," he said, "are you all surprised? Did you think I had taken vows of celibacy? Can you not find words strong enough to congratulate me in, Helen?"

The beauty turned to him with a smile and held out her hand.

"Please forgive me," she said. "I was taken by surprise. I hope you will be happy, Sir Roland."

"Thank you," he said. "Now, Reginald, let me have your congratulations."

"Eh?" said Reginald, rising. "Yes, of course. I hope you will enjoy your luck, Roland. She is confoundedly pretty."

"Thank you," said Sir Roland, with a sarcastic smile. "Now, mother!"

Lady Chesterton rose and confronted him, her face white as the driven snow, her eyes blazing.

"Are you mad, Roland?" she said.

"I think not," he answered, calmly meeting her stern gaze. "Madness does not run in our family, mother."

"You ask me to congratulate you," she said, the antique lace on her cap quivering with passion. "I would sooner see you in your grave than married to the daughter of such a man."

"I don't marry the man, mother," he answered, quietly, but there was an ominous light in his eyes.

"I would far sooner see you lying dead before me," she went on. "Dead! You must be mad to dream of perpetrating such a disgraceful thing. Do you forget the race of which you come?"

"No, but I think in some slight measure of myself. I love Marjorie Deane, mother."

"Love!" she echoed, and her accents of scorn filled the room. "Love! I do not forbid your loving her, but I do forbid your marrying her. You may love any dairy-maid on the estate, and I have nothing to do with it; but when you ask me to receive her as my daughter, it is time, Sir Roland, for me to rise and protest."

"Mother," he said, and his voice was stern and angry, "you not alone. You are speaking of my future wife."

"Your future wife, perhaps," said the proud old dame, drawing herself up to her full height, "but not my daughter. I disown her at once. You may forget what is due to a race whose unstained name you bear, but I cannot; and I tell you, Roland, that the day the daughter of that man enters this house, I leave it at once and forever. You have to choose between your mother and that low-born girl—between the woman who bore you and the daughter of Mr. Deane. I have no more to say, except"—and she turned to the beauty with a haughty apology—"except to apologize to my guests for this scene, which is a disgrace to the name you bear and to the house which witnesses it."

And with a proud gesture of the hand, as if she waved the subject aside, she took her candle and marched proudly out, followed a moment later by Helen Montressor.

At Sir Roland's announcement Reginald had turned pale, but he

had had time to recover himself, and now that they were alone together, he said :

"This is a bad business, Roland."

"What? Oh, yes. Thank you : but it has to be borne. Don't let me keep you up. Good-night."

With all his nonchalance, Reginald was not courageous enough to withstand this plain dismissal, and, with a shrug of the shoulders, he took up his candle and left Sir Roland alone. But he did not go up to his own room. He stopped on his way at his sister's. She had donned a satin dressing-gown, and evidently expected him.

There had been critics who had dared to hint that Helen Montressor's beauty was too perfect—that it lacked feeling and expression. If they could have seen her at that moment, they would have admitted that they had been wrong. White to deathliness was the fair skin ; the blue eyes, which the whole world had never seen otherwise than languidly limpid, were glittering like a basilisk's ; the thin lips were compressed over the white, even teeth ; and the low brow was full of lines eloquent of suppressed passion.

"Well?" she rather hissed than spoke.

"Pretty kettle of fish, this," said Reginald, sinking into a chair.

"Why did you bring me here?" she cried, between her teeth.

"Could I foresee that Roland would make such a complete fool of himself? He is over head and ears in love with the girl—a girl nobody ever heard of!"

"And he thinks he will marry her," she said. "Her! and I am here!"—and she stretched out her bare arms, very beautiful arms, too—"he thinks he can pass me by as if I—I were a mere nobody!"

"Evidently he thinks so," assented Reginald. "Confound it! I did not foresee this. But it mustn't be, you know—it must be stopped! He's out of his mind—he cannot marry her."

"Cannot? Shall not!" she cried. "Look at me! It was you who persuaded me to come to this miserable place, and now see the consequences! But you do not care!"

"Do I not?" he exclaimed, opening his eyes. "But I do, most confoundedly. Why, I meant going in for the girl myself."

"You!"

"Yes, I. There was no opportunity to tell you, but the old man, confound him! let out that he meant to give her, Lord knows how many thousands. And I meant going in for her. But now"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"the best thing that we can do is to throw up the game, and try fresh woods and pastures new."

"And leave her to become Lady Chesterton, mistress of the Wold?" and Helen Montressor smiled scornfully.

"How can we prevent her?" he asked, dolefully.

"How?" she cried, angrily, pacing the room. "I do not know —yet ; but we must—must. Do you hear? We must!"

"Oh!" said Reginald, elevating his eyebrows, "I didn't think you cared about it so much."

"You do not understand," she answered; "but be sure of this—that girl shall never be mistress of the Wold! Never!"

"Who is to prevent her?"

"I!" she retorted, with her eyes flashing. "I! We shall see who is the stronger—I, or that miserable girl. You smile. You think it is Roland I care for. No matter, think what you will; but this I say—that girl shall never be mistress of the Wold, and I will prevent it. I swear it, on my soul!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MORNING AFTER.

BREAKFAST at the Wold, the following morning, was not a delightful affair. In the first place, nobody was at the table on time; and in the next, each bore himself or herself as if the effects of the last night's storm had not yet been dissipated.

Then, too, Reginald, who was usually so astute, told a story about an unfortunate wedding, which was intended to enliven the breakfast-table, but which, instead, was so suggestive of the trouble in hand, that it fell like a wet blanket on all but Sir Roland, who, with a short laugh, asked if it was meant as an indirect warning to him.

Reginald looked appalled, and the others moved uneasily in their seats; but Sir Roland urged the matter, and the result was another passage-at-arms between the mother and son, which frightened the former and drove her to take counsel with Helen Montressor, with a result that was soon to be seen.

At the house of the plebeian everything was so very different. It must be confessed that Marjorie over-slept herself; but then, with such happy dreams as visited her slumbers, it was no wonder; but if she overslept, it was not so with her father and Bessie, both of whom were up with the earliest, the one to congratulate himself on his good fortune, and the other to be able to congratulate her sister.

Ordinarily Mr. Deane would not have had Marjorie indulged in any such way, but since last night she had become a precious thing, and nothing could be too good for her; consequently, Bessie was obliged to content herself with hovering about Marjorie's door

until that young lady showed by unmistakable signs that she was awake.

Then Bessie rushed in, and overwhelmed her in the same breath with reproaches for her unromantic drowsiness, and with caresses for looking so beautiful, and with congratulations for having such a lover. Then she gave Marjorie a flower which she had selected especially for her, and which she begged her to wear in her hair, and she further besought her to wear her sea-green gown ; to both of which requests Marjorie laughingly assented, saying that if her lover came he should find the victim properly decked for the sacrifice ; whereupon Bessie declared that she was cold-hearted and undeserving of her happiness when she could joke about it.

"Dear little Bess," said Marjorie, with a sudden tenderness, "I shall never have a more devoted lover than you ! "

"Excepting Roger," answered Bessie, with a little sigh.

"Poor Roger ! " sighed Marjorie, in her turn, and looking sober instantly. "Don't let us speak of him now. And run along, Bessie, dear. I will be down in a few minutes."

Bessie left her, and she dressed herself slowly and thoughtfully. How Miss Montressor would have smiled at that toilet! It was no such elaborate affair as her own, but consisted mainly of a cold bath, out of which she came glowing and fresh as the morning itself.

She could not but smile, as she entered the breakfast-room, to notice the elaborate politeness with which her father greeted her ; and then his anxiety lest she was in a draft, or lest she was not eating enough, and the way in which he made Bessie wait upon her sister. The two girls exchanged laughing glances, but made no protest, knowing that their father would only find some other and possibly more annoying vent for his feelings if he were checked in this.

"You must take care of yourself, my dear, you must, indeed ; or rather, we must take care of her—eh, Bessie ? " and he chuckled significantly.

"I have never been accused of self-neglect as yet," said Marjorie, calmly, "and as to my appetite——"

She stopped suddenly, for her quick eye—quickened since last night by the touch of love's finger—saw a stalwart form striding around the path that turned by the elms.

"You must take some more exercise," said Mr. Deane, whose eyes were not quick, and who, moreover, was sitting with his back to the window that commanded the path. "And—er—by the way, my dear, I was thinking last night, that—er—you might like to have a little money to—to get any little thing you fancied in the shops, and I've written a little check. Take it, my dear, and if you want any more——"

It was a check for two hundred pounds, and Marjorie flushed as she looked at it, for it flashed across her in an instant that it was due to the title of her lover. She essayed to make a remonstrance, but her father waived his big red hand pompously, and with an inward shudder she heard him go on:

"A mere nothing, my dear Marjorie—a mere nothing. You mustn't think that—ahem!—some great friends of ours have all the money in the world. Ha, ha! No, there is still a little left for outsiders, like ourselves. Put it in your pocket, my dear; and—ahem!—I'm thinking of buying that pair of ponies you admired the other day; they're for sale, I hear. Tut, tut! Not a word! What did I say the other day? You please me, and I'll act like a liberal parent by you. I hope I know what is due to position; and though you are my daughter, I can't forget that you are to be the future Lady——"

"Sir Roland Chesterton!" announced one of the giants.

"Eh? What? Where?"

"In the library, sir."

Mr. Deane rubbed his hands, wiped his mouth and winked at Marjorie with a smile of ineffable cunning.

"Prompt! It's what I expected of him. Prompt and up to the mark," he whispered with satisfaction. "Ah, well! He'll find we'll meet him just as handsome as he deserves," and with an emphatic nod he trotted out of the room.

"Papa?" cried Marjorie, springing to her feet in troubled dismay; but Mr. Deane was out of hearing. "What will he say? What is it he means to do?" she exclaimed. "Oh, Bessie! He was never like this when we—we were poor. Never. I know—I know he will insult Sir Roland!"

"Never mind, dear," said cheery little Bess; "Sir Roland will understand."

But Marjorie was past consolation, and paced the room regardless of the giants who, in the process of clearing away, glanced curiously at the graceful figure and anxious face.

Suddenly Bessie, who had been staring out of the window—speculating, if the truth be told, on the manner in which Sir Roland would greet her—started up, crying:

"Marjorie, look! A brougham! What—it can't be—it is the Wold Brougham!"

What!" cried Marjorie. "Are you sure?"

"Lady Chesterton, miss," announced one of the giants.

"Oh, Marjorie!" cried Bessie. "How kind! How really kind and thoughtful! She has come to tell you how glad she is—"

A quiet, scornful smile curling Marjorie's lips stopped her.

"Lay not that flattering unction to your soul, Bessie. Unless

I am grievously mistaken, she has come to declare war. But not a word to papa of it. Hush! here he comes with Sir Roland.

And before they could enter she had slipped out of the room.

She paused a moment in the hall to—well, to gain her fighting breath; for, like the war-horse, she scented the battle from afar. Then, with her face properly composed, she opened the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER XVII

A PASSAGE-AT-ARMS.

INCLOSED in furs, Lady Chesterton rose from her chair and confronted Marjorie. For a moment the hard, stern expression in the cold, grey eyes melted. It was impossible, even for this haughty mother, who had come "to save her son" to look upon the girl unmoved by her pure, fresh beauty and youthful, natural grace. For a moment, for one little moment, she flinched, and wished that Helen Montressor had not put the idea of a personal encounter into her head. Then she thought of Roland, thought of all she had come to fight for, and hardened herself. With a little icy smile that was meant to be conciliatory, she held out two fingers of her thickly gloved hand.

"Good morning, my dear," she said, her voice closely resembling that of the wolf when he accosted Red-Riding-Hood. "It is scarcely necessary to ask if you are better this morning. You look the personification of health."

"I am quite well, thank you," said Marjorie.

Then they sat themselves opposite to each other, and Marjorie wisely waited for the other to open fire.

"I was so sorry that you were unwell last night," said my lady, "and am very glad to find that it was only a passing weakness. But," and she lowered her voice, "but it was not to speak solely of that that I came to you so early this morning, Miss Deane. Indeed, I ought to apologize for intruding at such an unusual hour."

"I am very glad to see you, Lady Chesterton," said Marjorie, with appaling untruthfulness.

"I am afraid you will not be so much pleased," said Lady Chesterton, smiling grimly, "when you have heard the subject of my visit."

Marjorie raised her eyes and looked her straight in the face with a grave composure that was not without its effect.

"I have come, my dear young lady," continued her ladyship, "to have a few quiet words with you respecting something which my son, Sir Roland, tells me occurred between you and him last night,"

She paused, and Marjorie again looked up, but in silence.

"Of course you did not expect him to conceal the matter from me?" said her ladyship, sharply.

But even that did not break the patient self-restraint of the fair opponent.

"I am glad to be able to say that my son, Sir Roland, came straight to me with a confession of what I must call his strange folly."

Silence still.

"To say that I was shocked, and grieved, is but poorly to describe the disappointment and sorrow with which I heard that he contemplated a step which would eventually ruin his prospects and position in life, and not only his future, but yours, Miss Deane."

Now Marjorie looked up and spoke.

"It was very kind of you to consider me, Lady Chesterton," she said, and there was something in the tone of the clear voice that brought the thin color to the blanched cheek.

"It is true," she said. "I did consider you. Of course I thought of my son's welfare first. It is naturally the first consideration with me—his mother. But I thought of you, and felt sorry for you—that you should even for a moment have been led to think that such an event as that of your marriage with Sir Roland was possible. But I do not wish to take this tone, or to look at the matter in this severe way. I hope—I sincerly hope that the quiet night has brought reflection with it, and that you yourself see how unwise—how impossible such a match must be."

A faint smile, half sad, half naive, flickered on Marjorie's lips.

"I was asleep all night," she said.

Lady Chesterton's eyes glittered.

"Am I to understand that you intend to meet my natural and inevitable remonstrances with levity, Miss Deane?"

Marjorie shook her head.

"I did not mean to anger you, Lady Chesterton. Will you go on, please? I will promise to listen to you patiently."

Lady Chesterton inclined her head in stately acknowledgm t.

"Thank you," she said. "I trust we may understand each other. Frankly, I should not have set out on the unpleasant errand if I had not had greater hopes of succeeding in convincing you. I am quite sure that I have not to address either a frivolous or a scheming young lady."

A hot flush rose to Marjorie's face, and her eyes flashed.

"I say I am quite sure of that. I have only to point out how unsuitable this match would be, how surely it would end in the unhappiness of both of you, to gain your consent to the breaking of this—this engagement, if it can be called so. Miss Deane, Sir Roland is my only son; he is the heir to one of the oldest titles in the kingdom; the Chestertons have held the estate since Henry the Fourth. With such a name and standing any man might hope to take a foremost position; but Roland has other qualifications, and his ultimate success as a statesman is beyond question, unless he should make some such false step as the one which he now proposes to take. Miss Deane, he could find no surer way of accomplishing his social ruin than by an unfortunate marriage. I have always looked forward to his union with some one who should be at least his equal in birth and station, and who should be qualified to help him to the position in the country which he is bound in honor to take. Should he marry as his friends could wish, there is no doubt of his rising; but if, on the other hand, he is led away by a transitory passion, or passing whim, to a step beneath him, he is lost! I beg, I implore you to consider this. If you refuse, then I must appeal to your own self-interest. Miss Deane, I have seen more of the world than you have, and I, here, solemnly assure you that no unequal marriage can end in happiness, either for one or the other. And Roland! Ah, you do not know Roland! It grieves me, his mother, to have to speak of his faults, but Sir Roland has his faults. You know nothing of his past life, you know nothing of his temperament and disposition, you know absolutely nothing of his prejudices and sympathies, and yet you think that you can hold him fast!" Her thin voice rose and trembled with earnestness. "You cannot do it!" she went on, her hand half-upraised and quivering; "you cannot do it! I, his mother, know something of his disposition, and I tell you his great weakness is that passion which holds him for the moment, and which surely passes away. If my son marries you he will grow tired of you in a month—— Stop!" for Marjorie had risen, with white face and flashing eyes, "I beg you will hear me out. He will tire of you in a month, he will go back to his old pursuits and friends—pursuits and friends with whom you cannot associate or sympathize—and you will rue the hour in which you allowed him to deceive yourself and him. Miss Deane, I have spoken plainly; but is it not best? Think! I am a mother pleading for the future of my son. Do not look resentful. If I have any need of excuse for speaking thus, have I not the greatest of all pleas? I love him!"

At this, the first touch of tenderness in this long harangue, Marjorie winced; her passionate indignation died out from her eyes; with a sudden pallor and a quiver of the red lips, she sank into the chair, and, clasping her hands, turned away her head.

Lady Chesterton rose hastily, and, going over to her, put her hand on her shoulder.

"My dear," she said, with stiff gentleness, "I beg your pardon. I am sorry to have spoken so—so plainly; but what could I do? As a mother I could not see my son rushing to ruin, and dragging another thither, also, without speaking. I did not mean to insult you. No! but I would do the same again if it were necessary. but I see it is not. You understand, do you not, how impossible this thing is? Quite, quite impossible!"

Motionless and silent, crushed and heart-wrung, Marjorie sat like a statue. Lady Chesterton waited and looked at her and sighed, and was about to murmur a kind word of consolation and gratitude; but some imp would not let her leave well enough alone, but impelled her to add, as she thought, the top stone to the edifice.

"My dear," she said, "I shall always feel grateful to you for listening to me so patiently, and sacrificing yourself for my son's welfare. I am very grateful, very grateful indeed. I cannot utter the usual commonplace truisms about speedy forgetfulness, but you will let me say that I hope, that I confidently believe, this—this little incident in your life will soon pass away. You have known each other so short a time that it is impossible that the feeling that has sprung up can have a very strong root. And I do hope you will forgive me. I think I ought to tell you that I have not spoken of my son's future on mere speculation. Until you came across his path, I had strong hopes—and these hopes will now flourish—that I shall see him married to a young lady whose position in life will be of the greatest assistance to him. I am sure if you knew more of my young relative, Miss Montressor, you would like and esteem her."

The young girl she was torturing so complacently sat writhing under her hand, still silent, but the eyes, which she could not see, had grown harder and fiercer, and the lips, tightly shut together, were white and quivering.

"But we must not be selfish," went on the proud, patronizing voice, "we must not forget the service you have rendered us. I trust that, though any tie of relationship between us is impossible, we shall be friends, great friends. And who knows, we may be fortunate enough to find a more suitable and happier match for you than my son could possibly have prov——"

She reached no further; for with a suddenness that caused her ladyship to stop as if she had been stung, Marjorie rose to her full height, and, with crimson face and flashing eyes, with her soft, witching beauty transformed into the loveliness of a Medea, confronted her.

"Stop!" she said, not loudly, but low and pantingly, with her small hand pressed to her throbbing bosom. "Stop! You shall

not—you shall not—say another word. How dare you insult me? Was it not enough that you had gained your end? That you had robbed me of the only great happiness I had ever known? Was it not enough that you should humiliate me in the dust before your proud, miserable, worldly plots and schemes? Was it not enough that I was in the dust under your feet? No! you cannot be content—you must trample on me."

Panting, she was perforce compelled to pause for breath, but she would not let the white and trembling woman speak yet.

"No," she said; "I have listened to you; I have listened patiently to every cruel and scornful word. Now you shall listen to me. You come to plead for your son's happiness; you say that I shall ruin him and make him miserable. What have you ever done to make him happy? Was he happy before we—we met? I would believe his word against yours. And now, not content with dividing us, you insult me by thrusting another woman in my face—and she that false, heartless creature of the world! I am to give him to her. I will not do it! I will not! You love him! You forget when you heaped insult upon insult on me, that it was possible I, too, loved him. I do love him; and I will not give him up. No! I would have done it for his sake, I might have done it for yours; but—" a gleam of scorn flashed like lightning in the bright hazel eyes—"not for Miss Montressor's."

For a moment her ladyship was too overwhelmed to retort. With her mouth wide open, like the most vulgar of mortals, she stared in speechless astonishment at the passionate outburst; then she roused her numbed faculties, and her thin face grew hard and set, her eyes flashed, not warmly, as Marjorie's, but like cold steel, and she spoke:

"So that is your decision. You will not give him up, as you so appropriately term it. You have ensnared a good *parti*, and you mean to keep him. Well, I can scarcely be justified in expressing surprise, much less disappointment. I might have known that the interview would end in this way. You 'will not give him up.' You intend to be mistress of the Wold, in the face of the world, and of his own mother. Take care! You have not gained your end. I would advise you to hasten the conclusion. Persuade him to marry you, and learn for yourself, by bitter experience, how inevitably misery follows on such a union! Marriage!" she echoed, her face flushing with the insolence of furious passionate pride. "It is well for you that Roland considers such an elaborate ceremony necessary."

At this—the cruellest insult that one woman can deal out to another—Marjorie stared, at first not comprehending; then, as the full meaning of the words broke upon her, she put up both hands and shrank away from the furious face with a faint cry of dismay.

As she did so the door opened, and Roland strode in. He stopped a moment, looking from the stern, threatening form and face of his mother to the shrinking, abashed girl; then, taking it all in at a glance, he stepped forward, and drawing the graceful figure into his arms, looked over the head that lay upon his breast at his mother—looked at her as he never looked before.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, his eyes glowing from below his dark brows, a red spot of anger on each tanned cheek.

"Let her tell you," answered Lady Chesterton, raising a denunciatory finger. "I came here to save you from disgrace—her from misery. This is the result."

Roland laid his hand upon the soft brown hair and smoothed it soothingly.

"Hush, my darling!" he said, for the heart that beat so close to him was throbbing wildly, and the bosom heaved with stifled sobs. "Hush! Mother, you had no right to do this. What have you said? Surely you know me too well to think that I would go back from my word—my pledged word—even though its results were unwelcome. You have done wrong. Your brougham is at the door. Marjorie, darling, excuse me a moment, while I take my mother to the carriage."

"No!" gasped the old lady; "do not come near me! You have chosen between that girl and me! You have deserted me! I will go alone."

"Oh, no! Go, go!" murmured Marjorie, and she drew away from him.

Roland gently forced her to a couch, and then advanced to his mother.

"Come!" he said, simply, but his word was full of stern command, and he drew her hand within his arm.

With bent head the old woman went to the door, but her venom was not wholly expended. With a sudden gesture she turned and looked at the sitting girl.

"Remember!" she cried, fiercely. You have won the day; but it is not yet ended. I shall live to see you repent—repent!"

"Silence!" thundered Roland, and at the tone so full of wrath the old woman shrank within herself and allowed herself to be led away.

A few moments later Roland was by Marjorie's side, trying to soothe her.

"For Heaven's sake, darling, don't mind! Great Heaven! I had no idea that mother would take to tragedy in that way. Marjorie, darling, go into a passion—abuse her—me—anybody—but don't cry, darling. Every sob goes through me."

"I—I am not crying," she said at last, raising her face with its wet eyes and quivering lips. "I would not cry for the world."

"Do not," he said pressing her to him. "What can I say, except to beg your forgiveness for subjecting you to the—this outrage. Will you ever forgive me, I wonder?"

"Yes," she said, with sudden gayety and a little wilful smile, "it's always the injured one who forgives; the other never does. She will never cease to hate me, and I shall make her hate me worse than ever if I let you stay. Go now!" and she withdrew her arm from around his neck.

But he took it and replaced it there.

"No," he said. "My mother and I are best apart for a few hours. Besides, I intend to spend the day with you, if you'll have me. Perhaps you'll soon tire of having a man tied to your apron-strings."

"Do you mean it?" she cried, a swift smile of delight chasing the grief from her face. "Really!"

"Really!" he replied. "Go, now, darling, and get rid of these tear traces, while I talk to Bessie. Do yo[illegible]ow, I'm half inclined to think that it's Bessie I'm in love with after all."

Marjorie looked around as she left the room and said laughingly: "Don't tempt her."

Roland was as good as his word. For the remainder of that day Marjorie held her lover in thrall. At luncheon and dinner he sat by her side, his eyes scarcely leaving her face; they rambled through the woods, side by side, wandering neither knew nor cared whither. They went on the water in the punt, and they sat in the conservatory, where Roland upset the equilibrium of the insect world with the fumes of an immense regalia, while Marjorie, under the pretence of watering the flowers, watched and listened to him.

With a delicacy that did him infinite credit, Papa Deane took himself off, no one knew or cared whither, and Bessie was careful to efface herself generally.

They had it all to themselves, those two lovers, and the day, which began so stormily, passed off in a glorious flood of sunlight which Marjorie would never forget in all the years of sadness that were to follow. And at last they stood on the steps, Roland's arm around her waist, her head lying peacefully on his breast, so rapt and peacefully that she did not move even when Bessie ran out to remind Sir Roland of an engagement he had made for the morrow.

"Mind! You said the dog cart, Sir Roland," she called, in her sweet treble, "and only we three."

"The dog-cart it shall be, *Miss* Bessie," he called back with emphasis. "Good-night, Miss Bessie Deane!"

"Good-night, Roland," laughed Bessie, who had been teased all day for addressing him by his title, and the two were left alone.

"To-morrow," he said, musingly. "I wish it were here. Marjorie, we will have another happy day."

Marjorie looked up, dreamily.

"Shall we?" she said. "Do you think it is possible to have two such days in succession? Isn't there a proverb about the impossibility of two happy days coming together until two Fridays fall in a week?"

"What a superstitious child it is!" he murmured, stroking her cheek caressingly. "We'll prove that proverb to be bosh to-morrow. Good-night, my darling—my darling!"

"Good-night," she murmured.

They did not part then, of course. Lovers never do at the first, and not very often at the second good-night; but at last he let her go, and striding away, was swallowed up in the dark night.

Marjorie stood watching, listening to his retreating footsteps, the rapt look on her face which love alone has the power to paint. Then, with a long sigh, half of pleasure, half of pain, she turned to go in.

As she did so, something light and white seemed to shoot out of the shrubs at her side, and, striking her on the bosom, fall to the ground. With a start she looked around, and then, instead of being frightened into running away, as might have been expected, she stooped and picked up a folded piece of paper which lay at her feet.

With a sudden quiver of excitement, half dread, half hope, she stepped into the light and unfolded the paper. It was a note of a few lines only, written in a man's hand. At the first glance she seemed to recognize it, and hastily clapped her hand to her mouth to suppress the cry that rose to her lips.

"Meet me in the piece of wood by the river to-morrow at sunset. Don't tell a living soul that I am here. I am in danger."

That was all the note said, but it was enough to send her faint and trembling to the wall, her hand upon her heart and her eyes staring out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BEAUTY PLAYS HER FIRST CARD.

WHEN Sir Roland reached the Wold, after leaving Marjorie that night, he would have much preferred going directly to his own room; but moral cowardice was not one of his failings, and he stifled the desire for comfort, and went at once to the drawing-

room, determined to face the worst and have it over. He was prepared to say some very plain and peremptory words to his mother, but he liked his task so little that he was glad when he opened the drawing-room door to find it apparently deserted. With a sigh of relief he turned to go, when Helen Montressor rose from a low ottoman, which was hidden behind a screen near the fire.

"Hello!" he said. "I thought you had all fled the festive scene."

"No," she answered, softly, "I am still here," and she advanced into the soft light of the candelabra.

Roland looked at her absently at first, and then more fixedly, for something in her appearance forced his attention. She was in evening dress, a robe of some softly delicate fabric of a rich, subdued hue, draped her tall and exquisite figure. On her neck, which rose like a column of white marble, gleamed a necklace of dull gold, set with diamonds; a dead white flower nestled in the gold of her hair; and, more beautiful and potent than all else, a smile full of subtle sympathy showed in her eyes and rested on her lips.

Unconsciously the absent look faded from his face and gave place to one of frank admiration. With a sudden sense of reproach he remembered how he had deserted his guest for one whole day, and, with a half repressed apology in his voice, he said:

"All alone! That is too bad! I am afraid you must think me a perfect bore."

She shook her head slowly, and smiled.

"Do not say a word," she said. "Why should you? There is no apology needed between us."

"I don't know about that," said Sir Roland, shaking his head doubtfully. "I've been guilty of the most abominable selfishness. I suppose my mother has gone to bed. Where is Reginald?"

"In the smoking-room. He stayed as long as he could, and then I sent him away, in pity for him."

"And you sat up for me," he said, looking up at her half remorsefully, half gratefully.

"Yes," she answered, smiling pleasantly. "I have a message to deliver from Lady Chesterton."

"A message? A declaration of war to the knife, I suppose. Of course she has told you of the scene she made at Harley House?" and Sir Roland bit his lip.

"Ye-es, she told me there had been some unpleasantness. I am so sorry—so very sorry it should have happened." She looked at him with an expression of frank sympathy. "And this is my message: She bade me to tell you that she also was sorry."

"What!" with incredulous surprise.

"Yes, she is very sorry. It was done on the impulse of the mo-

ment, and under the impression that neither of you quite knew your own minds——"

"Being children," interjected Sir Roland, sardonically.

"And, in short, dear Lady Chesterton is filled with remorse and sorrow for the way in which she took the matter."

"Is it possible?" said Sir Roland. "My mother apologizing! She must be ill."

"She is very much upset," said the sweet voice. "It has been a disappointment for her. You cannot find cause for annoyance in the fact that she—that we all looked for great things from you.

"Great things! Great things!" he cried, impatiently. "What on earth do you mean? Did you expect me to marry a princess of the blood, or the Queen of Spain?"

"Don't be angry with me, Roland," she said with a soft deprecation.

"Angry with you? No. I beg your pardon. I should be an ungrateful beast if I were, for I know I have you to thank for my mother's change of heart. Forgive me for being so selfish, Helen," he said, putting his hand on her arm in his earnestness. "Why, how cold you are! Come nearer the fire," and he went down on his knees and stirred the great logs of wood into a blaze. Come!" and he drew her chair, with kindly eagerness, to the glow.

The beauty laughed softly, and held out her white hands to the red, leaping firelight, which fell in warm gleams of color on her exquisitely beautiful face.

"I am rather cold."

"Cold as ice," and he put his hand on her arm again; but it was not cold now.

His touch had sent the blood coursing through her veins, and the soft, white skin burned beneath his fingers.

"But never mind me," she said, in her undulating voice; "tell me about Marjorie."

"About Marjorie," he repeated, dreamily, as the words called up to him the face of the woman he loved.

"You are formally engaged to her now, are you not?"

"Quite formally," he answered, holding up his hand to show her ring. "Mr. Deane saw no objection."

A smile of scorn swept for a second over the beautiful face.

"Indeed, he wanted to be particularly generous—to play the benevolent father-in-law, in fact. He offered to make me a present of fifty thousand pounds, or something of that sort, on our wedding-day; but of course I told him that was impossible."

"You refused?"

"Of course. I told him that if he liked to settle it on Marjorie, for her own separate use, I would settle a like amount also; but that as to handing me fifty thousand, or whatever it was, as a dowry—it was not to be thought of."

One hundred thousand pounds this underbed girl was to have! Helen set her teeth hard, and a jealous, envious fire consumed her.

"And so my mother has withdrawn her objection. I cannot understand why she should have objected so strongly in the first place."

"You see," said Helen, looking down, hesitatingly, "she knew so little of her—knows so little of her now. Of course, she has told you all about her past life?"

"No-o," said Roland, fidgeting with the poker, "I don't know that she has."

"No!" with a faint smile of surprise. "No! Girls are usually so communicative under such circumstances. I should have thought she would have told you everything—concealed nothing."

"Everything! Concealed! What on earth can she have to conceal?"

The beauty looked at him out of the corners of her half-closed eyes, somewhat as a cat might look at a mouse with which it is playing. She noted the annoyed way in which he fingered his mustache.

"Conceal! Oh, nothing," she answered, with her soft laugh. "Though I think no girl can reach womanhood without having something to conceal; and her life has been so—so—varied. Roland made an irritable drive at the logs with the poker. "And, of course, Lady Chesterton is only too ready to be suspicious, and will have it, though I have half-laughed her out of the idea, that Marjorie is something of a flirt. I tell her that she has only seen her twice, and that one must not draw conclusions from a girl's conduct at a ball. Of course, there will be rumors about new people, but it is ridiculous to listen to them."

"Rumors?" he repeated, gnawing his mustache and frowning at the fire, as the barbed arrows insinuated themselves into his mind. "Rumors! her past life!—a flirt!" shot through his mind, and recollections of the locket, and the embarrassment and the trouble his speaking of it had caused, rose up before him.

"Absurd, isn't it?" said the beauty, smoothing her dress and turning the rings on her white fingers. "But Lady Chesterton will forget all her wild suspicions and prejudices now, I am sure. We must do our best to dispel them—for your sake," and her voice dropped.

He looked up, half curious, half anxious. He was not thinking of his mother's suspicions, but of the locket—the confounded locket for which he had dived, and about which Marjorie had maintained so mysterious a silence—for it seemed mysterious now.

"'Pon my word," he said, with an uneasy laugh, "I'd better get Marjorie to write a short account of her life up to present date, so that my mother may be satisfied."

"Do not," she said, with a playful shake of the head. "Believe

me, that innocent flirtation with the music teacher, and so on, would read quite dark in your eyes. Let the past rest, Roland, and take Marjorie as she is. And I am sure she is pretty enough to make one forget her past. I quite love her for standing so wonderfully to her colors. A girl with anything less than her spirit would have retreated before such an attack."

"You are right," he said, warmly; "she has been cruelly used, poor child!"

"Never mind," she said, hiding a malicious sneer behind the screen she raised. "She will have her reward."

"In marrying me, do you mean?" he asked, with self-scorn.

"In becoming mistress of the Wold," she answered, with a little laugh that stung him more than the words, for it said that Marjorie was marrying him for his position, and not for himself.

"Well," she went on, rising, "I must go now. I hope you will be happy, Roland. I am intensely interested in your—this matter. You must let me come to the wedding."

"Thanks. At any rate I shall not forget your kindness. You have been awfully kind."

"Not at all. Good-night," and she held out her hand.

He took it and held it. It was warm now, and the soft, warm fingers seemed to cling around his. There is always a nameless, indescribable delight in holding such a hand, even when it lies coldly in one's palm; but when it clings and presses with that silent eloquence, which a woman's hand is capable of, it exerts a fascination which it is difficult to resist.

Roland looked up, and as he did so her eyes met his with a gentle, half-abashed tenderness. He even fancied that they were moist; certainly a kind of spell fell over him.

"Good-night," he said, and as he arose he lifted her hand to his lips.

In an instant a crimson flush suffused her face and neck, and she drew her hand away; but not until he felt the warm fingers close around his with a sudden pressure. A moment after she was gone, and Roland, with a start, shook off the spell; but hours elapsed, as he sat over the fire, before he could dispel the effect which her softly voiced suspicions had insinuated into his mind.

But at last he succeeded, helped thereto by the vision of Marjorie's pure, innocent face; and he went to bed and to sleep long before the beauty had ceased to toss to and fro in the self-torture of unrequited love and envious jealousy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HUNTED MAN.

PUNCTUALITY was not as a rule one of Sir Roland's virtues, but on the following morning he was as punctual as time itself, as on the stroke of eleven he drew up in front of Harley House and waved a saucy kiss to Bessie, who stood waiting for him.

A moment later Marjorie appeared, looking somewhat pale and anxious, as it seemed to Roland; but the instant she looked up into his eager face the color flew into her own, and nothing but happiness shone upon it.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, with a laugh and a stare, as she looked at the dog-cart; "how are we to get up? Have you brought a ladder?"

"No," he answered; "you bargained for the dog-cart, and here it is. It is just as well you should get used to it, my lady. There's a step down there; you can see it with the naked eye if you look closely. Put your foot on it and give me your hand."

The next moment she was by his side, and Bessie, scorning advice or assistance, had clambered up behind. But even she looked down from the terrific height with something like awe.

"Ready?" asked Roland. "Then off we go. Don't be frightened; the Dutchman always goes off at first as if he had been fired out of a gun, but he's as kind as a kitten, and twice as playful. Not frightened, are you, dear?"

"Not at all," answered Marjorie, with a look that seemed to say that she never could be at his side.

"I thought you looked pale. Not worrying about my mother, are you? I told you she would be sorry. She is very sorry; and she sent her best wishes to you this morning."

"Did she?" said Marjorie, gratefully. "That was very kind of her—very! What made her do it, I wonder?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to say "Helen Montressor, but he stopped in time. "Oh, my mother is not an ill-tempered woman. Hasty, perhaps. We are all hasty. That's one of the troubles you will have to bear. I ought to have told you that we Chestertons are a jealous, hot-tempered lot—always were."

"Thanks. Forewarned, forearmed. I must be careful to conceal all my peccadilloes."

It was an innocent, unmeaning speech, but it jarred on him unreasonably, and he hastened to change the subject.

"Are you well wrapped up?" he asked, anxiously, his eyes, glad of the excuse, wandering, lover-like, over what was visible of the graceful figure.

"Look!" she answered, and she opened an inch or two of her seal-skin and revealed a soft, fleecy wrap. "I am like a mummy. Bessie insisted on my wearing it. For some unaccountable reason the dear child has suddenly assumed the authority of a mother, and watches me as if I were in the last stages of a decline."

"Dear little girl," he said, "I shall love her to distraction. Are you comfortable, Bessie?" and he turned around.

"Never was so comfortable and jolly in my life. If the horse will only run away, now!"

Roland laughed—not his cynical laugh, but the honest, open laugh that rises from a happy, restful heart.

"You're right, Bessie," he said, "it is jolly, and we'll have such a day! Do you know where I am going to take you? No, of course not; and I am not going to tell you. What's the matter, darling? Are you looking for anything?" he broke off softly, for Marjorie, while his head had been turned, had been looking long and anxiously into the bushes that lined their road.

"I? No!" she answered, with a start and a sudden flush. Then, with an effort, she roused herself, and looked straight before her, as if she had thrown something from her mind.

"I thought," said Ronald, laughing, "that your quick eye had detected something wrong with the harness. If you do see anything, give me notice in time, for if a breech goes wrong, Bessie will be shot out like a bag of coals. Do you hear that, Bessie?"

"I hear," said Bessie, recklessly, "and I don't care. I'm wrapped up, and shall fall like a feather bed."

Presently they came to a steep hill, and Roland persuaded the Dutchman to descend at a walk.

"What a lovely view," said Marjorie. "Look, Bessie! It is like a world in miniature. The farms are like toy houses. Where are we now? Haven't we come some distance?"

"Yes, we are on Whitely Heath. This is considered the prettiest part of the estate."

"What estate?" asked Marjorie, looking around with a start.

"The Chesterton. It extends as far as you can see," and he waved his whip indifferently to the east and west.

Marjorie was silent for a moment; looking down from the eminence on the broad range of fields and streams—on farm after farm, homestead after homestead, meadow rolling upon meadow, and wood stretching into wood—she realized for the first time the wealth and power of the man whose wife she was to be—the power and

wealth that she would share with him. For a full minute she was daunted, overwhelmed by the extent of it.

"Surely," she said, hesitating, "this does not all belong to you?"

"Yes, and there's more of it on the other side of the hill," he answered, laughing at her wonder. "Our land joins the Hull land, you know. It's a wide prospect. I think it is the most imposing of the Chesterton property, but my mother considers the Warwickshire estate to be the larger; and so it is by the map, but you can't see it all at once as you can this."

Bessie, leaning forward to listen, gasped for breath; Marjorie remained silent. For the first time, she realized and understood Lady Chesterton's disappointment and mortification at her son's marriage with such an insignificant body as herself.

"You will see the Rood—that's the place in Warwickshire—some day, very soon, I hope," and he smiled so significantly that Marjorie's face flushed, "and you will judge for yourself. For my part, I am attached to the Wold, and this. But," and his voice sank, "you shall choose for yourself."

"Oh, no, no! not I!" and Marjorie shrank timidly,

He laughed merrily, and suggested that she might like the villa which his father had built at Lago Maggiore.

"Have you any more places, Sir Roland?" asked Bessie, smiling but awe-struck.

"One or two, Miss Bessie Deane. But hold tight now, for here is a hill the Dutchman considers it his bounden duty to spin down at the top of his speed."

At the foot of the hill the chestnut did not slacken his speed, but flew on at a pace that seemed to set the hedges flying past them. Then suddenly a noise broke upon their ears—a confused blare of voices, and the clatter of rough music. Then a bend in the road brought them, much to the astonishment of the two girls and to the disgust of the Dutchman, upon a country fair.

It was in full swing—roundabouts, menageries, wax-works, penny shows, shooting galleries, and Aunt Sallys. Mingling in strange concordance with the human voices, was the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep.

It was a sight entirely novel to the two girls, as Sir Roland had expected it would be; and Bessie, at the imminent risk of her neck, stood up, clinging fast to the rail, and was speechless with delight. But presently she recovered speech, and broke out:

"Oh, look, Marjorie! Isn't it glorious? It is like a scene at a theatre. They will all come forward and sing a chorus directly."

"It is to be hoped they won't, for that would be the last straw for the Dutchman. Steady, old man!—steady! Sit firm, Bessie. You are not frightened, darling?"

"Frightened? No. And this is a fair? I've often longed to see a real country fair. How thoughtful of you!" and she looked at him with a soft smile that made his heart leap.

"Do you really care for it? We will go right through it if they will make way."

There was not much question about that. No sooner was the chestnut and his master recognized than the crowd, that looked as solid as a block of wood, divided, and a lane was made, while hands went to foreheads, and respectful "Good morning, Sir Roland," rose on all sides.

Sir Roland touched his hat right and left, and smiled as every now and then an unmistakably audible exclamation of admiration of the beautiful women by his side reached his ears, and the crimson rushed to Marjorie's face as a woman standing near the dog-cart plucked the sleeve of a companion, and exclaimed in a stage whisper:

"Look, Jennie! that's the squire's sweetheart. Heaven bless her pretty face!"

"We'd better get out of this," said Sir Roland, not ill-pleased, "or we shall be mobbed. It's dangerous to have a pretty woman for a sweetheart."

Fidgeting and prancing, the Dutchman at last made his way through the lane and reached the other side, and they drove on, much to Bessie's regret; but Sir Roland consoled her.

"Never mind, Bessie; we are coming back. I've something else on hand now."

The something else was quite to Bessie's taste, for it was a dainty luncheon in one of the quaintest and neatest of inns. It was altogether delightful, and it is doubtful if Bessie would not have forgotten the fair if Marjorie, who had been showing signs of uneasiness, had not asked at last if it was not time to go home, adding, timidly:

"Do you think—I want to be home by sunset."

"By sunset!" echoed Bessie, staring at her. "What on earth for?"

Marjorie smiled rather forcedly, and looked at Sir Roland anxiously. He caught the glance, and though himself wondering, gave her a cheery nod, and went at once to have the Dutchman brought around. And presently they were all in the dog cart again, and the chestnut, having had his luncheon, was in a better mood, and went through the mass of human beings less as if he wanted to eat them all up, or at the least walk over them.

"I do think," said Bessie, "that a fair is the greatest treat in the world. I think it must be just fun to be that clown; he has a fair every day of his life."

"Yes," said Sir Roland, laughing, "he has a fair every day if he hasn't a dinner. Steady, Dutchman!"

For just in front of them, in the very thickest part of the crowd, there was a sudden commotion, which caused the chestnut to shy and throw up his head.

"What is it?" asked Bessie, leaning forward. "It looks like a fight. Oh, Sir Roland, what is it?"

"Hush! be quiet! sit down!" he said, easily. "It is nothing," but he rose and strained his neck.

"Is it a fight?" asked Marjorie, gently.

"N-o," he answered. "I can't make it out. Steady, Dutchman? There are a couple of soldiers; they—confound it!"

And he gripped the reins tight, for as he spoke the crowd had parted suddenly, and from out the crush a tall, fair-haired young man darted like an arrow from a bow, and dashed right under the horse's nose.

Immediately afterward, and evidently giving chase, the soldiers followed in the same line. The crowd roared and swayed to and fro behind them, and in the most unaccountable manner the fugitive, for that he evidently was, doubled, and once more ducked under the Dutchman's head.

As he did so he looked up, looked up with the white set face of a hunted man, and Marjorie, who had bent as far forward as she could with safety, sprang to her feet and uttered a strange, wild cry.

The man turned in his zigzag flight, and, seeing her standing with white face and outstretched hands, stopped short with startled surprise.

It was a fatal pause, for the soldiers, thrown back by this unexpected double, regained their lost ground, and were almost upon him. Another moment and they would have had him in their grip; but in that moment a cry of agonized entreaty rang from Marjorie's white lips.

"Oh, save him! save him!"

As if her cry had gone straight to their hearts, the crowd, which had up till now taken a mere spectator part in the chase, awoke to find that they had hearts and sympathies.

With an answering yell they closed in one compact, immovable mass between man and pursuers, and then, surrounding the soldiers, pressed them together like a couple of sardines.

It was all done in a minute, the imminent capture, and the prompt, effectual rescue were over before Sir Roland could utter a word, either one way or the other. Already the tall, lithe figure of the fugitive had sped down the lane the crowd made for him, and was lost to sight.

Marjorie sank back into her seat, with white face and half-closed eyes, struggling with an heroic effort against the deadly faintness which threatened to overwhelm her.

"For Heaven's sake, my darling!" breathed Sir Roland, half distracted by her distress, and yet not daring to withdraw his hand from the furious Dutchman, "don't faint. It's all over. The fellow is safe. How could you distress yourself so? Lean against me. Confound the fellow! Bessie, haven't you a—a smelling bottle, or—or something? Take your hand off the horse's head, you idiot!" this latter to an officious individual whose efforts at soothing the Dutchman were driving the beast out of his remaining senses. "Are you better, darling? Don't think anything about it."

"No, no!" she said, struggling with the faintness. "I am—am all right. Are you sure he is safe?"

"Safe?" and he laughed shortly. "I'd answer for his safety with my life. What a tender heart it is!"

"Who was he!" asked Bessie, tremulously. She had not seen the white face of the hunted man.

"Who was he? Oh, I don't know. Confound the fellow? A deserter, I suppose."

"Yes, sir," said one of the soldiers, coming up and making the salute, the perspiration streaming from his forehead. "A deserter, sir. We should have got him if it had not been for the young lady. He's given us a good chase, but we're bound to have him."

"Oh, go to the dev—. There! stand aside, my good fellow, if you don't want your brains kicked out," said Sir Roland, his patience and temper exhausted, and with a word he set the Dutchman flying from the fair.

"Are you better, darling?" he said, as they cleared the crowd. "Do you feel any better?" and he put his strong arm around her.

Marjorie looked up with a smile on her lips, but with a far away look in her dark eye.

"I'm all right," she said, quietly—too quietly. "It—it frightened me, rather, and I could not help calling out. Are you very angry?" and she turned her eyes upon him.

"Angry?" he exclaimed, with a passionate tenderness; "angry on discovering that my darling has a heart too tender to allow her to see a man chased for his life, without uttering a cry in his behalf!"

"For his life!" she breathed, with wild alarm, clutching him convulsively by the arm.

"Eh? Well, no; I suppose not. No, they don't shoot deserters now. Though he deserves to be shot for disturbing you so. Make your mind easy, darling, he will be twenty miles away before we reach home."

"Do you think so?" she said, in a low voice, and she stole a timid hand into his.

CHAPTER XX.

BEFORE SUNSET.

NOTWITHSTANDING the excitement of the incident in the fair, Sir Roland did not forget his promise to be at home before sunset, and made the Dutchman "eat the ground," so that the sun had scarcely touched the top of the Wold elms when the dog-cart bowled along the high-road to Harley House.

Marjorie had apparently forgotten her fright, though her face was still rather pale, and there was in it an expression strangely like that which had sat on the face of the hunted man. Her hand was still hidden in the protecting one of Sir Roland, and almost unconsciously she had nestled closer to his side. Not unconsciously as far as he was concerned, however, for the contact of her warm arm thrilled him through.

Bessie had long since relapsed into that contented silence which a long drive after an exciting day usually produces. So far as she was concerned, the two lovers might have been alone.

Roland glanced around occasionally, and threw her a word, and received a word in return, but by bending toward her, he could whisper in Marjorie's ear without being overheard.

"Are you happy, my darling?" he asked, and the little hand within his own closed eloquently over his fingers. "Quite happy?"

"Quite," she breathed.

He looked thoughtfully at the beautiful face.

"I wonder," he said, "if it is possible for a woman to be as happy as a man! I doubt it. I don't think she can be either as intensely happy or as intensely miserable. There is always some make-weight, something to console her if she is unhappy, something to detract from her perfect happiness. I wonder if you could possibly be as happy as I am to-night!"

She looked up at him, but only for a moment; her eyes could not meet the passionate love that burned in his.

"Are you happy?" she asked.

"Happier than I ever thought it possible for me to be—happier than I deserve to be," he answered, fervently. "Marjorie, I used to laugh at love! Think of it! I used to say that there was no such thing as love, that it was all a fiction of loving and being loved; that no two persons could really love each other with perfect, equal love. That if a man loved a woman with all his heart and soul—

as I love you, my darling—she would naturally repay his worship with coldness, or that she would prove false. That is the creed of most of the men of the day. What a shallow creed it is! I used to think that love, perfect and equal, without reserve or concealment on one side or the other, was impossible," and he laughed with the happiness of a lost incredulity.

She looked up at him her eyes drinking in the beauty of his face, made noble, not by his high birth and patrician breeding, but by his love, which she—she—had awakened.

"Ah," and he sighed, "to think that I have lived all these years with that belief in my heart. To think that I should have wasted so much of my life. Bah! It will not bear thinking of," and involuntarily his face flushed a deep red, as scenes of the wild past rose accusingly before him. "Concealment!" he said, musingly, "yes, there must be some concealment on my part. I could not wish that the vail could be drawn aside, and that you should see the follies of an ill-spent life. Life! It was not life—I did not live until I met you, my darling."

"Oh, no, no! do not say that," she whispered, humbly.

"It is true," he repeated; "I had no object—nothing to make life sweet. Now!——" and he drew a long breath.

The intensity of his passion almost frightened her; her color came and went.

"Oh, why, why," she panted, "do you love me so?"

"Why?" he said, and he smiled down at her. "That's a question that requires some abstruse calculation. I love you because you are—yourself; I love you because you are my second self—that one soul for which mine has been searching. Is not that what the poet says? I used to laugh at the poets. There is something in them after all. Marjorie you will never love me as I love you!" He said it almost abruptly.

She looked up at him, with something half-sad in her wistful smile. If he could but know!

"It could not be," he said, half musingly. "I, loving you, love not only yourself, but the purity which you personify. That's philosophy. I love you because all your life lies before me like an open book, plainly writ, plain to read. Marjorie, though you have told me so little of your past, I feel that there are no concealments."

"Concealments!" she echoed, almost inaudibly, and her eyes sank.

"I don't mean," he said, with a soft laugh, "all the sins of your schoolgirl life. I pass those by; but I mean that though I have much to hide and bury, you have nothing. It like an open book. Darling, I could not bear that you should have any secret from me. It would be the death-blow—not to my love; for, as there is a heaven above us, I do not think that could die!—but to my

happiness. Marjorie, as you love me, let the book be open still, and the page plainly writ! Steady Dutchman!"

With a little sudden quiver, she tried to draw her hand away, but the strong fingers held it in a firm grip.

"Roland," she said, in a whisper, half-hesitating, half-fearful, "I—I want to tell you something."

He started, more at her tone than at her words, and his eyes devoured her face anxiously—so anxiously, that her heart sank. Not now—not now, while he is happy! Why should she spoil this, the one happy day of her life? Not now! How can she, with his hand caressing her, tell him that—No, no; some other time! It is so little, after all. She hesitated.

"Something to tell me?" he said, with a searching smile.

"Well?"

"No," she said, drawing a long breath, and looking aside—"no; let it rest, Roland. It is not much, and—and—does not concern our love. You—you know I love you! Some other time."

For answer he put his arm around her and drew her to him. Forgetful of the high-road, and regardless of publicity, she nestled closer, until her head nearly rested on his breast.

"I—I love you," she breathed, her eyes fixed on his with a rapt intensity that was full of passionate prayer. "Roland, if—if at any time you are led to doubt—if——— Oh, I can't explain. But you will remember that whatever happens to cause you to think ill of me, I love you!"

He bent his head until his lips touched for an instant her warm, half-parted ones. It was answer enough. With a shake of his head the Dutchman turned into the avenue of Harley House; Bessie waked up and looked around, and Marjorie, with a half-guilty flush, drew away from the arm that reluctantly released her.

"Papa will be waiting on the steps, with his watch in his hand, and his heart in his mouth," said Bessie, laughing mischievously. "He has a horror of horses, even when they are snail-like ones, and harnessed to a heavy landau. This morning he asked Marjorie if she was going to be strapped in, and when she told him that she was not, he turned pale. At this present moment he is wondering which of us has broken her neck, and hoping it isn't Marjorie."

Sir Roland laughed and gave her something like a shake when he lifted her down, which he did as if she were a child.

"I pity your husband, whoever he may happen to be, Miss Bessie," he said, "he will have a tease for a wife. There, run and show papa that your neck is not broken. Good-night."

"Oh, he doesn't care so much for mine now," retorted Bessie. But you are not going yet! You will stay! You can put the Dutchman in our stable. Let Thomas take him—do.

Roland glanced at Marjorie, but her face was turned aside, and there was nothing in the nature of an invitation about her.

"No-o, thanks," he said. "I'll take the Dutchman home; he might kick your stables down. Perhaps I may come in later," he said in a low tone, to Marjorie.

"Will you?" she said softly, giving him her hand.

Quite satisfied, he pressed her hand lovingly, and mounted the box again.

"Good-bye for the present," he said, raising his hat, and the next instant the Dutchman had dashed away.

At the bend Sir Roland turned around. Marjorie was still standing on the steps watching him; and as he turned she put the ungloved hand—the hand he had been holding—to her lips. And not until he was quite out of sight did she enter the hall. As she did so, Bessie came bounding out of the dining room.

"Papa isn't at home, Marjorie. He went to London soon after we left; there was a telegram, and he hasn't come back yet. It's late for him, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie, absently. "He will be here by dinner-time no doubt. You will go and dress now?" she asked, pausing at the foot of the stairs.

"Yes," answered Bessie. "We'll see who is dressed first. Oh, Marjorie, what a glorious day we have had! And why didn't you ask him to stay to dinner? He looked so hard at you, and you kept silent. A word from you would have done it; I wonder you can bear him out of your sight."

"Perhaps I am not so much in love with him as you are, Bessie," laughed Marjorie; but there was a look in her eyes that belied her apparent indifference.

Then she went into her room and waited until she heard Bessie's door close, when she threw off her seal-skin and wrapped herself in a long, fur cloak, exchanging the rather jaunty hat for one of sober proportions. She then pulled down her vail and stood, if not disguised, still unlike in outline the neat young lady who a few minutes before had stepped down from Sir Roland's dog cart, and few persons would have recognized her at a glance.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE WOOD.

WHEN Sir Roland reached home he took the Dutchman into the yard as usual, to see him rubbed down and made comfortable, and then turned into the house. In the hall he met

Reginald—Reginald, with his hands in his pockets, looking tired and listless.

"Hello," he said; "back again? What sort of a day did you have?"

"First-rate," said Roland. "I'm half ashamed to look you in the face, old fellow."

"Oh, that's all right," said Reginald; "don't mind me. I know what it is when a man is hard hit. Felt just the same way with little Maud Weatherly last season at Baden Baden. A man would desert his own grandmother at such a time. I'll have my revenge some day. I'm having it now, for I'm knocking over pheasants. By the way, I've just got a letter from Charlie Hamilton. Remember Charlie?"

"Rather," replied Ronald. "One of the best fellows in the world. Where is he?"

"Where do you think. You'd never guess, and yet it's just like him. He's with the Turks having a go at the Russians; and he says he's having a rare good time of it out there. They've given the Russians a beating or two, and Charlie implores me to come out, with as many other fellows as I can persuade to join me. A good joke that, isn't it?"

"Rather," said Roland with a smile, as he thought of the new joy he had at home.

"Just like Charlie," said Reginald. "Never could keep a good thing to himself. And he seems to have a good thing in this. Says that he has lived on dry biscuit and horseflesh for a week, and there isn't a bottle of brandy in the whole camp. Wouldn't you like to start by the next vessel?"

"Something better to do," laughed Roland, "though, mind you, I think there would be some fun in it."

"Especially if you lost a leg or got an arm shot off. I could stand that, however; but fancy not a bottle of brandy in the camp. Where's Helen?"

"I don't know. I'm ashamed to say that I've just come in. With my mother, perhaps."

"No," said Reginald, "Lady Chesterton has gone up to her room with a bad headache. She asked me to tell you to go up to her after dinner."

Roland raised his eyebrows.

"Hasn't quite forgiven me, even yet," he said. "The poor mother. Yes, I'll go up."

"And I'll turn in and write to Charlie," said Reginald. "Poor beggar! But it's pity wasted. He was never happy unless he was in some scrape or other," and with a yawn he went into the library.

Roland took up the post-bag and turned over the letters. There

was one for him from the heroic Charlie, and he opened it, just glanced at it, and put it into his pocket. Then he looked at the clock, and it was too soon to dress.

"Come and have a game of billiards, Reginald," he asked, putting his head into the library.

"Right," said Reginald, only too ready to shirk his letter, and they went into the billiard room.

"Will you open! How is Miss Deane?" asked Reginald, for want of something else to say.

"Very well," said Roland. "We have been over to the fair. Reginald, I want you and Helen to dine there—to-morrow, perhaps. I'll speak to Marjorie. And Reginald, I want you to tell Helen how grateful I am to her for her thoughtfulness in taking my mother over. I can't thank her enough."

"Then hanged if I can," said Reginald, innocently. "A word from you will go further than a printed book from me, old fellow. By the way, we think of taking flight."

"No, not yet," said Roland. I don't deserve any mercy at your hands, but you musn't go yet. I want to have a good time. We must get up a frolic. I've behaved shamefully; but then I am hard hit, you know. Hello! Who's that?"

"Only I. May I come in?" said Helen, opening the door with nice timidity.

"Come in," said Roland. "Have you been out?" for she had on her hat and jacket, and her cream-like complexion was tinted with a warm flush.

She advanced into the light of the gas, and he looked at her again with a kind of admiring curiosity; her usually calm, serene eyes were brilliant with a sort of suppressed excitement.

"Yes, I have been out," she said, "and wish I hadn't been. I am so sorry to disturb you—but do you know, I have been stupid enough to drop my locket."

"Your locket!" said Reginald, with disgusted surprise, for it was a valuable trinket set with diamonds and pearls.

"Yes," she said, with a little laugh of annoyance. "I have been in the wood. I know where it dropped, because I heard it fall. I thought it was an acorn."

"Acorn, nonsense!" said Reginald.

"Or something," she went on quickly. "But when I came on I missed my locket, and feel sure, now, it was that. I dropped it in a little wood where we stood that night—the first night we were here."

"Oh, all right," said Reginald, composedly. "We will go and look for it in the morning."

"In the morning!" said Roland, promptly. "No, I'll go now."

"Oh, no! pray don't trouble," she said, but with an eager, grateful look in her eyes,

"It's no trouble," said Roland. "Don't disturb yourself, Reginald. Come along, Helen, we'll find it," and he caught up his hat and followed her.

"I'm quite ashamed of troubling you," she murmured, "but I should be sorry to lose it. It was given to me by the Duchess of Perth on my birthday."

"Of course we must find it," he said. "Don't speak of trouble. I owe you a great deal for your kindness in the matter of my mother and Marjorie. Shall we want a light?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said, eagerly; "there will be light enough. The diamonds will glitter, you know."

"All right," he said, laughing. "Your eyes must be our light."

So eager and anxious was she that she almost ran down the path and across the lawn; and Roland strode along, reflecting on the wonderful power which diamonds possess, to move even so serene and impassive a soul as Helen Montressor's.

So anxious was she that when they reached the wood she became quite silent; and Roland strode along silently, too. Presently she stopped at almost the identical place at which they had stood and discussed the Deanes, on the night when Marjorie had declared that she hated Sir Roland Chesterton.

"It was here," she said, in a whisper, "just here I dropped it. What is that? I can hear some one talking, It must be poachers. Hush! don't speak."

And she pressed his arm.

"Poachers!" whispered Sir Roland, "early as this? Not likely. Some tramp—ah!"

For there struck on his ear the well-known voice of the woman he loved.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

"Oh, Roger, if you knew how grieved I feel! How grieved! Roger, I have deserted you——"

"No, no."

"Yes, I have, I have! I had almost forgotten you in this new love of mine! And you so worthy of all my thoughts! Oh, Roger, forgive me! And what shall I do? Oh, those dreadful men we saw this morning!"

"By George!" was the laughing answer, "it was a narrow squeak. If it hadn't been for you they would have had me. Confound them! But there, they were only doing their duty."

"And you are in danger still. Oh, Roger, what shall we do?" and she looked apprehensively around.

"Hush!" he said, coolly, "This is my plan: I mean to get to the sea coast as soon as possible, of course. Once there, I can get

on board a merchant vessel—they don't ask awkward questions—and work my passage out somewhere. Where, doesn't matter. But—but I must have some money, Marjorie!"

"Money?" she said, eagerly. "Of course. Oh, Roger, how glad I am! How much? Two hundred pounds?" and she plunged into her pocket.

"Two hundred pounds!" he laughed. "Bless the child! No. A few pounds, just to help me on the road. You see, they think I haven't a stiver, and, by George! they're right, and they'll keep to the high roads. They won't try the trains. If I can get on the line I'm safe. A few pounds will do it."

Marjorie took out her purse, tore it open eagerly, and thrust the check which her father had given her into his hands.

"What's this?"

"A check for two hundred pounds, Roger. Oh, I wish it was for more!"

He put it back into her hand with a laugh.

"Marjorie, you are a good girl—you always were; but this would be useless. Who would cash a check for two hundred pounds for such a tatterdemalion as I am? If I walked into a bank with that in my hand they would conclude, not unreasonably, that I'd stolen it, and detain me until the men came up to take me to prison. I'm very sorry, dear. Don't cry!" and he wound his arm around her caressingly.

"No, I won't. Will you wait? Stop!" and she opened her purse again. "Hold your hand down. There, how much is there?"

"Plenty," he said. "Two or three sovereigns——"

"No, not enough," she said, despairingly. "What shall I do? Oh!" with a sudden inspiration she stripped her fingers of her rings—of all her rings—Roland's old family ring among them—and pressed them into his palm. "Take them, Roger. There are some diamonds among them, and you can get rid of them. And, look! here is my watch and chain!"

"Stop!" he said. "No, this is enough. No, I will not have it, Marjorie. It cuts me to the heart to take these; and, by Heaven! you shall have them back if I can manage it."

"No, never mind that," she said, impatiently. "And, Roger, promise me—promise me that you will write. You never do, you know, but you must, you must this time, and tell me where you are, and I will send you some money—as much as you want. Remember, I am rich, and I shall be richer still."

"Yes," he said, "I promise; and, Marjorie, if I were downhearted, which I am not, the thought of your happiness would cheer me up. You deserve it all. Heaven bless you, dear!"

"No," she said, "I do not—I do not deserve it for deserting you; for I have deserted you. I had"—sobbing—"almost for-

gotten you; but you've only to say the word, and—and I will break off this——"

"My dear child," he said, "allow you to spoil your happiness for such a vagabond? Besides, what good would it do me? I was as good as dead and buried—no, I won't say that. There, there! I'll come back and make you proud of me. What's that? I'll swear I heard something!"

"Where?" she gasped.

"There, in the wood behind us, Marjorie. It is dangerous to stay. Good-by, good-by my darling!"

"Must you? Oh, Roger, Roger, Roger! my heart breaks at leaving you! If I could only wipe out the past! Must you go? Good-by, then, dear!" and the two embraced with convulsive tenderness.

Another moment and he was gone, and Marjorie, leaning against the tree behind her, sobbed woefully.

* * * * * * *

All of this did Sir Roland hear. At the first with wonder he listened, then with incredulity, then with agony and rage. He was moved to go away, but he could not do that. He could do nothing but listen, though it seemed that his strength would fail him, and he instinctively put his hand out to lean against a tree. The movement made a slight noise, which attracted the ever-listening ear of the man by Marjorie's side, and he turned his head so that his face became visible to Sir Roland.

Proof still more damning! It was the face of the fugitive whom Marjorie's cry had saved that very morning. Now, now he understood the agony that thrilled in her voice as she stood up and pleaded for him. The wretched being was her lover—she had saved him, and he was there. There by appointment, too. With a groan he remembered her anxiety to be home by sunset. And the locket! He knew—he felt as sure as he did of death, that if he had looked inside that locket he would have seen that man's accursed portrait.

The voices went on, growing more loving, more sorrowful, more despairing each moment. And every uttered word was a poniard in his soul.

A hand of ice seemed to clasp his heart. He forgot the tall figure beside him, felt not the devilishly joyful eyes fixed on his face. The woods seemed to swim, the heavens to rock. It was a strong man in the agony of discovering that the one woman he has ever loved, the one woman on whose purity and honour he would have staked his soul, is false beyond all falseness!

How long he stood there he did not know—never will. Suddenly the voices ceased, the awful spell broke, and he started forward. But the hand of the woman by his side restrained him.

"Roland," she whispered in his ear.

He started and turned to her ; and surely, if she could pity, she would pity him at sight of his haggard face and blood-shot eyes.

But there was no pity, no relenting. It was the hour of her revenge. The one word she could have spoken she hugged to her heart with a savage joy. For this wretched girl, she, she—the Beauty—had been neglected, put aside ! Relent ! Pity ! Who had pitied her ?

"Roland," she whispered, "why should you interfere ? Let them go. They are not worthy to triumph over you. And they will do it if you go to them."

He stopped and shuddered, and put up his hand to his brow. Then he turned to her.

"You are right," he said, and his voice was so changed, so unnaturally calm, that it struck her with a sudden, sharp dread, "we have no business here, let us go home."

And with the old courtesy, that did not desert him even in the hour of his agony, he stooped to pick up her glove, which had fallen, and took her hand upon his arm.

Once, once only he paused. It was when a low sob from the weeping girl smote upon his ear. A shudder ran through him and he half turned. Then, with a muttered oath, that made the woman upon his arm tremble, he moved away.

CHAPTER XXII.

SOMETHING WRONG WITH MR. DEANE.

FOR a while after Roger's departure Marjorie sobbed quietly ; but youth is ever hopeful, and presently she dried her tears and turned homeward, each step seemingly to leave behind it some of the grief she had but just felt.

Her father, she was told, was in the library, and as it lacked but ten minutes to the dinner hour, and as Mr. Deane was very particular in the matter of punctuality at meals, she hastened up to her room to dress.

The gown she chose was the same she had worn the night of the dinner at the Wold, the night Roland had first held her in his arms and whispered his love vows in her ear. And she put a flower in her hair, and the thought of how soon he would be by her side added a blush to her cheek.

The dinner gong boomed through the hall as she entered the dining-room, but, for once, the master of the house was not sitting at the head of the table, scowling at the late arrival.

"Where is papa?" she asked of Bessie, who was kneeling at the fire, vainly attempting to persuade a pug to stand on his hind legs.

"I don't know," she answered. "I have been running all over the house for—for the last hour! Perhaps papa has gone out for a walk, too," and she pouted.

"Don't be angry, dear," said Marjorie, putting her arm round her sister. "I—I only went for a run."

"You weren't running when I saw you. You were creeping round the house like—like an Indian on the war-path," laughed Bessie. "I wonder why papa doesn't come to dinner!"

"I'll go and tell him that dinner is ready," said Marjorie, and she went to the library door and knocked.

It was quite a minute before any response came, and then it was a quiet "Well?" which did not sound very inviting.

"Dinner is ready, papa," she said.

"Dinner? I—don't wait for me. I have a headache."

"I am so sorry," said Marjorie, gently. "Can I send you anything? May I not come in?"

"No," he answered, evidently from the depths of his chair. "I want to be quiet, that is all. Go on with your dinner."

Marjorie lingered a moment, and then went back.

"A headache!" said Bessie, staring. "I never knew papa to have a headache in his life, and it won't do any good for him to sit moping there. Let me go, Marjorie."

"No," said Marjorie, restraining her, gently, "I do not think papa wants to be disturbed. Let us wait a little while."

They waited a quarter of an hour, and then sat down at the long table, one at each end, and the soup was brought in.

"How strange!" said Bessie, after the dinner had progressed awhile in silence. "Look at these three great men to wait on two girls. I wish Sir Roland were here with us."

"So do I," murmured Marjorie, with a sigh, "if it were only to carve this duck. What agony its mother must have suffered at parting from it, after living with it for so long."

Bessie laughed, as she always did at all Marjorie's witticisms, and the dinner went solemnly on through all the courses, even to the port wine, which the butler placed before Marjorie, with the air of performing a solemn duty. And then, as Mr. Deane had not yet come, Marjorie rose, saying he must be ill, and that she would take him a cup of tea. And this she did, but returned in a minute with the cup still in her hand, and her face troubled.

"Papa will not have any tea, and does not like to be disturbed. We had better go into the drawing-room," and she led the way thither.

Bessie threw herself down on the hearth-rug and leaned her head against Marjorie's knee as she sat in a low chair, and for a minute or two there was silence, but only for a minute or two, for Bessie and silence did not agree well together.

"How soon do you think he will be here?" she asked, leaning back to look at the clock.

"I don't know. You seem very anxious for his arrival."

"I am," said Bessie, candidly. "I'd have him here every minute of the day if I could, and who could wonder? There never was such a dear fellow in the world. Fellow! Fancy calling Sir Roland a fellow! I ought not to do it, ought I, Marjorie? You are not angry, are you?"

"Angry? No," said Marjorie, laughing softly. "You may call him what you like, dear."

"Well, he is the dearest fellow in the world. Think of his taking me to day. Why, most any other man would have left me to mope at home and would have treated me like a child. Marjorie, I understand now why people set such store by gentlemen—real gentlemen, I mean, not your make-believe sort, veneered with politeness, but not sound at heart. I know now what a real, true gentleman is; and people think they are proud! Did you hear how he spoke to the men, and to the landlord and the landlady? Just as if he'd known them all his life and liked them! A make-believe gentleman would have been afraid to be kind to them. I like him," and Bessie nodded her head emphatically.

"I told him to-day that if anything happened to me, he could easily supply my loss, Bessie," laughed Marjorie.

Bessie laughed and shook her head.

"Marjorie, it is my opinion that he is a great deal too good for you."

"Thank you, dear."

"And that you don't care half enough for him."

"No!" softly.

"No. Why, he loves the very ground you walk on. I saw him looking at you as you went out of the room to-day, and—oh, Marjorie, what a wonderful thing love is!"

Marjorie was silent, but her face colored and her eyes grew dreamy.

"Ah, Marjorie, what a proud lady you will be! Why, I thought the queen hadn't more land and places than he seems to have; and he talks about them all as if they were nothing. Now, see what a fuss we make about our trumpery place. We can't have gold and marble enough about it; and how different it is at the Wold. Marjorie, you will be Lady Chesterton, of the Wold. And I shall be Lady Chesterton's sister."

"Counting chickens before they are hatched is a very unprofitable occupation, Bessie," laughed Marjorie.

"Yes, I know; but these chickens are sure to be hatched, and grow into fine pullets—isn't it pullets? They must have had dinner by this time; Sir Roland will want to smoke a cigar with Mr. Montressor, and then—there is the bell!"

"No, that's the library bell," said Marjorie, the color flying to and from her face. "What is it, Thomas?" she asked, as the footman entered.

"Master wishes the brougham to be sent to meet the last train, miss."

"The brougham! To meet the last train! Why, who is coming, Marjorie?" demanded Bessie.

"I don't know," answered Marjorie, quietly, as she rang the bell and gave the necessary orders.

Bessie knelt upright and stared at her.

"Isn't it very strange, Marjorie? Who can it be? Papa hasn't said a word about a visitor; perhaps—perhaps it's a lady!"

"Nonsense," answered Marjorie, smiling at Bessie's mysterious manner. "Papa would have told us. There would have been preparations to make. I wish papa would let me go to him."

But she did not like to disturb him again, and so she waited. Every moment she expected to hear Roland's ring at the bell, and each moment, as it did not come, she grew anxious and heart sick, until at last, as the evening passed away without bringing him, her heart sank with a vague fear.

Bessie, who had at the first been petulant and impatient at Roland's absence, became quieter and more thoughtful, and took to consoling Marjorie.

"He has been detained. Some one has turned up, as he would say. Or, perhaps, Lady Chesterton is really ill."

"Yes, yes," said Marjorie, smiling down the aching feeling of disappointment.

"It's not too late though, now," said Bessie, with a sudden flash of hope. "It's only half-past ten."

Marjorie shook her head.

"No, he will not come to-night," she said, with an assumption of cheerfulness.

"Be comforted, Bessie; your adored one will not come to-night, but he may come all the earlier to-morrow."

"But he won't be my adored one if he disappoints you like this," retorted Bessie, with a pout.

"I think we have had more than our share of his attention," said Marjorie, laughing softly; "perhaps he has awakened to a proper sense of the claims of his guests."

"Yes," said Bessie. "Miss Montressor must love us dearly."

"Hush!" said Marjorie, flushing. "She has been very kind, Bessie."

"Ah," said Bessie, with an incredulous nod. "Did you ever hear that the moon was made of green cheese?"

"Hush!" said Marjorie. "What's that?"

It was the brougham returning from the station, and Bessie sprang to her feet.

"Now, Marjorie, if I were a man, I'd bet you two to one that it's a lady."

"But as you are a woman," retorted Marjorie, "put your dress straight, and try to look awake."

The warning was unheeded, for in another moment the door opened and the footman announced:

"Mr. Cartel."

A short, pale-looking man, with light eyes, that winced perceptibly at the glittering room, and with the peculiar cast of countenance which one sees by the dozen, belonging to the men who hurry through the city during the busy hours. Business was plainly stamped not only on his face, but on his whole person.

He stood in the door-way, looking very ill at ease as Marjorie bowed and seemed by her manner to bid him enter.

"Miss—Miss Deane, I presume!" he said, in a small nervous voice.

Marjorie bowed, and the little man's eyes wandered to Bessie, to whom he also bowed, before he said:

"I—er—Mr. Deane is in, I suppose."

"Yes, my father is in the library."

"Just so, just so," and he brightened visibly, as if he had encountered an idea with which he was more familiar than he was with pretty girls. "I don't think I ought—ought to have troubled you—intruded on you, Miss Deane. Pleased to have met you—ha, ha!—— If you will kindly—that is if you will have him informed that I am here. Appointment, you see."

Marjorie rang the bell, and sent the footman to her father with the message of the arrival of Mr. Cartel. And, then, knowing there was no up train that night, she asked the stranger if he would not take his coat off, and if he had had dinner.

"Dinner!—ha, ha!" was the embarrassed answer. "I always dine at one o'clock."

"Supper, then," said Marjorie, gently.

"Thank you—ha, ha! no. I will see Mr. Deane first. This is—ha, ha!—a beautiful place, if you will—ha, ha!—pardon me."

At this moment the footman returned with the message that Mr. Deane would receive him; and the little man, blushing and laughing with a sort of hysterical embarrassment, rushed away as if his very life would have been endangered by another moment in such company.

"What a funny little man!" said Bessie, with a stare of wonder

and a little laugh of amusement. "What can he be doing here at this time of night?"

"Business, I suppose; but I must have a bed prepared for him." And she went away to consult with the house-keeper.

When she returned, half an hour later, there was no news from the library, and Bessie was sitting on the hearth-rug, with her head upon a chair, and her eyes heavy with sleep. Marjorie hurried her off to bed; and then, having seen that a meal was laid in the drawing-room, and with the lights turned low, sat over the remains of the fire, trying to feel cheerful and not disappointed.

But it was a failure—a miserable failure. The very clock seemed to tick out, "Roland has not come to-night—Roland has not come to-night!" That sense of loneliness and unrest, which will come over one when still waiting for what is certain not to come, enshrouded her; and it was with something like a nervous start of dread that she heard the library door open. She listened intently, and she could hear unsteady footsteps in the hall, unlike those of anybody she knew. They came nearer the drawing-room, and then the door opened and Mr. Deane appeared.

"Papa," she said, "I have had supper laid——"

Then she stopped, smitten with a sudden silence.

Standing in the door-way was certainly her father, but so unlike her father of every-day life that she could not seem to realize that it was actually he.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT WAS IT.

MR. DEANE'S face, usually so red, was white and strained, his eyes blood-shot and leaden-ringed; his very manner was changed, and in place of the familiar pompous, self-satisfied air, his whole bearing was downcast and broken-spirited.

As she moved forward, he stopped and turned as if to avoid her.

"Er—Cartel," he said to the little man, who was close beside him, "I—er—think I'll go back and write that letter while you—er—have something to eat. Come back to me when you've finished. Marjorie, don't sit up. Mr. Cartel and I have some—er—business. Good-night. Er—er—would you kiss me, Marjorie?"

He asked it in a sort of apologetic and pleading way, which startled her; but she went up to him and kissed him with more tenderness than she could remember ever doing before.

"Thank you. Er—Cartel, this is my eldest daughter, Marjorie. Miss Deane, the—er—the—ahem!"—and the old pompous manner came back like a ghost of itself—"the future Lady Chesterton."

"Papa!" murmured the distressed Marjorie.

"Cartel, the future Lady Chesterton, eh?" and with a little pat on Marjorie's arm he went out, followed by Mr. Cartel, who had been watching his face with a mixture of anxiety and affection.

Mr. Cartel saw Mr. Deane to the library, and then returned to the drawing-room, where he made a brave attempt to eat as if he were hungry, and not in the least succeeding.

"I am afraid papa is not well," said Marjorie, after an anxious pause.

"Trying weather, Miss Deane," said the little man, nervously. "One day hot, another cold. Not anything more, thank you. I will go now. Yes, this is a beautiful place—must have cost an enormous sum of money," and as if the reduction of his thoughts to money had composed him, he looked gravely around the handsome room.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Marjorie, absently. "Do you think papa is seriously ill?"

"No, no. That is—— Is this a freehold property, Miss Deane?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid I don't understand quite—yes, I remember now. It is a freehold."

"And settled, no doubt, on one or both of you young ladies?"

"Really, I do not know, Mr. Cartel."

"Certain to be, of course. Thank you. No, not seriously ill, I hope. A little—— Yes, yes, I think I will go now; he may need me. Good-night, Miss Deane."

"Perhaps you would not mind taking in a glass of wine if I carry it to the door," said Marjorie, uneasy at the evasion and singular questions of the little man, who, nevertheless, was so kindly in his manner that she could not but feel a certain confidence in him.

"With pleasure," he assented, and they crossed the hall together. She gave him the wine and turned back; but before she reached the drawing-room she heard a sharp cry of alarm. With a bound she was at the library door; but Mr. Cartel stood against it and put her off. Her pale face was ghastly white now.

"No, no," he said. For Heaven's sake, don't go in.

Marjorie stopped for a moment, and then looked at him.

"My father?" she gasped.

"Your father is—is very ill. For Heaven's sake, be calm! This —this is dreadful! Be calm, miss."

"I am quite calm," said Marjorie, each word dropping like a stone from her white lips; "quite calm. Touch me! I do not even tremble. Something has happened. I must go to him. I will. You must not stop me, please."

"Well——" He hesitated. "You must promise not to cry out."

Marjorie made a gesture of assent. He stood aside and went in with her, closing the door behind them and locking it. For a moment Marjorie saw nothing; then she saw a still figure lying on the hearth-rug, face down and hands clinched. She threw herself on her knees beside it, with a low stifled cry.

"Hush!" gasped Mr. Cartel. "Lift his head. Ah, no! It's no use! For Heaven's sake, be calm, miss. He—he——"

"I know," said Marjorie, lifting her white face; "he's dying! The doctor!" and she sprung to her feet and rang the bell.

In five minutes all the house was astir—astir in a subdued mysterious way, for Marjorie would not have Bessie awakened. The doctor came, the door was shut—shut even upon her, and a silence fell—a silence broken by the slow step of the doctor, as he came into the room and took the girl's cold, white hand.

"My dear," he said—he was an old man, with two daughters of his own—"can you bear a great sorrow?"

"I am bearing it," she answered, raising her heavy eyes.

He nodded and led her to a seat.

"It is all over my dear; your father is dead."

She uttered no cry, but sat looking at him.

"Dead!"

"Yes," he said. Then he added, quietly, "It was heart disease. He did not suffer. There was some great excitement, and——"

"What shall I do?" moaned Marjorie.

"Go to your room, my dear. I have sent for Mrs. Gore-Boothe—she is a friend of yours. Is there any one else? Any relation?"

Marjorie shook her head. In this, the first moment of her grief, she did not even think of Roland.

"No, there is no one else—no one in the wide world. What shall I do?"

The old doctor wisely left her to herself for a few minutes, and when he returned she was calmer, and he saw that she had been crying.

"That is better, my dear young lady," he said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"If you will tell Mr. Cartel that I would like to see him," she said. "I cannot understand it at all. Papa was never like this—never so ill and upset until to-day, until this gentleman came down."

The doctor went away, and presently, as Marjorie sat with folded hands and rigid, stony face staring at the fire, the door opened and Mr. Cartel came in.

"Do you wish to see me?" he asked, with his nervous, agitated air.

Marjorie rose and stood looking at him.

"Will you tell me who you are, Mr. Cartel?"

He put his hand tremblingly to his mouth. It was a gesture peculiar to him.

"I am your father's confidential clerk, Miss Deane. I thought you knew that."

"No," said Marjorie, sadly. "My father never spoke to me about business. I am not sure that I know where his office in the city is."

"His office was in the Crutched Friars and Mincing Lane, but he had a great many places of business. Your father was an admirable man of business, Miss Deane," and something like a tear crept into the pale eyes.

"As you were so close a friend of my father," said Marjorie, "perhaps you will forgive me for asking your advice. What shall I do? I—I—" and her lips quivered—"I do not know what to do. It is so sudden—and so terrible."

"Yes," he said, under his breath, "it is sudden. I am afraid there is not much to be done. I have taken the liberty to send for Mr. Blake, and I asked Mr. Deane's solicitor in London to run down by the early train."

"Solicitor!" repeated Marjorie, wondering.

Mr. Cartel hesitated a moment, then looked pityingly at her.

"There was some trouble, Miss Deane. Men in business always have some trouble."

"Some trouble? Some great, heavy trouble; I can see it by your manner. Mr. Cartel, you need not fear to tell me. You must not think that I cannot bear it. Will you tell me the truth—the whole, plain, truth? It will be better."

There was something piteous and most moving in the absolute calm and composure of the sweet voice, the straightforward appeal of the large, fearless eyes. The little man of business who had never had much occasion to consider whether or not he had a heart, was surprised to find it fluttering strangely, and he was obliged to blow his nose to stop the tears coming into his eyes.

"Miss Deane," he said, "there was trouble, great trouble. I'm afraid there isn't much use attempting to keep it from you. If I didn't tell you, somebody else would have to. Miss Deane, we—your father, I mean—have had very heavy losses—very heavy."

"Losses!" said Marjorie; "but my father was a very rich man."

"Yes, he *was* a very rich man," with marked emphasis on the was, "but things latterly were going badly with him; and to-day, yesterday," glancing at the window through which the dawn was creeping—"we met with a sudden fall in the market. I'm afraid I cannot make myself clear."

"Go on," said Marjorie, her eyes fixed on his face.

"A sudden and most unexpected fall, that took us completely by

surprise—not all of us, though," he said, with a sort of sad dignity and self-defence. "I saw it coming and told your father. But he was a man who always relied on his own judgment, and he thought I was wrong. Not only that, but he was particularly anxious to clear a large sum of money by this transaction, which he would have done if things had gone on as he expected. I don't know why it was, but Mr. Deane was more anxious about making great sums of money lately, than ever he was in the early days. I've been with him since he began business. It was by my advice that he bought the opium which made his fortune."

"If he had but taken your advice now, Mr. Cartel! But, surely, the loss did not make my father ill."

Mr. Cartel looked at her pityingly. It was hard, cruel work to have to tell her the truth, the bitter truth, so plainly.

"It would not have been of so much consequence six months ago," he said, "though a heavy enough loss at any time; but—but your father has been very reckless lately—well, not reckless, but too eager. I never understood it thoroughly. He was rich enough, in all conscience, but he wasn't satisfied; and he said to me one day, Miss Deane, 'I want to be the richest man in the county, Cartel.' And he would have been, miss, if this had come out right—the richest man in the county."

"And now?" said Marjorie, wearily.

"And now, he has died the poorest!" was the solemn response.

It was out at last. The truth, the naked truth, was out, in all its ugliness. The great, gorgeous mansion, with its crimson and gold, had fallen like a pack of cards; the millionaire speculator had fallen to the dust; his thousands had taken wings unto themselves and flown, not slowly, but swiftly, in a few weeks; and he lay upstairs, in the gaudy, luxurious bedchamber, with not enough left out of the wreck to bury him.

Already a thick pall of disgrace and dishonor, of bankruptcy and ruin, seemed to be falling on the handsome house in which he so delighted. Servants were muttering and conjecturing in the kitchen, staring and listening in the hall, shaking their heads and whispering in the stables.

And in the midst of it all, scarcely comprehending, scarcely grasping it yet, sat Marjorie, looking with fixed gaze on the little man who sat brooding opposite her.

"Do you mean," she said at last, "that my father was—was ruined?"

"I am afraid so, Miss Deane," he answered, and his voice quivered. "It would be only cruelty to deceive you. I had hoped, when I came down, that this place, and something substantial, would have been settled on you or your sister; but—but it is not. It was a strange piece of neglect on his part—very strange, such a

sound business man as he was! But there is nothing settled. You—you will forgive me, miss, but I ask it out of the deepest respect. I've been with your father, man and boy, for forty years—forty years!" and the honest eyes filled with tears now; "but is it true, what he said just before he left this room—that you are engaged to marry Sir Roland Chesterton? I ought not to doubt it, I know; but his mind seemed quite unhinged. Was it true? I do hope——"

"It is quite true," said Marjorie, turning her face sadly away.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, rising and sitting down again, agitatedly. "Miss Deane, I—I never was so thankful for anything in my life! Then all this doesn't matter—doesn't really matter. I know Sir Roland Chesterton—everybody knows him, of course. He is one of the richest men in the county—the richest. And excuse me, Miss Deane——" and he fairly broke down.

Marjorie's face softened, and tears sprang into her own eyes. Who would have given the pale-eyed little man credit for so tender a heart? Certainly not himself.

"Please do not—do not!" she said, going up to him, and touching his arm. "I know how good a friend my father had in you. Will you be my friend, Mr. Cartel? I am quite helpless and alone" —she flushed reproachfully as she thought of Roland, and corrected herself—"I—I mean that there is only my sister."

Mr. Cartel shook his head sadly, and was about to speak, when Marjorie went on:

"I am thinking most of my sister. Where can I send her? She cannot remain here, it seems to me."

"No, no; certainly not, miss. If"—and he looked at her eagerly—"if you wouldn't think it presuming, and if there is no one else who has a proper right—though I think no one else has—my wife would be proud, greatly proud, to have Miss Bessie and yourself under her humble roof as honored guests."

Marjorie's tears fell. Before she could answer the door opened.

"Mrs. Gore-Boothe is away in Scotland, miss. She was called away the day before yesterday," said the footman.

"That's the lady you sent for?" said Mr. Cartel.

"Yes," answered Marjorie, sadly.

"Have you—have you sent for Sir Roland?" he asked, respectfully. "If not, I——"

"No," said Marjorie, looking down. "No; he will be here soon, no doubt. No; I will not send for him."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR ROLAND AND HIS MOTHER.

IN silence Sir Roland and the beauty made their way back to the Wold—a silence that was more terrible than the most passionate outburst could have been. Notwithstanding the success of her skilful manœuvre, notwithstanding her victory over her rival, there mingled with the beauty's malicious satisfaction a vague feeling of alarm; that indefinite sense of insecurity, which, for instance, the most adroit lion-tamer must feel even while the savage beasts he has cowed into quietude are crouching beneath his heel. They may spring up at any moment and rend their tormentor.

At the present, however, Sir Roland did not turn and rend her, but walked on with firm step and bent head in silence.

They reached the Wold at last, after what seemed to both of them a long, weary march, and, abating not a jot of his usual courtesy, he opened the door for her and made way for her to pass in before him.

The hall was never brilliantly lighted, but to-night, by some chance, only one lamp was burning. He went to a side table and lighted a candle, and, as he did so, she, standing beside him, raised her eyes and looked at him, and looking, shuddered involuntarily.

His face was white and haggard; it was like the face of a man who had received a mortal wound, and who was increasing his agony in his efforts to conceal it. It was the face of a man who had staked his all on the cast of a die, and—lost.

Her once smooth, serenely lovely countenance paled and shrank as she looked at him, and, almost unconsciously, she stretched out her hand and touched his arm fearfully and timidly.

"Roland!"

He started, and looked at her as if suddenly aware of her presence.

"Well?" he said briefly, and with the quiet apathy of a man who has accepted his fate.

"Roland!" she said, falteringly, "I—I am very sorry."

He smiled, a cold, mechanical smile that was too lifeless to be bitter.

"So am I," he grimly answered. Then he opened the drawing-room door for her. "If you will excuse me," he said; "I have a letter to write."

She inclined her head. and, still looking at him, was about to pass in, when, as if struck by a sudden thought, he turned.

"Helen," he said, his eyes fixed on her face with hard scrutiny, "I want to ask you one question."

"Yes."

"Did you lose your locket to-night, or was it an excuse to take me to that accursed wood?"

She faltered, and turned white, but the light was behind her, and she nerved herself in a moment.

"Can you ask, Roland?" she said, with sorrowful reproach. "I would have given all I possessed to have spared you——"

"Enough," he said, cutting her short. "Good-night!" and he turned away.

A fire was burning in his dressing-room; he drew a chair up before it and sat down, clasping his hands, leaning forward, and staring at the blaze. And as he stared the glowing logs took the shape of two faces. the strange man's and the face of the girl—so fair, so false—who in a few short weeks had crept into his heart but to make it desolate; and, in the crackling of the wood, he heard their voices—the soft, sweet, clear voice revealing her own treachery and proclaiming her own guilt.

He had thrown his old life—a wild, unsatisfactory life—behind him—behind him, cast it away and buried it utterly, and had given himself up unreservedly to this the first love he had ever felt. And now she had proved false, and his faith was utterly shattered.

Until now he had not realized how much he had loved her. She had become the be-all and the end-all of his existence. He would have maintained her truth, and honesty, and goodness against all the world. He would not now have believed the word of any one against her; but he must believe his own senses.

How long he sat there in a sort of stupor, his thoughts revolving round the one miserable idea of Marjorie's treachery, he neither knew nor cared. It was not until the last flickering embers faded into darkness that he roused himself. Then, with something that was half a sigh, half a bitter laugh, he arose and went down the corridor to his mother's room.

Something told him that she would be awake, and she was. With a gentler summons than usual he knocked, and entered. Lady Chesterton was wrapped in a three-fold dressing-gown, with a hood over her head.

"Is it you, Roland? I expected you sooner."

"Ah, well, I did not feel like coming sooner."

She glanced quickly up at him, and by the light of the candle could discern the trouble in his face. A look of apprehension passed over her own, and a softer expression than was usual shone in her eyes.

"You have not come to quarrel with me, Roland, dear?"

"No," with a short laugh.

"No, do not. I could not bear that you and I should quarrel. I have been hasty and ill-judged, Roland. I will yield everything you wish, sacrifice all my own desires. I withdraw any objections to Marjorie. I—I—am sorry. I did think—I do think, Roland—don't be angry—that she is not worthy of you."

He waved his hand impatiently, but said nothing.

"I have no objection to her personally," she went on, "and I shall try to like her—indeed I shall, Roland. I am sorry I opposed you, Roland. I have only you to live for, and if your heart is set on this girl, it shall be enough for me, and I will try to take her as a daughter."

She paused and looked up into his face for the approval she expected to receive in words. A sardonic smile was curling his lips, and without knowing why, her heart misgave her.

"Why don't you speak, Roland?" she said, almost piteously.

He laughed in a curt, hard fashion, and answered:

"I am waiting that you might enjoy the good news I have to tell you."

"Roland!"

"I am not going to marry her, mother."

"Not going to—to marry—marry Marjorie Deane?"

"I am not going to marry Marjorie Deane," dropped from his lips, in deliberate, hard, cold words.

"Oh, Roland!"

"For Heaven's sake don't look so delighted!" he whispered, hoarsely, and then, recovering himself with a strong effort, he laughed in his bitter way again, and said, "Yes, rejoice, laugh. We will laugh together. It is such a joyful thing. Bah! a woman and a man's heart! What business has a man to play the fool and think of love?"

"Roland! What has happened?"

"Nothing of any consequence, mother. The engagement is broken off, that is all. I have told you, because I knew you would share in the pleasure of it——"

"Roland!" with piteous reproach.

"And now I am going to London. London first, anyhow. After that—the Lord knows where."

"Oh, Roland!" cried his mother, starting up in alarm. "You will not leave the Wold? You will not——"

"I am going to London."

"But—but when?"

"Now. The first train after this moment."

"But, my boy, the house in London is shut up."

"I will go to Mivart's. It is idle to waste words. I am going. I will write to you before I leave London.

"For where, Roland?" she despairingly asked.

He laughed bitterly.

"I do not know yet. I should prefer some place where there are no women; but, in default of such a paradise, I will seek the place where the women are in the minority."

"Oh, Roland, women are not all bad and false."

The first touch of human feeling showed in his voice.

"There is you, mother."

"And here is Helen."

He turned with a weary shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes, Helen is a good girl, no doubt, and one a man might rely on; but just now, mother, I think I had better get away from every reminder of—of— Well, no matter. Good-night and good-by," and he bent and kissed her.

The proud old woman uttered a sacred sob.

"Oh, my boy."

He called up a smile to give her, and then vanished from the room to go to his own and call up his valet to give him the necessary directions for the early departure.

Brooks was too good a valet to even look his surprise; and so, as if it were the most commonplace matter in the world, he placed the brandy and seltzer where Sir Roland would get it, and then went away to spend the remainder of the night in packing and preparing.

Sir Roland was in no mood for brandy and seltzer. His brain had no need for stimulant. Before him arose all too plainly already the vision of the beautiful face, the music of the sweet young voice. Only last night, and her arms, the round, soft arms, were around his neck—only last night, and her lips were clinging to his.

The hours glided steadily onward, the replenished fire burned low; and just as Marjorie, if he could but know it, was sitting watching her fire, with the dead father upstairs and the story of her ruin ringing in her ears, so he sat, trying to harden his heart against the ever-recurring thought of the seeming purity and loveliness of the woman whom he still loved as madly—more madly than ever. So madly that there were moments when the thought came to him to take her as she was, and give no heed of the testimony of his eyes and ears.

Presently he arose and made a few preparations for his departure. He packed his dispatch-box and sorted his letters. To do so he had to open a drawer in his escritoire, and the first thing that met his hands was the ribbon which had fallen from her bosom, as he held her in his arms the night the breastplate fell on her, the

night he told her he loved her, and heard the sweet sobbing murmur of her answering love. Beside it lay a glove and a withered flower, all worn by her and eloquent of her.

He took them up one by one and looked at them thirstily, as a man dying for a draught of water in the desert might look on the empty gourd which once held the precious liquid, a draught of which would now save his life.

With a groan and a malediction on himself he threw them on the fire. They all fell on the fire but the glove; that, with a sudden resolution he recovered, and, with a gesture of self-scorn, thrust into his breast.

"Let me keep something," he muttered, bitterly, "to remind me of how great a fool I have been;" and yet, as he spoke thus in self-deception, he knew that love for her and only that prompted him to keep the token.

Then he took up a pen, and hesitated. Would it not be better to go, to disappear, without a sign? What good could words written or spoken do? But no, he could not go without letting her know that her treachery had been discovered. He sat and stared at the paper, pondering what to say. A flood of passionate words rushed into his mind, but he would not commit them to paper, would not bare his heart-wounds to her to laugh at.

And at last he wrote just the line:

"I was in the wood at seven o'clock to night. Farewell!

"ROLAND CHESTERTON."

CHAPTER XXV.

TO ENJOY HER RIVAL'S TROUBLE.

AT HARLEY HOUSE, that morning, breakfast was laid as usual, but the two girls sat hand-in-hand in the drawing-room, not crying now, but passive. One hope animated them and that was the speedy coming of Sir Roland. He was their one prop. Bessie would have Marjorie send for him, but she, listening with sharpened ear to each footfall, to each noise which might presage his arrival, said no; that he was certain to come at any moment.

At half-past ten the bell rang, and Marjorie drew a deep sigh of joy, for she had no doubt it was he.

"I won't stay, Marjorie, dear," said Bessie; "but—but will you

let me come in almost directly? I do want to see him, and know that he is with us."

Marjorie would have detained her then, but the thoughtful child would not stay, and Marjorie was left alone, standing with folded hands, her head cast down and her heart beating. There was a sound of talking in the hall, and although she could not distinguish the deep tones of her lover's voice, she had no doubt yet that it was he.

Then the door opened, and she saw, not the tall figure in the morning-coat and squire-like gaiters, but the graceful form of Helen Montressor, clad in serge and seal-skin.

A dead weight seemed to drop on Marjorie's heart, and she had much to do to keep her lips from quivering as she went forward. The beauty sailed in, her perfect, faultless loveliness heightened by the delicate flush of triumph in her face and the cold sparkle of victory in her eye.

She came forward with outstretched hand, a faint curiosity visible in her raised brows at the unusual stillness which seemed to reign in the house; a curiosity which grew deeper as she saw how pale and wan was the face of her late rival. What had happened? Was it possible that she had been forestalled, that Marjorie had already learned that her short reign was over?

A pang of disappointment assailed her. Was she too late to deal the blow and gloat over the misery it would inflict?

"How do you do, dear Miss Deane," she said, holding out her hand and smiling sweetly into the dark, sorrow-deepened eyes. "I am an early visitor, am I not?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie, after more than one ineffectual effort to speak.

"Perhaps," said Helen Montressor, with an arch smile, "you expected some one else? I hope not, for then I have a little disappointment in store for you. Did you—now tell me truly—did you not expect Sir Roland?"

A faint flush rose slowly to Marjorie's cheek, but to leave it colder and whiter than before.

"Yes," she said, scorning a conventional falsehood, "I did expect Sir Roland."

"There, now, I thought so," murmured Helen. "I quite felt that, and almost turned back, for a substitute is always unwelcome. But it was such a fresh morning, and I knew you rose early. But how pale you look! Are you not well?"

"I am—tired," said Marjorie, in a low, sweet voice.

"Tired?" echoed the purring voice. "Now, that is the effect of your drive yesterday. I told Roland that it would be too much for you. May I sit down?"

Marjorie moved her hand to a chair, but she stood and looked at

the lovely face with its cruelly sweet smile, looked at it as one might look at a picture which repels and yet fascinates.

"Men are so careless," went on the beauty, settling herself comfortably in a chair. "They measure our strength by their own. But, indeed, you do look worn-out."

Marjorie steadied her voice, and opened her lips at last.

"Is Sir Ronald coming?" she asked, utterly unable to keep from her lips the question which her heart had been framing all the while.

"Roland!" echoed Helen, with an assumption of surprise. "Why, don't you know? He started for London this morning."

Marjorie looked up with a sudden shrinking, as if a blow had been dealt her.

"Gone!" she murmured, her lips quivering. "Gone this morning!"

"By the first train," said the beauty, putting up her vail, and smiling with keen enjoyment at the disappointment and sorrow depicted on the pale face. "He went off, my dear Miss Deane, like a—a flash of lightning. They tell me that that is his usual way of exit and entrance, and that he makes up his mind to come or go, on the spur of the moment——"

"Where—where has he gone?" asked Marjorie, breaking in on the soft, silvery voice.

"Ah, that is the question," answered the beauty, raising her shoulders. "No one knows, not even Lady Chesterton. He disappeared from our ken before dinner, yesterday; something upset him—I am afraid you will not have the best-tempered of men for a husband—and this morning we learned that he was gone."

"Gone!" echoed Marjorie, a cold wave of helpless loneliness sweeping over her spirit, and daunting her. "Gone? And did—did he not leave a message for—for me?"

The beauty gave a little start.

"Now, really, this is too bad of me! I was nearly forgetting the purpose of my visit. Yes, he did leave a message for you—a letter. It found it way into the hands of my maid, and, as she is a most forgetful creature, I am afraid it would not have reached you if I had not felt that you should have it at once, and so brought it to you."

Marjorie held out her hand, not impatiently, not imperatively, but simply demanding the letter.

"Let me see," said the beauty, "what did I—oh, here it is," and, rising, she held out the note.

Marjorie took it and looked at it, and then stood with it in her hand unopened. But Helen Montressor was not to be robbed of one morsel of her revenge.

"Do open it, dear Miss Deane," she said, softly. "You hold the

key to the enigma, and we are dying to know what it is that has sent him away like an arrow from a bow."

Marjorie opened the envelope mechanically, and as mechanically read. For a minute she stood and looked at the two lines with staring gaze, as if they bore no meaning for her; then as their fell significance dawned slowly upon her benumbed senses, her brain seemed to swim, the brilliant room to reel, the lovely mocking face to grow indistinct in her eyes, and with a gasp she staggered against the mantelpiece.

Helen Montressor stood before her with a mocking, malicious smile on her face.

"Are you ill, Miss Deane?" she asked. "Is there any bad news?"

Before Marjorie, speechless Marjorie, could have time to reply, the door opened, and Mr. Cartel entered. He looked from one to the other in anxious interrogation, and then went up to Marjorie.

"Miss Deane what is this? I beg your pardon," with a hurried bow to the tall, graceful figure. "I thought it was Sir Roland Chesterton."

"Sir Roland Chesterton," repeated the beauty, with grave irony, "is miles away by this time. He has gone by the first train; the letter which I have brought explains his absence. It seemed to have upset Miss Deane."

Mr. Cartel looked from one to the other, then he gently forced Marjorie into a chair, and, hurrying across to Miss Montressor, touched her arm.

"Do you not know?" he asked in a whisper.

"Know—what?"

"That—I am afraid they have not told you—Mr. Deane is dead."

The beauty changed color, and looked startled; let us give her credit—she looked startled.

"I—I did not know," she said, faltering. "I declare I did not know."

Mr. Cartel, glancing at the still figure bowed over the fire, drew the beauty farther away.

"Yes," whispered he, "he is dead. I thought they would have told you, and—and if you can tell me where Sir Roland is——"

Helen Montressor shook her head, her face white and agitated.

"I cannot tell you. I don't know. Is it—is it really true? Is he dead?"

Mr. Cartel nodded his head.

"You are a friend of Miss Deane?"

She inclined her head mechanically, her eyes fixed on the still figure as if fascinated.

"Yes, that is—no! I must go! I cannot stay!"

"One moment," said Mr. Cartel, quite ignorant of the relation

of his listener to Marjorie. "If you will be kind enough to tell Roland that we should be glad of his assistance. I will—well, there can be no secrecy—if you will tell him that you saw Mr. Deane's business man, and that things have gone wrong."

"Gone wrong?" gasped the beauty, mechanically.

"Yes. I am afraid it is simple—ruin."

Helen Montressor sank back, white and breathless.

"I declare," she said, earnestly. "I did not know! I would rather have died than come. I—Miss Deane," and she went over to where Marjorie sat, white and silent like a statue. "Miss Deane, I beg you to believe that I did not know this. And—and," she went on, so stricken with shame that her lips quivered and shook, "and if this is true, I hope you will allow me——" She broke off, and instinctively held out her purse—a purse filled with notes and gold. "If you will accept this as—as just for the present moment——"

She stopped suddenly, for the silent figure had risen to its full height, the white face confronted her, and there was something in the dark eyes, such majesty of insulted sorrow, that her own shuddered and averted themselves.

Slowly Marjorie raised her hand and pointed to the door.

"Go," she said, the word dropping from her lips as with an effort.

The beauty, pale to the lips, took a step and then turned.

"Miss Deane——"

But Marjorie's finger still pointed to the door with an inexorable command.

"Go," she said, "your task is done. You have taken your revenge. This home is still mine. Go!"

By accident or intention, the purse, a dainty toy of seal-skin and silver, had dropped on the table.

Marjorie went toward it slowly, and taking up the purse, let it fall at Helen Montressor's feet.

The beauty stooped and picked it up; then with a lowered head, and a glance, half-frightened, half-remorseful, at the white face, turned and left the room.

Then, and not till then, Marjorie sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands, shutting out the cruel world.

Mr. Cartel, who had stood looking from one to the other of the two girls with an amazed, bewildered stare, hurried forward.

"My dear Miss Deane, what does all this mean? That lady——"

Marjorie looked around on him suddenly.

"Do not speak of her! It is she—she—who has torn him from me! I feel it! I feel it!"

"Torn him—do you mean Sir Roland? Is he not coming?"

Marjorie rose by a great effort, and looked into the pale, anxious eyes.

"Sir Roland," she said, with a sudden twitch of the lips—"Sir Roland has left us with our fortune, Mr. Cartel. He will not come. We have waited in vain."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Cartel. "Do you mean to tell me that—that Sir Roland has broken the engagement?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, and a smile more bitter and pathetic than tears curved her lip. "Yes; you see, fortune does not do things by halves. She makes us rich one day, and robs us of everything—even our friends—the next."

Sir Roland! The engagement broken off!" he muttered, striding, running rather, up and down the room. "This—this is altogether unexpected and unlooked for! Your whole hope rested on Sir Roland. Miss Deane, I—I am glad to see that you are so calm."

"Oh, yes, I am calm, Mr. Cartel. You cannot deal me another blow."

"Don't, don't," he pleaded, with a scared look. "I don't like to see you look like this, Miss Deane. But—but if this is true, this alters all my arrangements and hopes. Will you—I am a business man, Miss Deane, and business is paramount with me—will you tell me how much ready money you have? I beg your pardon for asking the question, but I can only serve your interests by acting expeditiously."

Marjorie inclined her head.

"Money?" she said. "I do not know; but"—she handed him her purse—"here is all I have."

He took it and poured its contents into his hand. As he did so the check met his eye, and he unfolded it.

"Two hundred pounds!" he exclaimed, looking at the clock. "Two hundred pounds! By George! I'll chance it. They may cash it before the crash comes. Miss Deane, do you mind my leaving you for a few hours? I can just catch the first train, and if I can I may save two hundred pounds, at any rate!" and he darted out of the room.

As he did so Bessie came in with Roland's name on her lips.

She stopped short as she saw Marjorie crouching over the fire alone.

"Marjorie, where is Sir Roland?"

Marjorie looked up.

"Sir Roland?" she repeated, hoarsely. "Sir Roland is like the rest; he has—gone!—gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Bessie, throwing herself at Marjorie's knees. "Gone? Where? For how long?"

"Forever!" replied Marjorie, with a wild smile. "All has gone—father, fortune, lover! Bessie, dear, we are left to face the storm alone!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER THE STORM.

THE short winter day was drawing to a close; the muffin man and the lamplighter were tramping through the quiet suburban streets and squares—the streets and squares that never are quiet from early morning to dewy eve; the weary man of business was wending his way homeward from the great city in omnibus, train and street-car. Under foot the pavement was moist and damp; the usual misty haze, which crowns the world's metropolis in winter, was hanging like a pall overhead; the day—the busy, moiling, toiling day was over, and London, which never sleeps, paused, so to speak, to take breath before it dashed into the roaring, restless night.

Very little of the roar and excitement, however, reached Hanley street, Bayswater, and the only sound that penetrated Mrs. Cartel's front parlor were the tolls of the muffin bell and the tramp of the lamplighter.

A month, just four weeks, had passed since Peter Deane had fallen dead in the library of his grand country house. Four weeks only, and yet they seemed months, years, to the two girls sitting by the fire in Mrs. Cartel's back parlor.

Many changes had been worked in four weeks, and changes enough had they seen in that time, and yet there seemed little change in them.

According to the well-known canons of romance, at least one of them, Marjorie should be wan and white, and exhibiting every symptom of dying shortly of a broken heart. But though Marjorie's heart might be broken, she did not look it.

"Men have died," says Shakespeare, "from time to time, but not for love," and Marjorie looked as if life still had a strong hold upon her. Both girls were dressed in black, a soft cashmere, which, much to Mrs. Cartel's secret dismay, was innocent of crape.

And just as there was no crape, so there was no weeping and wailing. Both girls had borne the double, and, in Marjorie's case, the treble blow, womanfully. Not a word of repining for all that was lost escaped either of them. They sat sometimes, as they were doing now, looking at the fire in silence, but it was not the silence of despair.

Still, though they did not repine, they did now and then wonder. It was so marvellous and astounding, this trick which fickle fortune had played them—being one day nursed in the lap of luxury, basking in the sun of happiness, the next, bereft and thrown upon the mercy of the cold world.

It was so sudden, so overwhelming, that it was hard sometimes to realize that it was not the fantastic freak of a dream. Very often, during those four weeks, Marjorie had awakened expecting to find herself either in the poor little home of her former years, or in the seminary where she had taught. The Harley House episode was so short, so unreal, that she never even dreamed of it. All that was a blank, save—ah, save those few too short days of her first passion!

To those few days of rapturous delight she went back—how often—in the stillness of the night, went back with an infinite longing, infinite despair.

There had been no repining, no fretful wailings about better days and a cold-hearted world.

"I don't believe in a cold-hearted world," she said one night when the two sat talking over the strange events. "These dear, good people cannot be the only generous-hearted ones in the world. There are more Cartels than ours, and while the world holds them it cannot be very cold."

For Mr. Cartel and his wife had proved themselves to be pure gold, tried in the furnace. It was he, the little pale-faced man, who came up manfully and buckled on his armour in their behalf.

From the moment in which he learned that Sir Roland had gone, he went to their aid and stood by them with a devotion which, in the old days of chivalry, would have won him his golden spurs of knighthood. Not even in those by-gone days was knight more chivalrous and devoted than he.

It seemed as if he could not do too much to prove his devotion to the daughters of the man whom he had served from boyhood to middle age.

Notwithstanding that he had not closed an eye for an hour of that dreadful day, he caught the first train to London, and was at the bank with Marjorie's check—the last the ruined financier ever drew.

Pale and anxious he stood facing the cashier, and still paler, but triumphant, he swept into his pocket the notes and gold, almost the last of the many, many thousands of Peter Deane's which had passed through the cashier's hands.

And there had been need of haste. One hour after that check was cashed the crash came, and the city rang with the news of Peter Deane's ruin and death.

Merely stopping long enough to send a telegram to Mrs. Cartel,

the brave little man dashed to the railway station, and was by Marjorie's side with the two hundred pounds in his hand.

For some hours Marjorie refused to touch it, and it was not until he had explained for the fiftieth time that the money was legally and justly hers, and that to relinquish it would but toss it into the hands of the lawyers, that he succeeded in persuading Marjorie to retain it.

Then there came another battle. She had strung herself up to remain at the house until after the funeral, and it was only by picturing the useless misery which this step would entail on Bessie that she yielded.

Having gained this point, Mr. Cartel lost no time, and before the day had closed they were standing in the hall of his modest little villa. All the journey up, Bessie had been wondering, half fearfully, what Mrs. Cartel would be like, and picturing a thin copy of their pale-eyed little friend.

Instead of this, a buxom little woman came in, with gentle, commiserating eyes that looked as if, as indeed they had, been crying. She received them literally with open arms; for, when Mr. Cartel said, with mingled pride and sadness, "The Misses Deane, my dear," she then hesitated and dropped a courtesy, and then, overcome by Marjorie's beautiful face, and Bessie's pale, tearful one, she had taken Bessie into her arms and burst into tears.

Then, and for the first time since they had started, they had broken down, and somehow the good woman had them both on her bosom, and Mr. Cartel, turning his back on the melting sight, had blown his nose hard, and tried to persuade himself that he was not crying, but only had a cold.

As to his pride in having the daughters of his late master beneath his roof, it paled to insignificance beside his wife's.

Mrs. Cartel had all her married life held fast to two articles of faith—one being that Peter Deane was the most wonderful man in the world, and the other that her husband was the next.

"My dear," she said, smiling through her tears, when Marjorie had murmured her reluctance to trespass on their good nature, "if it wasn't for remembering that your trouble has brought it about, I should be the happiest woman in the world to-night. As for Cartel, he is as proud as man can be. You would wound me very much, Miss Deane, if you spoke of trouble or anything of that kind. Why," burst out the poor woman, with a sob, "we owe everything in the world to your father—everything! And this is the proudest moment of our lives. I am only afraid that—that you will find such a difference in our modest home, Miss Deane, to what you have been used to——"

Marjorie shook her head.

"Do not say that," she said in a low voice, "and—my name is Marjorie, my sister's is Bessie; please do not call me Miss Deane."

When the two girls went to bed, Mrs. Cartel insisted upon waiting on them as if they had been duchesses. Then she went to the parlor, where Mr. Cartel was taking a modest glass of whiskey-and-water, and kissed him.

"John," she said, crying softly, "they are two angels—two angels, that's what they are," and he shook his head in solemn assent.

"By George! you're right," he said, "and you'll say so when you know them better. As for Sir Roland!" and then he told her all that he knew, and Mrs. Cartel's tears were dried up in fiery indignation.

"John," she said, "he must be a fool! Nobody but a poor fool would desert such a lovely, lovable girl as that. And, oh! John, do you think we can keep them? Do you think they will stay?"

"Stay!" echoed Mr. Cartel, curiously. "Why shouldn't they stay? Where are they to go to? Stay? Of course they will. We must make them!"

And then they sat up into the small hours, planning how they should make the two angels comfortable and contented.

Mr. Cartel had saved money and was independent. They had no children of their own, and they built up a delightful castle in the air. Marjorie and Bessie were to become—well, not their daughters, but two princesses. To be waited upon and tended with the greatest care and affection while the old people lived, and were to inherit their fortune when they died.

But Mr. Cartel was doubtful.

"I'm afraid of losing Marjorie," he said, with a sigh. "She's proud, as is natural, and she won't like to be dependent, as she'd call it. I wish I hadn't got that two hundred for them. They'd have to stay then."

Wonders do not last even the nine days now. Long before that period of time Peter Deane's sudden ruin and death were forgotten save by the lawyers who quarrelled over the remains of that dead man's wealth.

Mr. Cartel continued as he had begun, and took upon his shoulders the whole of the worry of the funeral and the winding up of the affairs, and before the four weeks had passed the world had ceased to remember the financier, or to take any interest in his sudden rise and downfall.

All this might well seem like the troubled fantasy of a dream to Marjorie, as she sat before the fire, listening to the muffin bell.

"A penny for your thoughts, Marjorie," said Bessie, leaning back, with her hands folded behind her head.

"I won't rob you," answered Marjorie, with a smile. "I was just wishing I were a man."

"You wouldn't make a bad sort of man. Yes, you would,

though ; you'd make one of those hideous creatures, a pretty man, like the figures in a hair dresser's windows. Why do you want to be a man, Marjorie ?"

"Because I would like to be a useful animal ; because a man can do so many things to earn his living—sweep a crossing or break stones. It is twice as hard for a woman to live as a man. It is because the world can better spare us than the lords of creation. Of course we cannot stop here, Bessie."

"No," said Bessie, staring ruefully at the fire.

"No," said Marjorie, rising and walking too and fro, her hands clasped behind her back, her head erect, and her dark eyes dreamily meditative. "We have stayed too long already."

"Not too long for them," observed Bessie, meekly.

"No," assented Marjorie, gratefully—"no ; they would keep us forever if we would stay. I know that, but we could not do it. Besides, we are not penniless."

"How much have we ?" asked Bessie, her pretty young face as grave as a judge's.

Marjorie pulled out her pocket-book, and emptying the contents on the table, proceeded to calculate :

"One hundred and eighty-two pounds, three and twopence. And there's our jewelry—that would bring—let me see——"

"Oh, Marjorie !" exclaimed Bessie, aghast.

Marjorie sighed a little herself, then laughed gayly.

"Jewelry is as good as money, Bessie," she said. "Let us call it two hundred and fifty pounds. But that is capital, and everyone knows that to live on capital is like sawing off the branch you are sitting on. It means destruction, ruin, downfall. Capital——"

"Oh, don't !" pleaded Bessie, piteously. "I can't bear to hear you talk like that. It is just as—as poor papa used to talk, and I never, never understood him."

Marjorie laughed, and stroked the golden head caressingly.

"Well, what I want to say is that we must not use our nest-egg. We must save that in case of dire necessity. We must work, Bessie, mine."

"Work ?" repeated Bessie, looking around helplessly. "Yes, but what at ? Do you mean to sweep a crossing, Marjorie ? And shall I hold the little tin mug at the side of the pavement ?"

"Well, that is not such a bad idea," said Marjorie, with mock solemnity. "There was a man once who swept a crossing near the band—he made a fortune. He used to sweep all day in rags and tatters, and at night went home to a grand home on Belgrave Square. He grew tired of his crossing at last, and sold it to a cats'-meat man for five hundred pounds."

Bessie laughed, which was just what Marjorie had told her story for.

"Still," she went on, "I don't think a crossing would suit us, Bessie. For one thing, we have both an absurd objection to rags; and for another, we look too well fed. Seemingly, Bessie, there is only one thing open for us. I can't sweep a crossing, but I can sweep the cobwebs out of children's brains. I can teach school."

"Oh, Marjorie!" gasped Bessie, "you don't mean to—to go back to Mrs. Brown's! You won't leave me!"

Marjorie smiled, and gave the suddenly pale cheek a soft pat.

"Not exactly, Bessie. No, we'll cling together as long as a spar remains, as the song says. No, I was thinking that perhaps I might get a situation as a school-teacher, in some school in the country. Would you like that, Bessie?"

The color returned to Bessie's face, and she nodded in approval.

"That would be better, Marjorie; but wouldn't it be very—very difficult to obtain? It seems to me that everybody who hasn't any money would like to get that sort of thing."

"Something like this, for instance," said Marjorie, with affected carelessness, and she took a scrap of paper from her purse and read:

WANTED—A lady to take charge of a village school. Must be thoroughly competent. French and drawing indispensable. Salary, £100 per annum, with small school-house. Address, with all particulars, VICAR, Warley, Wilts."

Bessie uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Marjorie! That is too good! A hundred a year, and a little house, all grown over with ivy, and—oh, Marjorie, of course there will be a hundred, a thousand answers! And yet, you might answer it yourself, just to see——"

"I have answered it," said Marjorie, quietly, going behind her and stroking her hair. "I have answered it, and here—listen, Bessie!" and she opened a sheet of note-paper, and read:

"The Vicar of Warley has received Miss Deane's letter and inclosures, and will be glad to make an appointment for a personal interview."

Bessie jumped up with a cry of delight.

"Why, Marjorie, you never told me!"

"No, dear, I didn't want you to bear all the anxiety of suspense, and when I wrote I had so little hope of anything coming from it. And even now—well the vicar may think I am too young. I fancy he pictures a Miss Deane of about forty or fifty."

Bessie laughed hopefully.

"Wait till he sees you, Marjorie. I'll defy him to refuse you. Nobody could refuse you anything if you opened your eyes and looked at him in that little, eager way of yours. This vicar is a lost

man, Marjorie; but—but—oh, Marjorie, the Cartels! What will they say?"

Marjorie shook her head gravely.

"I am afraid they will be very much disappointed and cut up, Bessie, I am afraid to tell them; but it must be done to-night. I have written to the vicar telling him that I shall go down to see him to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Bessie, aghast. "What a business woman you are, Marjorie! Oh, do you think we shall like him?"

"The question is, will he like us?" answered Marjorie, laughing. Then there came upon her face a sudden wistfulness. It was transient, but Bessie caught it.

"Oh, Marjorie," she said, with a little sigh, "how good and brave you are! You almost make me forget how differently things were to have been for you! Marjorie, do you think *he* knows?" and she lowered her voice and let her head sink caressingly on Marjorie's shoulder. "Surely he cannot! He would not be so cruel and hard-hearted as to let you do this if he knew."

"Hush!" said Marjorie, and her face flushed. "We were not to speak of—of Sir Roland, dear! What does it matter if he knows or does not know? That is all past, long ago——"

"Four weeks ago," murmured Bessie, with moist eyes, as she reached up and kissed the soft red lips. "Marjorie, you never speak of him—but you—don't forget, dear Marjorie."

"No," said Marjorie, with a gentle smile, "I do not forget. That will come in time, perhaps. Meanwhile—— Hush! there is Mrs. Cartel," and she broke off as that good lady's voice was heard at the bottom of the stairs, announcing tea.

Mr. Cartel, who had exchanged his city coat and boots for a lounge jacket and slippers, welcomed them with his usual smile, a smile of affection and respect finely commingled, and drew Bessie's favorite chair to the fire as he shook hands with Marjorie.

Never in all his life had the worthy little man been so happy as he had been during the past four weeks.

The mere fact of having the two beautiful girls beneath his roof and under his protection was a source of delight to him. In the city he held his head even higher than was his wont when he was confidential clerk to the great Peter Deane. And all the day long he was on the lookout for something to buy as a treat for one or both of them.

For Marjorie he entertained a respect that was as like a feudal devotion as we can approach in these matter-of-fact days; and for Bessie, golden-haired Bessie, he cherished a love that was simply paternal.

If they wanted to repay him for all that he had done for them they had only to smile and look happy, and his gratitude knew bounds.

This night, as he drew Bessie's chair forward, and put another for Marjorie at the table, where she would insist upon cutting the bread and assisting generally, he beamed more cheerfully than ever. Marjorie, as she met his beaming smile, felt the Vicar of Warley's letter burning like a coal in her pocket.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARJORIE TAKES UP A NEW LIFE.

"WELL, Miss Bessie," said Mr. Cartel, rubbing his hands, "did you think I was never coming? I ought to apologize for being so late. I've been detained in the city. No, I've not—I've been to the West End." and he smiled. "I'm afraid you find it very dull, Miss Marjorie?"

"Oh, no," said Marjorie, cutting away at the bread.

"Oh, but you do, you know," he said, confidently. "I know you do. You miss things—it's only natural. You miss your horse-riding, for instance, and your music, eh?"

Marjorie shook her head.

"Oh, but you do! Come now, be candid," he said. "But you sha'n't miss it long—not after to-morrow, Miss Marjorie."

"To-morrow?" asked Marjorie, smiling across the table at him.

"Yes," he nodded, with a beaming smile. "I didn't mean to say anything about it, but I'm a bad one to keep a secret. I've bought a piano for you young ladies. None of your German instruments, but a real Broadwood. Oh, I hope I know what is due to you, my dears!"

Marjorie put down the knife, and looked across at him with sorrowful regret.

"Oh, Mr. Cartel!"

Mr. Cartel rubbed his hands with keen enjoyment at her dismay.

"And why, 'oh, Mr. Cartel!'" he said, with a chuckle. "Did you think that I was going to let you mope and pine for the want of a little music? Besides, you needn't look so sorrowful, Miss Marjorie; it's a piece of pure selfishness, for it's I and the missis will benefit by it. You can't play without us hearing it. I hope you'll like it. They say it's a fine tone. And you needen't think anything of it. I've had a very good week in the city, as your poor

father used to say, and I've cleared two—ah, half a dozen Broadwoods. What's the matter, Miss Bessie?" for Bessie had begun to sob.

Marjorie went around to him and put her hand upon his arm—the thin, small arm that had done such knight's service in her behalf.

"I am so sorry you should have done this," she said, and her lips quivered. "I am afraid you will think us ungrateful; but—but will you read that, Mr. Cartel? You will not misunderstand us will you?" and she put the advertisement and letters in his hand.

With knit brow he read them, read them over twice; then looked at her, consternation and indignation battling for the mastery.

"What!" he exclaimed at last. "You don't mean this? It's a joke, Miss Marjorie, isn't it?" and he laughed; but Marjorie's sorrowful look of appeal alarmed him.

"What!" he almost shouted. You—you—my master's daughter, going as school-mistress!"

"I was one before," said Marjorie, pleadingly.

"I know," he said. "But I don't care for that. That—that was before all the money was made. Now it is different. Oh, Miss Marjorie, you don't want to break our hearts?"

Then Mrs. Cartel came forward.

"Oh, Miss Marjorie, you will do this?" she exclaimed, tearfully.

"What can I do?" answered Marjorie, sadly. "I cannot—cannot take advantage of your generosity! You would not wish me to be so dependent?"

"Dependent!" shouted the little man, his usually pale eyes all ablaze. "Why, this very house, this very coat I wear, I owe to your father. Wasn't I dependent on him when I went to him a little errand boy? Dependent! Who speaks of dependence? All I have is yours—we've no one else to live for but you. Do you want to break our hearts?"

"No," said Marjorie, "I only want to save my own from breaking, dear Mr. Cartel."

At this he turned to the fire and groaned. Mrs. Cartel cried silently in company with Bessie. It was a scene of love and devotion battling with pride.

"I can't think of it," groaned the honest fellow. "What reason is there for it? I see you are too proud to accept anything from your father's servant," he said, vehemently.

"No, no," cried Marjorie, "not proud, but just. It is not just that we should be burdens upon you. Oh, Mr. Cartel, do not—do not misunderstand us!"

It was a stormy and a painful scene. All the hopes and fond

expectations of the worthy couple were scattered to the winds. Mrs. Cartel cried until her eyes, fixed on Marjorie's pale, beautiful face, were red and swollen. Mr. Cartel raved and entreated in a breath, but at last Marjorie's sad, sorrowful wistfulness won the day, and before midnight she gained the victory.

Trembling and grumbling, he consented to read the letters again.

"Warley," he said. "Wiltshire," and he looked across at Mrs. Cartel, who had Bessie in her arms. "Humph! Well, if you are so determined, I suppose I must give in. I—I suppose you won't object to our going to Warley, too? What have we to live for? We've enough, the missis and I. If you mean to do this, why, we won't be left behind. Warley will suit us, eh, Mary? You go to-morrow. Well, I'll go with you; you will let me do that at least?"

On the morrow they started, Marjorie calm and thoughtful, her face serenely beautiful—too beautiful for a village school-mistress—Mr. Cartel sorrowfully resigned.

Warley is one of the outlaying villages to which a railway does not run. They travelled by rail to the nearest town, and there took the coach to their destination.

The coach, ere it set Marjorie and Mr. Cartel down at the vicarage, passed a pretty little school, from which the boys and girls were trooping after their morning's work. A little apart from it was a small cottage overgrown with Virginia creeper. It was—there was no doubt in Marjorie's mind—the school cottage.

With a grieved and serious face, Mr. Cartel helped his young princess out of the coach, and rang the vicarage bell. A trim, neatly capped servant answered it and conducted them into the library.

Mr. Cartel looked at Marjorie as the servant closed the door.

"It isn't too late yet, Miss Marjorie," he said, pleadingly, and with the air of a man leading a forlorn hope. "Say the word and we will go back in the next coach to London."

But Marjorie smiled, and shook her head, and the vicar entered. He was a man of little more than middle age, if indeed past that mystic period, and as he entered he glanced from Mr. Cartel to Marjorie with something like surprise.

"Miss Deane?" he said.

"I am Miss Deane," answered Marjorie, bowing.

The vicar eyed her with the remnant of his first surprise.

"Ah, yes—yes of course," he said, rather vaguely. "Pardon me but I expected to see an older lady."

Marjorie colored prettily. Mr. Cartel caught at the hope, and broke in before Marjorie could speak.

"Yes, just so, sir. Miss Deane is such a young lady."

"So I see," said the vicar, with a smile, as he put a chair for each of his visitors.

"Quite a young lady," said poor Mr. Cartel, "and perhaps you will think her much too young to undertake your school."

The vicar looked curiously from one to the other.

"I don't know that," he said.

And Mr. Cartel nearly groaned.

"I think I am quite competent," said Marjorie, quietly, her large, dark eyes fixed on the vicar's face.

The vicar nodded. As Bessie had predicted, the dark, eloquent eyes told at once.

"I have read your testimonials. I know Mrs. Brown, and I have communicated with her. She tells me that sudden reverses——"

"Just so, sir," said Mr. Cartel, breaking in. "Miss Deane is the daughter of Mr. Peter Deane—you may have heard of him?"

The vicar shook his head politely, his eyes fixed on Marjorie's downcast face.

Mr. Cartel shook his head at such sublime ignorance.

"Well, sir," he said, "you may not have heard of him, but Mr. Peter Deane was one of the richest men in the city of London."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. And it is only in consequence of sudden reverses that Miss Deane is in this position. And I may add that it is only by her own wish, and by no necessity, that she is here to-day."

"I understand," said the rector, with a quiet smile, and a glance from one to the other, "Miss Deane prefers to be independent."

Mr. Cartel groaned.

"You may put it that way, sir. Yes, sir, she prefers to be independent."

The vicar looked steadily at the beautiful, downcast face.

"May I be permitted to say that I admire such a spirit?" he said.

Marjorie raised her eyes with a grateful glance.

Mr. Cartel merely groaned again.

"As I said before," went on the vicar, "I know Mrs. Brown; I was curate in the parish; and she writes me a letter recommending Miss Deane in the highest terms. May I ask what relationship you bear to her?"

"I am no relation," said Mr. Cartel, shortly. "I was only her father's confidential clerk; but Miss Deane permits me to be a friend—up to a certain point. It is not my fault if she does not go further. It is not at all necessary that she should do this!"

"I see," said the vicar. "I quite understand. It is your wish to accept this situation, Miss Deane?"

"It is," said Marjorie, in a low voice.

The vicar rose and took a turn or two up and down the library. Then he came back and joined them—a smile on his face.

"Then I think we may conclude the business. I shall be happy to engage Miss Deane as mistress of Warley school, if she thinks proper to accept the engagement.

"Thank you," said Marjorie. Then she raised her eyes. "I have a sister—a young sister—she may live with me?"

The vicar bowed,

"That is a matter for your own decision," he said, with a smile. "Now let us go and get some luncheon. You must excuse a bachelor's menage, Miss Deane. My establishment consists of a house-keeper, a cook and a boy. Warley is an out-of-the-world place. I trust you will be happy—you and your sister, I should say. Mr.——"

"Cartel," said Mr. Cartel, with a grunt.

"Mr. Cartel need not fear that we shall not try to make you happy."

And he took her hand upon his arm and led her into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT SIR ROLAND WAS DOING.

OF all the so-called fast clubs that have sprung into existence during the past half century, there is none faster than "The Daws." Their club-house lies in a quiet street off St. James street—a street so quiet that the unsophisticated and uninitiated would scarcely believe that a club of any sort existed there.

And yet, for all its quiet surroundings and an unpretending exterior, the Daws is and was one of the most exclusive clubs in London. A prince of the blood-royal is and ever has been its president, dukes are on its committee, and it always has for its *chef* the highest-salaried cook in England.

To be a member of the Daws is to be a member of that mysterious upper ten thousand which rules that part of London known as "society."

It was long past midnight—the night on which Marjorie had decided to accept the situation of school-mistress at Warley—and the Daws was at its height. Footmen, in the gold and blue of the club livery, were hard at work conveying the far-famed claret and

grilled bones to the card-room. Hard-worked members of Parliament were smoking their last cigar in the waiting-room, hard-worked do-nothings were lounging in the drawing-room, and, hardest-worked of all, the card-players were playing in the card-room.

That famous game, baccarat, was in full swing. At one table sat a young duke, or mere boy, with a rent-roll of fifty thousand, which, large income as it was, was all too small for his spendthrift habits. With him was a legislator, one of the men to whom England looked with confident hope, and next him sat Reginald Montresser.

Handsome, beautiful as ever, Reginald reclined in the satin chair, without a wrinkle on his smooth brow or a shadow of care in his eye. He had been losing for two long hours, losing steadily, but his mien was unchanged, his light, buoyant air undisturbed. Between the deals he talked with the duke with careless nonchalance, talked of politics, the drama, anything and everything, with the same airy grace. Presently some one near the duke mentioned a familiar name.

"Where is Chesterton to-night?"

It was far beyond night by this time, but no matter.

Reginald smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. He ought to be here by this time. His mother is in town; perhaps he is there."

"I hope he'll come," said the young duke; "I want to give him his revenge. He lost heavily last night."

"Yes," assented Reginald, with a smile, "he has lost heavily, but I don't think he cares."

"No," said the duke, "that's the extraordinary part of it! You can never take a rise out of Chesterton. Win or lose, it seems the same to him. What's the matter with him, Reginald?"

"Don't know," said Reginald, shuffling the cards, "he's a mystery. He's my cousin, yes: but he's a mystery all the same."

"Some love affair," I suppose," said the duke, with a smile. "Don't believe in love myself: make you unfit for cards. Sorry for Chesterton! He used to be such a jolly good fellow. Hello! there he comes!"

Notwithstanding their natural abstraction, there was an under-current of interest among the card-players as a tall figure entered the room, and stood looking from one table to another, and as he stood men looked up with curious glances.

For Sir Roland Chesterton's name had been on many lips during the past month, as the name of one who, unlike the prodigal, had returned to the world which, after ringing with his exploits, had been prepared to lose and forget him.

It is not often that the prodigal does return, but when he does it

may safely be affirmed that the last state is worse than the first, and with this difference, that whereas he used to take his wild diversions with enjoyment, now he takes them bitterly and wearily.

For the last month Sir Roland had been, as Reginald puts it, "going it." Not going it with the old buoyant hilarity, with the old keen sense of enjoyment, but with a steady intensity that was, as Reginald put it, "ferocious."

With a candid, unconcealed earnestness he had plunged into all the various modes of dissipation with which our modern fashionable world supplies us. There was one form which he avoided, and that was the intoxication of the flowing bowl. He drank little. It would have been better, according to Reginald, if he had drank more, for, if the flowing bowl does no other good, it certainly does drown the sorrow for the moment, let the cost be what it may.

Sir Roland did not drink, but he was ready for anything else, and more especially ready for the green tables in the comfortable card-room of the Daws.

Four weeks of bitter sorrow and cruel disappointment had passed over Marjorie's head, and left her unchanged; but the same could not be said of Sir Roland. As he stood, tall and stalwart in his evening dress, the carefully toned lights fell upon his face and showed how hard the time had gone with him.

He was thinner, he was almost gaunt, in fact; his dark eyes, somewhat stern at the best of times, gleamed with a fierce, though suppressed fire; his face was pale and set; his lips, under the heavy moustache, were fixed in a hard impassibility, and there was about the whole man that indescribable air of hopeless weariness which is so eloquent of the restless, dissatisfied soul.

To-night, or rather this morning, he had just come up by the mail from Melton, had snatched a couple of hours sleep in the railway carriage, which he had literally won by a hard day's riding. It was only by sheer exhaustion that he could get to sleep at all; it was only by incessant movement—in change of scene—that he could render life bearable.

Sometimes he found himself, in the rare intervals when he allowed himself to think unwillingly of the change that had come over him, wondering, with amazement, at the effect which a girl's treachery and falseness had brought upon him.

There were times when he was inclined to believe that he was actually and veritably bewitched, or why should this thing cling to him so stubbornly? Why, when he slept, did he dream that the soft, warm arms were around his neck, the sweet voice murmuring lovingly in his ear? Why, in his waking moments, did the brown eyes follow him about, accusingly, pleadingly?

No man could make a harder fight for it than he had done. He had plunged into every form of excitement without avail. He

might succeed in forgetting this bit of a girl, as he called her bitterly, for the time; but as surely as he sat down quietly, she came back to haunt and madden him.

Sometimes the wild, unsatisfied love gave place to a fierce self-reproach. He called himself a fool for acting as he had done. Why had he not stepped in between those two as they stood in the dark wood? Why had he not stepped in and wreaked his vengeance upon the man? He was a fool that he had let him go without a word, or—a blow! Besides—besides, who knows if he had so interfered that Marjorie would not have turned to him and sent the other adrift. It was true that the scene of her treachery would always have been with him, but still he would have kept her; and through all his misery he felt that it was not her treachery that tortured him so much as her loss. He had loved her—he loved her still, with the passionate love which a man, who has known the world, pours out on the woman who first reaches his heart. He had loved her and he had lost her, and do all he would he could not console himself.

As he stood, looking from table to table, nodding to this man and to that, a great weariness fell upon him, an infinite disgust. The sight of the exquisitely furnished room, the familiar faces, the very cards themselves, was distasteful and repellent. He had tried this form of dissipation and found it fail—fail utterly to bring him any amusement or satisfaction.

Win or lose, as the young duke had said, it was all one to the distracted man. He had lost heavily for three consecutive nights, so heavily that the rumors of his ill-luck had reached the house in Grosvenor square, where Lady Chesterton sat, unutterably miserable and wretched, listening to the stories of his wild life, and helpless to mend it.

Only once since she had been in town, and she had arrived three weeks ago, had he been near her, and then he had staid a bare quarter of an hour, had declined to live in the house, or even to dine with her, and had worn such an expression on his pale, stern face that she had not dared to put one of the questions or remonstrances which trembled on her lips.

Although he had lost Marjorie, although she had proved false and unworthy, he could not forgive his mother for prophesying her unworthiness, could not endure to meet the proud, sorrowful face that reminded him so vividly of Marjorie.

"Hello, Roland!" said Reginald. "Just got back? Had a good run?"

Roland nodded. Every eye was fixed upon him. "Yes, fairly so. I came by the mail."

The duke whistled.

"The mail! By George, Chesterton, you don't do things by

halves. You started yesterday, or was it the day before? One never knows which was yesterday. It's morning now, of course. And here you are back again! Don't you ever sleep?"

Roland smiled grimly.

"Not much," he answered. "What's the game?"

"Baccarat," answered Reginald, rising. "Come and take my place. "I've had the most confounded luck——"

Roland dropped into the seat wearily, and took up the cards, and Reginald signed to the footman to bring more champagne.

"You missed a good thing last night, Roland," said the duke. About the best ball of the season—wasn't it Montressor? Everybody there, and quite a fight for the best dances. I managed to get one from Miss Montressor by the skin of my teeth, and I shouldn't be surprised if I was called out by Graneland for it."

Roland looked up. The Marquis of Graneland was one of the best known, the most famous (or infamous, whichever you please,) men about town.

He was a shining light when Roland first made his entrance into the fashinable world, and had been to the fore many, many years before that. In fact, the age of the marquis was a standing topic of conversation.

"Is Graneland back?" he asked, with faint interest.

The duke nodded, and, glancing at Reginald, who had moved out of hearing, lowered his voice.

"Yes, and looking younger than ever, by George! They were saying last night that he was hard hit by Miss Montressor. I saw him dance four times with her. 'Pon my word, I think it's a case."

A slight frown crossed Roland's brown. He was not himself in love with Helen, but he knew the Marquis of Graneland, and——

"It's your deal," he said almost sharply.

The play went on until the wintry sun forced its way between the chinks of the heavy curtains, until the world awakened to life and activity, until even Reginald grew tired and sleepy.

"Haven't you had enough, you fellows?" he asked, coming up to the table.

Roland looked up, his pale face calm and impassive.

"Quite," he said, inclining his head.

"And so have I," said the duke. "Wonderfully bad luck yours is, Chesterton."

Roland smiled indifferently.

"It will change some day," he said. "Meanwhile,"—and he counted a roll of notes, for all losses are paid on the spot at the Daws.

A footman brought his hat, and helped him on with his coat, and Reginald took his arm.

"You must be awfully tired, old man," he said.

Roland shook his head.

"I ought to be," he said, "but I am not. Got forty winks in the carriage."

Reginald looked at him and shook his head.

"Aren't you—look here, Roland, I don't want to be intrusive, you know—but aren't you going it a little too strong, eh?"

Roland looked at him absently.

"How do you mean?" he asked. "What does it matter?"

"Well, I don't know," said Reginald, seriously. "It doesn't matter for some of us, I'll admit; it doesn't, for instance, much matter for a poor devil like me—I haven't much to lose, and when I've lost it, why, there I am where I was before. But you—it's a different thing with you, you know. What's the tune to-night."

"My loss?" said Roland, stopping to light a cigar. "I don't know. Don't care to try to recall. The time is gone, and that is the main thing."

"Some hundreds," said Reginald, gravely. "I know you have plenty at the back of you; but is it worth while?"

"Is anything worth while?" retorted Roland, with a hard laugh. "If you have discovered a game that is worth the candle, I wish to Heaven you would teach me to play it. You've turned moralist, Reginald. Isn't it something rather out of your line?"

Reginald blushed—actually blushed.

"By George!" he said, "I think it is, but it's only on your account, and—and—I say, what about Grosvenor square? Aren't you going to put up there?"

"No," answered Roland. "Mivart's is comfortable enough. Why should I?"

Reginald shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, Roland. Lady Chesterton has been dropping down on me like a stone-quarry. She thinks, as she says, that it's my fault that you're going the pace. Now——"

Roland broke in, with a hard, sarcastic laugh:

"And you promised to put in a word in season. Well, you've done it, and your task is done. Reginald, you are a good fellow, but you'll never earn your living as a preacher."

"I think you're right," said Reginald, candidly. "Where are you going now?"

"To breakfast," said Roland. "You had better come with me."

Reginald shook his head.

"No, I don't think I will. That is, I promised to look in at Grosvenor square early this morning."

Roland nodded.

"Very well," and he unlinked his arm.

The two men stood silent for a moment, then Roland, looking full into the handsome face, said, suddenly:

"Is this true about Helen and Graneland?"

Reginald shrugged his shoulders, and kicked the pavement gravely.

"I'm half afraid it is," he answered. I'd stop it if I could. It's not all Helen's fault."

Roland frowned.

"You mean it's partly mine?" he said.

Reginald flushed, and then looked gravely up at the frowning face of the other.

"If I am to speak the truth, I must say that—it is. It's absurd to blink the truth between us, you know. You could stop it if you liked. A word from you would do it. Mind, I don't ask you to say it—you know that—but you put the question to me, and I have answered it. Of course you could stop it. I don't believe any other man could."

Roland stood silent and grim, and as he stood, the London street faded from his view, and in its place rose the sweet face with its dark, loving eyes. If he could only get rid of it—forget it!

With an impatient movement he turned to Reginald.

"Tell my mother I will come home to-day—dine, perhaps. And —and—tell Helen——"

He broke off suddenly, held out his hand, and then strode away.

Reginald looked after him for a moment, and then made his way to Grosvenor square, where Helen Montressor was staying with Lady Chesterton.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PREPARATORY.

BREAKFAST was on the table as he entered, and he buttoned his overcoat over his dress-coat with a half-guilty air.

"Lady Chesterton is up, sir," said the footman, "but Miss Montressor is not down yet."

"I'd better go home and dress, I think," said Reginald, but at that moment Lady Chesterton entered, and went up to him.

"Reginald!" she said, and then she looked beyond him wistfully. "Is Roland with you?" was her first cry.

"No," answered Reginald; he has gone to Mivart's. I have just left him. Helen is not down yet?"

"No," said Lady Chesterton; "she is tired. You have just left him? How did he look? I am very anxious about him, Reg-

inald. They tell me the most dreadful stories about him!" and the proud old lady compressed her lips.

Reginald looked down.

"He is going the pace," he admitted reluctantly.

Lady Chesterton bit her lips, and went to the table. "It is dreadful!" she said with a sigh. "And he was so quiet and steady! I thought that all—all this sort of thing had been given up. It is all that miserable girl!"

Reginald shrugged his shoulders.

"I am afraid it is. I never saw a man so knocked over. I couldn't have believed it was Roland."

Lady Chesterton groaned.

"It is driving me mad, Reginald! At times I could almost wish that things had taken their course. Anything would have been better than for Roland to have taken it to heart so."

"It is not my fault, said Reginald."

"I am sure you do the best you can. But to go so mad about? for he is mad—he must be! Lady Sernon told me last night that he had lost four thousand pounds to the Duke of Smalter. Is that true?"

"I don't know. He has lost rather heavily," answered Reginald, evasively.

"I don't care so much about the money," said the proud old woman. "Roland can afford to lose. It is not the money I care about; it is Roland. He never gambled—never in this way, anyhow, Reginald."

"Yes."

"Do you think he knows what has happened to these people?"

"No, I am sure he does not. He never looks at the papers, or if he does it is in a careless sort of way. He knows nothing. Of course he thinks they are still down there."

Lady Chesterton mused.

"You know that I have bought the place?

"No! Have you?"

"Yes, bought it. I had some money to put by, and I bought it at the sale; and as the land has come back to us, I think I shall pull the house down. I hate the sight of it!"

"I wouldn't do that. It isn't such a bad house."

"I loathe it! Yes, I bought it, and there it is—the land that ought never to have gone from us!"

Reginald nodded.

"And what has become of—of the girls?" he asked.

The old lady made a scornful gesture.

"I neither know nor care. They have gone—disappeared. Mrs. Boothe—Mrs. Gore-Boothe, as she calls herself, came to me and cried—actually cried about them, and wanted to know what had become of them. They have disappeared."

"She wasn't a bad-looking girl, Lady Chesterton," said Reginald, musingly.

The old lady compressed her lips haughtily.

"A round face and a pair of dark eyes," she said scornfully. You have a strange idea of beauty. I could never see anything in her to catch the simplest of men. But Roland! Now, Helen—Helen is beautiful!"

Reginald nodded his head.

"You have heard this about Helen and Graneland?"

"I'd rather see her in her grave," said the old lady, grimly.

"Graneland is the best match of the season," said Reginald, musingly. "there isn't a girl that wouldn't jump at the chance. Helen——"

Lady Chesterton leaned forward in her chair, and beat the table with her thin white fingers.

"Helen will accept him unless—— There is only one person who could prevent it, and he is playing madman for the sake of a miserable girl utterly unworthy of being named in the same breath with Helen"—she groaned.—"Do you think he will come to-night? Cannot you bring him?"

"He said he would come, but I do not know. I'll try," he answered, but not very hopefully. "I'll try. Of course I should like to see Helen settled, and Roland too; it would please me; you know that."

He went to his club. Then he had breakfast and walked around to Mivart's; but Roland was out—where the faithful valet did not know.

With all the rest of the world, the valet was fully cognisant—and more fully cognisant—of the wild doings of his master, and the good fellow's face was as grave as a sexton's as he answered Reginald's inquiries.

"When will he come in again, Mr. Reginald? Ah, who can say, sir? I never know. Sir Roland is'nt as he used to be, Mr. Reginald. He never went out without telling me when to expect him back. Not that I complain, sir; you will understand that; but—I'm afraid there will be a bad end to this, Mr. Reginald. It isn't like the old days. They were pretty—well, wild, but he'd take some rest then. Now I can't get him to take any rest at all. He'll be ill, Mr. Reginald. No man could stand such a racket for long."

Reginald shook his head in sympathy with the devoted fellow, and sauntered off. Perhaps, after all, it would have been better if Marjorie Deane had become Lady Chesterton.

They dined at seven o'clock at Grosvenor Square, and [illegible] hour Lady Chesterton sat in the drawing-room, upright in her stiff-backed chair, her anxious eyes fixed on the door, her fingers beating an impatient tattoo on the arm of the chair.

Presently the door opened and Helen Montressor entered. There was a faint flush on her cheeks, a subdued light in her eyes; but both flush and light died away as she looked around the room and saw only the haughty old woman.

With the old graceful, gliding step, she crossed the room, and bent to kiss the white forehead. Then she stood and looked with a smile into the tall mirror.

She was perfectly dressed to-night, that is artistically perfect in taste. Not too richly nor conspicuously. The material was of soft yielding texture that showed her exquisite figure in all its graceful curves and undulations. The color was as unobtrusive as the fabric, a subdued tint that heightened the delicate light of her dazzling complexion. Little clouds of old lace faintly outlined the white throat and encircled the exquisitely shaped arms. Never had the fair loveliness which artists had painted and poets sang, shone more palpably than to-night. A soft wistfulness curved the delicate lines of the sensitive mouth; a subdued tenderness sat enthroned in the deep blue of the long-fringed eyes.

Even the haughty old woman looked at her with silent admiration. Surely there could be only one man able to withstand the charms of such exquisite beauty, and that man—this mad son of hers.

The dinner gong sounded, and Lady Chesterton looked up at the clock with a heavy sigh.

"He will not come," she said, despairingly.

The beauty looked down and raised her arched brows.

"And Reginald?"

"He will not come without him. Let us go in."

They went into the dining-room and soup was put on. Then the door opened, and the footman said:

"Sir Roland, my lady."

And his tall figure appeared in the doorway. Lady Chesterton looked up with something like a gasp, and half rose; but suddenly recovered self-control and summoned a smile.

Helen looked up, too, and the flush came back for a moment to her face, and the light to her eyes. In her heart there sprang up hope and the determination to conquer.

She knew the question Roland had asked Reginald about her and Graneland, she knew the frame of mind he was in, and she was prepared.

Would she win? It was this night or never!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE BEAUTY.

WITH his usual self-possession, and without any show of embarrassment, Sir Roland crossed the dining room to where his mother sat, and kissed her; then he held out his hand to Helen.

As he did so, both women remarked—the old one with sorrow, the young one with a fierce jealousy—the haggard and the weary face.

"Don't move," he said, as Helen rose to give him the end of the table. "I'll sit here at the side; I'm a guest you know. Quite well, Helen?"

"Quite," she answered with a smile. "And you?"

He nodded carelessly, and took up the menu. In the expectation of his coming, Lady Chesterton had ordered his favorite dishes, and as he looked down the elaborate list, he knew this.

"I'm afraid I'm too late," he said. "I'm glad you didn't wait."

"We'd given you up," said Helen, lightly—as lightly as if she had seen him every day for the past month—as lightly as if nothing had occurred. "We were just lamenting our solitary state. Where is Reginald?"

"Reginald?" he said absently. "Oh, yes. He called twice at Mivart's to day, I think. Was he to be here? I got in only just in time to dress."

Then he began on the soup, and they left him to himself for a little while. By the time he had finished, Lady Chesterton had taken her cue from Helen, and made an effort to imitate her light carelessness.

He was to be treated as if nothing had occurred. Even the butler caught the tone, and hovered about him with an earnestly affectionate obsequiousness, taking care that he obtained his favorite dishes and favorite wines. They treated him as if he were a prince, who had suddenly returned from a long travel in foreign lands, and as one who could not be made too much of.

And then, when the fish had come and gone, Helen began to talk. She did not ask him questions; she put him to no trouble; she talked to amuse. Now it is a difficult thing to withstand a beautiful woman when she is silent; but a beautiful woman who is also clever, and who exerts her cleverness in your behalf, is simply irresistible.

For some time Roland sat and listened, with an absent, wearied expression; but gradually, as the dinner progressed—a dinner carefully chosen with a view to his taste, accompanied by rare vintages—his apathy yielded, his coldness melted beneath the sunny warmth of her beauty and the irresistible charm of her manner.

Lady Chesterton, watching her closely, was too clever to spoil the effect by joining in the conversation, and merely threw in a word here and there.

Gradually, but surely, the charm began to work; the exquisitely furnished, yet home-like room, the beautiful woman exerting herself to please, and yet concealing evidence of effort, began to tell. And, not once or twice, but often, the stern lips relaxed into a smile, the cloud of weariness lifted from his brow, his lips grew softer, and his voice less harsh.

For the moment he almost forgot those dark, loving eyes, with the wistful tenderness and half hidden passion.

Not until she had won the oft-repeated smile from him did Helen rise, and as he opened the door for her and his mother, she looked over her shoulder and glanced up into his face.

"Don't be long, will you? I am going to Lady Longley's."

He inclined his head, then said, suddenly:

"Don't go to-night."

"No! Why not?" she asked, with a smile. "Well, I will think of it."

He went back to his chair, and the butler brought in a bottle of the old Chesterton port, and uncorked it carefully.

"What is this?" asked Sir Roland.

"The '48, Sir Roland. I think you will find it in good condition. The Chateau Lafitte is in town if you would like it."

"No," said Sir Roland, "leave the port," and he threw himself back in an easy-chair.

Meanwhile the two women sat over the fire, Lady Chesterton anxious and wistful, Helen Montressor confident and smiling.

"How old he looks!" murmured the grim old woman. "He has aged five years in these few weeks. It kills me to see him, Helen."

The beauty smiled, and laid her hand caressingly on the bent shoulder.

"Don't let him see that you are anxious," she said, in a low voice.

"How can I help it? How could any mother look on her son so changed, and appear unconcerned?"

"And yet that is what you must do. We must not frighten him, unless we wish to lose him."

Lady Chesterton looked up anxiously.

"No, we must not lose him! Helen, I have every confidence in

you. Oh, I have noticed how you influence him! Save him if you can for my sake."

The beauty smiled significantly.

"I will do so for my own," she said.

"Do you think he knows anything—anything about the girl?" asked Lady Chesterton.

"No, I am sure he does not," replied Helen. "If he knew anything about her he would have sought her—followed her, and he has not done that. No, at all costs we must keep that from him."

Lady Chesterton looked up.

"Helen, you have been very good to me. You will save him if you can."

"I will make a strong effort," was the smiling reply.

Meanwhile Roland sipped his '48 port. It is difficult for a man to feel dissatisfied and unhappy, with such wine following after such a dinner. For the first time for a month Marjorie's sweet, bewitching face paled before his mental vision. For the first time for a month the restless weariness gave place to a reposeful calm.

He finished the half bottle of priceless wine, and went into the drawing-room.

An air of restful repose seemed to pervade the room. On one side of the fire his mother sat in her high-backed chair, on the other Helen Montressor lounged on a spacious ottoman; the tea-urn steamed on a table between them.

As he entered, Helen gathered her long train together and made room for him.

"Tea is only just in," she said; "let me give you some," and she filled a dainty Sevres cup for him, and put it in his hand with a smile.

Roland stretched out his long legs before the fire and sipped his tea. Lady Chesterton appeared to be dozing.

"You are quite a stranger," said Helen, smiling upward at him. "Why do you not come to see us oftener?"

He looked at the fire silently for a moment.

"I have been about a good deal lately."

"If you have been amusing yourself, that is quite sufficient excuse."

He smiled grimly.

"I don't know that I have been amusing myself. Does any one between the ages of fifteen and sixty ever amuse himself?"

She laughed softly.

"Yes; I do. I have been amusing myself, and I am not sixty—quite."

He raised his eyes slowly and let them rest on her. No, she was not sixty. She was young, too young for a professional beauty. He looked at her with a sense of pleasure which was quite novel to

him. There was something about her to-night which struck him as quite novel and strange. He certainly thought he knew the face most minutely—as indeed, did most people, seeing that her portrait could be bought, in many attitudes and with divers expressions, in every fancy shop in London; he certainly thought he knew the face, and yet to-night there was an added charm to it, a touch of tenderness and soft melancholy, that was like balm to his wearied spirit. He thought that it was because she had grown more beautiful—in reality it was because he, though far from feeling it, was worn out, body and spirit; and the exquisite loveliness told upon him like toned music.

He did not know it; he would have laughed at any one who had presumed to tell him so, but the hard life which would have crushed a less iron-like constitution, had done its work even with him. Incessant dissipation and restless nights are far more fatal than broken hearts.

"Let me give you some more tea," she said. "Then I must go."

He raised himself and looked up.

"Go? Where? Oh, yes, to the Longloys. Must you go to-night?"

She hesitated, and moved the dainty hand-screen to and fro.

"I am afraid I have half promised."

"Half-promises are less reliable, even, than pie crust. When did you promise?"

She hesitated again, and shifted the screen so that he could not see her face.

"Lord Crane[illegible]," she replied, with a sort of falter in her voice.

Roland raised his head and frowned. Then he rose slowly and stood with his back to the fire, looking down at the hearth-rug.

"They are to have a large party for this time of year," she went on. "I fancy it was gotten up for him. Will you not come with me?"

"No," he abruptly answered.

She did not look offended at the time. Indeed, rather a faint light of satisfaction gleamed in her blue eyes. If she could but pique him into anger and resentment, she would gain all she wished.

"No, I suppose not," she said. "You must be tired. You were hunting yesterday, were you not? They said you had a wonderful run. Do you like your new horse?"

He nodded absently, his mind halted on the balance. Should he ask her to stay, or should he let her go, and resign her to the old, world-worn *roue?*

With restless impatience he went to the window and back again, and stood looking down at her as she sat apparently serenely

reposeful, but in reality with fast-beating heart, for she saw, with womanly instinct, the struggle that was going on within his heart.

Suddenly she turned her head and looked up at him as he stood over her.

"Would you please ring and ask them to send the brougham?"

He went to the bell, but he did not ring it; instead, he turned back to his old place, and said, in a low voice:

"Do not go to-night. Stay—for my sake."

She looked up at him with a faint, pleading smile in her eyes, and then bent her head, saying, softly:

"I will if you wish it." Then, with a quick change of tone, as if to hide too palpable a feeling, she went on, "But you must come and sit down. You are like Banquo's ghost, you will not down."

He smiled again, and dropped into his old chair.

A servant came in and removed the tea-service. Lady Chesterton roused herself.

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "Have you any news, Roland?"

"No," he answered; "we were talking about ghosts."

"A cheerful topic, is it not?" laughed Helen. "It ought to be accompanied by slow music," and she rose and went to the piano, humming softly.

The old lady rose stiffly, and murmuring something about her work, left the room. Roland opened the door for her and then retired to his chair. As he did so Helen began to play a low, soft-toned sonata, that floated through the room in waves of dreamy music. Then, without stopping, she glided into a song, and again there was something in her voice which struck him as new and strange. It acted as a spell, or a subtle charm, and when she ceased he said, gently:

"Do not stop; sing something more."

Her fingers wandered over the keys lightly, and she sang again. Then she moved back to the fire and stood behind him, half-leaning on his chair.

Something, some indescribable feeling compelled him to turn his head and look up at her, and as he did so he met her eyes bent down upon him, with a sad, wistful tenderness that sent the blood to his face and back again, leaving him, as he rose and bent over her, pale and excited.

"Helen," he said, in a low voice.

With a quick glance she turned away, her eyes tremulous with a sudden moisture, her lips quivering. She turned away her face, her hand faltering at the bracelet on her arm as if seeking some employment to hide her agitation. Her hand trembled so that the bracelet came unfastened and fell, with a dull clink, to the floor.

He stooped and recovered it, and held it up for a moment; then he took her hand and slipped the trinket over her soft, warm arm. As he did so he felt it tremble beneath his touch.

He looked up.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in a low voice.

She raised her eyes and let them rest for a moment, meekly pleading, on his.

"Why are you angry with me?" she murmured, brokenly.

"Angry?" he echoed, his eyes fixed on hers, his spirit troubled by the distress in her beautiful face. "Angry, I am not—yes, I am angry—I am sick and disappointed. What is this about Graneland, Helen?"

She looked aside, and attempted to draw her hand slowly from his, but he held it firmly in his hot fingers.

"What is it?" he repeated. "Is this that they are rumoring true? Can it be possible that—that——"

She turned her head still further away; her long lashes swept her face, now pale as a lily; her bosom heaved with what he might well mistake for distress.

"Is it true," he sternly questioned now, "that he intends to ask you to become his wife?"

She paused a moment; then faltered almost inaudibly:

"Yes, it is true. He has asked me."

He dropped her hand, and paced to and fro, and she shrank into a chair with meekly bent head.

"Helen," he said, standing over her, "do you know what you are doing? Do you know this man? He is old enough to be your father's father, bad enough——"

He paused, for with a sudden gesture she looked up at him.

"I know. Why should I care? Roland, do not reproach me. I—I cannot bear a hard word, an unkind look from you." And as she spoke she put out one hand, and laid it timidly, imploringly on his arm, her face turned up to him with passionate pleading.

Blame him if you will—call him fickle and unstable; but while you blame remember that the face upturned to his was that of the most beautiful woman of her day; that the voice possessed as subtle a power to charm as Cleopatra's of old; and her soft hand caressed and courted caress; and, finally, that the man was storm-tossed and weary.

Under the eloquence of that soft white hand, which clung to his arm so appealingly, his resolution waxed fainter and fainter.

"Helen," he murmured, "this must not be! Heaven, it shall not be! It were better that you should marry even me than such a man as Graneland."

A vivid crimson flooded her face, and her eyes drooped.

"Yes," he said, "much, much better." And he bent over her

for a moment in silence, his eyes fixed on her downcast face. Then he said, in a low voice, "Helen, will you, knowing all that has passed, be my wife?"

For a moment she remained motionless, then she turned her head, and, with still downcast eyes, touched his hand with her lips.

A man must be colder than ice to withstand such a caress from such a woman.

With a sudden thrill he bent over her, and, taking her into his arms, looked into her eyes.

"Helen!" he exclaimed, almost hoarsely, "Helen, is this true? Do you love me? For Heaven's sake, tell me the truth! Do not you be false also!"

For answer she met his fierce, questioning gaze with one of passionate tenderness.

"Do you doubt me?" she murmured. "Roland, you know I love you! I have always loved you!"

And slowly, very slowly, she wound her arms around his neck and put her lips to his in one, long, lingering kiss.

Half an hour afterward the door opened and Reginald entered.

"Hello!" he said, nodding to Roland, who stood leaning over Helen's chair, his hand, from which hers had suddenly slipped, toying with the fringe of her shawl. "Hello, you here? I had a pretty dance! Your valet said he thought you had gone to the theatre. Are you ready Helen?"

She looked up with a soft smile and a faint blush.

"I—I don't think I am going, Reginald."

"No!" he said. "Then what on earth did you mean by insisting upon my taking you? Not going, eh?"

"No," said Roland, with a smile that was still rather grim. "I can't spare her to-night, Reginald."

Reginald looked from one to the other; Helen rose slowly and crossed toward the door, but Roland took her hand in his and detained her.

"Helen has promised to be my wife, Reginald," he said.

Reginald started, and, with an unfeigned expression of satisfaction, held out his hand; and as Sir Roland released her to take it, Helen Montressor, with one swift glance of triumph at Reginald, glided from the room and up the stairs into Lady Chesterton's room.

The old lady was sitting before the fire, her hands resting idly in her lap. The beauty went softly forward and stood before her with a smile on her face.

Lady Chesterton looked up with a questioning, half-muttered word, half-excited glance.

"What is it, Helen! What do you want?"

"I have come to ask if you will have me for a daughter, Lady Chesterton," she said, with mock humility.

The old woman put her hands on the sides of her chair and attempted to rise, but she fell back and stared at the beautiful, mocking face.

"Helen," she gasped, "are you playing with me?"

The beauty laughed softly.

"No," she said, "it is true. We have won the game. I, and not Miss Marjorie Deane, shall be Roland's wife!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHEN SPRING HAD COME.

WINTER had gone at last. Like the sullen old man that he is, he had retreated grudgingly, with slow, lagging step before the advancing, all-conquering Spring-maiden. But he had gone at last, and the meadows long imprisoned by his strong hand, gleamed greenly in the warm sun; trees put forth their buds, with a tinge that grew into strength with each succeeding day, and the birds sang out their advent song of summer.

So warm was the air, bearing upon its bosom the familiar sounds of country life, the lowing of the cattle passing down the hill to be milked, the murmur of innumerable bees, the shouts and laughter of the school-children on the green, that Marjorie leaned out of the old-fashioned casement window, and drank in with peaceful welcome the caressing breeze.

Very lovely her face looked, clothed in its rapt expression of serene enjoyment, and framed by the wisteria that clustered in thick bunches all around the window.

With her small white hands clasped loosely on the sill, she leaned forward and looked down the valley. Spring, that had worked so many miracles to the land, had been generous to her, and had touched the face, that had been pale as the lily all through the long winter, with its rosy fingers, and left a delicate, peach-like bloom upon it.

If it had also imparted a gleam of its joyous brightness to the large, dark eyes, there would have been nothing wanting to win for the beautiful face the coveted title of "happy." But even spring's subtle powers are limited, and there was a look of wistful weariness which defied even its magic.

Never for a moment, though the lips and the eyes themselves smiled, did that look leave her. There were those who considered that expression the secret charm of her face.

It was this vague, faint touch of sadness, of suppressed wistfulness, which attracted those who saw her for the first time—attracted and held them as by a spell. It was in the eyes where the secret lay—her laugh, though rare, was buoyant enough, her voice as clear and sometimes as gay as of old; but those who were given to watching her, saw that dreamy look that started into the dark eyes whenever their owner was silent and in repose.

And there were many who were given to watching her. Warley was not a large place, but to nearly all, old and young, Marjorie was an object of interest—and of importance.

When it was made known that the vicar had chosen a young lady—a mere girl to be the school-mistress, and when it became apparent that the young girl was to be accompanied by her sister only, and that sister still younger than herself, there was no little shaking of heads and wagging of tongues, from the squire's lady to Mrs. Pinch at the post-office.

But the vicar met all doubts or objections, expressed or implied, with a quiet smile of confidence. And before long, Warley was compelled to admit that his confidence was not misplaced. The most critical could not but own that the school thrived, the most censorious could pick no flaws in the manners and conduct of the girls. And they were critical to a degree.

"We couldn't be more closely inspected, Marjorie," said Bessie, "if we were a couple of wax figures in Madame Tussaud's. What do they think we are going to do? Dance the can-can on the village green, or smoke cigars in the high street?"

When it was found that there was no smoking of cigars or dancing of the can-can on the green, but that, on the contrary, the two girls lived the lives of nuns, and were rather too reserved than otherwise, Warley swung around, and was preparing to make idols of them, especially when it cropped out that they were the daughters of the great Mr. Deane.

The squire's lady went down to the cottage in her chariot, and filled up the little sitting-room, which Marjorie had made more tastefully artistic than was that great lady's own drawing-room. Then the brewer's wife called, and all the little constellations that revolved around these two planets called in their turn.

"They are two ladies, my dear Mr. Cumming," said the squire's wife. "Positively quite ladies!" and the vicar smiled. "And the elder one is really beautiful. Such a sweet face!"

Still the vicar remained silent.

"It is dreadful they should be brought so low in the world!" went on the great lady. "The younger one—Bessie I think they

called her—let out casually that they had lived in the house adjoining the Chestertons, and that they knew them. I wanted to ask her more particularly, but caught her sister glancing at her, and the little one blushed and held her tongue. Really, I think we ought to do something for them."

"Something for them?" said the vicar, with the smile that always puzzled his parishioners. "In what way?"

"Well, you know," said the squire's wife, hesitatingly, "I think we ought to take them into our set, and make it pleasant for them."

Mr. Cumming nodded slowly, and a doubtful smile broke over his handsome face.

"Yes," he said, "that would be very well if—if they were agreeable to the arrangement; but——"

"Oh, nonsense!" said the great lady, "of course, they would be only too pleased. Two young girls like that would be only too glad to see a little pleasure. I shall ask them to dine with us."

"Do," said the vicar, and he smiled, and was not at all surprised when the great lady came to him the next day to announce, with mingled despair and indignation, that Miss Deane had respectfully but firmly declined the invitation.

"Here is her note. Quite a—proper kind of note, and very—very respectful. She says 'she feels that in their position they cannot enter into our society.' That is all. It annoys me."

But though it had not amazed Mr. Cumming, he had put on his hat and walked down to the silent cottage.

"I hear you have declined Mrs. Greening's invitation," he had said.

And Marjorie had looked up from her chair by the fire, where she was sitting, mending one of Bessie's dresses, and had smiled an assent.

"Is that—well, wise?" he had asked, smiling down at her as he leaned against the table, his tall form almost touching the ceiling, his handsome face full of respectful earnestness.

"I think so," Marjorie had answered. "Yes, I think so, under the circumstances. Besides, I do not wish to go."

He inclined his head.

"Of course that settles it; but your sister?"

"Bessie," Marjorie had said, with a sudden hesitation. "No, Bessie is too young, and—and—it would only make her—well, not dissatisfied, but—she is quite happy now, I think."

"I understand," he had said. "I quite understand."

"And you think I am right?"

"Yes, I think you are always right, Miss Deane."

And Marjorie had laughed, and he had colored and laughed, too.

"That sounds very much like flattery, Mr. Cumming, and reminds me of one of our copy-book headlines, 'Praise to the face is open disgrace,' whatever that may mean."

He remained silent for a moment, and then put his second question:

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No," Marjorie had said, and her large eyes had softened and become eloquently grateful. "Nothing, indeed, nothing. You have already done so much."

"Nonsense!" he had retorted, almost impatiently. "You will not permit me to do anything. I am half inclined to think I ought to preach you a sermon on pride, Miss Deane."

"Am I proud, do you think?" she had asked.

"Very," he had said, as he held out his hand and then he had gone.

That had been in the winter, and now spring had come around, and still the question was always on his lips, and, more than that, in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"CAN I do anything for you?" had been the question on the lips of the vicar so many times, and more than once he had felt grieved by the pride which repelled all his efforts in her behalf.

But he did what he could. Not a week of the long winter passed without a bunch of hot-house flowers from the vicarage conservatory; not a day went by without a visit from him.

It was wonderful how often he found time to drop in at the school, and it was singular how often, on his daily walk, he found himself outside the cottage-gate, talking to Marjorie, as she stood in the little garden or sat by the window.

With Bessie he at once established a perfect understanding. Bessie, blue-eyed and buoyant, full of fun—which not even the trouble could quench—at once took to the handsome, good-natured vicar.

He lent her books, sent her the new magazines, gave her lessons in skating and lawn-tennis, and was, as Bessie said, one day, like a brother.

As a matter of fact, Bessie had never been happier in her life than now; certainly not so happy in the days of Harley House and grandeur. Though Marjorie refused all invitations to dinner for both of them, she did not make any objection to Bessie going out

to teas and small festivities; and Bessie, long b... the winter was over, was quite a popular personage, and welcome not only at the squire's, but at the doctor's and at the lawyer's, and at every house which she visited.

Yet, notwithstanding, the strong bond of love between the two girls was never loosened for an hour. There was no one in the wide world, in Bessie's eyes, like Marjorie, and Marjorie watched over her with all the old loving care and solicitude.

As Mrs. Greening said, it was a treat to see the two girls together; the bright young blue eyes looking up, with the old dainty smile at the lovely face of the elder sister.

"Oh, no, there is no one in the world like Marjorie," said Bessie one day to Mr. Cumming. "Of course you don't know her as well as I do, and you think that she is rather quiet and reserved; but, ah!"—and she drew a breath of vast significance—"if you saw her as I do sometimes, you would say that she is just the cleverest, brightest, most beautiful creature in existence."

"I dare say I should, Miss Bessie," he had answered, looking down with a musing face. "I dare say I should. Do you mean me to understand that your sister is not always happy, that it is only sometimes she is as bright as you say?" he asked.

But, Bessie, who knew that no word was to be said of the past, took alarm, and turned the question aside.

"Marjorie is always happy, of course, because she is always good."

And she looked up archly at him.

"Quite right, Miss Bessie," he said, with a smile in return; "only the good are happy, and——"

"Then how happy I ought to be!" exclaimed the irrepressible minx.

Marjorie leaned out of the window, looking down the valley on this spring evening, the voices of the children on the green mingling with the lowing of cows; and a quiet, dreamy feeling of peace stole over her. The world was so far away beyond those hills, tho past had glided away from her so noiselessly, that on such evenings as this she could almost persuade herself that there were no such places as Chesterton Wold and Harley House, and that Sir Roland Chesterton was a phantom of a dream.

Suddenly from below rose the clear treble of Bessie's voice,

"A damsel from her window looked down,
Looked down,
Upon her lov-yer below."

she sang with her yellow head stuck on one side and her eyes cast up sentimentally.

Marjorie laughed, and pulling a bunch of wisteria threw it at her.

"That's not the way to give your lover a flower, miss!" ex-

claimed Bessie. "You should lean down and drop it with a smile. Marjorie, that nearly hit me on the nose!"

Marjorie laughed.

"Come up," she said.

"Come down," retorted Bessie. Come down, sweet picture, from thy frame! Come down, Marjorie; I want to ask you something."

"Ask away," said Marjorie, leaning out. "I'm in the mood to grant requests. A child could play with me to-night."

"I should be sorry for the poor, confiding infant," retorted Bessie. "Well, look here, Marjorie—Mrs. Greening wants me to go over and try the new songs they have sent down. Shall I go?"

"Shall you go?" repeated Marjorie. "Of course you may go; you know that."

"But I don't like leaving you alone," said Bessie, reluctantly.

"Nonsense! You will not be gone long, I suppose? And if you promise to be a good girl, I will come across the fields to meet you."

"Really? Very well, then. I will stop an hour or longer. Good-bye——"

"Stop!" said Marjorie, as she disappeared. "Take this shawl with you," and she threw her own crape down, "and be sure that you put it on; don't carry it on your arm, as you did the other night."

"Very well, grandmother," answered the light voice. "In an hour, then. Don't eat all the chocolate while I am gone. Oh, by the way, Mrs. Greening asked me to ask you if you would not come also?"

"No," said Marjorie, shaking her head. "Thank her for me. Run along, or the time will be up."

Bessie ran off, and silence reigned again. Marjorie remained until the last cow had disappeared into the farm-yard; then she went down stairs into the little sitting-room and roamed to and fro, collecting the books, pieces of fancy work, drawing materials, and other items with which Bessie had contrived to litter the room during the day.

Then she put on her hat and jacket and went slowly out. There still remained a good half of the stipulated hour, and she turned aside from the manor field and strolled into one of the lanes, which Bessie had named the Maiden's Walk, from the fact that Marjorie was given to wandering in it.

Half way up this lane there was a gate opening into a field, and revealing a view of the distant hills. Upon this gate Marjorie had fallen into a habit of leaning, not to see the view, as Bessie declared, but to enjoy a good "moon."

It was just the evening for mooning, and Marjorie stopped as usual, and leaned with folded hands and wrapt eyes, gazing

dreamily at the hills, already gathering their faint, misty robes of night about their shoulders.

Plowmen, trudging homeward, glanced aside and gave her a respectful good-night; the shepherd's dog turned aside and stopped to rub its nose against her hand; not a passer-by but knew and respected her, and gave her a "good-even."

But to-night the salutations came with a faint dreaminess upon Marjorie, for there revolved in her brain the words of a paragraph which she had happened to read in the county paper, announcing the coming marriage of Sir Roland Chesterton and Miss Montressor.

"So soon, so soon!" she murmured. "She had not long to wait," and her lips quivered slightly with the effort at a smile. "Yes, she has won, after all, and I have lost. The gods bless men with short memories," and, as the vision of the handsome face as it looked down at hers that moonlit night with such passionate admiration, rose and blotted out the hills, a sigh escaped the half-parted lips.

Then the clock in the ivy-covered belfry, with lazy slowness, struck the hour, and with a start she turned to go meet Bessie.

As she did so the sound of a horse's hoofs mingled with the clock chime, and a horseman turned the corner of the lane, and, pulling up suddenly in the road beside her, raised his hat and said:

"Can you tell me if I am on the high-road?"

Marjorie started, and the color fled from her face. For one moment she stood with a wild stare in her dark eyes; then she turned and rested one hand on the gate, as if for support.

The horseman waited; then, thinking she had not heard him, he drew nearer to her.

"Excuse me, but will you tell me if I am on the high-road——"

He broke off suddenly, and, with a jerk that threw the horse upon its haunches, he reined in, and leaped to the ground, crying:

"Marjorie!"

Slowly, and with an effort, she turned her white face and looked at him. It was Roland!

For a minute—it was as a year—they stood and looked into each other's eyes. White as death was Marjorie's face, white even to the lips. On his rested an expression which one might wear who had suddenly been confronted by the ghost of one beloved and buried.

Beside them, held by the rein so loosely that he could free himself by a jerk, stood the horse, sniffing at the motionless figure of the girl.

Beyond them rose the solemn hills, half-hidden by the vale of night.

The minute that seemed a year passed, and with an effort he

found his voice—a hoarse, broken voice, that sounded harsh and forbidding.

"Marjorie!" he said. "Is it you? Here?"

"Yes, it is I," she answered, the words coming faintly from her sad, pale lips.

"But—but," he said, looking around slowly, as if he still discredited the evidence of his senses, "but here—why are you here?"

She did not answer, but her eyes drooped beneath his, which looked out from his haggard face with a fierce, troubled questioning.

"Heaven! It is like a vision!" he said, more to himself than to her, though his eyes were riveted to her face. "Like a vision! I—I would as soon have expected to meet the dead, as you—here."

Still silence on her part. Silence and an immovability that almost persuaded him that she was a vision.

With a gesture of almost savage impatience he took off his hat and wiped his brow, on which great drops of perspiration had started.

"Will you not speak to me?" he asked. "Not one word?"

She raised her eyes—sad, accusing eyes, that went straight to his heart like the stab of a knife.

"What should I say, Sir Roland?" she asked, in a low voice. "There is nothing to be said."

"Nothing—to be said!" he echoed, like a man bewildered, "nothing to be said!" It rang in his ear like a knell.

No, there was nothing to be said; he felt it.

But he could not go; his feet seemed glued to the spot, his eyes chained to the beautiful face that stood, with such pallid trouble, between him and the distant hills. Nothing to be said between those two, who, only a few months ago, stood as one before the world. Nothing to be said! while now—even now—the touch of her lips came back to his, and the soft, passionate tones of her voice rang in his ears.

His eyes drooped from her face to her dress.

"You—you are in black?" he said, in a questioning tone.

She inclined her head.

"My father is dead."

"Your father!" he echoed, and his hand went to his mouth in an uncertain, impatient gesture. "Your father! I did not know. Why did I not know?"

She raised her eyes slowly.

"Why should you know? What does it matter to you?" and her words stabbed him more deeply than her eyes.

He groaned and looked aside; then his gaze came back to her.

"And you are here! Why are you here? Are you alone? Bessie, your sister——"

"My sister is with me."

"You are on a visit?" he asked.

She did not answer, but looked away into the darkening horizon.

More than all else his pity would be hard to bear. She could not tell him, him who had once been her lover, now the affianced of Helen Montressor that she was poor and dependent, the mistress of a village school.

"I did not dream of it," he went on. "I could as soon have dreamed of meeting the dead as you, here. Heaven! to think of seeing you—you, standing there!"

More to himself than to her the bitter words dropped from his lips. He longed to leap on his horse and ride—ride anywhere out of the reach of those dark eyes which held him with a fascination which was irresistible.

"You have been in trouble," he said, presently. "I did not know it. I am sorry."

She looked silently at him for a moment, and then her gaze went back to the hills.

"It must have been a great trouble," he said, slowly, almost mechanically, as he took in the sweet mournfulness which sat enthroned on her beautiful face—the face that had rested on his breast and shone with such ineffable joy, not—ah, not so many months ago.

"Yes, I have been in trouble," she said, "but that is past."

"Past!" he echoed. "And—you are happy now?"

It was a cruel question, though he did not mean it as such.

For a moment she was silent; then she turned her eyes upon him.

"This road leads to the high-road, Sir Roland, and she made as if to go.

He put out his hand in a hesitating way.

"Stop! stop! do not go. I—Heaven! what can I say? How can I leave you here, alone, like this?"

A smile, sad and bitter, flickered on her face.

"I am used to being alone, Sir Roland."

"Alone! Why," he demanded, with a sudden fierceness, "why should you be? You were not alone when I saw you last."

She turned and looked at him, and something in her look struck him with a sudden fear and trembling. It was not—no! it was not the look of a guilty, treacherous woman.

"You were not alone then?" he said. "You—oh, Heaven! that one so fair, with such a face as yours, should be so false! Why did you deceive me? For what purpose? In another woman I could have understood it; but you, who never spared your scorn for the rank and wealth for which other women sell themselves—you! Why did you play me false?"

With a quick gesture she turned upon him, her face aflame, her eyes flashing, her lips struck dumb with indignation.

"Yes," he said, savagely, "you looked like this! You would give me lie upon lie, woman-like!—the fiend made you all alike! And I, blind fool that I must be, would believe you if I had not stood beside you on that cursed night, and seen and heard your treachery. You cannot deny it! You played me false—you with your innocent face and child-like smile. Tell me!—am I mad, or did I see you two together there in the wood?"

In his passion he made a step toward her, his eyes fiercely blazing into hers, his hand upheld.

But she did not flinch, neither by look nor movement. Pale and proud she stood, and her lips opened to hurl back the accusation; but suddenly she remembered—remembered that the man who stood before her was not only her old lover who had cast her off, but the affianced husband of Helen Montressor.

Without a word she turned from him.

"You are silent," he said. "Even you can find no excuse for such treachery. You knew I loved you, and you played with my love like the falsest of your sex; and now you turn upon me with eyes like these! Have you forgotten so soon? Traitors have short memories."

Then she turned upon him with a smile of bitter reproach and scorn.

He understood the smile, and knew that she had heard of his engagement.

As if his soul had been revealed to him by that smile, he could read what was passing in her mind. With an oath ground out between his teeth, he turned and laid his hand upon the horse.

"No, there is nothing to be said between us! Would to Heaven I had not crossed your path! I had—yes, I had almost learned to forget you. Now——" and he stopped to look at her, his eyes devouring her downcast face, as if he would impress it on his memory for all time.

Marjorie turned aside and leaned on the gate, waiting for him to go. Before her the hills swam in a mist of unshed tears, his voice rang heavily on her ears, her strength was almost spent.

"Marjorie!" he said, and his voice sounded hoarse and broken. "Marjorie!"

She half turned, and after a moment's pause, he went on:

"Do not let us part like this! The past has gone—gone. I never expected to meet you thus, alone! I did not wish to meet you. Fate has thrown us together—to torture me, to distress you! But—but we have met, and we must part. Do not let us part as enemies! I—I am willing to let the past bury itself. I would not wish to think of you—standing here alone—with a bitter word of

farewell between us. We may not meet again, Heaven grant we may not until—until I can learn to think of you as I could wish. Good-by, Marjorie!"

She turned slowly and looked at him. For a moment his eyes faltered beneath her steadfast ones, then he went forward and held out his hand.

"Will you take my hand for the last time? Marjorie, say Heaven that we may never meet again"

Slowly she put forth her hand and laid it in his.

He held it, pressed it with a convulsive grasp, his face white and haggard, and with an irresistible impulse raised it to his lips. But with a shudder she drew it away from him, and, covering her face with it, turned away.

He stood looking at her a moment as a man might look who sees the one great good of his life fading away from his sight; then, with a gesture of infinite grief, he sprang into the saddle and rode away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AFTER THE OLD LOVE—THE NEW.

MARJORIE did not break into a passion of tears. She heard the sound of his horse's hoofs growing less distinct each moment—knew that she had let him go when a word might have held him; knew that he had said his last farewell, and that by her silence she had relinquished him to her rival. But she could not weep.

She simply leaned upon the gate and looked at the stars twinkling faintly in the sky, and listened with the benumbed sense of some swiftly vanished delight to the nightingale that poured out its plaintive song above her head. How long she stood communing with the echo of the fierce, despairing voice, calling up the memory of his pale, haggard face, she did not know.

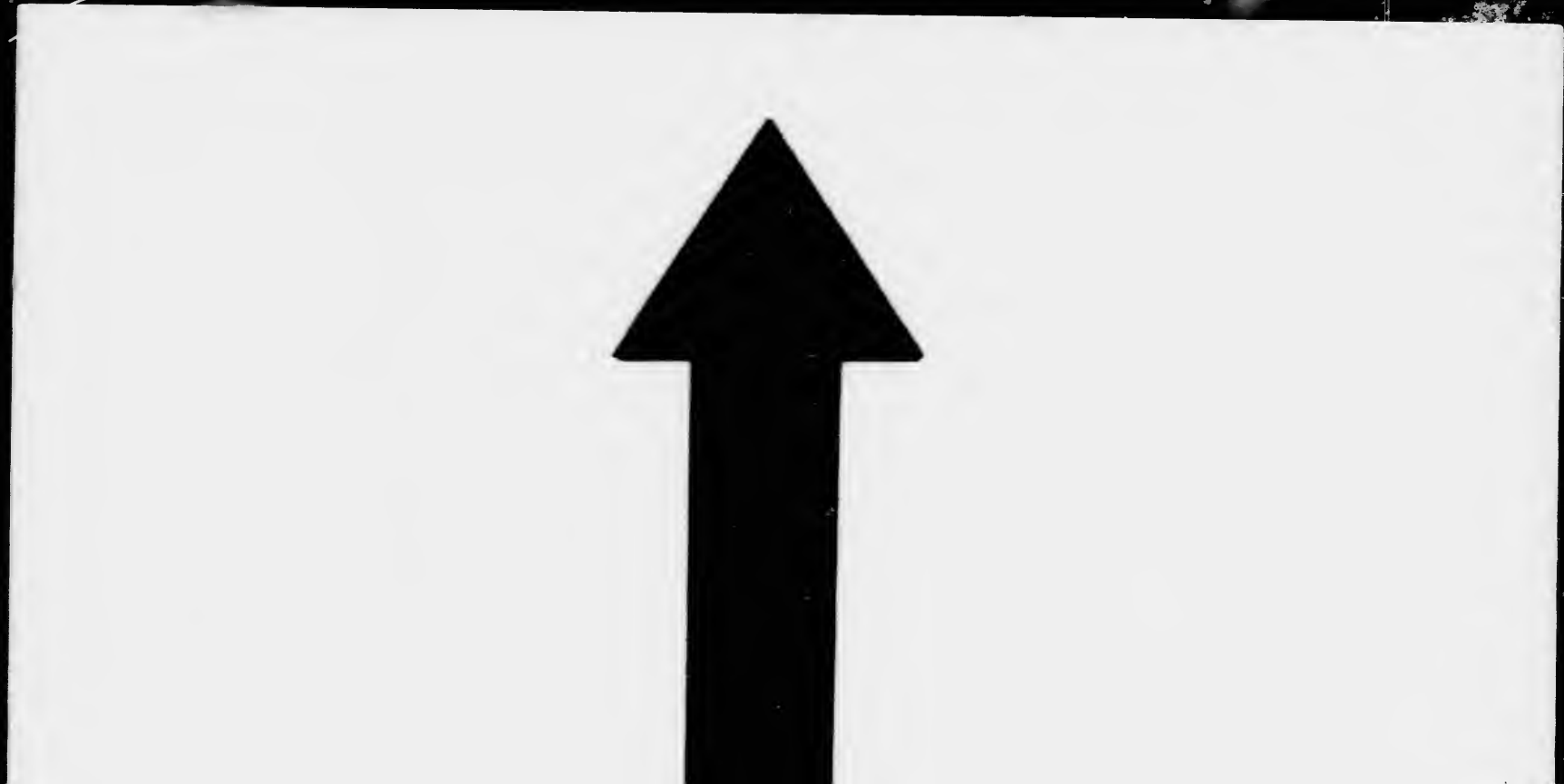
A step behind her roused her; a voice said at her side:

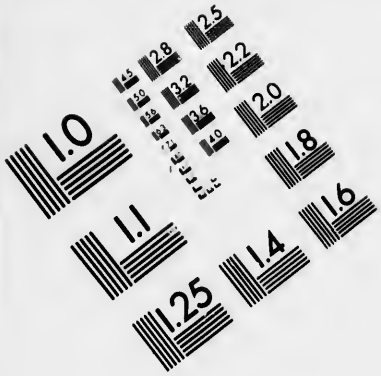
"Is that you, Miss Deane?"

She turned with a faint smile. It was Mr. Cumming, the vicar.

"I wondered who it could be," he said, and his voice betrayed his pleasure at the recognition. "What are you doing! Star-gazing?"

"Yes," she answered, with a smile of self-mockery, "I am star-





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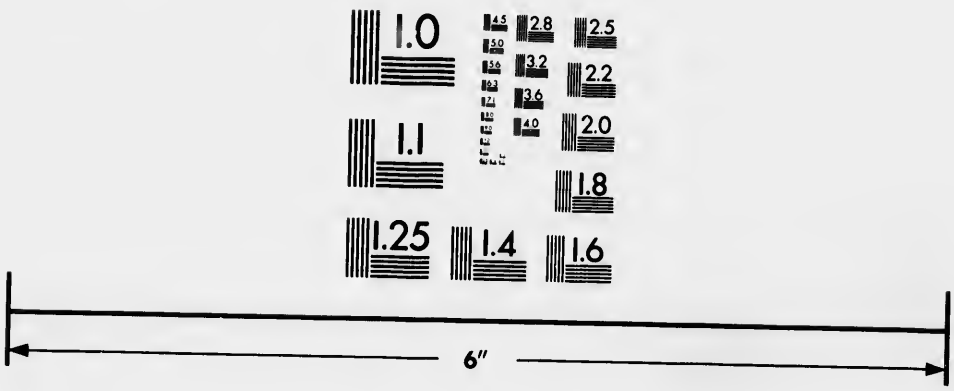

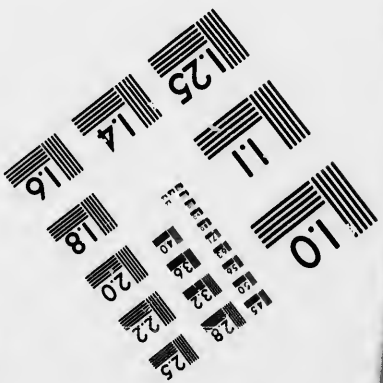

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gazing," and she thought of the star that had fallen from her view forever.

Something in her voice struck upon his ear, which had grown sensitive to her every tone.

"It is rather late," he said, looking at her anxiously. "It does not do to trust these spring evenings too implicitly. You should have a wrap around your throat."

"I do not feel cold," she said, but a little shiver ran over her. "Is it late? I promised to meet Bessie in the Manor field. She has gone up to the hall."

"I met her scampering up the village half an hour ago," he said. "She said she had missed you."

"Half an hour ago!" she echoed. Could they have been talking half an hour? "I did not know it was so late. I—I have been thinking."

He looked down at her as she walked at his side.

"Thinking?" he said, in a low voice. "Sometimes I have an idea that—you will not be offended?"

She looked up at him, striving to collect her thoughts and give him her attention.

"Offended? No. Why should I be?"

"I don't know. I am always fearful that I may offend you. I was going to say that I am afraid you think too much."

"One cannot help one's thoughts," she answered, smiling sadly.

"But you should not give way to them. Sometimes, when I am looking at you, I fancy that—that your thoughts are not too happy. Is that so?"

His voice dropped almost to a murmur as he looked at her, and his eyes sought hers with a tender wistfulness.

Marjorie laughed, not bitterly, but wearily.

"One cannot direct one's thoughts," she said. "If one could—" And she stopped.

He did not press her to fill up the pause, but he touched her arm in a protecting, reverential fashion.

"Will you put your handkerchief around your neck?" he asked. "It is colder than you think."

She laughed, but she obeyed him.

"You would almost make me believe that I am delicate," she said, "whereas I am quite surprisingly strong."

"Are you?" he questioned. "I am not quite sure of that; I have seen you look anything but strong at times."

"Oh, you are quite wrong," she protested. "It is Bessie who is delicate, if either of us is. I have to take care of her. Had she a shawl on when you met her?"

"Yes, your shawl. I recognized it in a moment."

Another woman would have noticed the significance of the admission, but Marjorie smiled innocently and blindly.

They passed out of the lane and under the shadow of some trees, and Marjorie stumbled slightly in the sudden darkness.

"Will you take my arm?" he asked, and he took her arm and drew it to his side.

"How soon the twilight fades," she said. "Bessie will think I am lost. Did she say she had enjoyed herself?"

"Yes," he replied, "she seemed very happy. I heard her singing as she went on her way. Yes, I think Bessie is happy. I wish—I wish I could be as sure of your happiness."

Marjorie started and looked up at him, and as she did so she met his eyes bent upon her with a fixed regard of wistful tenderness that made his face look handsomer even than usual.

"I am quite—happy," she said, with a little flush. "If I were not, it would be base ingratitude on my part, seeing how kind you have all been to us two girls."

"No," he said, "you will not let us be kind. It is simple gratitude on our part. I do not know how we managed to live before you came among us."

Marjorie looked down silently. Something in his tone made her tremble with a fond thrill, half of fear, half of pleasure.

"At least," he went on, "let me speak of myself. Life has been a very different thing to me since you came down here. I look upon the past time before I knew you, and I wonder how I could have been so contented. Yes, you have changed my life."

Marjorie trembled and glanced up at him, half-questioningly, half-fearfully. She felt the tender regard of his clear gray eyes, felt the pressure of his strong arm, heard in the deep mellow voice the ring of a true, earnest love.

For a moment her heart beat so fast that she faltered and stopped short; and before she could speak or move to prevent it, he had taken both her hands in his and stood looking down at her, an eager light in his eyes.

"Miss Deane—Marjorie! why should I strive to hide my heart from you? I have known that I loved you for months past. I think I loved you the first time I saw you. I do love you most passionately. Dare I hope to win your love in return?"

Startled and agitated, she stood trembling, and in silence.

She had endured much, already, to-night; this revelation of a good, pure, honest love overwhelmed her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ONLY A LITTLE HOPE.

UNDAUNTED by Marjorie's silence, Harvey Cumming tightened his clasp on her hands.

"I frighten you," he said, gently, evidently repressing his eagerness by a great effort. "I did not mean to do so. I did not mean to tell you this to-night. I meant to keep silent for some time to come, until—until you had learned to know me better. But such love as mine is hard to silence. I have carried it about with me, part and parcel of myself for months past. Sleeping or waking, your face, your dear voice, has been beside me. Forgive me if I am too rough and imperative," for Marjorie was shrinking back and faintly endeavoring to withdraw her hand. "This love of mine has taken such possession of me that I am blind to all else. Marjorie, dear Marjorie, how could one help loving you? Not I, at least. I do love you, with all my heart and soul; and now—what fate are you going to deal out to me?"

He paused, his handsome face pale and anxious.

Marjorie looked up suddenly, her lips tremulous, her eyes moist, looked up with an appealing, an imploring gaze.

"Oh, no, no!" she murmured, don't say this!"

His lip quivered but he smiled with a little, earnest gesture.

"But I must say it. You—you will not tell me that I am not to hope! Hope! I do not ask you to say that you return the love I bear you? No, how should you? But I ask you, most humbly, to let me try to win your love."

Marjorie covered her face with her hands, and the tears coursed down her face. She knew as surely as if an angel had whispered in her ear, that there was a love offered to her which the proudest woman on earth would do well to grasp and cherish, a love which fell to the lot of but few of the daughters of man. If she could have but put away with a firm hand that other wild, passionate, hopeless love, whose flame burned with the torture of despair in her innermost heart.

Silently the tears coursed down her cheeks, each tear falling like molten lead on his heart as he stood and looked at her.

"Marjorie," he said, at last, "is there no hope? Am I too late? Are you going to tell me what I have dreaded to hear—that there

was some one else—some other claim upon you?" and his strong voice broke.

With a wild gesture of sorrowful regret she raised her face to his and clasped his hand.

"Oh, why did you tell me this? Why—why should you love me? You who are so noble and good, so far, far above me! I am not worthy of such love as yours. Too late! Is it too late? I wish—I wish I had been dead before I came here to make you unhappy."

"Hush! hush!" he said, and he raised her hand to his lips. "Do not say any more. Unhappy? You have not made me unhappy. My greatest happiness lies in my love for you! 'It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all!' Hush! Do not cry. I cannot bear that!"

"No," said Marjorie, "I—I—am not crying. But—I am so unhappy," and, in the depth of her self-reproach, she drew nearer to him and laid her hand upon his arm.

Her half-caress scattered his self-control to the winds.

With a low cry he caught her hand and looked down at her with passionate longing.

"Marjorie, do not send me away quite—quite hopeless! I cannot bear it. Tell me that I may hope, that I may hope in time—years forward, if you like—to win you! Do not take all hope from me."

Marjorie looked from side to side, tortured by his passionate entreaties, her heart melting with pity and reproachful tenderness.

"I—I cannot tell you," she said. "Do not say another word. I—I let me go now. Do not say another word."

"Not one word," he said, earnestly, a gleam of hope flashing in his eyes—"not one word. I will wait, yes, patiently. Leave me but hope. Good night, dear, dear Marjorie!" and with a reverence and tenderness that would have befitted a knight of old, he lifted her hand to his lips, and let her go.

Harvey stood and looked after her, watching her with that lingering, wistful look of a great and unselfish love, until her slim, graceful figure had faded away in the twilight; then he turned, and went slowly homeward.

For months this love of his had been growing, but not until this moment had he known how dear she was to him. Harvey was no narrow-minded cleric. Vicar of the country village as he was, he was yet a man of the world. Captain of the college eleven, stroke in the 'varsity eight, his form was that of an athlete, his bearing eloquent of the good old race from which he had sprung.

Marjorie had been right when she called him good and noble, and what is more powerful to sway the feminine mind, he was handsome as well.

Very slowly he walked home, and, entering the drawing-room, looked around with a strange smile.

"I have often pictured her sitting here opposite me, and sometimes here at my side, with her sweet head on my knee. Will the vision be fulfilled? God grant that it may! If he does I shall be a happy man—dear, sweet Marjorie!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

REGINALD'S ADVICE TO ROLAND.

IT was noon of the day following the meeting between the two lovers, and the spring sunshine was flushing Bond Street, and wooing the young leaves of the park trees.

Carriages were just beginning to roll along the handsome street, men appeared by twos and threes on the club steps, with that confused, absent, no-appetite-yet sort of look, which lasts from, say ten till one o'clock.

Reginald, lingering in the coffee-room of the "Gridiron," exchanged salutations with the inmates, and glanced idly at the morning paper.

As usual, he had nothing to do, and was doing it with graceful ease and contentment. Presently the door swung noiselessly open and the Duke of Smalter looked around.

"Hello, Reginald!" he said. "Just the man I was looking for."

"That's what my tailor always says, confound him!" said Reginald, tilting his hat back. "What is it, my child?"

"Why, look here! I'm thinking of taking the coach down to Richmond, and I want you and Chesterton to come. Miss Montressor half promised?—that's all one ever gets out of her now—that she would join us if Chesterton was going. But I can't find him; at least I couldn't last night. I drove around to Mivart's, and his man—decent sort of fellow, by the way—said his master hadn't come home. Looked rather anxious I thought."

Reginald laughed softly.

"That's a way he has. He has lived with Roland since he was a boy, or something like that, and is rather more attached to him than his own mother is. Hadn't come home, eh? Well there's nothing in that."

The young duke dropped in a chair, and chuckled knowingly.

"Taking a last fling or two, I suppose. Let's see, when do you chain him up? Lucky dog! Wish I was in his shoes!"

"You'd better say that to my sister," replied Reginald, coolly. "I'll bet you what you like she'd throw Roland over."

The young duke shook his head.

"No, you're wrong. I don't know much about women—oh, grin away, but I do know this, that if ever a woman was clear gone over a man, Miss Montressor is to Chesterton. We never stood a chance with him, not even Graneland! By the way, they tell me that Graneland has gone to South Africa—says he hates white women, they are so false, and means to marry a dusky bride. When do you say the marriage is to come off?"

Reginald yawned slightly.

"If I have to answer that question once, I have to answer it fifty times a day. I wish Helen or Roland would advertise it in the papers. How long? Oh, about six weeks. If I had ever entertained the mad idea of plunging into matrimony, this affair would act as a sufficient deterrent. I hate fusses, and there has been enough fuss over this to last one a life-time. I used to think I should like to be—well, like you, and Roland, and the other Plutus, but I can see it's a mistake. It's bad enough when you've a couple of rooms in the Albany to do up and arrange, but with the lot of places which you and Roland have, it must be simply crushing. Hasn't come back, hasn't he? Let me see, he went down day before yesterday to one of his places in the country, a little place in Wiltshire, which he hasn't seen for years, and which he means to make his headquarters."

"But what about Chesterton Wold?" asked the young duke, who, like everybody else, felt a strange interest in Sir Roland Chesterton.

It was not only because the great beauty of the day had refused the great parti of the day for his sake; it was not because he was one of the old noblesse. There was something beyond this, indefinite and intangible it might be, but effective enough to make him a matter of curiosity wherever he went. When he entered a ballroom with the beauty on his arm, women looked after him with that fascinated gaze which a wild life ever exerts over them, and they whispered behind their fans all sorts of extravagant stories about him, some of which were believed and some not.

"Chesterton Wold," answered Reginald, with a sudden yawn that hid a vague embarrassment. "Oh, he has taken a dislike to the place—grown tired of it, I suppose. Besides, Lady Chesterton is to live there. If you wa[illegible] him to go with you, I'd better go find him, hadn't I?"

"Do!" said the duke. "Bring him here, and we'll have a bit of lunch before we start."

Reginald nodded and sauntered out.

Roland's man opened the door for him and stared at him with that candid look of disappointment which sits upon the face of one who expects another than yourself.

"Sir Roland up yet?" asked Reginald.

"Up, Mr. Reginald? He ain't back, sir."

"Not back, eh?" said Reginald, entering and throwing himself into the easiest chair.

"No, sir. I expected him back last night, and I sent the brougham to meet the three last trains, and I sat up all night, thinking he might have gone to the Daws, and would drop in for a bath. But he hasn't come. The breakfast has been waiting since ten, and there are no end of people coming this morning by appointment, men about the furniture and Miss Montressor's ponies, and the courier. Haven't you seen him, sir?"

"No."

The valet stood and looked at the table with a gloomy face.

"I thought he'd done with all this, Mr. Reginald," not complainingly, but regretfully. "Sir Roland has seemed so much better in health and spirits lately."

"Don't alarm yourself," said Reginald, kindly. "He has lost the train, or stopped another night. You fret like an old woman."

The man shook his head.

"You don't know Sir Roland as well as I do— begging your pardon, sir. I'm always anxious now. I see him sometimes, sir, when he doesn't know I'm in the room, and I don't like the look of him. There's something on his mind, Mr. Reginald."

"So there is on most of our minds, my good fellow. What weighs most on my mind is the fact that there is nothing in my pocket. We all have a skeleton in the cupboard. By the way—have you a small bottle of Pommery in your cupboard? This sort of conversation is exhausting."

Roland's valet opened the bottle without a word, and Reginald sipped the wine languidly.

"Tell you what it is," said Reginald, presently, "this wedding will be the death of me. When it is over, I shall retire to a lunatic asylum, to recover my balance of mind. Some people like Roland and Miss Montressor are too much for me."

"Hush, sir! there is Sir Roland!" and the faithful fellow, whose ears had been more intent on the stairs than on Reginald, opened the door.

It was Roland—Roland enveloped in an ulster, splashes of mud on his riding gaiters, his face white and haggard, his eyes wild and wearied.

He came in, and paused suddenly at the sight of Reginald; then crossed the room and stood before the fire.

"Hello!" said Reginald. "Here you are at last! Where have you been? Is anything the matter?" and he stared curiously at the haggard face.

"Matter!" was the retort. "What should be the matter? Something to drink!"—to his man.

The valet opened another bottle of champagne and poured out a glass; then, with an anxious stare at his master's face, noiselessly and reluctantly left the room.

Roland took up the glass, and Reginald noticed that his hand trembled so that the wine was shaken over the brim.

"Can he have been drinking?" he wondered.

Roland drained the glass and put it down, then took off his ulster and dropped into a chair, looking around the room with a vacant stare.

Reginald watched him for a minute in silence. Intimate as he was with his brother-in-law-elect, there were times in which it was best to leave him to himself, and this was one of the times.

At last Roland seemed to remember him.

"Have you been waiting long?" he asked.

"No," answered Reginald, "not long. I have just left Smalter; he wants us to go down to Richmond on his coach. Helen——"

Roland started to his feet and paced up and down the room. Then he stopped and looked at him.

"I cannot go. Do not wait for me. I am too tired and played out."

"Where have you been? asked Reginald. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

A smile, bitter and mocking, broke over Roland's face.

"So I have," he said.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"No matter," said Roland, wearily. "You say Helen is going with Smalter? Will you make my excuse? Tell her that I have only just returned, and am tired. Reginald, how long does it want to the wedding?"

Reginald looked up with a rather sullen flush.

"'Pon my word, you are the last man to have forgotten!" he said.

"Forgive me," he said. "Six weeks, is it not? I am not fit to show up to-day—not fit to be seen in decent society."

Reginald arose and looked at him gravely.

"Look here, Roland," he said. "You are all wrong again. What I prophesied has come true. The pace has told upon you. The hanging about town is playing the deuce with you. Why don't you get away for a few weeks? I dare say Helen could manage to

do without you. Get away over to Paris—to Jericho, if you like—any place where you can be quiet."

"Quiet!" repeated Roland, with a bitter laugh. "Quiet! Your prescription is a poor one, my dear fellow! I don't want quiet. I loathe it!"

"Well," said Reginald, with a great candor, "it seems to me that you will have a pretty long spell of it in the family vault if you don't stop that kind of game. 'Pon my word, I'm in earnest! We shall have a funeral in the family instead of a wedding."

Roland smiled grimly and looked out into the street, the sunlight revealing the deep lines in his handsome face.

"So you advise me to go away?" he said, moodily.

"That's it; and I bet anything Helen will say the same. For Heaven's sake, take my advice, Roland! Look here! I'm going around to the square, and I'll break it to Helen; and don't you come around until you have pulled yourself together. Unfortunately, she is foolish enough to take an interest in your personal appearance, and—by Jove! old fellow, you look half mad this morning."

"Half mad! I think I am," said Roland. "Perhaps you are right. I will efface myself for a time."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW SIR ROLAND TRIED TO EFFACE HIMSELF.

FROM London to the Turkish camp. From the roar of the city to the roar of the artillery. From luxury to privation. From safety into danger.

"Chesterton?" said Charlie Hamilton, in reply to a question from a brother officer who was cooking a duck over an open fire using his sword for a spit. "He'll get knocked over, one of these days. Never saw a fellow so reckless. Acts as if he wanted to be killed. Can't think what's come over him. He used to be wild, but this isn't wildness; it's sheer madness."

"Ah," said one of the others, who did not take the matter so seriously as Roland's friend, "it doesn't surprise me. He is going to be married, you know."

Hamilton smiled, but said, uneasily:

"Joking aside, there's something about Chesterton that I don't like. It was through me, you see, that he came here. I wrote him and Reginald Montressor, asking them to come out. Of course, I knew Montressor would never do it, and I didn't know Chesterton was engaged. I suppose I wouldn't have asked him if I had, though he needn't have come, for that matter. Still, I feel a sort of responsibility."

"Why did he come, anyhow?" asked another.

"Hanged if I know. Didn't intend to at first. Then he happened to come across my letter, and in two hours he was on his way here. Confound my luck! If he's shot, the beauty'll blame me."

"Maybe you'll have to marry her yourself to console her," suggested some one.

"Maybe, but he isn't dead yet. But it's a mystery to me. Chesterton doesn't help me to a solution. He's as grim as a tiger, and doesn't open his mouth. I wish to Heaven he was safe home! It wouldn't matter much to the rest of us if we were killed—except Tommy, there, who has a coronet in view. But Chesterton! Hang it, you know, it's absurd. Hush! Here he is."

And he turned as the tall figure of Roland Chesterton entered the tent.

Like the rest of them, his face was begrimed with powder, his long military coat stained and patched, his long boots covered with mud.

As he entered he threw off his coat, revealing the fact that his uniform was as seedy as his cloak, and that in addition it was stained with blood.

"Hello!" exclaimed Charlie Hamilton, "anything the matter?"

"The matter? Oh, no," glancing down at the stain. "A splinter from a shell hit me on the arm; nothing to speak of," and he threw himself down beside the fire, and stared at the duck with a calm, absent air, which sat upon him like a garment.

"All right at the magazine?" asked the man next to him.

"Yes; we have packed it round with sand and meal bags not an hour too soon, for they got the range and threw a shell right against it; two men were wounded by it."

"Three, including yourself," muttered Hamilton, who seemed to take it as a personal matter when Roland exposed himself.

"They have gone into hospital," went on Roland, without heeding the interruption. "Yes, the magazine is safe now, I think."

"A good thing, too," growled Hamilton. "Now, you'll find something else that's dangerous to do, I suppose."

Roland smiled grimly.

"Difficult to find anything to do that is not dangerous. Is the guard set?"

"Yes. Don't worry yourself about that," retorted Hamilton. "Make yourself comfortable, and eat your supper. We are quite ready. Have some champagne?"

Roland took a horn cup.

"I wish it was water," he said, with a smile.

"So do I," said the Tommy, who had the dukedom in prospect. "I should very much like to wash my face, just as a treat. We must be running very short now."

"We are," some one answered. "The men are on half rations. Something will have to be done. If the enemy hadn't got the well, we should be able to keep them at bay for another month. It's always something. If it isn't liquor, it's grub. I was shut up in Paris, you know, and there you heard the same cry—'give us food and we will keep them out forever!'"

"The question is," said Hamilton, "what are we to do? Are we going to keep it up until every drop of water is gone, and then give in quietly, or make a dash for it? I'd rather do the latter."

"And I," said Roland.

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Hamilton, instantly, "of course you are ready for any mad trick! If I were in your shoes I should be only too ready to end the game."

"Would you?" said Roland, looking at him with an inscrutable smile.

"Yes," retorted Hamilton, promptly. "You've no right here at all, and I wish I'd been in Jericho before I wrote that confounded letter!"

"Nonsense!" said Roland, quietly. "I am enjoying it. It is something new for me, and good fun. I don't see why you should distress yourself on my account, Charlie. It's too late now, anyhow."

"Ah," said Hamilton, "don't you see? Well, I do. I can plainly see that if some one doesn't put you into a strait-jacket, you'll be doing some mad trick or other and be knocked on the head."

Roland laughed and turned the subject.

"Isn't that meat done?" he asked.

The cook, a man who would rather have walked a mile out of his way, a few months ago, than to have muddied his boots, laughed and served up the duck.

But when he had received his share, Roland did not seem very hungry, and after a few mouthfuls, lay back on his elbow and smoked his pipe in contemplative silence.

Rude as was the menu, the dinner was eaten with a gusto which the young men had found missing in London at the best of tables, and they one and all lighted the pipe of peace and fell to smoking.

They had all done a hard day's work; the enemy was within

cannon-shot, the worst kind of famine stared them in the face, not one of their lives was worth a guinea's purchase, and yet they lay back and chatted and laughed and joked as carelessly and nonchalantly as if they had been reclining on the select fauteuil of a club smoking-room.

Roland alone lay back silent and abstracted; but though his eyes were closed he was not asleep.

In his ears the laughter and voices of his companions sounded indistinct and dream like, the tent, half filled with smoke, faded into air, and before him rose the slim, graceful figure of a girl leaning on a gate in an English lane, her sweet, pale face turned to the waning light, her sad, dark eyes fixed upon him with a wistful, mournful tenderness.

At intervals, another face, one of surpassing loveliness—the face of Helen Montressor, the woman to whom he is plighted—crosses his vision, but it does not stay; the sad, pale face of Marjorie Deane reigns supreme in his waking dream to haunt and torture him.

Suddenly there sounded a sharp, quick voice at the door of the tent, and the laughing and talking ceased. A moment later a thin, spare man in the Turkish uniform entered.

He was a short, wiry man, with gray hair and small, keen eyes, that glinted like steel in the flaring light of the oil-lamp, as he looked around the group.

It was the general in command of the fort.

"Be seated, gentlemen," he said, raising his fez, and he went to the fire and held out his hand to the blaze.

He looked so small and insignificant that one might have passed him in the street without a second glance, and yet he was one of the most famous commanders of his time. The brain behind the pale, wan brow had won a dozen celebrated battles, the thin, white hand had waved armies to a score of hard-won victories.

"Be seated, gentlemen! A beautiful night. Good-evening, my lord, good-evening, Mr. Hamilton." He spoke in the purest English and without hesitation. "Asleep, Sir Roland? I have just been to the magazine. You have done the work thoroughly."

Roland bowed.

"I am glad you think so, general."

Charlie Hamilton offered his cigar-case.

"A cigar, general."

But the little man declined with a smile, and with swift fingers rolled up a cigarette. Then he seated himself beside the fire and chatted, but they could see, one and all, by his manner, that he had come among them with some desperate purpose. And presently he broke off in some careless remark to ask, as if casually:

"How is the water?"

"Short—very short," answered the one who seemed to know the most about it.

The general nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said, as if he did not know almost to a quart how much the fort held—"yes, I was afraid so; and the bread is running low. But there is a convoy near."

Every man looked up with sudden interest. The general nodded.

"I was advised that the supplies would be sent by the twentieth If they have kept their word at the other end, those supplies are now just outside the enemy's lines. We must have those supplies, gentlemen!"

There was an intense silence as he looked around.

"If I am right in my calculation, those supplies are waiting in the west fork down the valley. They are waiting to pass the lines. We must get them in, or give up the game."

"Never!" exclaimed Charlie Hamilton.

The general inclined his head with a smile, and puffed his cigarette.

"It seems to me, gentlemen," he said, "that the only way to get those supplies into our midst is by creating a diversion in an opposite direction, and withdrawing the enemy's attention from the west."

He took another puff.

"We must make an attack on the east, and while the enemy is engaged there, must slip the convoy in on the west. Now, gentlemen"—and his keen gray eyes flashed around the hut—"who volunteers to lead the attack?"

Instantly all sprang to their feet; but foremost among them stood Roland, his tall figure towering above the others.

"With your permission, general, I will lead the attack."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RESULT OF THE NIGHT'S WORK.

THERE was a courteous but reluctant silence after Roland had spoken.

The general looked with calm scrutiny into the pale, stern face.

"You want the lion's share," Sir Roland," he said, quietly. "You were in command at the magazine to-day, and on the ramparts yesterday."

"Quite right, general," said Charlie Hamilton, eagerly. "It's my turn this time."

But an eager denial from the others drowned his voice.

The general looked from one to the other.

"Just what I expected," he said, with a proud smile. "You cannot all go, gentlemen, and you all want to go."

There was a moment's silence, which was broken by Roland's deep voice.

"Let us cast lots," he said.

The general nodded, and one of them took a letter from his pocket and tore it into six pieces.

"The man who draws the signature wins," he said, and with a laugh he threw the pieces into his cap.

One after another they drew and kept the pieces hidden in their hands.

"Now!" said the general, and each eagerly examined the fragment in his hand.

In the midst of a chorus of disappointed murmurs Roland said quietly:

"Mine."

The general calmly nodded.

"I could not wish for a better man," he said, courteously. "If you will be kind enough to come to my quarters, Sir Roland, we will arrange. Good night, gentlemen."

And he went as quietly as he had come.

Roland put on his coat, refilled his pipe, and with a "good-night," stepped out.

Charlie Hamilton followed him, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

Roland turned.

"Well?" he asked.

Hamilton was silent for a moment, and then he said, in a troubled voice:

"I wish you'd give this up, Roland. I wish you would let me take your place."

Roland shook his head.

"Look here!" said Hamilton, anxiously, "this is no work for you. I am an older hand at this sort of fun than you are, I know; and—and—I know what this means!"

Roland laughed his short, mirthless laugh.

"So do I. What then?"

"Just this," replied Hamilton—"that knowing what this means, you have no right to go in for it. Any one of us has a better right than you. We have all been here longer than you have, and some of us are better fitted for it than you are. I, for instance, am just the man for the work. It means something to me to win, if I win:

it matters little if I lose. There is no mother and future wife to think of in my case ; there is in yours. And it doesn't matter to anybody, excepting my creditors, if I do make a mess of it. But yours——" and he paused significantly.

Roland smiled.

"Do you want to rob me of my glory ?" he asked.

"That s nonsense," retorted Hamilton, impatiently. "You don't care a brass farthing for the glory ; you know that, Roland. For Heaven's sake, think of the mother and the woman waiting at home in England for you ! I've no one waiting for me."

Roland turned away impatiently.

"You are a good fellow, Charlie," he said, in a low voice ; but you don't know how powerless that sort of appeal must be to me. Don't waste any more words on me ; I shall go. Good-night—good-by, perhaps, for this will come off to-night, I think ; and, as you say, it may be—serious. If anything happens, tell my mother —tut, tut ! I shall be back before breakfast ; and if not, you will know better what to say than I can tell you. Good-night," and gently releasing himself, he strode out into the night.

A few stars shone dimly in the heavens, their cold pallor contrasting with the glare of the shells that at intervals rose from behind the enemy's trenches and flew shrieking into the town.

Roland stood for a few moments looking out into the darkness with dreamy abstraction.

He knew well that the adventure before him was dangerous ; that the plain stretched before him might well be likened to the plain of the Shadow of Death and that in all probability he would never see England again ; but, though his mother's loving face rose before him, there was another beside it, toward which his heart turned yearningly.

"Thank Heaven," he murmured, "that we parted in peace. Come what will of this night's work, we parted in peace ; our hands have touched.

Then, with a long breath, he threw off his soft mood, and strode through the silent streets to the general's headquarters.

An hour later, and with noiseless, cat-like caution, the attacking party stole out of the fortress and glided into the night. There had been no sound of bugle, no clatter of arms, no word spoken save the low-whispered word of command. Like some dumb animal stealing forth to spring upon its prey, the little column made its way into the darkness.

Even the horses seemed to undertand that noise meant death, for they trod cautiously, and peered with eager eyes, expanded nostrils, and erect, nervous ears.

Clad in his dark, stained, military over-coat, Roland rode at the head, his hand upon his sword-hilt, ready at a moment to draw it forth, with the word to attack.

Beside him rode the straight figure of his faithful valet, who, by dint of entreaty and sheer stubbornness, had obtained Roland's permission to accompany him. What he thought of the business, no one could tell from his face. Almost as calm and impassive as his master, he rode beside him, his eyes continually seeking Roland's face.

Perfectly silent the company made its way, anxious eyes watching it from the fort, anxious eyes strained to detect the first sign of any discovery on the part of the enemy.

Lying upon their breasts, and staring into the night, Hamilton and one of his comrades eagerly watched.

"Do you think they will do it?" asked Hamilton.

A doubtful grunt was the only answer for a moment; then:

"Can't say. I's a hundred to one against them. If a horse neighs, or a man sneezes, before they cross the plain, out of range, they are lost."

Hamilton groaned.

"Poor old Roland! I shall look well if I have to go to his mother and tell her how it ended. I wish my hand had been cut off before I enticed him here with that infernal letter of mine."

"At any rate," said the other, "if he gets to close quarters he'll sell his life at a pretty high figure. I can't see them now. We shall see them directly. I wish to Heaven I was in it."

Yard by yard, the long, dark line crept across the plain. Another hundred yards or so, and it would have passed out of the direct range of fire and reached the east end of the enemy's line.

Bending forward in his saddle, Roland peered into the darkness. He could see the light of the Russian camp-fires, could hear the thud of the sentinel as he grounded his gun. For the first time for many a long day, Roland's heart beat fast. His eyes flashed, the blood ran swiftly through his veins.

After all, he thought, war is the proper game for a man. Even if he lies stiff and stark in the trenches yonder, he will have had for one quarter of an hour a full and perfect life.

Suddenly a shell whistled through the air right above their heads, and threw a long streak of light full down upon them.

The next time the stillness was cleft in twain by the sound of a bugle giving the alarm. Lights flashed, a gun fired? They were discovered!

Out into the night sprang Roland's sword, a deep, hoarse "Charge!" burst from his lips, and with a half-smothered roar from his excited men, they followed him as he dashed forward.

A dull, echoing roar of encouragement from the fort rose behind him, a defiant yell from the enemy, and then the dogs of war were let loose, and the demon of slaughter rose triumphant and raging.

Mounted as he was on a charger whose impatience ran parallel

with its master, Roland yet found the men pressing close behind him in the hot race for death.

So dark was it that there was danger of friends cutting down friends.

"Steady, steady!" shouted Roland; but for himself he urged the willing horse with spur and voice, and the next instant he was in the thick of it.

Then there came light, for the fort behind them suddenly belched forth shot and shell, aimed at another part of the enemy's line, which answered back in kind.

Torches flared, fires blazed and shot up into the sky, and in the red glare the fight began, hand to hand, sword to sword, neither side asking nor accepting quarter.

Taken by surprise, and outnumbered at this particular point, the enemy gave way in a momentary confusion, and Roland, seizing the advantage, cheered on his men, his flashing sword sweeping to right and left, and mowing down all before him.

Every spring and stride the horse took was over prostrate bodies of his foes.

With stubborn courage the enemy made a stand, giving blow for blow; but nothing could withstand the furious onslaught of these assailants. Like a swollen wave they threw themselves on the thick ranks, which shook and swayed, and inch by inch gave way before the charge.

A yell of triumph rose around Roland, answered by a shout of defiance from the foe.

Suddenly, just as the victory was in his hands, he heard the tramp of cavalry, and in the red glare he saw a company bearing down upon them from the right.

The foe saw it also, and sent up a cheer of delight.

Roland pulled up and looked around. By this time the general had either succeeded or failed in getting in the convoy. In either case no purpose could be attained by remaining, to be outnumbered or extinguished.

Waving his hand, he gave the word to retreat, and swung around, waving his men before him. As he did so he felt a sudden shock run through his right arm, but he contrived to pass his sword into his left hand, and to wave it aloft.

"Back! back!" he shouted; but it was not so easy to call them off then—very like bull-dogs they hung to the foe. There was not a moment to lose. Spurring his horse right across the line of attack, Roland forced his men to turn, and then rode after them, his sleeve cut and ripped, and with the blood streaming from his shoulder down upon his horse's side.

It was not a moment too soon. With a sound like thunder the charging cavalry dashed after them, and a race, a veritable race of [illegible] and death ensued.

Still in the rear, Roland spurred forward, the bullets whistling about his head, the pursuers thundering at his heels.

With a grim smile he looked around. Strain as they might, his men would escape them, the night would be theirs!

In his excitement he waved his sword and laughed, and at the very moment he did so his horse stumbled and fell, pitching him on his face.

A yell rose from his pursuers, and the leader of the troop, being better mounted, gave spurs to his beast, and in a moment was by the side of Roland, his sword upraised to strike; but Roland had extricated himself in a second, and his sword caught the blow meant for himself.

But he was on foot and his adversary mounted; he was weak and wounded, and his adversary fresh and whole. There would have been a speedy issue to the unequal combat, had not a sudden diversion wrought a change.

A corps of cavalry from the Turkish camp had swept down upon the pursuing party in order to cover the retreat of the valiant body of soldiers who had been risking life in order that the fort might be provisioned. The Russian cavalry, being outnumbered, turned and fled, and the leader was left face to face with Roland, who had at once been joined by his faithful man, who with a stroke of his sabre had run the horse of the Russian officer through.

"Foul war, that," said the officer, very coolly, in good English, as he dexterously landed on his feet, and sprang clear of the struggling animal.

"Surrender!" said Roland, "the odds are against you."

The officer looked deliberately at the soldiers who had surrounded him, and then dropped his sword into his scabbard, and answered:

"I am your prisoner."

"A horse, for this gentleman," commanded Roland.

The horse was brought, and without another word the tired troops sped back to the shelter of the fort, ere a larger body of the enemy should appear.

The men were tired, yes, but they were triumphant; and as soon as they were safe under the shelter of their own guns, their feelings found vent in yells and shouts of joy.

Cheering, yelling, frantic with triumph, Roland's men surrounded him, and almost hustled him into the gate.

For a moment order and discipline were forgotten. They had made a charge unequalled for reckless hardihood, and had won. It was some minutes before the roar subsided, and the men fell into line.

And then, alas! it was seen how dear a price had been paid for their victory.

One out of every three men had been left outside, and of those that remained half were wounded.

Roland dropped from his horse—was almost pulled from it, in fact, by the eager hands of his English comrades.

Speechless and half-mad with delight, Charlie Hamilton seized his hand and wrung it, while the others pressed around with hearty congratulations.

"The hottest thing we've had," said one of the most phlegmatic of them, for the first time since he had been in the war, showing signs of strong excitement. "The very hottest! The supplies are in, my boy, and the general is—satisfied."

At this moment a murmur ran through the crowd, and the general came forward, a smile upon his thin face.

Roland saluted, and stood grim and silent.

"I congratulate you, Sir Roland," he said, holding out his hand. "A more masterly thing I never saw! The supplies are in, and—ah, you are wounded!" he broke off, his quick eye noticing Roland's limp and bleeding arm.

"A mere scratch," said Roland, quietly.

The general nodded.

"Go to your quarters, Sir Roland," he said, with grave concern, "and I will send a surgeon."

Then, before he turned away, he addressed a few words of thanks to the men, who answered by a single cheer, and this act of the drama was over.

"Come, old man, let us go," said Charlie Hamilton. "I know what your 'mere scratch' means. Hello! who is this?" and he stared at the prisoner, who had been standing in the shade watching the proceedings with a look of the extremest surprise on his handsome face.

"A prisoner," said Roland, scarcely turning his head. "Show him to my quarters." This latter to his man, who had returned with a sword-cut through his arm.

Then he turned and saluted the men, who clustered around him, cheered him to the echo, and at last Charlie Hamilton succeeded in carrying him off to the hut which had been assigned to him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHO THE RUSSIAN OFFICER WAS.

WITH a careful tenderness equal to that of only womanly hands, Hamilton took off Roland's coat, the others standing around and watching anxiously; and the doctor made his examination.

"Hem!" he said. "Bullet gone right through, Sir Roland. No probing necessary, fortunately. Let's look at the other arm. Ah, a mere trifle."

With deft hands he bound up the wound and hurried off, for there was plenty of work for him to do.

Roland lay down before the fire, while Charlie Hamilton boiled some coffee for him; and the others grouped themselves around him and watched him with anxious glances.

"It was a big thing," said one. "'Pon my word, Chesterton, we didn't expect to see you back."

"We had luck on our side," he said, quietly, "the rarest luck. "If they had seen us five minutes earlier, we should—we shouldn't have come back."

"I never spent such an hour in my life," said Charlie Hamilton, with a long breath. "We couldn't see what was going on, of course, and we didn't know how things had turned out until the men were at the gate. Now I suppose you've had enough of it?"

Roland smiled grimly.

"I never enjoyed myself so much in my life as I did to-night," he answered. "I know now why you fellows are always craving for a fight."

Then he put down the coffee cup and rose slowly.

"I think I'll turn in now—I shall be wanted in an hour or two; for if I am not mistaken there will be an attack on us to-morrow."

"All right," said the stolid one, with a look of supreme satisfaction. "To-morrow, though? Look! there's the dawn. Come along, old fellow—we'll see you safe home. Lean on me."

And with him on one side and Hamilton on the other, Roland reached his quarters, and as he turned to say good night, the dawn gleamed grayly in the east.

His valet opened the door, his right arm bound up, an anxious look on his blackened face.

"Is it much, Sir Roland? Are you badly wounded?"

"A mere nothing," said Roland, sinking down before the fire. "And you? The doctor has been with you?"

"All right, Sir Roland. Mine isn't anything to speak of. Heavens! What a night it has been! I didn't think we should have been back, Sir Roland."

Roland nodded wearily.

"You had no right to go," he said. "Go to bed now, and call me if you hear the bugle. I shall lie down before the fire—it seems rather cold."

The man dragged a mattress to the fire, and made as comfortable a bed as possible: then, with a salute, was about to go, when he hesitated.

"The prisoner, Sir Roland? He's in the next room."

Roland looked up,

"Oh, tell him to come in here. Is he wounded?"

"A slight wound. The doctor has seen him. He's not badly hurt. Shall I send him in?"

"No, I'll go to him. You go to bed."

The man went reluctantly, and Roland, taking a candle, knocked at the door of the adjoining room. Receiving no answer, he opened the door and entered.

By the light of the candle held above his head, he saw the prisoner stretched full length on a heap of straw, his head resting on his hand, his captain's uniform splashed with blood.

The easy carelessness with which the man could sleep under such circumstances, attracted his attention, and he stood for a moment musing wearily. Then he turned to go again, but, as he did so, the light of the candle fell upon a glitering speck upon the man's hand, and, half absently, he approached nearer, to see what it was.

He bent down and looked, then started up, and stood pale and trembling.

The speck of gold was a ring, and that ring was his—Sir Roland's! It was the ring he had given to Marjorie!

For a moment the room spun round, and he had to lean upon his sword, heavily.

Had his wound, and the fatigue combined, got the better of him? Was he dreaming?

He bent down again and looked at the man's face. It was the face of the man he had seen with Marjorie in Chesterton Wold.

For a moment he stood staring at the sleeper, a storm of conflicting emotions raging in his breast. Then he examined the ring again, and, by the light of the candle, held close to the hand, saw his own crest engraved upon the stone.

Yes, it was his ring! It was the man! With a smothered ejaculation, he dropped down upon a broken stool, and stared at the sleeper.

The man, his prisoner, was Marjorie's lover; was the man for whom she had betrayed him—Roland.

In an instant, a furious, irrepressible jealousy sprang up within his bosom. A few hours ago, had he known this man, he could have killed him! A single thrust would have put an end to him! And now, there he lay to mock him.

Half delirious with the loss of blood, Roland sat and stared and ground his teeth.

At least, he would have his ring, he thought, and he seized the hand of the sleeper roughly.

So roughly that the man awaked, and sprang half upright, and sat and stared at the white face on a level with his.

Slowly the remembrance of the night s event, passed into his consciousness, and a faint smiled dawned on his face, as he nodded good-temperedly:

"Glad to see you safe, if not sound. Nothing serious, I hope."

Roland stared at him in silence for a moment, then pointed to the hand on which the ring glittered conspicuously,

"That ring!" he said, hoarsely.

The prisoner glanced at the ring in surprise for a moment, and then of a sudden a smile broke over his face.

"Oh, yes, of course," he said.

Roland's lips twitched.

"That ring," he repeated, with suppressed passion. "That ring is mine—how did you come by it? I demand it. It is mine."

"Yours? Of course it's yours. You know me then?" and he laughed lightly.

Roland eyed him sternly.

"I know you, and you know me. That is enough. Do you refuse to give me that ring?"

The prisoner leaned against the wall, and eyed the questioner with wondering surprise.

"Refuse? No, certainly not. It is yours; but why this tone? I came by it fairly."

A spasm of furious jealousy distorted Roland's face and he sprang to his feet.

"Fairly? Is it your idea of fairness," with an ugly sneer, "it was given to you by a traitress."

The prisoner rose and confronted him.

"There is some mistake," he said, his face reddening, his eyes flashing. "You are rather free with your words. The lady who gave the ring to me deserves no such appellation. To whom has she played traitress? To me she has always been true."

"To me," cried Roland, the delirium of his weakness getting the upper hand, "to me she has played traitress—to me, the man who

loved and trusted her. I know you! It was for you she betrayed me! And I saved your life to-night! Give me that ring!"

The young officer stared and felt at his side for his sword, for there was a deadly meaning in the furious words of Roland; but his sword had been taken from him.

"I don't understand," he said; "I can't make it out. Your ring? yes, I know it is your ring. If I had not known it was, it would have gone long ago. But—but what the deuce are you doing here?"

"I am here," panted Sir Roland, "because her treachery and falsehood sent me here—because it was fated that we two should meet. Give me that ring or——"

And he drew his sword.

"Or you will murder me," said the other, calmly, his eyes fixed with a troubled, puzz'ed scrutiny on Roland's delirious ones. "Well, I'm unarmed—your man took care for that! and at your mercy; though why you should want to kill me—*me*—passes my understanding."

With extended sword Roland moved toward him.

"The ring! the ring!" he gasped, hoarsely.

Then suddenly, as reason struggled for her throne, he made a great effort, recoiled, and flung the sword from him

"No," he said, with a hoarse, unnatural laugh, "keep it! Take it back to her, and wear it on your wedding-day, and tell her that I, her last lover, spared you her first!"

"Lover!" shouted the young man, staring. "Are you mad? I am not her lover! Don't you know me, after all?"

"Know you?" echoed Sir Roland, vacantly.

"Yes. Great Heaven! You cannot think—poor fellow! Take time. Do you know who I am?"

Roland stared, and put his hand to his throbbing brow.

"Yes, I know you," he said, hoarsely. You are the man who met her in the wood. You are Marjorie Deane's lover!"

"Lover!" he cried, with an excited laugh. "Merciful Heaven! You must be mad, or I am. I am Marjorie Deane's brother!"

And he sprang forward in time to catch Roland as he staggered and fell.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE LOVER AND THE BROTHER.

THOUGH Sir Roland's valet had taken the prisoner's sword away, he had been considerate enough to leave him some slight refreshment, and Captain Deane contrived to force some brandy through Roland's pale lips.

A feeling of delicacy deferred him from calling the valet, for he instinctively felt that if he had been in Roland's place he would have desired as few witnesses as possible to be near him.

Presently Roland came to, and after a steady, puzzled stare at the handsome, boyish face, lowered his eyes and sighed—a sigh of infinite remorse, regret, and self-reproaches.

There was no occasion to ask for proof of the young man's assertion, now that Roland looked at him with the glamour of jealousy fallen from his eyes. He could detect evidence of the relationship in every line of the young man's face. There were Marjorie's eyes, the very curve of Marjorie's mobile mouth, and a look of arch raillery which reminded him also of Bessie—bright little Bessie!

With a gesture of intense self-scorn, he raised his hand to his brow.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "what a fool I have been!"

Captain Deane jumped up and busied himself at the table.

"Take a little more brandy, Sir Roland," he said. "Your wounds are deeper than you were inclined to believe. One doesn't feel 'em until the excitement's over. I got two cuts and a bullet-hole in that tussle with your fellows three weeks ago, and I didn't know I was touched until I got into camp."

Roland listened to the young fellow's talk, evidently made to give him time to recover, and, as he listened, Marjorie's very voice seemed to ring in his ears.

"You know me?" he said, at last.

Captain Deane nodded in a cheery way that seemed made up of Marjorie and Bessie.

"Yes, Sir Roland."

Roland held out his hand.

"I hope you will forgive me," he said, in his deep voice, full of humble self-reproach.

"With all my heart," was the instant response, and he took the hot hand and pressed it, "with all my heart. Not that there is anything to forgive on my part. You've done me no wrong, Sir Roland."

Roland colored and paced to and fro.

"I am afraid I have done your sister a grievous wrong," he said.

Captain Deane leaped to his feet with fiery eyes; but Roland waved his hand, deprecating the sudden idea that his words had called up in the brother's mind.

"And myself, too," he said. "I have wrecked half my life—both our lives, perhaps, on a stupid, insane blunder. You know that I was engaged to your sister, Captain Deane?"

The young man inclined his head with a distant haughtiness, not unlike Marjorie's when she was offended.

"I know," he said. "My sister told me on the night when I met her down in Berkshire."

"That night!" groaned Roland. "Heaven and earth!" he cried, suddenly, as the torturing remembrance of the past overwhelmed him, "why did you not make yourself known to me? Why did you create all that mystery and concealment? Could you not trust me?—me, the affianced husband of your sister? And if you could not, why could not she? What did you, what did she fear from me?"

Captain Deane stroked his moustache.

"You forget that I was a deserter. You were a magistrate, and bound to cause my arrest if I had revealed myself. Besides—well, you have never been so unfortunate as to be a fugitive, hunted like a dog from place to place, or you'd understand the distrust with which such a man views every human being. I swore Marjorie to secrecy, Sir Roland. You would have done the same, I venture to think."

Roland groaned.

"You are right, and yet, yet a single word would have dispelled the hideous misunderstanding."

Suddenly Captain Deane looked at him.

"Who told you that I was Marjorie's sweetheart, Sir Roland?"

Roland started and his face paled. Who had told him? No one, in so many words; but some one, nevertheless, had drawn his suspicions that way; and she, the woman who had led him into the wood and to the supposed discovery, was to be his future wife, Helen Montressor.

Captain Deane stared at the fire thoughtfully, waiting for Roland's answer, and when none came, he asked with a tinge of scorn in his voice:

"Why didn't you—if you thought Marjorie was playing you false, Roland—why didn't you cut in between us? By Heaven!

should have done it if I had been in your place! and his eyes flashed.

Roland sank on a stool and rested his head in his hand, as he remembered how Helen Montressor's hand had held him back.

"And how did you come there?" again demanded the young captain.

"I happened—— No!" said Roland, hoarsely. "I was led there—to the place where you were——"

Captain Deane sprang to his feet.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "I knew it! I knew there was somebody hovering about. It was a woman, too!—a fair, beautiful girl. I saw her as I was in hiding, waiting for Marjorie! Sir Roland, there's more in this than appears on the surface. You have behaved cruelly, most cruelly to my sister if you have punished her for your own mistake."

Roland hid his face in his hands.

"I deserve all your reproaches," he said. "You cannot condemn me more than I condemn myself! I have been a fool and a madman!"

Captain Deane paced up and down, his handsome face working with emotion.

"Now I can understand the poor girl's letter," he said. "I might have known that my father's death and their poverty would never have crushed her so if there had not been something else."

"Poverty!" exclaimed Roland, looking up. "What do you mean?"

Captain Deane looked down at him.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know that my father died a ruined man, and that Marjorie and Bessie have had to begin the world anew with only one friend, my father's old clerk?"

Pale and trembling, Roland stared at him.

The young man smiled bitterly.

"Why," he said, "the blow fell the same night. Your desertion must have been instantaneous, Sir Roland. Was it so easy to suspect my poor Marjorie that you could not even give her the chance to explain that you would have vouchsafed a stable boy?"

Roland bowed his head before the young man's indignation.

"I knew nothing of it!" he said, wildly. "I knew no word of it!" And he ground his teeth as he thought how cleverly his mother and the others had kept it from him. "If I had known, do you think?—— And she said no word of it to me when I met her! Not a word."

"Speak of it," said the young man proudly. "It would hardly be Marjorie's way to tell the wealthy Sir Roland of her poverty—the man who had thrown her off. Pure girl! the brightest, purest girl in the world. But she knows how to bear it! She has forgot-

ten you by this time, as you deserve. And if she has not sent you back your ring, it is only because she hasn't it to send. She gave it to me in mistake, that night—as she would have given me the shoes from off her dear feet! It is a satisfaction to me, Sir Roland Chesterton, to be able to return to you your ring," and he cast it with a gesture of contempt at the feet of the other.

Roland started and stared at it in silence for a moment; then he took it up and put it on his finger.

"I accept it," he said, "but only to put it on her finger again. Yes," he exclaimed, striding to and fro wildly, "It may not be too late. She may not have forgotten me. I will win her forgiveness. A life's devotion shall atone for the misery I have caused her! I swear to you, her brother, that I have never ceased to love her! Day and night she has been with me—sleeping and waking. Yes, I will atone; and you, even you, shall be brought to admit that I have done so!"

With trembling eagerness he pulled out his watch, his eyes flashing, his lips quivering.

"There is no time to be lost," he went on. "We must go to her at once! Thank Heaven, I know where to find her! In poverty! My dear Marjorie! We must go at once," and in his frenzied impatience he took up his coat, as if he had but to drive to the London terminus and book seats for Warley.

Marjorie's brother watched him in sad silence for a moment; then he touched him on the arm.

"I am afraid, Sir Roland, that your discovery has come too late."

"Too late!" said Roland, hoarsely, his disturbed mind evidently failing to grasp the situation. "What is to prevent us? Come, Mr. Deane, we must start at once. Too late? No. What can stop me?"

Captain Deane drew him to the window, and gravely pointed to the enemy's camp fires, which, burning at intervals brightly in the morning air, formed a ring around the besieged fort.

"Look!" he said. "That is what will stop us! Sir Roland, there is an army between us and Marjorie."

Roland stared. Then he broke out into fierce and vain imprecations at his own folly.

It was too true! There was she, pining in poverty and sorrow, and here was he, shut up as closely as if inclosed by the walls of a prison! With a groan he sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

Captain Deane stood with folded arms and looked down at him.

Not even he, Marjorie's brother, could desire a heavier punishment for this man, who, fooled by jealousy and a woman's wiles, had worked such wrong.

The young man's resentment yielded to pity.

"Come, Sir Roland," he said, in a gentler voice, "hear up. As you say, it may not be too late, and something will turn up to release us from this trap. Bear up unless you want to knock yourself over altogether. There's fever in your veins, man! Be calm!"

As he spoke the door opened, and Charlie Hamilton entered.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, looking from one to the other, "not to bed yet? Good-evening, sir," nodding to Deane. "Look here, Roland, you must turn in at once if you want to be fresh for the work that's coming on!"

"What is it?" asked Roland, raising his head wearily.

Hamilton laughed.

"Why, we've caught a spy, just come in, and he says that the enemy means to make an attack before night! It seems that you riled 'em by that little spurt of yours. They mean to make an attack in force, and we shall have to put our backs into it."

Roland started to his feet, his eyes flashing with the light of a sudden hope.

"An attack?" he said, with an unsteady laugh. "You are right. I will turn in for an hour or two. I shall be ready at the first call."

"All right," said Charlie, cheerfully. "I should advise you to keep out of it altogether, old fellow, but the general has decided that if we can't hold the fort we are to try and cut through them on the west, and join the main body; so, in any case, this is our last night here, old man."

Then, as he went out, gleefully, Roland turned and laid his hand on Captain Deane's shoulder, his face calm and set, a determined smile on his lips.

"It may not be too late, after all," he said. "To-night sees me on the way to her, or——" and he stopped, significantly.

Captain Deane nodded.

"Meanwhile, I am your prisoner, Sir Roland. What are your commands?"

"That you attend me on parole," answered Roland, with a smile. "If we live, we leave the place together."

"Then you will take some rest?"

"Yes," said Roland, and there was a ring in his voice that had been absent from it for a long time. "Yes, do not fear—I shall sleep soundly until I hear the bugle. Do you do the same. Can I make you more comfortable?" and he looked around.

"No," was the reply. "I am all right, and want nothing except to see you more fit."

"I shall be fit enough," responded Roland, holding out his hand. "You will not refuse to take my hand? If I have sinned against

your sister, I have been punished more bitterly than even you can guess. Will you shake hands?"

The young man grasped the outstretched hand and wrung it.

"I believe you have been punished, Sir Roland," he said. "And I hope to Heaven it may not be too late to put matters right again."

"Amen!" echoed Roland, solemnly, but hopefully, and the door closed on him.

CHAPTER XL.

WHILE SIR ROLAND WAS ABSENT.

MEANWHILE the world rolled on. The war had had its short life in the interests of the world of fashion and folly; it had been a nine days' wonder, and though occasional paragraphs, with capital headings, and sensational telegrams, appeared with distressing regularity in the papers, the world paid little heed.

The great Eastern question had become a great bore long ago. That a fort here and there still held out, that fighting was still going on, and lives were staked and lost, excited no interest. The game had become wearisome even to the players, and the spectators could scarcely be expected to maintain any interest.

In some few minds, however, the war paragraphs did arouse a little sensation, notably in Lady Chesterton's and Helen Montressor's, the mother and the affianced wife of one of the mad Englishmen who were still interposing in the quarrel in which they had no real interest or business.

To the haughty, stiff-necked old woman, the telegrams had an interest paramount to all else the papers contained.

She did not quite know where this willful, reckless son of hers was. No letters had been received for weeks past. He might be lying in six feet of Asian soil, or languishing in a Russian prison. At times she was inclined to give up all hope, but Helen Montressor was still confident and reliant.

Never had the beauty been more popular and sought after. Her approaching marriage lent just the additional touch of sentiment which was wanted to keep her popularity from waning.

To be the beauty of the day was something; but to have refused the Marquis of Graneland for a mere baronet, who spent the interval between his betrothal and marriage in fighting with the Turks,

was to be surrounded by a halo of romance that rendered one, indeed, the celebrity of the season.

Never had Helen Montressor appeared to better advantage. It was true that there was sometimes a hectic flush on the oval, pale face, and an occasional restless, wistful look in the bright blue eyes; but those outward and visible signs of an inward sentiment only went to prove that she had, what many were inclined to doubt, a woman's heart, and that the coming marriage was really one of affection

To both Lady Chesterton and Reginald, she was a bewildering enigma.

Reginald, even light-hearted Reginald, began to regard Roland's absence with an undefined uneasiness.

"Confound it!" he said, over and over again, whenever the subject cropped up at the Daws, "I don't understand it, you know. Advised him to go? Yes, I know I did. He was bound to get away or knock under altogether. Not one of us could have kept it up half as long as he did. I advised him to go, yes; but I meant a little trip to Paris, or a bit of a fling at Vienna. I didn't suppose he was going to be such a fool as to take notice of what that idiot, Hamilton, wrote, and go join the Turks. Why, bless my soul! the lunatic wrote and asked me—actually me—to go over and join him; but that was no reason why I should be fool enough to go."

"And where is Chesterton now?" some one was sure to ask.

"Where?" Reginald would always answer, peevishly. "Heaven only knows! We haven't heard from him for weeks! Knocked on the head by the Russians, perhaps, or shut up in one of those beastly forts, eating horse-flesh and sawdust bread. And there is the estate going to the dogs, and the next heir—some fellow whom nobody heard of—scenting around, and expecting to walk in and take possession."

Then Reginald would leave the club and go around to Grosvenor square, to find Lady Chesterton haggard and anxious; and they would condole together, until Helen appeared to laugh their fears to scorn.

"Dead! Nonsense!" she would exclaim, the hectic flush rising to her fair face, her eyes flashing defiantly. "Why should he be dead? Roland never did like letter-writing; you have said so yourself a hundred times. No, he is not dead. No man is more able to take care of himself than is Roland. Besides, you don't know that he is in the war."

"The last letter we received was from the seat of war," the old lady would say, with a long sigh.

"The last? That is ever so long ago," the beauty would retort, with a laugh. "Since then he has had time to be at the other end of Europe. No; I am quite sure nothing has happened; nobody

shall make we believe it. He will come back in time for the wedding, if it is only a day beforehand."

And never for one hour did she delay the preparations. The dressmakers were as hard at work as if the bridegroom were close at hand. The house in Wiltshire, from which Roland had been returning when he found Marjorie leaning over the gate in Warley lane, was still filled with a noble army of carpenters and upholsterers. Even the wedding-cake was ordered. And to every one who mentioned her absent lover, the beauty responded, with a smile:

"He is away for the benefit of his health. We do not expect him back until the last minute."

But though she carried it off so bravely in public, there were moments when the proud spirit threw off its mask and grappled with the stern facts.

Not even her maid, who brushed out the long tresses of golden hair, had any suspicion of the paroxysms of doubt and jealousy that wrung the proud heart of the popular beauty, and caused her to toss to and fro through the wakeful night.

For through it all she knew with a certainty beyond all doubt, that she did not hold his heart—that he still loved the brown-eyed girl, whom she by treachery and falsehood had supplanted.

But like the Spartan boy, who hid the fox under his robe, and let it gnaw his vitals rather than confess his theft, she hid her love and her doubts, and appeared before the world smiling and triumphant.

And, after all, she did not doubt.

"Let him come back to me," she thought, proudly conscious of her power, "and all will be well. Let him come back, and I can hold him against the world!"

And so the preparations went on, the stern old mother sitting silent and sorrowful, amazed at the confidence of the girl, who refused to believe that anything ill had happened to Roland.

"You will see," said the beauty, with a brilliant smile, and the hectic flush that so frequently glowed in her cheeks. "He will come back, and you will have all your anxiety for nothing."

"All right," said Reginald, gloomily, one night when he dropped in at Grosvenor square, after a ball, at which the beauty had carried off the laurels. "I don't want to discourage you; but I would merely remark that the wedding was fixed for the thirteenth, and that to-day is the sixth, and that we haven't had a line from him for a month!"

She smiled, and turned the diamond bracelet on her arm.

"One week! Well, he is on his road home, no doubt! I shall be mistress of Chesterton Wold in a week. Have you seen my dress? Worth has surpassed himself. I always said that I should be the best-dressed bride of the century, and I think I shall be."

"If he comes home," growled Reginald.

"Oh, he will come," said the beauty; and then, as her brother turned away, she murmured to herself, "but if he does not I shall be a bride nevertheless."

What did she mean? Perhaps Lord Grancland could have answered.

CHAPTER XLI.

HARVEY CUMMING'S HAPPINESS.

ON the same day that the beauty was prophesying the return of Roland within a week, Marjorie and Bessie were sitting in the little room, which went by the name of the best parlor. Marjorie was putting the finishing touches to a water-color sketch of the church; Bessie was tilted back in a chair, tilted to its extreme limits, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes fixed on Marjorie's face with a thoughtful, admiring gaze.

"Nearly finished, Marjorie?" she asked, presently.

"Just finished," answered Marjorie, with her head on one side to view the effect of the last touches.

"I'm glad of it," said Bessie. "I've been waiting for the last quarter of an hour for that finishing touch. Let's look at it! Let me see; how much do they give you for this?" and she took up the sketch unceremoniously.

"Two guineas. Take care that you do not smudge it!" answered Marjorie, smiling.

"All right," said Bessie, cheerfully. "It's worth fifty guineas. Why don't you put Mr. Cumming in? He'd be a pleasing addition to the picture."

Marjorie laughed softly and wiped her brushes in silence.

"Yes, I'd put him in," said Bessie, carelessly. "He'd make a handsome addition. By the way, Marjorie, what have we—or rather you—done to offend Mr. Cumming?"

Marjorie looked up with a sudden blush; then rose and put her paints together, as she answered:

"Offend him? I don't know, Bessie."

"Oh, I didn't know," said Bessie, resuming her old position and scrutinizing Marjorie through half-closed eyes. "Something has offended him, I suppose. He has not been down to the school for—oh, for weeks past, and he doesn't call as he used to. Indeed, if he happens to pass, he turns his eyes away, as if we were forbidden fruit."

"Bessie!" exclaimed Marjorie, reproachfully; but a faint flush rose to her face.

"It's the truth," said Bessie, calmly. "No one could help noticing it. If we had been detected playing pitch-and-toss on Sunday, he couldn't avoid us more palpably. What is it?"

"I—don't know," answered Marjorie, falteringly.

"I believe that to be a falsehood," said Bessie, cheerfully. "But I'm very sorry. A nicer man than Harvey Cumming——"

"Mr. Cumming," corrected Marjorie, but laughingly

"Harvey Cumming," repeated Bessie, with pretty wilfulness. "What nonsense it is to always talk of a man by his formal name just because he is a clergyman! He was christened Harvey, and he is Harvey. It's a pretty name, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie, "it is a pretty name."

"Very well, then," retorted Bessie, "I choose to call him Harvey Cumming. He ought never to have been a clergyman, with those shoulders! He ought to have been a soldier! I should like to see him in a scarlet coat. If he had been a soldier, what would the young ladies of Warley have done, Marjorie? Eaten him up, considering that they worship him now."

Marjorie laughed again, and going to the window, leaned out, her beautiful face turned to the sunlight.

"They would have eaten him," said Bessie, confidently. "I can tell off on my right hand five maidens who are dying of love for him."

"Nonsense!" laughed Marjorie. "Pray be more sensible, Bessie!"

"I am sensible," retorted Bessie. "I am crammed full of sense, only you will not believe it. Let me see, there are the two Miss Greenings, there is Miss Drayton, there is——"

"Hush!" whispered Marjorie, warningly, and the door opened and Harvey Cumming's tall form entered.

No knight of the middle ages could have behaved more chivalrously than this vicar of our modern days had done.

Many a man, loving a girl as he loved Marjorie, would have given her no rest until he had gained her; but Harvey Cumming had behaved with a nobleness which befitted his name and ancient lineage.

Ever since that night, a month ago, when he had declared his love and besought her to allow him to hope, he had lived on that hope alone, and had never once obtruded his love.

At one time a daily visitor to the school, he had for the last month laid himself open to the distinct charge of neglect of the youth of his parish. At one time he had never allowed a day to go by without calling at the school-house and exchanging a word with the beautiful mistress; but lately he had so pointedly avoided the

lane, in which the ivy-covered little cottage stood, that Bessie, to whom Marjorie had said no word, had begun to think he was offended.

Once or twice he had met Marjorie by chance in the houses of some of the villagers, or in the sweet-smelling lanes, but beyond a firm, tight clasp of the hand, he had said nothing to remind her of that evening a month ago, when his heart had spoken out.

Even now his visit seemed more intended for Bessie than for Marjorie, who stood silent by the window, the beautiful eyes downcast, her face faintly flushed.

"Oh," said Bessie, with her usual candid frankness, "we were just speaking of you, Mr. Cumming. I was saying we had offended you; have we?"

Harvey Cumming smiled, and laid his white hand on her golden head.

"Were you speaking of me?" he asked, glancing at the graceful, motionless figure in the window. "That was kind of you. Offended? No, I am not so easily offended, Bessie. Why are you not at the Grange? They expected you."

"Did they?" asked Bessie, coolly. "Well, I've come to a resolution, Mr. Cumming, and that is not to go out again without Marjorie. You see, she is such a stay-at-home, that as long as I will go without her, she will never budge away from the door. So I mean to stay at home and grow pale and thin, like the girl in the 'May Queen,' who falls into a decline and dies. Then Marjorie will be sorry."

He laughed, and looked at Marjorie.

"Hadn't you better avert that direful climax, Miss Marjorie?" he asked.

Marjorie smiled.

"It is only an idle threat," she answered. "Bessie could not work it out if she tried."

"Meanwhile," he said, "suppose you go with her now. I am going up to the Grange and shall be happy if you will let me escort you. Mrs. Greening will be delighted to see you."

Marjorie hesitated, but Bessie jumped up.

"I'll get your hat and jacket, Marjorie," she said. "Don't give way, Mr. Cumming. Insist upon her going!" and she ran from the room.

Harvey Cumming went up to the window.

"Seriously," he said, "why should you persist in remaining in seclusion when so many desire your presence among them?"

Marjorie looked down.

"I am very happy as it is," she said, in a low voice.

He smiled.

"But how about their happiness? If you can add to it, why should you not?"

"Here's your hat, Marjorie," exclaimed Bessie, "and here's your jacket. You haven't seen her play lawn-tennis, Mr. Cumming. She can give Miss Greening points and then beat her. Come along, Marjorie!"

Marjorie smilingly put on her hat and jacket, and they went out, Bessie chattering at their side in her usual light-hearted fashion.

All Warley was on the tennis ground, and gave a most hearty welcome to Mr. Cumming, who had absented himself from their gatherings during the last month. And all Warley welcomed the beautiful Miss Deane, who, so to speak, was making her first appearance among them.

"This is as it should be, my dear," said Mrs. Greening, pressing Marjorie's hand. "We all know your sister, and have long wished that you should join us. I am very glad to see you."

In her plain black dress, with lace at the throat and wrists, her tall form stood out from the rest, marked by that peculiar grace which was Marjorie's birth-right, and of which rough fate had not robbed her.

There were several visitors from neighboring towns, and Mrs. Greening went from one to the other, graciously explaining away the little air of curiosity and surprise at the appearance of a school mistress at the Grange.

"Oh, yes, she is a school-mistress," said Mrs. Greening, "but they are both most unexceptionable. You remember Mr. Deane the millionaire and financier? Well, these are his daughters, brought down by a sudden misfortune. Beautiful? Oh, yes, she's very beautiful, poor girl!" and the good-natured mistress of the Grange, who was "fat and scant of breath," went from one to the other, thoroughly enjoying her little display of benevolence and sympathy.

Meanwhile the "poor girl" seemed hardly to require much sympathy. Lawn-tennis, if you know how to play it, is one of the best remedies for melancholia and all other love complaints, and very soon Marjorie's cheeks were crimsoned, and her eyes were flashing, and her red lips laughing as of old.

"Your sister plays a good game, Bessie," said Harvey Cumming, who had scarcely taken his eyes off the beautiful face he loved so dearly.

"Doesn't she," exclaimed Bessie, emphatically. She had contrived to get herself into a violent perspiration, and was being fanned by Master Greening, from Eton, who had fallen in love with her, and whom she teased almost to the verge of youthful madness. At this moment he was fanning her with his hat, and gazing with all a boy's admiration into her clear, artless eyes. "There's nothing she doesn't do well; but lawn-tennis is her particular game. Why don't you play, Mr. Cumming?"

"Mr. Cumming used to be captain of his college club," said young Greening, looking up at him with an awed smile.

"That's so many years ago," laughed Cumming, nodding at him; "however, I'll take a racquet if they'll make room for me."

A few moments afterwards he was playing, with Marjorie for a partner, Bessie having dexterously arranged it so, for she was heartily in favor of Harvey Cumming as a brother, and was determined to do what lay in her power to have him for one.

Both he and Marjorie were excellent players, and it was a treat to watch their skilful handling of the ball. Gradually a little knot of spectators gathered around the court; but Marjorie, who would have shrunk into her cell a month ago, seemed to have cast the garment of shyness from her this afternoon, and stood revealed as the Marjorie of old, in all her fresh, frank beauty.

Cumming, too, had thrown aside his clerical gravity, and his voice rose and mingled with hers, and sounded like a lad's fresh from college.

Of course, they won, and then stood looking at each other, both feeling rather abashed at their buoyant spirits.

"Will you play again?" he eagerly asked; but Marjorie shook her head, answering, laughingly:

"No, I am quite out of breath."

"Come and sit down," he said, and brought a chair for her. "Mind you don't catch cold! Have you brought a shawl?" he asked, with that quiet and respectful solicitude with which he always watched over her.

Marjorie laughed and threw her pocket-handkerchief around her neck, thereby unwittingly making a snowy line of white to show up the delicate tints of her fair, oval face. He stood over her, looking down at her, his love glowing in his handsome eyes.

"Are you glad you came?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, a little shyly, "I am glad. I should not have ventured out of my little shell if you had not persuaded me. I am glad I came."

"And I," he said, in a low voice. "To see you happy is the gladdest sight in the world for me. And I think you have been happy."

Then fearing, by the sudden downcast look on her face and its heightened color, that he had gone too far, he went and brought her a cup of tea. The way in which he handed it to her was eloquent of his devotion, and Marjorie would need to be insensible indeed, not to feel it.

Her heart began to beat, and she looked around with vague uneasiness, and took out her watch.

"I think I must go now," she said, rising. "It is Saturday, and

I have ever so much to do. Bessie may stay. I will go and bid Mrs. Greening good-by."

He did not follow her, but when she had, with much difficulty, got away, and was half way across the field which led to the village, she heard a step—his step—behind her, and she turned.

"Why did you come?" she asked. "They could not spare you yet."

"You reminded me it was Saturday," he said, going to her side, "and that I had my sermon to finish."

Then, as Marjorie looked down, he asked, humbly:

"You are not offended? You do not think it intrusive of me to follow you?"

She looked up, a vague trouble and pity in her eyes.

"No, oh, no," she answered, in a low voice, and went on rapidly. "What a pleasant afternoon we have had. I don't wonder at Bessie liking them all. Did you tell her she need not hurry, and that I would send Margaret for her?"

"Yes," he answered, with a smile; "but I think she considerrd the information quite superfluous. She told me she hadn't thought of leaving yet, and that she would take care of Margaret."

Marjorie could not help laughing at the characteristic speech of Bessie.

"I am afraid Bessie is not as respectful as she ought to be."

"Bessie knows when she is loved," he said, gently. "We are great friends, and understand each other perfectly. If she were my own sister——"

Then he stopped with a quick flush, as the significance of the words broke upon him.

"Yes," he went on, firmly, and in a tone that made Marjorie draw a quick breath. "If she were my own sister we could not care more for each other. I wish she were. Marjorie, dear Marjorie! you can make us brother and sister. Why will you not do it?"

Marjorie stopped, and then hurried on, her hands working nervously, her color coming and going.

No girl in the world could remain insensible to such devotion. The power of his manly presence and deep musical voice seemed to infold her, and there was only pity in her heart for him and for herself.

"Why will you not?" he repeated, his eyes fixed ardently on her downcast face. "Do Marjorie. You know how dearly I love you! I made a vow the night I parted from you a month ago, that I would not pester and harass you, would not speak to you of my love for a month. I have kept my vow, though the weeks have seemed woefully long and weary. But here I am at your side again, with the old story. I have nothing to add to it, Marjorie, nothing

except that I will not ask for too much—for all your heart at once. I know, or I can surmise, that there has been a something painful and trying in the past; but I do not ask you to confide it to me. I don't want to make you unhappy. I would lay down my life to purchase your happiness," and his voice broke.

Marjorie looked up, the tears in her eyes.

"Don't, don't," she said. "I am all unworthy. I cannot give you anything in exchange for all you so nobly offer me! Oh, I am quite unworthy."

He flushed and took her hands.

"Unworthy!" he said, then stopped, his emotion silencing him. "No, Marjorie, in my eyes you are worthy of the best love that the highest could offer."

"You do not know," said Marjorie, wearily. "Listen! I did not think to say this to a living soul, but I owe it to you. My love is given to one who cares so little for it that he has cast it aside. It is my shame and my sorrow, but so it is. Now let me go my way alone, Mr. Cumming."

"No, Marjorie, all is not said yet," he replied, with a sad eagerness. "I did not know this, I could not, and I do not now comprehend how it can be true; but I did suppose that there had been an experience in your life which had left a wound. I could not hope, and did not, that you would give me all your love; but—will you let me ask you this—and believe I say it tenderly as one who would die rather than cause you a moment of heart agony—do you hope for any change in—in regard to——"

"I know what you ask," interrupted Marjorie, sadly. "No. He is to marry another. That is past; but the love, alas for me! cannot be rooted out of my heart. I have said this to you, when never before have I confessed it to myself," and the silent tears rolled down her fair cheeks.

"Believe that I respect your confidence, Marjorie, and let me say what is more than ever certain to me, that you are worthy of the highest love man can give. I love you, Marjorie. I do not ask your love now. I can win it—believe that I can. I will give you the devotion of my life, and shall deem myself well repaid when you can say that I have won from you a small part of the affection of which I know you are capable. Do not refuse me because of the past. Give yourself and your future happiness into my keeping. Knowing the past, I can love you more tenderly for it. It is your present and your future I ask for. You past has gone into God's keeping. Give me yourself and the right to try to make you happy, and I am content. I ask nothing more of you. Marjorie, it is the happiness of my life that is at stake, or I would not plead so selfishly."

Marjorie looked at him with sorrowful earnestness.

"No woman could be but happy in your hands," she said, "oh, I know that! But I—I have but the shadow and semblance to give in return. My life seems a shadow—my heart is lost forever!"

"Not so!" he urged, "for I will find it and keep it for my own, my very own! Come, my darling! By a word you can make me the happiest man in all the world! And Bessie! Will you think it vain of me to say that Bessie will be happy, too? Marjorie! dear, dear Marjorie! give me the right to win your love! God helping me, you shall not repent it!"

As he spoke he took her hand and drew her to him. She did not resist; but she looked up at him with her eyes full of tears, as she said:

"Take me, if you will, knowing how my life is wrecked; but take me, also knowing that no man lives whom I more respect, and believing that I will strive to make you a good wife. God help me if I have done wrong in this!"

* * * * * * * * *

Two hours later, Bessie, running in breathless fron the race she had run with the little maid-servant, Margaret, and finding the house empty, sprang out into the trim little garden and almost into the arms of a tall, dark figure that was just entering the house.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "is it a burglar? Oh, it's you, Mr. Cumming! Where's Marjorie? Have you just murdered her, and come from burying her under the apple tree? Oh, there you are!" she rattled on, as Marjorie came from the shadow and slipped past her into the house.

"Why!" exclaimed Bessie, starting with amazement, and was about to follow, when Harvey Cumming slipped his arm around her waist, and, holding her for a moment, bent and kissed her.

"Mr. Cumming!" gasped Bessie, looking up into his happy face, "have you gone clean, stark mad?"

"What's the matter, Bessie?" he coolly asked. "Can't a brother kiss his sister?"

Bessie opened her mouth in speechless surprise, for a moment, then, with a cry of delight, she stood on tiptoe and gave him back the kiss.

"Of course," she said, "but is it really true. Oh, I am so glad!"

Then, breaking from him, she ran into the house, and from room to room, and at last found a crouching figure by the bedroom window.

"Oh, Marjorie," she exclaimed, sinking down by her sister, and throwing her arms around her neck, "Is it really true? Crying? Ah, don't Marjorie, dear! How happy you will be!"

"You are glad then, Bessie?" whispered the tremulous voice.

"Glad? I am frantic with delight, Marjorie. He's the best

fellow in the world, and too good for anybody but you. Oh, Marjorie! and this is to be the end—the happy end of it all. Glad? I cry with you for joy. I don't wonder you cry after all. Oh, Marjorie!" she went on, little thinking how her every word pierced her sister's heart, "he will never leave you as the other did—not if all the Helen Montressors in London were tugging at him!"

Marjorie started, and her face blanched white to the very lips, but she did not speak. She merely stroked the rough, tangled hair from the fair forehead and kissed it.

CHAPTER XLII.

MARJORIE'S WEDDING EVE.

"IT'S the most perfect dress I ever saw," exclaimed Bessie. "Not that I have ever seen many wedding dresses, it's true; but I've read about them and seen them in the fashion plates, and that's just as good, isn't it? When I'm married, my dear Marjorie, I'll have just such another. You mayn't try it on, may you? It's unlucky, isn't it? But, there! I know how you will look. Dead white always was your color. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if there was a free fight in the church to-morrow, the other young men will be so mad that Harvey is going to have you."

It was just three weeks since Harvey Cumming had won Marjorie's consent, and in spite of her remonstrances he had succeeded in persuading her to let the day be set so soon.

"I shall not begin to make you love me until you are my wife," he had said, and Marjorie had yielded because she thought it could make no difference to her, and because in her humility and fear of doing him a wrong she had made it her practice to do whatever he asked.

Nor would she be a dismal bride, but with that courage she possessed she entered into the spirit of the coming event, and taught herself to smile and think herself happy.

Not for many a year had a wedding caused so much excitement in Warley. The living was rich, and Harvey Cumming was handsome. Many and various had been the match-making mammas who had laid traps for the young vicar. Then, in addition, there was the romance attached to the young bride. It was well known

that she was the daughter of the millionaire, and it was rumored that there had been a previous and romantic attachment violently broken.

Warley, notwithstanding the disappointment of some of the young ladies, was in the seventh heaven of delighted excitement; and though there was some disappointment, there was no ill-feeling; for Marjorie bore herself so quietly, so meekly it might almost be said, that it was impossible to feel aggrieved against her.

Indeed, it was Bessie who took the foremost part in the preparations. Bessie was in her element. She and Mrs. Cartel—of course Mr. Cartel was to give the bride away—purchased the wedding-dress and trousseau; and if she had been going to wear it herself, Bessie could not have displayed more anxiety and interest.

"It's fortunate that I am only an inch shorter than Marjorie," she said; "for I can try everything on."

And Marjorie stood aside, almost a disinterested spectator, and looked on smilingly, with that peaceful serenity on her beautiful face which had come to it lately.

To-night, Mr. and Mrs. Cartel were at the vicarage, the schoolhouse having no spare bedroom, and Mr. Cartel, seated in the arm-chair in the study, with a cigar and a glass of whisky and water, was going over, for the twelfth time, but not once too often for Harvey Cumming, the story of Mr. Deane's rise, fall and death.

To night Harvey Cumming learned what little Mr. Cartel knew of Marjorie's engagement to Sir Roland Chesterton—heard it with a dull, heavy pain that Mr. Cartel little suspected, so well did the listener hide it.

But he had no fear. Once she was his, his very own he would teach her to forget Sir Roland Chesterton, or any other.

"Yes," said Bessie, taking up the dress for the fiftieth time, and viewing it with her head cocked on one side, "it is simply perfect! Mine is not a bad dress, not by any means; but this?" and quite unable to conclude in fitting terms of eulogy, she laid the wonderful garment down with tender care, and returned to the table, where she was making white satin rosettes for the coachman's button-holes and the horses' heads.

Opposite sat Marjorie, her arms extended on the table, her hands folded idly, though her writing-desk lay open before her.

Very beautiful she looked, all the more beautiful, perhaps, for the soft, dreamy light which glowed in her dark, eloquent eyes, for the little touch of gentle wistfulness that curved the red lips.

Her eyes were fixed on Bessie's nimble fingers, and she smiled every now and then at the incessant streams of chatter which poured from Bessie's restless lips. But, all the same, it would not have needed the closest of observers to detect that her thoughts were wandering, and that the dark eyes were blind to the beauties of the satin rosettes.

"Yes, it's a pity it isn't St. George's, Hanover square," said Bessie, tossing a rosette into the basket; "we should have had the newspaper people with a long report, and all the particulars of the bride's dress, and the length of her eye-lashes. As it is, we shall have a full, true and particular account in the Warley and Stapleton *Bugle*, as follows: 'The bride was exquisitely dressed in dull white satin, which showed off to advantage the beauty with which the lady is most conspicuously endowed——'"

Marjorie laughed, but absently.

"Have you written the report yourself, Bessie?" she asked.

"No, my dear; if I had I should say something for myself: Miss Bessie Deane, the chief bridesmaid, was also exquisitely dressed in white silk, with——' But nobody will notice my poor dress, except Charlie Greening."

"Charlie Greening?" repeated Marjorie, smiling.

"Yes," nodded Bessie, coolly. "He'll admire it, poor boy! He has had a special holiday for the wedding, you know. I met him to-day, and he told me he thought I should be the most beautiful girl there. Poor fellow! I had to sit on him. He needs a great deal of it. Not literally, of course, though I think he would go mad with delight if I should really sit on him."

Marjorie laughed at the young chatterbox.

"You seem to be busy with your thoughts, Marjorie," said Bessie, suddenly.

"Yes, I was thinking. What is there for me to do! Give me some of those rosettes, won't you?"

"Not one," answered Bessie, putting them out of her reach. "Finish your letter."

"I have. Poor boy! What would I not give if he were here? And we don't even know that he will get it for months."

Bessie paused.

"You are not going to fret about him! Haven't we just heard that he was safe and sound? Besides, who knows how soon he may be here? That stupid fort can't hold out forever, and then he will get leave and come to us, like an arrow from a bow. Fancy, Marjorie! Captain Deane!"

Marjorie's face lighted up and she murmured:

"I knew we'd have cause to be proud of him. I wish he were here!"

Ah, if she but knew how he, with a companion, was striving with all their might to reach her! And had *they* but known how slim their chance was of ever again seeing Marjorie *Deane*!

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

"IF brother were here," said Bessie, "there'd probably be a fight between him and Mr. Cartel as to which should give you away. Dear old Cartel! I'll be bound he is enjoying himself up at the vicarage to-night. I told Harvey to be sure to give him plenty of cigars and some whisky and water. It's the best fun in the world to see them together. Harvey, so meek, and eager to be friendly, and old Cartel anxious to impress him with the idea that in marrying poor papa's daughter he is contracting an alliance with a princess of the blood. And the best of it is that Harvey quite falls in with that view. If ever a man was in love, that unfortunate man is Harvey Cumming! Marjorie, if you don't worship him, if you don't adore him passionately, I will never forgive you. Harvey's the best man on earth!"

Marjorie looked up, a faint color flushing her face.

"Yes," she said, simply.

"There's the last," said Bessie, flinging the rosette into the basket. "Now, what next? What's the time? Half-past eight! They will be here in half an hour! Oh!" and she stretched out her hands in dismay, "there isn't such a thing as a cigar or a drop of whiskey in the house!"

Marjorie rose, and pushed her gently out of the room, with a little laugh.

"All right!" she said; "I'll explain to Mr. Cartel that you've smoked and drank them all."

Bessie went out, and bounded up the stairs, singing, and Marjorie went back to her chair, and fell into her old attitude.

To-night, as the hours fly by and carry her toward the all-important day, a sense of unreality takes possession of her, which not even the mass of white satin on the chair beside her can dispel.

Try as she would, her thoughts, like home-flying birds, sped back to the woods of Chesterton Wold. The handsome, haggard face of the man who had loved and left her, rose before her like a haunting vision; his voice rang in her ears.

Once or twice to night, as the dreary abstraction had grown upon her, she had almost felt the touch of his lips upon hers as they had clung in that first passionate kiss, and it had needed all her strength of mind to keep her from springing up with a wild cry of sorrowing despair.

It was only by repeating to herself the very words that Bessie had used, that she could dispel the haunting phantom of the past:

"The best man on earth!"

Yes, and the noblest, was the man she was to marry on the morrow; and yet—well, he was not Roland Chesterton.

For all her outward calm, her heart beat fast, her head burned, and her hands would have been restless had she not kept them fast locked.

With an effort, she rose and took up the wedding-dress.

Yes, she would have done with the past and all its haunting memories! Safe in the love of such a man as Harvey Cumming, she would be happy—happy!

With nervous hands she folded the dress, and, smiling at the litter on the table, made an attempt to put it straight.

Overhead, Bessie's light footsteps pattered cheerfully, her voice floating down to the tune of "Young Lochinvar."

In a few moments her lover would be with her, handsome, and eager, and devoted. What a fate was hers! To be worshipped by such a man!

Yet, even as she thus thought, that other face rose before her, her hands dropped to her side, and she stood staring with dreamy eyes at the vision of that other as he had stood beside her in his evening dress, his dark, passionate eyes—so different from the pure ones of Harvey Cumming—fixed on her, pierced to her heart, and a thrill went through her.

"If one could but forget," she murmured with passionate anger at her weakness. "Oh, shame, shame upon me, that a thought should trouble me now!"

With a gesture of self-reproach she wrung her hands and set her lips tightly.

Then she started, for there was the sound of footsteps outside.

With a blush she sprang to hide the dress away in its box, but before she could do so, the door opened—a tall figure strode in and seized her in its arms.

With a feeling of surprise, for Harvey was gentleness itself, she turned her head, and met Roland's passionate eyes burning into her soul.

Like a thing of stone she stood, passive and unresisting, her lips apart, her eyes fixed on his, spell-bound.

"Marjorie, my darling!" he cried, hoarsely, and his lips clung to hers.

The spell broke, a deep crimson flooded her face for a moment, her eyes closed, and then she drooped lily-like upon his breast, her hands clinging to him as a drowning man's cling, at the last gasp, to the saving rock.

Not yet, not yet did she realize it! But it was as if a heaven of

happiness had opened for her, and the joy were almost lost in the delirium of the surprise.

As for him, convulsive shudders of emotion passed like waves over his pale, haggard face, that still, through all the rack and harrassment of the past few weeks, retained its grand, subtle beauty.

"My darling! oh, my darling!" he murmured hoarsely, "have I killed you? Forgive me! I have been watching you through the window until I could not keep from you longer. Oh, my Marjorie! is it really you, my own darling? Heaven forgive me for frightening you! Speak to me, Marjorie! Let me hear your sweet lips say that you have not forgotten me!"

Forgotten him! Alas! alas! When every sense within her responded to his touch—when her heart leaped at sound of his voice as a dog leaps to its own master. Forgotten him! Ah, if she could but forget!

"Not a word? Not one word?" he pleaded, his voice low and trembling with passionate entreaty. "Will you not look at me? It is I—Roland—come back. I, who ought never to have gone—fool that I was! Marjorie, my darling, I am not fit to touch you—I have wronged you, wronged you cruelly! Forgive me, my darling, my own sweet Marjorie!"

And he lifted her to his lips; but before they met in the passionate kiss, the spirit within her freed itself from the spell, and, with a low cry of agony and pain, she put her hand against his heart and forced her head back from him, her eyes fixed on his with a wild despair, her lips pale and trembling.

"No, no!" she panted.

"No!' he echoed, hoarsely. "Marjorie, for Heaven's sake, do not drive me mad! Look, how at your feet I beg your forgiveness!" and he dropped on one knee, his arm still wound around her waist and imprisoning the lithe figure that writhed in his grasp. "Marjorie, look at me! I have frightened you. I—I ought to have written, but I would not dash my joy with one drop of cold caution. Look at me, Marjorie, here at your feet! You—you have not forgotten me! You still love me! You will—you must forgive me! I can explain everything! No, I will not insult you with explanations! I am here at your feet—see! at your feet, my darling! You will forgive me!"

Hoarsely, brokenly he poured out the passionate entreaty. Wildly she trembled and looked at him; in her ears his words surged like the roll of the sea; his face seemed in a mist before her eyes; but his hands—ah, his hands! hot and eager as they clung to her imploringly—were tangible enough, and she thrilled beneath them.

"Marjorie," he said, with a pause, during which his eyes had wandered over her face with greedy, hungry longing, "Marjorie,"

and his voice was calmer, but still trembled and quivered with the storm of passion that raged within him, "I have come back to implore you to forgive me, and to make you my wife. It is all summed up in that. I will make the rest as clear as the sun at noonday—presently, presently. Now, now, I want to hear you say, 'Roland, I forgive you! I love you still! I will be your wife! Take me!'"

At last her voice found sound, and "Too late! too late!" broke from her pale lips.

For a moment the sense of her words failed to reach him, then a spasm convulsed his face, and he staggered to his feet

"Too late! too late!" he hoarsely echoed. "What—what do you mean? Ah!" and with a cry of dread he seized her arm. "Are you married?"

She shook her head slowly, and shrank back, for with a cry of relief he was ready to seize her again.

"Too late!" she said, and over her face came a shamed look of sorrow, and into her eyes a look of pitiful anguish.

"Why? why?" he passionately demanded.

Then, still holding her, he turned and looked around the room, with an eager, yet vacant stare; but suddenly his eyes fell on the white dress, on the lace and ribbons, on the unmistakable signs of bridal attire.

With a shudder his head dropped from her arm, and he stood as if smitten by a sudden death-stroke.

Silence fell like a pall; the clock ticked loudly, Bessie's "Young Lochinvar" floated down in bitter mockery, and there they stood, these two, so near and yet so divided.

At last he looked up.

"Tell me," he said, with his eyes fixed on her's in dumb, pitiable entreaty, "the—this—this—then—" and his arm moved in the direction of the white satin, and then fell to his side—"is yours?"

He read the answer in her eyes.

"Yours! You are going to be married! Is that so? When?"

"To-morrow," she breathed, faintly.

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" he echoed, vacantly; "to-morrow!" and his hand wandered to his brow—his hand that was so thin and wasted.

Then he turned with lowered head.

"By Heaven!" he breathed, "I am punished!"

White and rigid, one hand holding the chair for support, she watched him.

"Yes," he muttered more to himself than to her, "I deserve it."

Then he looked at her over his shoulder, as a man might look

when he takes his last glimpse at the paradise from which he is expelled forever. His eyes took in every line of the beautiful face, and slowly, with bent head, he moved toward the door.

Alas! she could not let him go! The passionate love which was not dead, but had sprung into life again at his touch, leaped like a wild beast within her bosom, and overmastered her.

With a low cry she sprang toward him, and, falling at his feet, clung to him.

"Roland! Roland! Roland!"

Shaking in every limb, he looked down at her for a moment, then he bent and took her in his arms, and with a wild light breaking over his face, he cried:

"No! not too late! You will not leave me, my darling, my darling!"

For a minute, one brief, delicious minute, she yielded to him, then honor, right, conscience, rose and did battle with her soul for the man whose plighted wife she was.

"No, no!" she cried. "Save me, Roland! Save me from myself! I love you! I love you! But it is too late! too late! Save me, Roland! Go! go! go! now, this minute! I—I cannot bear it longer! See! look at me! Listen!" and she shrank back, her eyes fixed wildly on his. "Every kiss of yours, every word of yours, shames, shames me! You have come too late, Roland! I am married—married already in all but the mere form! I cannot, cannot betray him!"

A malediction broke from his lips.

"You are mine and no other's," he passionately exclaimed. "Who is he, the other, that he should step between us?"

The question made her shudder, but it calmed her.

"Who?" she repeated, panting. "One who loves me better than you did—one who has never deserted me—whom I dare not betray. Roland, say what you will, I shall marry him to-morrow. You are too late! too late! The past can never be revived—never! If—if you love me, leave me now, this moment, while I have strength to save my honor. Go, oh, go?"

And with a great expiring effort she freed herself.

He stood and looked at her.

"Is—is there no hope?" he groaned.

"None," she breathed, her hand pressed to her heaving bosom. "None, but that we may never meet again."

"None?" he said, vacantly. "By Heaven! it is hard. But I have deserved it. Oh, that I had never learned the truth, or had known that I had lost you forever! I could have finished the story. But now——"

And his hands fell with dreary despair to his sides.

There was a moment's silence; then he took up his hat from the

floor, and stood fingering it with trembling hands, his eyes fixed on her's with pitiful intensity.

"Good-by," he said, at last. "After all—it—is—best, perhaps. You will be happy with this—the other—who loves you so well. So be it. Good-by!"

She did not dare to touch him, and after a piteous pause his hand fell to his side. He took a step nearer to her and touched the edge of her dress with a lingering, dumb caress of farewell; then went slowly to the door.

But even as his two fingers touched the handle, the door opened, and Harvey Cumming stood on the threshold.

Erect and motionless he stood for a moment, his face white and set, his eyes fixed with a look of suppressed agony on Marjorie's face.

Roland started back and glared at him.

"Who is this?" he demanded, without turning to Marjorie, his voice indicating plainly that the question was unnecessary.

For answer, Harvey Cumming went forward and took Marjorie's hand, now cold and limp, and gently led her to where Roland stood, white and haggard and watchful.

Without a word, Harvey stood and looked at her, with the same set gaze of noble resignation, and then he lifted her hand to his lips and as it fell into Roland's eager grasp, went out into the night.

When, a minute afterward, Bessie rushed in, dragging her brother after her, she found them still standing, looking into each other's eyes, awed and subdued, scarcely daring to realize the happiness which Harvey Cumming's noble sacrifice of self had wrought for them.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE BEAUTY REVEALS HERSELF.

IT was the evening of the day following that of Roland's return. London, hot and parched, had just dragged through its long twilight, and the rattle of carriages along the sultry streets proclaimed that the night's gayety had commenced. The season, an unusually long one, was drawing near its close.

But though many had fled, and the shutters were closed in half the houses, the lights were burning in the Chesterton house in Grosvenor square.

Lady Chesterton still clung to town, and to all the invitations gave the one answer, "My son may come back at any moment; and as he must come to London first, I must remain."

Hard, very hard had the time gone, with the proud old woman, and the high and stubborn spirit was beginning to show signs of breaking under the strain of months and months of weary watching and anxious suspense.

Reginald endeavored to cheer her in vain. To his assurance that nothing wrong could have happened, simply because if it had they must have heard, she turned a deaf and incredulous ear.

All that she knew was that, months ago, Roland had gone to the seat of war—that battles had been fought, forts taken, men slain; and a vague horror had fallen upon her that she would never see her son again.

No word of self-reproach passed her proud lips, but within her heart she longed, positively longed, for Peter Deane to be still prosperous and living, and his daughter to be her son's wife.

"If he had married her," she murmured to herself, as she lay awake in the still watches of the night, "if he had married her he would have settled down, and I should have seen him happy and had him near me. Would to Heaven he had married her!"

Yes, it had come to this now, that the haughty old woman would receive Marjorie, penniless and ruined as she was—would even welcome her with open arms.

For, with all her pride, Lady Chesterton was no fool, and pondering and thinking she had guessed, during those weary months, what it was that had made Roland desperate and had sent him to a probable death.

But never a word of this escaped her lips. Even when Helen Montressor spoke confidently of Roland's return, and softly murmured of the approaching marriage, the old lady uttered no prophecy, made no wail; only at times, when the beauty mentioned his name, mentioned it as if he were on some pleasure trip on the Continent, the old lady looked up with a glance of sad presentiment. But Helen Montressor took no account of glances, would not even listen to Reginald's vague murmurs of uneasiness; and, to tell the truth, Reginald was growing both anxious and fearful.

Scarcely a day passed but he looked in and inquired if they had heard any tidings of the missing man, and when Lady Chesterton gloomily shook her head, the beauty invariably laughed.

"Heard? No, we don't expect to bear, my dear Reginald. Roland always was the worst correspondent in the world. No man hates letter-writing more than he does. We sha'n't hear, we shall see. I give him another month. By that time he will have grown tired of the whole execrable business, and be tearing home by the quickest route, and so heartily sick of the Turks and the Russians that we sha'n't get a word from him about it."

And Reginald invariably gnawed his mustache and looked down at his boots, and took his departure in silence.

Not only to Reginald, but to all other inquirers, and they were many, the beauty gave the same answer; and the world in which she moved, the little world of the upper ten, wondered and shrugged its shoulders.

"A rare, high-spirited one, the Montressor," said the duke to Graneland. "Looks very much as if Chesterton had become food for powder, and yet she doesn't show a sign; no mourning bride about her!"

And for answer, the famous, or infamous, marquis showed his exquisitely made set of teeth in a significant smile, that seemed to say that he knew a thing or two which he would keep to himself.

"No; the sort of woman I admire. Don't wear her heart upon her sleeve for daws like you to peck at, duke. As for the fellow, he doesn't know when he has a good thing. He'll come back and find he's lost it, if he doesn't take care."

No, the beauty was not one to wear her heart upon her sleeve. Not even her maid knew or guessed anything of the long, weary hours in which, when all was still in the great house, the famous beauty walked with noiseless feet up and down her bedroom, tortured by wild anxiety and ceaseless longing.

To-night, ignorant that he was almost within reach of her, she entered the drawing-room, dressed for the last ball of the season.

She was magnificently attired. Diamonds gleamed in her yellow hair, and rose and fell on her white bosom. So exquisite a picture did she make as she stood in the soft light of the shaded lamp, that Lady Chesterton, as she turned and looked at her, could not help but wonder that any man should leave so radiant and beautiful a creature for a wild life of hardship and peril.

"Where are you going to-night, Helen?" she asked, listlessly, a touch of reproach in her voice.

Surely this girl could not love the absent man, or she would not thus array herself in his absence.

"To Lady Wrenbrow's," replied the beauty. "It is the last ball. What we shall do afterwards, I know not. Die of *ennui*, I suppose. Do you mind my going? Say the word, and I will stay. I do not care for it."

The old lady shook her head.

"No; go by all means. It is fortunate you can enjoy yourself as you do under the circumstances."

The beauty smiled strangely, and for the first time she allowed nature to show itself.

"Would you have me play the part of the deserted bride?" she asked, and there was a tone of bitterness in her voice that caused Lady Chesterton to look up at her.

"No," she answered, coldly, and with a haughty gesture. "I would not have you assume an anxiety you do not feel. You are wise in your generation. I am past such wisdom. You have your world. My son is all the world to me."

For a moment the beauty stood toying with her bracelet, then she went and stood opposite the proud, upright figure, and looked down at her with white face and flashing eyes.

"Are you blind?" she asked, in a low voice, and her lips trembled. "Do you think it is only you who suffer? Yes, I am wise in my generation. I can suffer and be silent. More, I can suffer and seem glad! Do you think that it is nothing to me that the man I love may be lying now on some inglorious battle-field, cold and stiff? You do not understand. You think that I am a fool. I know as well—better than you why he has left us. I know that it is that miserable girl who has driven him to this; but I have vowed to overcome her, and I will do it. You think me cold and heartless. Let it be so. Time will prove which of us has suffered most—you who sit idly at home nursing your sorrow, or I who face the world and hide it. You think he is dead. Let it be so. I would rather he were dead than that he should return to her."

She stopped, the diamonds scintillating on her heaving bosom.

Lady Chesterton looked up at her in dazed wonder.

"I do not understand you, Helen. You love him?"

"I love him," answered the beauty, quietly. "I have loved him all through, and I have known the price I must pay to gain him. But for that miserable girl I should have won him ere this: but fate is against me. Well, I have sat down to play against fate. I am patient; I can wait; I shall win. Meanwhile I take care that the world shall have no cause to laugh at me. He has left you, but there is no shame in that. He has left me, but if I did not face the world there would be shame for me. I can wait. He will come back, and I shall win him."

And with a proud gesture she threw the lace shawl over her shoulder, and strode up and down the room.

Lady Chesterton rose and moved toward the door, but turned ere she went out.

"If that is so, I pity you, Helen," she said with a stifled sob. "I feel that he is dead."

"And I am sure he is not," retorted the beauty. "Good-night." And though the carriage was waiting at the door, she re-crossed the room, threw herself into a chair, and seemed buried in thought.

Half an hour passed. The coachman, swearing inaudibly, struggled with his impatient horses, the footman yawned in the hall, and wondered what had come to the young mistress; but still the beauty sat buried in thought, wearing her heart upon her sleeve for any daw to peck at.

Suddenly, with an effort, she threw off the spell of melancholy which bound her, and rose.

And as she did so, the door opened and some one entered and crossed the room. For a moment she was unconscious of his presence, then she looked up, and started to her feet with a sudden cry:

"Roland

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BEAUTY RELIEVES HER MIND.

YES, it was Roland—haggard and grave, but with a strange look of peace and happiness on his worn face.

Though her arms were outstretched—white, exquisitely molded arms, upon which gleamed diamonds and rubies—he did not offer to embrace her, but stood grim and motionless, his dark eyes all the darker for the heavy lines which hardship and privation had drawn around them, regarding her with a stern yet pitying glance.

"Roland! is it really you! You have come back?"

Then he spoke, and in his voice her senses, strained to their uttermost tension, detected that there was something wrong.

"Yes. Where is my mother?"

"She—she has gone to bed. Have you no word for me, Roland?"

He looked at her as she stood in her marvellous beauty, the diamonds flashing on her white bosom, the violet eyes gleaming with the light of longing love, and his eyes fell.

"Sit down," he said, and he moved a chair toward her. "I have only just returned. You were going out to-night?"

"Yes; but not now. Oh, Roland! if you only knew how we have longed for your return!"

And she put her hand upon his arm.

With a gentle, but firm gesture, he put the white hand from him, and as it fell to her side, she knew that all was lost.

"I have only just returned," he said. "I have been down to Wiltshire—to Warley. You do not know it? I had a companion; his name was Deane—Captain Deane, of the Russian army—Marjorie Deane's brother. It was he who was in the woods with her. You remember?"

Remember? Did she not remember?

White and motionless she confronted him.

"You have been to her?" she asked, almost under her breath.

"Yes; to whom else should I go?" he answered. Then, as she stood silent and motionless, he went on, "Helen, I have one desire, one wish, and that is that you should never, from this hour, tell the story of that night's work. If you will grant me that one favor I shall be your debtor."

She looked at him for one moment, then, with averted head, said almost inaudibly:

"When does the marriage take place?"

"Immediately."

There was a moment's silence; then, as if with an effort, she raised her eyes and regarded him with proud calmness.

"Roland," she said, and her voice had just the same constrained calm in it. "You are generous, or you think you are," and a cold smile curled her lip. "You would have us part without humiliating me, as you think; but I will not have it so. There can be no humiliation for me. What I have done I would do over again."

He looked up and his eyes were rigid with mingled anger and pain.

"Spare me," he said, haughtily.

She smiled and waved her fan to and fro. The self possession she had fought so hard for, had come back, and she would fight to the last—would, at least, stab him with the dagger of womanly malice, though she could not slay him as she would like to do. She waved her fan and leaned back.

"Do not begrudge me the few moments, the last few moments we shall have; for, if I know you and myself, Roland, we part for good to-night. Well, you wish to spare me. You forget that it is I who consider myself ignored. Oh, stop!" she said, with a scornful smile, "I know what you would say. I will save you the trouble of putting the question. I was in the wood before I brought you, and I knew, from the first, that he was her brother."

Roland rose and looked down upon her, calm enough but for the angry light in his eyes.

"Oh, yes, I knew it," she went on, with a faint, almost amused smile hovering about her beautiful eyes and lips, as if the memory of that evening's work rather pleased her than otherwise, "and I did not think but that you would know it. When you heard them talking, I thought that though you were prepared to swallow the girl's vulgar antecedents, and her inexpressibly horrible father, that you would shrink from a vagabond brother, a common soldier, a deserter flying from the lash. I thought that the pride with which the world has generally, but mistakenly as it seems, credited the Chestertons, would step in and break off this mesalliance. But chance did more for me. As it happened, they said no word denoting their relationship, and you left them with the impression

that you had been a witness to a clandestine meeting of lovers, that you had found her to be treacherous and faithless."

She paused. He did not speak, but stood looking down at her with a strange expression on his haggard face. Her voice, soft and low, and subtly melodious, scarcely reached him. He was looking back to that awful evening, and wondering why the chance she spoke of should have played into her hands. She paused and touched her lips with the edge of her handkerchief.

"You wonder why I did this. No. You think that I was anxious to become Lady Chesterton, mistress of the Wold; that I was scheming for wealth and position. You are wrong—partly wrong at least. I was scheming for the title and the wealth—how else could it be? What is the aim of a woman like me? They call me a beauty. Well, beauty is worthy of its hire. But it is not altogether that," and she paused and looked at him with a calm smile on her face that had, however, grown suddenly white. "Roland, I loved you!"

He started slightly and put up his hand.

"For Heaven's sake!" he said hoarsely, "spare us both! Let there be an end to this!"

She rose and stood fingering her jeweled bracelet, but still looking at him steadily.

There can be in one minute. You think that I should be ashamed to speak thus, having lost you. There is no shame. There shall be truth between us and this parting. I loved you, Roland, and my very love gave me strength and will to endeavor to save you from this disgrace——"

He started and his face hardened again.

"I thought it disgrace then; I think it doubly disgraceful now that the father turned out a mean adventurer."

He stopped her, his patience exhausted at last.

"To what may all this tend, may I ask?"

"Simply to this," she answered, "that you may know fully why I, Helen Montressor, the future Marchioness of Graneland"—and she rose to her full height—"once stooped to scheme for the honor of your hand. Good-night—good-by. I should like to utter the usual conventional wishes for your happiness, but I know too much of the world to hope for any good to arise from an unequal marriage. Good-by, Sir Roland."

Roland went to the door and opened it, accompanied her to the carriage, and put her in with calm, cold courtesy, and then returned to the house, marvelling, more sorrowfully than angrily, that such a beautiful form could inclose so hard and cold a heart.

Perhaps it was as well that he could not see her as she sat, her head bent in her hands, the whole beautiful form working in the agony of disappointed love and wounded pride.

It took him five minutes to recover himself; then he went up stairs and knocked at his mother's door, and in response to the feeble "come in" he entered,

The poor, proud old woman was sitting in her chair, her face resting on her hand, the whole attitude so eloquent of hope deferred and of unspoken wretchedness that his heart smote him.

"Mother!" he said, in softer accents than he had spoken for years, "mother!"

At the well-loved voice she rose hurriedly, holding the arm of her chair; then she uttered a low, heartrending cry, and fell fainting into his arms.

He carried her gently and placed her in her chair, and would have gone for some restorative, but her feeble hands clung to him, as if she feared to lose him again, and presently her eyes opened and looked wildly at him for a moment; then a smile of ineffable peace and joy lighted up her old face, and she took his thin face between her hands and murmured:

"My boy! my boy!"

"Mother!"

"You have come back to me?"

"Yes, mother."

"And you will not go away again?'

"Not again."

She had recovered her full faculties now, and she scanned his face with an eager, searching look.

"You are happy, Roland?"

"Yes, mother."

"Then it is because you have found Marjorie Deane!"

"I have found her, mother.'

"Heaven be thanked for that! Where is she? Take me to her. I will ask her to forgive me for what I have done to her, and you will love me as you did, and you will not leave me again, Roland?"

Roland wondered to see his proud mother so, but he said no word, only thanked Heaven that at last peace had come to those he loved, and to himself.

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN CONCLUSION.

THAT same night that Roland had returned home, the Marquis of Graneland persuaded the beauty to elope with him, and thus it came about that London was startled by the news that Sir Roland Chesterton had suddenly returned, and that the beauty, in order to avoid a marriage with him, had eloped with the more desirable party, the Marquis of Graneland.

And thereby, the beauty, though married, lost none of her prestige, for she became more than ever the sensation; and if she felt a pang, when, a few days later, she read of the marriage of Sir Roland Chesterton and Miss Marjorie Deane, she did not show it to the marquis, her husband, but laughed and said:

"Poor Roland? He has consoled himself, but he has thrown himself away.'

Yes, they were married, Roland and Marjorie, and if their faces were witnesses for their souls, they were happy.

Young Captain Deane did not rob good old Mr. Cartel of the happiness of giving the bride away, and so it was that a man of the city actually gave a Chesterton of the Wold his bride. And Lady Chesterton in her happiness at seeing her son at rest with himself, never even winced at the awful sight. She even took the worthy man by the hand and invited him to visit her at the Wold with his wife, a thing he stammeringly promised to do, and then went secretly to his wife in a corner and vowed he never would have the courage to do.

Bessie could not but be happy when she saw Marjorie so, but down in her heart she felt that Marjorie would have chosen better had she taken Harvey Cumming, who embodied to her all that was noble and worthy in human kind.

Her sympathy was all with him; and some months later she proved it to him by becoming Mrs. Harvey Cumming, in order that she might be always with him to console him for the loss of Marjorie; but by that time he was willing to confess that it was a fortunate loss that had brought him so much gain.

Sir Roland and Lady Chesterton lived at the Wold, and the Dowager Lady Chesterton lived with them, learning every day the sweetness and worth of her son's wife.

(THE END.)