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THE

BANKER'S

GRANDCHILDREN.

N.

BY NENA C. RICKESON,

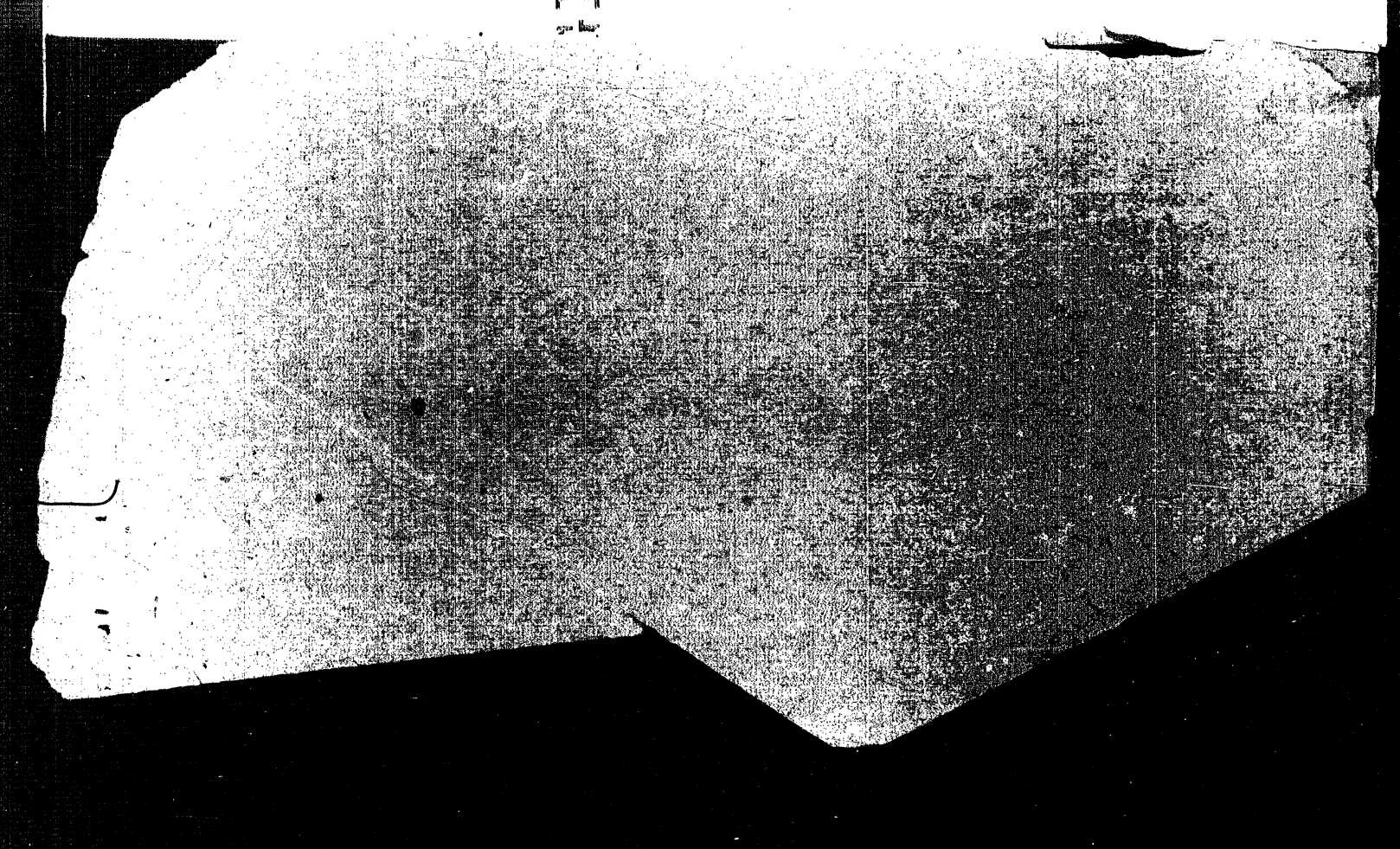
OF WOODSTOCK, N. B.

ST. JOHN, N. B.:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY GEO. W. DAY,

57 CHARLOTTE STREET.

1877.



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CHAPTER I.

THE BALL AT MAPLEWOOD.

he grand reception rooms at Maple-d house were thronged with elegant sts. There was everywhere a radi-brilliancy of lights—a delicious per-on of perfume. From the orchestra ted brilliant, entrancing music; e was a soft murmer of mingled es in pleasant chat and laughter—gleaming of rich silken draperies, glittering of costly gems—rich ettes, beautiful women, elegant men short there was all the appoint-nts of a grand soiree.

was eleven o'clock, and the whirl of ety was at its height, when Glencora ssom, tired of the glitter of lights, crash of gay music, and the bewil-ing mazes of the dance, permitted gentleman, with whom she had been rtner in the last waltz, to lead her the heat of the dancing-room to delightfully cool quietude of the ony.

was October, and the soft, hazy, e-like atmosphere, which had been lay warm and golden with sunlight, now aflood with silvery moonlight. yellow tinted coppices lay en-ped in perfect stillness; but through asional openings flashed sparkling ts of golden light from the softly ling surface of the Thames.

What a lovely night! and what a sing, to escape from the barbarous in there, out into this delightfully fresh air."

iss Chessom said this as she sank the seat to which her companion conducted her.

Very charming was this superbly beautiful heiress, Glencora Chessom, grand-daughter of Philip Chessom, the wealthy London banker, and entertainer of this gay party at Maplewood. She was a splendid brunnette; black glossy coiling hair, brilliant, liquid, restless, dark eyes—rich tinting of cream and crimson—an evening toilette of pure white crêpe over a shimmering train of gold-colored satin,—with elaborate, yet exquisite, gold ornaments, richly set with costliest pearls, upon her neck and arms, and in her ears. Her rich, shining dark hair was arranged in a regal style that well became her—a parure of pearls glistening among the jetty coils.

She was beautiful and fascinating, and though there was nothing of Madonna-like loveliness in her fair features, there was a great deal of bewitching brightness and brilliance, and a charming vivacity and piquancy in her manner. She was a born coquette; and just the sort of woman with whom, out of a hundred men, ninety-and-nine would fall madly in love.

To-night she was more than usually enchanting: and it was evident that the handsome gentleman who now seated himself by her side, was far from being indifferent to her charms.

"I am so awfully warm!" said the young lady, fluttering her fan vigorously. "Do look! There's that ugly little Rose Castlemaine leaning on Lord Crofton's arm. Rose, indeed! what a name for her, to be sure. Resembles much more one of those yellow maple leaves lying out yonder. Hideous, isn't she? Ah, here comes the stately Miss Wil-

loughby!" and the ripe lips of the heiress curled contemptuously.

The young lady thus alluded to presently passed by, leaning on the arm of the young French Count DeChellis.

Hers was a rarely beautiful face—very different in contour from the face of Glencora Chessom; it lacked the expression of arrogant hauteur which characterized the perfectly moulded features of that young lady; but it was a fair, lovely face, full of pure, sweet womanliness, with great dark eyes, in whose clear depths shone such mingled pride, passion, and sweetness. She was attired in soft fleecy white, over pale blue, draped with bows of pale blue ribbon, and clusters of apple blossoms and pink geraniums. It was a simple, inexpensive toilette, and yet it could scarcely have been more exquisite than it was. She was very, very pretty to-night; and even the haughty Glencora could not but admit the fact inwardly, and a pang of piqued jealousy, such as all coquettes experience when they behold the loveliness of another woman admired by one of the opposite sex, passed through that organ which the fair Glencora designated her heart, as she beheld the eyes of her companion follow, with admiring gaze, the girl's slender, graceful figure.

"Miss Willoughby is very beautiful," remarked Mr. Waldegrave, who, though much charmed by his handsome cousin, was not yet so deeply enamoured as to be unable to admire a sweeter, if not a more brilliant face.

"Yes, if one happens to fancy the milk-and-water style of loveliness; I don't admire it myself," said Glencora with a laugh.

"I see she is practising her wiles upon the young Frenchman, DeChellis, at present: an hour ago she was striving to captivate my cousin. What vast fun it must have been for you to watch her airs, Cousin Bertram. Of course you saw how determined she was upon making a conquest?"

"My fair cousin, I was not sufficiently vain to suppose anything of the kind," said Mr. Waldegrave. "Indeed, she treated me with a carelessness of manner which I thought almost amounted to indifference," added he.

"She most probably thought that the surest method of driving you to love-making!" said Glencora with one of her dazzling bright smiles.

Now Bertram Waldegrave was fast falling in love with his charming cousin, who showed such flattering preference for his society; but her sarcastic remarks concerning the beautiful Mabel Willoughby annoyed, and half angered him.

He had been in Mabel Willoughby's society but a few times, although he had now been stopping at Maplewood nearly a month; but somehow he had a dim idea that there was that in her graceful, interesting conversation, her merry smiles and rippling laughter, capable of leaving an impression upon his mind, after they were over, infinitely pleasanter than could all Glencora's flattering words and enchanting smiles.

He stooped to pick up the fan which his cousin had accidentally let fall to the floor, as he answered.

"Possibly, but not probably," he said. "In behalf of my vanity, I should be delighted to admit that you are right; but, in justice to the young lady, I must say that I think you are mistaken."

An angry gleam flashed for a moment in Glencora's black eyes, but she smiled gaily as she answered:

"You don't understand her, my dear cousin. Like the generality of milksops, Miss Willoughby is very deceiving. Having been born poor, and brought up dependant upon the bounty of others, may perhaps be a reason for her mercenary ambition; but any how, if she doesn't make a brilliant match some day, it will not be her own fault. The way she angled for Sir Digby Desmond last season, not to mention a score of others, was a caution! But never mind the Willoughby's. Do tell me about that exquisitely elegant Count DeBrinton who is here to-night. Such magnificent eyes! Oh, his beauty is heavenly!"

"I have but a slight acquaintance with him," answered Waldegrave. "I met him something over a year ago in Paris, and only once since then—a few weeks ago—at a dinner at the 'Norwich.' He is immensely wealthy, I believe."

"And a perfect Adonis!" said Glen-

cora. And they chattered gaily on, upon a dozen frivolous topics until Glencora said,

"Come along, let us go in; dancing will begin presently. I see my spoony admirer, Mr. Thurston, coming this way, in search of us. I presume I have promised him my hand for this waltz. He is my devoted slave, I assure you—ready to fall down and worship me, at any time. Oh, he's immense fun!" and Glancora laughed.

A moment later they were in the ball-room, and the spoony Thurston was claiming the fair hand of Glencora for the dance. They went off together, and Bertram Waldegrave walked over to where Mabel Willoughby was seated.

"Will you favor me with your hand for this waltz, Miss Willoughby?" he asked, and the next moment Mabel's graceful little figure was in his arms, and they were whirling 'round in the brilliant waltz.

"How lovely she is!" was the softly breathed whisper that pervaded the ball-room.

Glencora said nothing, but her restless black orbs flashed, and her coral lips, curled in scornful contempt.

When the second waltz was over, the elegant DeBrinton, who seemed to flit, butter-fly like, around all the fairest flowers, made his way to Miss Chessom, soliciting her hand for the third. Glencora wrote down his name, and after a few moments merry conversation the Frenchman remarked:

"How exquisitely beautiful Miss Willoughby is. My friend DeChellis is madly in love with her already—raves about her terribly, and no wonder, she is so charming, so ingenuous. *En passant*, she is your cousin, is she not?"

Glencora gave her haughty head a little disdainful toss.

"Nothing of the kind," she answered. "Her people were connected in a very remote degree with my mother's family; but how, I realy never took the trouble to find out."

"Ah, I understand," said Monsieur le Counte, adroitly, "you and Mademoiselle are really no relation at all, only a very distant connexion. Shall we sit in the balcony until the dancing begins—it is cooler."

On the balcony they discovered Mabel and Waldegrave seated in one of the cushioned seats, and engaged in pleasant conversation. Glencora's black eyes flashed again, beneath the soft white lids that fluttered over them; but she smiled dazzlingly, uttered a few jesting words to Bertram, and glanced with a carelessness that was contemptuous at Mabel.

Monsieur bowed gracefully to the latter, nodded with polite familiarity to the former, and the twain passed on.

The next moment another lady and gentleman passed, at a little distance from where Mabel and Waldegrave were seated; this time, it was Jarvis Chessom—Glencora's handsome, graceless brother—and a sentimental damsel leaning on his arm, with whom, judging from his ardent glances, and softly murmured words, it was evident he was desperately flirting.

He was twenty-two, and quite deserving of the reputation which he had already obtained of being fast;" but was handsome, fascinating and wealthy, and therefore considered a splendid "catch," among the "manœuvreing mammas" and "marriageable daughters."

"What a sad scapegrace cousin Jarvis has grown up," said Waldegrave, his eyes resting upon young Chessom's face, which was becoming somewhat flushed with rather liberal wine-drinking.

Mabel looked also at the handsome, careless face which plainly bore the marks of dissipation, and a sorrowful shade flitted for a moment over her fair features as she answered:

"Yes, and I'm sorry for it. The recklessly wild course which he is of late pursuing is not only derogatory to himself but a ceaseless source of trouble and anxiety to Mr. Chessom. "Do you know," she went on, "that his inexhaustable patience with all of Jarvis' mad freaks and caprices make it seem almost incredible that he could ever have been so implacably stern and unforgiving toward his own son."

"The death of that son," said Waldegrave, "although his anger with him had been so deep, was a heavy blow to

uncle Philip, and served much to soften the cold pride and iron sternness of his character. He bitterly regretted his harshness, when too late; and the only atonement which he can now offer for the past is the lavish wealth and affection which he bestows upon the widow and children of his son."

Presently the conversation turned upon Glencora.

"Do you know," said Waldegrave, "that she is so changed I can scarcely believe her to be the same little elf whom I used to call 'Cousin Glennie,' some twelve years ago. I remember spending several weeks at Maplewood, when about eleven years of age, and a curious time we had of it. Glennie and I were recounting our juvenile battles—and they were numerous—last evening. Jarvis was usually too indolent to quarrel much."

Mabel laughed.

"Glencora has grown very beautiful during those years, has she not?" said Waldegrave.

Spite of her calm demeanor there was a good deal of bitterness and wounded pride in Mabel's poor little heart as she answered. She had not failed to perceive the disdainful contempt in Glencora's eyes a few moments before, nor had she forgotten how that young lady a few evenings previous, had, in the presence of several guests, Mr. Waldegrave among them, snubbed her with polite rudeness, to use a paradoxical phrase.

She raised her lovely dark eyes, and found those of her companion bent upon her. She knew that he could not have failed to perceive the supercilious light in Miss Chessom's eyes; was certain that he knew how cordially she and that young lady disliked each other. Most likely, she thought, Glencora had told him, as she had told many others, how enviously jealous she was of her wealth and beauty, and now he was desirous of hearing what spiteful reply she would make to his remark. A little flush mantled her white forehead as the thought crossed her mind, but she said calmly enough—

"Yes, Glencora is beautiful, certainly."

She then quietly changed the subject by remarking, as Miss Castlemaine with some gentleman, passed by.

"How pale Miss Castlemaine looks to-night. This is the first entertainment of any kind which she has been able to attend since her recent illness. She scarcely resembles her former self, so wan, so thin: she was really very pretty before that dreadful fever."

"Oh, then she has been ill, which accounts for her sallow paleness," said Waldegrave. "I think her pretty, even now: but Glennie, who was mentioning her a few moments ago, thinks she is hideous."

"Because Glencora so thoroughly dislikes her," said Mabel, calmly.

Mr. Waldegrave laughed slightly, and asked carelessly:

"Why does Glennie so much dislike her, pray? She looks quite amiable."

Mabel looked at him quietly, and replied gravely—

"I am sure I cannot tell you, Sir, unless for the reason that Miss Castlemaine happens to be guilty of possessing a heart which is nobly generous and frank. But it is time for me to go in," she added.

As Waldegrave could not dance the next with Mabel he would fain have remained seated upon the flower-garlanded balcony, with her beside him. He was interested in her, for she was interesting, and he liked her, spite of the haughty Miss Chessom's warnings.

They had just arisen, and Mr. Waldegrave was saying, "Allow me to accompany you to the blue satin room;" for it was there Mabel had promised the gentleman who was next to waltz with her, that he should find her when the dancing begun, when two gentlemen came toward them uttering some lightly spoken remarks.

The elder of the two was Philip Chessom, the master of Maplewood—the younger, Ernest Willoughby, Mabel's brother, and the only one on earth with whom the poor child could claim any real relationship.

Philip Chessom's face was one expressing noble, generous kindliness. There were lines of care around the handsome, pleasant mouth, and the silvery curling locks clustered about a

brow that was deeply furrowed. At times there was a careworn, weary look in the mild gray eyes: but he was ever genial and cheerful, bursting forth sometimes, into almost boyish hilarity.

Ernest Willoughby was twenty-two years of age and a perfect specimen of handsome youthful manhood. His features were regular and finely formed. There was a look of quiet firmness about the clear cut pleasant mouth, with its silken chestnut moustache—a frank, genial light in the dark gray eyes. Over the wide, white forehead clustered a mass of curling chestnut hair. It was a proud, noble, handsome head. In stature he was slightly above the medium—slender, but strongly and athletely built. Just such a man as one instinctively feels to be frank and honorable, noble and generous.

They stood gaily chatting for a few seconds, then Waldegrave led Mabel away, conducting her through the throng, to the blue satin room, to which Mr. Polsdon was just coming in search of her. Bertram left her by his side, and then went to lounge in one of the bow-windows, and watch the waltzers: he did not wish to dance just then himself.

Glencora whirled past in the arms of the elegant French Count: Waldegrave looked at her, and thought how brilliant and fascinating she was, and then his eyes wandered from her to the graceful, sylph-like figure of Mabel as she glided past with Charlie Polsdon.

"Truly," murmured Bertram, "she is lovely! 'Beautiful as a poet's dream,' as a novelist would say."

Then he fell to comparing her matchlessly lovely face with those of the other richly attired belles that thronged the gaily lighted dancing-room.

Philip Chessom and young Willoughby stood conversing together for a few moments after Mabel and Waldegrave had gone, then they parted.

The wealthy banker looked after his handsome clerk until his figure was hidden from sight as he entered the ball-room, then he leaned against one of the giant marble pillars and looked out over the dew wet lawn.

"He is a noble, true-hearted lad," murmured the old banker. "Would to heaven that Jarvis possessed half such honorable, high-souled integrity as his!"

There was a dreary look in the eyes of the master of Maplewood, a sorrowful droop to the pleasant mouth: he stood thus for a few moments, then drove the troubled look out of his face, and turned toward the house. A few moments later he was standing, smiling with pleasant urbanity, in the midst of his guests.

The hours glided by with bewitching music and pleasant mirth, dancing and merriment: and at last the brilliant Chessom ball ended.

There was pleasant confusion, a polite tumult of gay parting words, and then the host of guests departed.

Then there was the putting out of lights, the closing of doors and windows, and the great house was wrapt in silence.

CHAPTER II.

"Wings! that I might recall them—
The lov'd, the lost, the dead.
Wings! that I might fly after
The past long vanished.

Philip Chessom was standing in one of the great windows that fronted the wide lawn at Maplewood, a few mornings subsequent to the gay Chessom fete. The scene, gloriously lovely, spread out in all its peaceful perfect beauty, before the admiring gaze of the master of Maplewood. He had looked at it thousands of times before; but it was charming to him now, in the golden dawn-light of the October day, as it had been fifty years ago, when a little boy he had gazed with such childish admiration at the same sparkling, rippling, river, or wandered carelessly happy through the great park and shady woods of his ancestral home.

Leaning against the heavy oaken casement, in the quiet of the early morning, with no sound breaking the stillness, save the twitter of birds as they flitted among the branches of the giant oaks and maples—with the faint breezes wafting delicious odors from the gay flower-beds in the great garden, and the sun slowly rising in the ruddy flushing of the east, flooding the earth, and the shimmering crystal river, with golden

light, Philip Chessom lost himself in and monotonous though his occupation was; then he grew restive. The Australian gold fever was at that period raging, and crowded ships bound for the colonies were daily leaving the great metropolis, while those returning, brought with them quantities of gold, and glowing reports from the great mining region; and Leigh Chessom, with his love of adventure and his determination to of possess himself of some of the vast wealth which the colonial gold mines were daily yielding, left England to endure the hardships and privations of the Australian diggings.

Philip Chessom, glancing down the columns of the morning paper beheld, among the list of emigrants who had taken passage on board the steamer Gladiator, the name of his son. During all those five years he had not before heard of Leigh or his whereabouts. For months his pride alone had kept him from owning the regret which he experienced for his past harsh sternness; and the same pride prevented him from making any inquiries concerning the alien; and his friends, fearful of a repulse from the cold, proud man, liked not to give information unasked. But now the big bright drops sprang to the banker's eyes, as they rested on the name of his banished son; and compunctious feelings mingled with the old irrepressible love for the geniel, gay-voiced young fellow, of whom he had once been so fond, filled his heart.

It would be long years perhaps ere he would come back—he might never return. Somehow a foreboding haunted him, that he never would, but he thrust it aside, telling himself that he would come back ere long, and then they would let bygones be bygones, and the past should be forgiven and forgotten; and Leigh should come back to Maplewood and bring with him his wife, who, if poor, was at all events of respectable parentage, being the daughter of a gentleman, who during his life had been wealthy and highly respected.

Some three months later Mr. Chessom again beheld in the *Times* the name of the emigrant ship Gladiator. It was the steamer in which Leigh had sailed for Australia, and he read eagerly on.

Before proceeding further, let us lay before our readers a brief sketch of the past five and twenty years of the rich banker's life.

It was just such a June-like October day as was now dawning on which, twenty-five years ago, the banker had stood at that same library window, watching, with stern pride and stormy anger battling back the faint struggles of remorse in his heart, the lithe, manly figure of his only son, then a bright, handsome youth of twenty, as he rode down the great avenue of arching trees, through the heavy iron gates, and away from the home of his ancestors forever. It was the old story—an ardent, youthful, passionate love—a mesalliance—a father's curse and disinheritance.

Truly Leigh Chessom had acted rashly and wrongly in clandestinely marrying, at the age of twenty years, the penniless, unknown Grace Windham; but then he was, with all his generous, boyish heart, in love with the poor, pretty music-teacher, and was well aware that to ask the consent of his proud father, to their union, would be something worse than useless. To wait—the fair, fragile Grace toiling the meantime as a daily teacher for her livelihood—was not to be thought of; so they were married, Leigh assuring himself that, though his father would, in all probability, be furious at first, he would, when aware that his anger could not separate them, or annul the sacred ties which bound them together, relent, and that, eventually, he should be permitted to bring his fair young wife to dwell at Maplewood.

But the stormy anger of the banker was not so short-lived, and he sternly renounced the bright, handsome, manly young fellow whom, hitherto, he had so proudly owned as his son, sending him adrift penniless, save the very limited income which descended to him from his mother, who had died in his infancy. But Leigh was brave and courageous, and diligently industrious withal, and obtaining a situation as clerk in a London banking house, on Threadneedle street, he went resolutely to work. For five years he toiled manfully, tiresome

The article was a brief account of the ravages which a malignant, infectious fever had made on board that vessel, and contained a list of the names of the victims. Philip Chessom read among them that of his son, and then fell, white and senseless from his chair.

Leigh was dead! and to the bereaved father the haunting recollection that he had driven his son from him with a cruel curse, made the great blow all the bitterer—all the harder to be borne.

Dead! and the mutual forgiveness and reconciliation of which he had dreamed for the past few months, could never be given now or received. Alas:

"Is there never a chink in the world above
Where they listen for words from below?"

The rich banker would have given all his wealth—half the remaining years of his life even, if only Leigh could have heard and answered the passionate cries for forgiveness which rose so hopelessly from his burdened heart. But he must make what reparation lay in his power, he told himself, and that was to find Leigh's widow, and his children, provided any had been born, and were still living, and lavish upon them the love and wealth from which Leigh himself had been banished.

A year passed, and he could find nothing of his son's widow until one day, in answer to an advertisement in the *Times*, he received a letter from her. She was residing in a dingy little boarding house in one of the London suburbs, and he immediately called upon her, and was shown all necessary proof of her legal marriage with his son. She had two children, she informed Mr. Chessom, who were residing with a woman who had once been a nurse of her own, and who lived at a place some twenty miles distant; and with them were the orphan children of the step-sister, the widow of a young artist, who had died nearly a year before. This step-sister, Mrs. Chessom informed the banker, was the daughter of a widower, Captain Islington, who had married her mother, who was herself a widow, and being wild and extravagant had managed to squander nearly every penny of her fortune before his death, which took place some few months previous to that of her mother. Her step-father's daughter had married on the same day upon which she became the wife of Leigh Chessom, a young artist, Earnest Willoughby who was accidentally killed a few months after the birth of their second child. Mrs. Willoughby was a fragile delicate little creature, and died of heart disease a few months later, so the care and support of the little orphans, Earnest and Mabel, as well as that of her own children devolved upon Mrs. Chessom, who was now a widow herself, and earned a livelihood by teaching music.

This in brief is the history which Mrs. Chessom related to her father-in-law.

Poor she certainly was, but no ignorant, untutored creature—this young widow of Leigh Chessom; instead, she was a beautiful, well-bred woman, with a queenly air of proud imperiousness that suited well her dark, brilliant loveliness. Yet she was not such a woman as the banker would have supposed his son to have chosen for his bride.

He had imagined that she might be a slight, fair-haired, girlish little creature, with a world of clinging, loving tenderness shining out of big, silken-fringed blue eyes; but not a tall, dark beauty, with the full, perfect form of a Juno, and the proud air of an empress.

It was no wonder that Leigh had loved her, he thought, for she was beautiful, with a fascinating charm about her that was irresistable—indeed, he was himself delighted with her. So Mrs. Chessom and her two children—the Jarvis and Glencora whom we have already introduced to our readers, were removed from their dingy lodgings to the luxurious, palatial residence of the banker at Twichenham, with its beautiful, extensive stretch of grounds, finely laid out and cultivated—its quaint, picturesque combinations of ancient and modern architecture, and its pleasant pervasion of ease and luxury, and magnificent splendor. And the orphan children of Earnest and Agatha Willoughby, were well cared for and educated, at the expense of the master of Maplewood.

The years passed on and the cousins, if we may so call them, grew up to man and womanhood. Jarvis the indolent, handsome, half dissipated young gentle-

man of fashion, whom we have already described. Glencora, beautiful, wayward, coquettish and heartless, with more than her mother's loveliness, and a charming air of bright piquancy that was very bewitching. Earnest Willoughby we have already described to our readers, and Mable—sweet sylph-like little May—we can only portray her as a slight, graceful, golden-haired little damsel, with wavy masses of luxuriant bronze-brown hair, and lovely rose-leaf tinting, and the deepest of purple blue eyes which told her thoughts as plainly as could her pretty little rosy mouth.

A year previous to the present time of writing, Earnest Willoughby, who had then just completed his twenty-first year, entered as clerk Philip Chessom's great London banking house on Lombard street; and Mabel, who had spent the most of her life, when not at Madame DeChellis' Parisian seminary for young ladies, with Mrs. Mays, an elderly widow whom Mrs. Chessom had installed as her guardian and chaperone at Ambleside—a pretty Westmoreland town, romantically situated among lofty mountains—came to dwell at Maplewood, to be petted by Mr. Chessom, who could scarcely have decided whether he was most fond of his grand children or his proteges: to be carelessly, but not unkindly treated by Mrs. Chessom; to be designated by heedless Jarv. "a tip-top little girl;" and to be cordially disliked and snubbed by haughty Glencora.

CHAPTER III.

THE EQUESTRIAN PARTY.

Looking vacantly at the scene of silent loveliness outspread before him with the golden morning sunlight flooding his figure and falling softly on his silvery bowed head, Philip Chessom was still absorbed in meditation, when a step behind him, and the genial, spirited voice of Earnest Willoughby roused him from his reverie. The shadow passed from his face as he looked up, beholding his clerk advancing with his pleasant lively greeting toward him.

"Good morning lad," answered he; "it looks like the beginning of a fine day yonder, doesn't it?" he added; pointing eastward.

Earnest leaned against the casement, and taking an admiring survey of the scenery answered by remarking, "What a splendid picture it is!"

"I presume you are to make one of the equestrian party which the young people were proposing yesterday?" asked the banker.

"I think not," said Willoughby; "my engagement at Islington will prevent."

"But you can postpone it."

"That would be scarcely worth while; besides, I am not particularly desirous of going."

Mr. Chessom smiled. "Most young fellows are desirous of going almost anywhere where there is certain to be a bevy of beautiful and wealthy girls."

A quaint little smile rippled beneath Willoughby's chestnut moustache.

"My dear sir," he said dryly; "I am far from being indifferent to the enchanting loveliness of those same beautiful and wealthy girls; but which one of them do you suppose would care a sixpence whether Earnest Willoughby, the needy clerk, joined their gay party, remained at home, or took a cab, and a solitary ride to Islington?"

The banker answered smilingly, "And yet the fair portion of our guests do not seem at all to dislike you."

"Easily accounted for," laughed Willoughby; "I can ride well and dance and sing and play and paint, all passably; besides it was only the other evening I chanced to hear Miss Lochsley declaring to her friend Miss Chesley that if I were only more 'jolly' like your grandson, or that 'supurb' Col. Vivian, I would make a 'splendid flirtee.' I might," he added sarcastically "have been somewhat flattered, and even striven to emulate the witticisms of that *beau esprit* the 'supurb' Colonel; but my better sense reminded me that, though Trissie Locksley and Ida Chesley might deem me a passing 'flirtee,' they would raise their pretty eye brows in polite amaze, were I to essay turning the meaningless flirtation into serious love-making. Whereas if Jarvis or Col. Vivian were to do the same thing they would be simply in exstacy."

"Your opinion of our fair friends isn't exactly calculated to propagate one's

faith in the gentle sex, Willoughby. I hope lad," laughingly added Mr. Chessom, "that you're not going to become a woman-hater."

"By no means," answered Willoughby; "I am an ardent admirer of the gentle sex, and must confess that I have also a decided weakness for their society; but you see, in this practical nineteenth century, it isn't an every day occurrence for young ladies to bestow their pretty white hands upon penniless swains who have their own way to make in the world."

For all his assumption of light carelessness there was a ring of wounded pride in his tones which Mr. Chessom did not fail to detect and wonder at.

Earnest Willoughby had been, or fancied himself to be, all along, in love with pretty, stately Ida Chesley; but her reply to Miss Locksley's lightly spoken words, of the evening before, had cast a shadow upon his day-dream.

"Yes," she had said in her silvery, even tones, "he *is* grave sometimes; but never morosely so; and I rather like his quiet sensibility: it is a pity though," she added carelessly, "that he is so dreadfully poor."

"Would you fall in love with him, provided he were Mr. Chessom's grandson instead of his clerk?" laughingly enquired Miss Locksley; and Earnest listened breathlessly for the bell-like voice to reply.

"Very possibly I might", carelessly spoken; "*if* he were; but, as that *if* happens to be in the way, such a ridiculous idea never entered my mind." And then the young ladies passed on, unconscious of the proximity of the subject of their discussion, and the fact that he had been unable to avoid hearing a portion of their conversation.

And Earnest Willoughby leaned back among the mazes of a rank American creeper, profuse with gay, crimson bloom, and fell to alternately anathematizing the whole feminine race, and thanking his lucky stars that he was now aware of that which would prevent him from placing himself in a humiliating position. More than once had he been upon the point of telling Ida his love, and beseeching her to wait for him, until he should win fame and fortune sufficient to justify him in claiming her fair hand; but he was glad now, very glad, that he had restrained himself, that the heartless coquette should not have the opportunity of adding him to her list of victims.

Graceful, stately Ida was a coquette if ever one existed, and she had tried to win Ernest Willoughby's love. She had given him sweet, encouraging smiles, had rode with him, walked with him, and listened with flattering attention to his remarks—in short, she had practiced upon him all those numberless, subtle wiles, which flirts are wont to exercise upon the unfortunate masculine bipeds who become infatuated by them.

She was half in love with him too—that is to say she admired him, and had sense enough to see that he was much handsomer, more talented, and sensible than any of her other admirers; but she would as soon have thought of flying off in a balloon for the purpose of exploring the 'Milky Way,' as of wedding the poor handsome young clerk, his beauty, his talents, his clear good sense, notwithstanding.

Ernest comprehended all this now, and resolved to politely ignore the stately Ida for the future.

There was a moment's pause after Ernest's satirical speech, and then Mr. Chessom spoke.

"I had hoped," he said gravely, "that you and Glennie would have liked each other sufficiently to some day have married. I know that you quarreled savagely in your childish days, every one of the few times you were together after Glennie and Jarvis came here; but then they were always having their spats too, and I thought that such long absence and years of maturity would have banished all the old juvenile ill-will. I had a pretty little scheme in my head, which would have done credit to a feminine match-maker; but I foresaw from the first day you and Mabel came to remain here, that it must all fall through. "My dear boy," he continued, "the welfare of yourself and your dear little sister—though I can scarcely account for it—is equally as precious to me as that of my own children; and long ago

I made up my mind that you two should marry my grand-children, and thus you and Mabel share my wealth, instead of strangers; but I see that you and Glennie positively dislike each other, while Jarvis and Mabel would be anything but a well matched couple; they are in no way suited to each other."

He sighed, but did not tell his clerk that he should be loth to see fair, pure hearted little Mabel becoming the wife of such an indolent extravagant ne'er-do-well as his grandson.

"My dear sir," began Ernest, "my little sister and I can never sufficiently thank you."

"Then don't attempt it lad," laughingly interrupted Mr. Chessom, laying his hand on Willoughby's shoulder; "and I hear that 'little sister' coming if I am not mistaken."

He was not; it was Mabel's sweet, bird-like voice that was softly caroling a gay air, and Mabel the next moment stood in the doorway.

She lookod marvelously lovely, as thought her guardian and brother, in her fresh, pretty morning dress of blue and white cambric, with a little spray of blue forget-me-nots at her slender white throat; the pinky bloom in her cheeks all aglow; the violet blue eyes sunny and sparkling; the golden hairs falling in silky curls to her sylph-like waist; and that pretty, bewitching smile, its brightness lighting her sweet oval face. What a superb little beauty she was!

"Good morning," she said to both, running up to where they were standing.

The two gentlemen looked down at her smilingly, and then stooping down, kissed her.

"Just arisen, May-bird?" asked Mr. Chessom, patting her cheek with playful tenderness.

"Oh, no, indeed," said Mabel, "I have been arranging the flowers in the jardinere, and I've been up nearly an hour." Then she broke off suddenly, and turned to her brother. "Oh, Earnest," she said, "do come with me to the conservatory, there are some lovely flowers beyond my reach, and I want a lot of them to fill the vases."

Earnest laughed and looked down at her; she was very, very dear to him, this fairy-like, golden-haired little sister of his. He caught her up, bumped her head three times against the ceiling, and then ran with her, laughing, down stairs to the parlor conservatory.

Mr. Chessom sauntered down stairs, into the breakfast-parlor, where Eladah, the house-maid was laying the table; and in a minute Bertram Waldegrave entered also.

"Good morning, uncle Philip," he said.

"Good morning, nephew," responded the banker. "How do you find yourself this morning."

"Thriving," answered Waldegrave; "and it looks like the commencement of a very fine day."

"Yes," said his uncle; "our Indian summer hangs on remarkably."

They remained chatting together for nearly half an hour, and then Earnest and his sister came in. Mabel was in advance; fairer, fresher, and lovelier than ever; a fanciful basket on one arm filled with rainbow hued blossoms; her slender little white hands full of gay blossoms also.

Waldegrave thought he had never before seen her so lovely. Glencora, he thought, with all her radiance, her brilliant fascinating charm of manner, was not to be compared with her. How her black eyes would have flashed, could she have seen her cousin's intensely admiring gaze bent on Mabel, and known his thoughts just at that moment.

The ordinary greetings were exchanged, and a lively conversation ensued, which at length turned upon the projected ride, which the ladies and gentlemen had the day before planned.

"Uncle Philip tells me that you do not propose going with us," said Waldegrave, addressing young Willoughby.

"No," answered Earnest, "an appointment which I have to meet at Islington will prevent my joining you."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Bertram, who had taken a liking for the banker's clerk, "you proved yourself indispensible the last time we took an airing of that kind. Suppose we get into another such a scrape as the one in which we found

ourselves on that other occasion, we can't get along without you. You have certainly a marvelous way of diffusing calmness into agitated minds."

The occasion of which Waldegrave spoke, was one on which Ernest had behaved with much courage and calmness; and had been the means of saving the lives of several of the party, who were rendered powerless by the panic, caused by a herd of cattle which had rushed down the lane through which they were riding, terribly frightening the horses, as well as some of their riders. Bertram himself, with several others, had been too far behind to render any timely assistance.

They were gaily chatting when the breakfast bell rang, and the other members of the family, with the guests at present stopping at Maplewood, presently appeared. Glencora was simply elegant in her morning toilet of lavander cashmere; her beautiful black hair in shinning coils about her superb head —a spray of scarlet geraniums glowing in the jetty masses, she looked, as she usually did, regally splendid.

Breakfast at length over, preparations for the morning's ride began. The horses were brought round, the party mounted and rode off, Waldegrave, somehow or other, finding himself and Mabel riding side by side.

Glencora was as gaily piquant and charming as ever, but she was inwardly passionately jealous and angry.

Ida Chesley opened wide her dreamy eyes, on beholding Earnest Willoughby so calmly tearing himself from her side; and wondered what engagement could possibly be important enough to keep him from her.

Earnest watched them as they rode gaily off, and then started alone to Islington, to meet his appointment—and his fate.

CHAPTER IV.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate;
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
—*Shakspeare's Sonnets.*

Ernest Willoughby reached Islington, and found that business would detain him there until late the ensuing day. Towards evening of the day of his arrival he sauntered out for a walk. It was nearly sunset, and a fresh, invigorating breeze was blowing. He was slowly strolling along when a carriage, which had just passed him, stopped—a curly head protruded from the window, and a lively voice shouted:

"Heloa! Willoughby, is it yourself, in the flesh?"

Willoughby turned round, stared, and then shouted, as he dashed to the side of the vehicle:

"Fairleigh, by Jove! and where did you come from?"

A vigorous handshaking ensued.

"Direct from Lancaster," answered Fairleigh; "got here yesterday."

"I hear your uncle, Fairleigh, is ill; that is why you're here, I suppose," said Ernest. Young Fairleigh nodded.

"Very ill—yes, that's what brought us here."

"Then you are not alone; your father is in Islington too, I presume."

"No, father couldn't come—was enduring the agonies of the gout when I left Fairleigh; I came with my aunt, Lady Muriel St. Ayvas, and her daughter, my cousin, Winnifred."

"Is there no hope of your uncle's recovery?" inquired Willoughby.

"So the corps of attendent physicians seem to opine; but it's my opinion that he's rather too crabbed to be in imminent danger of decease. He was quite able to nearly snap my head off this morning, for venturing to inquire if he felt any better; and he is still himself sufficiently to relish snubbing every one with whom he comes in contact; Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter by no means excepted."

The young man rattled on.

"By Jove!" he said presently, in reply to some remark of Willoughby's; "but I'm glad to see you though; where are you stopping, old fellow?"

Willoughby named his lodgings, and added:

"Come on and dine with me, can't you?"

His friend accepted the invite. Willoughby jumped into the carriage, and they turned about and drove off together.

Ernest Willoughby and Harvey Fair-

leigh were fond of each other; they had been college chums, and emancipated together from collegial restrictions: Ernest with a fine, thorough education, Harvey, with a smattering of the various branches of knowledge, and a solid understanding of nothing in particular. But he was a bright, sensible young fellow, this gay-voiced, merry-mannered, Harvey Fairleigh, notwithstanding, and a good fellow withal. Not handsome by any means; he was too short, too brusque; his eyes, though bright, were too small, his nose too short; his mouth was pleasant, almost womanly in its curve and outline; and there was an air of gaity, of frank geniality about him that was irresistable. He was careless, jovial, jolly; yet there was more true-hearted, honorable manliness in his composition than one who only observed him casually would have imagined could be hidden beneath so frivolous a surface. He had taken an huge liking, as he phrased it, for Ernest Willoughby, quiet, studious, and in every way his opposite, though he was; and the huge liking was mutual, for Ernest was very fond of him, and they were firm friends.

Judge Fairleigh, Harvey's father, was not wealthy; he owned a fine, but not unincumbered estate in Lancaster. He was a pleasant old gentleman, and Harvey, in character and disposition was his counterpart, with the exception that while the Judge prided himself inmensely upon his fine old estate, his proud name and lineage, and the fact that his parent on the maternal side was the daughter of an Earl, Harvey cared little more about his antecessors than he did about those of his favorite grey-hound, Tasso.

Judge Fairleigh's brother, a very crabbed, very wealthy, old army officer, resided in a pleasant, finely situated house at Islington. He lived alone, and in case of an unusually severe attack of his rhumatism, pneumonia or gout, allowing his friends to come near him when they were then summoned to attend upon him, to administer his numberless doses of medicine—when the servants were afraid to approach him—to read aloud such books as he fancied, when he was in the mood to listen, to endure his snubbings with the best grace possible: and when he was able to sit up to play whist with him, when he cared to be amused in that way.

Such an office could scarcely be deemed an enviable one, and yet his sister, Lady Muriel St. Ayvas, was always ready to answer his peremptory summons, to listen to his sour speeches with a smiling face, to flatter him, and lavish upon him her condolences, to address him or speak of him as poor dear brother Lowder, and to sweetly bid him good bye the moment she was not of service, and began to find herself in the way.

The cross-grained Colonel was a bachelor, and nearly sixty. Lady St. Ayvas was a widow, and fifteen years his junior. She was not at all wealthy; her husband had squandered his property previous to his death, and had not Lady Muriel been a shrewd manager she would never have been able to have kept up in a manner befitting her rank. She had one child, the Lady Winnifred, for whose marriage with some man of title and fortune she was anxiously manœvering.

Lady Winnifred had come to Islington according to her mother's request, to assist in nursing the irritable invalid. He was more than usually irascible, and her patience and endurance was more than usually tried. She read stale, tedious books to him, and tried not to be angry when he stopped her, as soon as tired of listening, by tartly inquiring if she meant to bore him to death. She played whist with him when she longed to be out of the gloomy sick room, breathing the sweet, fresh air in the sunlit garden: she played the martyr with uncomplaining heroism, save when Lady St. Ayvas reproached her for not being still more assiduously attentive to her poor, dear uncle, whose sufferings made him sometimes exhibit a fretfulness that was quite unnatural to him; then she angrily rebelled. She was as gently attentive as if he were the most grateful individual in the world; but she would never consent to flatter and cajole him, as did Lady Muriel, even though it was in his power to will her as many thousands as he chose.

Ernest and Harvey reached the form-

er's lodgings; dinner was served, and they sat down together, Harvey rattling on in his usual lively strain.

"By Jove, Willoughby," he said, in speaking of his cousin, Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas, "she's a stuning girl, and just the style of young lady to exactly suit you—too stately and beautiful, and all that for an ill-looking cub like myself, but she'd suit you."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," said Willoughby, "but the difficulty would be that I shouldn't be in the least likely to suit her."

"Yes you would," was the answer; "she'd like you, I'm sure of it; but I'm not so sure about the maternal party. Lady Muriel has immensely high aims for Winnifred; she'd turn up her nose at me now, because I'm not rich; but Winnifred wouldn't, if she were in love with me, which, I'm sorry to add, she isn't."

At the present stage of Willoughby's career, he had very little faith in womankind—rich, fashionable womankind especially; and he felt small interest in his friend's eulogy of Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas's glowing beauty, though he heard her described. Dinner over the young men sat over their wine chatting together.

Talking business—talking politics—talking nonsense; Harvey discoursing the latter especially. They had not seen each other for more than a year, during which Harvey had been travelling abroad, and they had consequently a good deal to talk about.

"And now I must tear me away," said Fairleigh, at last rising and tossing away his cigar. "Good night, old boy; we'll meet in the morning, and I'm going to London in a day or two, provided my poor, dear uncle finds himself recovering, and doesn't bite my head off before I take myself off. Good night."

"Good night," and the two parted.

The morning following Harvey entered his uucle's chamber to inquire after his health. The Colonel was bolstered up in bed, querulously complaining of his hard-ships, when his nephew entered. Now any other man under the sun but Colonel Fairleigh would have welcomed the pleasant-voiced, cheery young fellow, who came in with a bright step, and pleasantly grave face.

"Good morning, uncle Fairleigh; better this morning I hope."

The Colonel turned his face round savagely.

"What makes you say that, you young hypocrite?" he demanded. "You don't hope anything of the kind. Who wants you coming in here, with that nasty dog tagging after you. Winnifred hand me one of them," he ordered, pointing to a huge pair of velvet slippers that lay on a foot-stool

Before Lady Winnifred had time to obey or make reply, Harvey quietly stooped forward and, with a ludicrous gravity picked up one of the slippers and respectfully presented it to his uncle. The next moment it was hurled at his head, but he dodged it, and the missile fetched up against the defenceless cranium of the Colonel's valet, who was just entering the apartment, and he darted back, at a loss to understand why he was favored with this extra help.

"Permtt me to bid you good morning, uncle; I am happy to see you so much like yourself this morning," said Harvey with droll sincerity, turning to leave the apartment.

"Come back, can't you?" snarled the Colonel gruffly.

"Yes sir," said Harvey, turning back, and standing in a respectfully attentive attitude.

"Do you see that paper?"

"Yes sir"

"Well then take it; it's a list of books which I wish you to purchase for me. Be sure you don't forget either; and I want you to charge Jacques particularly about the care of that gray mare's leg. Mind and tell him if he lets her die. I'll flay him when I get better."

"Yes, sir," said Harvey.

Then there was a slight pause.

"Anything else you wish me to do?" inquired Harvey.

"No!" snapped the Colonel, turning away his head. Harvey made a hideous grimace, and left the chamber softly whistling, his brown-eyed dog, Tasso, trotting at his heels. In the corridor he encountered Lady St. Ayvas.

"Have you seen your dear uncle this morning?" she inquired.

"Yes, I have," said Fairleigh, laconically; "he's a heap better, isn't he?"

"I am happy to say that there is now much hope of his speedy recovery," said her ladyship, with a radiently hopeful countenance.

"Well," said Harvey, "I'm not of any particular service to you here, so I think I'll drive to London with my friend Willoughby; he leaves Islington to-day."

"Now Harvey!" expostulated Lady St. Ayvas, "how thoughtless of you; why can you not remain here a few days at least and help us to attend upon and amuse him, your poor, dear uncle?"

Harvey lifted his eyebrows in a quaint grimace.

"Amuse him!" he repeated; "how pray?—by standing as a target for his slippers, or night-cap, or whatever else he finds nearest, and feels inclined to hurl at me, as he did this morning?"

"Oh, Harvey!"—but her ladyship's deprecatory speech was interrupted by Lady Winnifred. "Mamma, uncle Fairleigh wishes you to come and sit by him;" and Lady St. Ayvas hastened away.

"You look fagged," said Fairleigh, surveying his cousin's tired face.

"I am," said Lady Winnifred; and I am going out for a walk; the house is so stiflingly warm and close."

"Don't leave your *im*patient for long, or he'll raise no end of a row," said Fairleigh as he descended the staircase.

Lady Winnifred tied on a hat, and walked out into the garden. It was a lovely morning, the dew-wet lawn looked like gemmy velvet, the geraniums glowed in the warm sunshine, and the coppice of larch and birch was a line of mellon, yellow gold. Lady Winnifred opened a wicket and passed out of the garden. How gloriously bright and beautiful, and fragrant everything was. She forgot the irritable invalid at Birchbrook house—forgot every thing in contemplation of the bright, lovely scene that surrounded her, and gathered flowers and trailing vines with almost childish delight. She was stooping to pluck some sprays of starry wild blossoms when a footstep on the narrow path startled her, and rising she found herself face to face with a gentleman.

He was handsome, with a lithe graceful figure. This much Lady Winnifred had time to perceive as he paused for an instant to lift his hat and utter a graceful apology—the next he was out of sight in the winding path.

Lady Winnifred bent over the flowers again, but the next moment she had dropped her blossoms and started to her feet with a wild cry of terror.

She had heard without heeding the baying of a dog on the other side of the coppice; but now a great grey hound, the fiercest canine animal on the premises, with his red tongue tolling from his grim jaws, came tearing throtgh the narrow path toward her. He saw her, and gave a short, savage bark as he sprang forward.

Lady Winnifred's white lips parted in another terrified scream, and she clasped her hands despairingly together. Three was a quick rustle—a loud shout—and Winnifred's bewildered senses took in knowledge of the fact that somebody with a club was beating back the snarling, infuriated cur. A heavy blow stunned the animal, and with a howl he fell over. Then Lady Winnifred looked at her rescuer, who now stood beside her, and perceived that he was the same gentleman who had passed her a moment before.

"How terribly frightened you must have been," he said, looking down at her as she clung to one of the trees for support. "Pray let me find you a seat—see, here is one," and he led her to one of the stone benches that were scattered here and there through the copse.

Lady Winnifred sat down, still pale and trembling; and the strange gentleman looked down at her, and thought he had never before in his life beheld anyone so beautiful.

The rosy tint came softly back to her cheeks as she glanced up, and found the fine dark eyes of the handsome stranger resting with such evident admiration upon her. Presently there was footsteps on the path, aud they heard a lively voice singing:—

"Come and see the winkles,
Come and see the whales;

Come and see the crocodile
That plays upon the ——."

"Helloa!"

Harvey Fairleigh stopped short, both in his absurd song and his brisk walk, and stared at the scene, before him. Lady Winnifred, who had not yet quite recovered from her fright, sitting on one of the benches, Ernest Willoughby—for he it was—standing beside her, his gray eyes saying as plainly as his lips could have done, how lovely he thought her, and the senseless grey hound lying a few feet off.

CHAPTER V.

Love is ever busy with his shuttle—is ever weaving into life's dull warp bright, gorgeous flowers and scenes Arcadian.—Longfellow

Explanation being made Harvey's look of astonishment changed to one of indignation

"Just like all the rest of it here!" he exclaimed; "I should like to know why that snarling brute was let to run loose this time in the day."

A servant presently appeared, and Harvey, who had begun introducing Willoughby to his cousin, only waited to finish the ceremony, and then turned furiously upon the domestic with:—

"Why in the name of all that's unheard of, is that savage brute allowed to go loose in the day time? Do you know," he added sharply, "that he nearly frightened her ladyship out of her wits, and would have torn her to pieces had it not been for this gentleman?"

Pilkins looked considerably frightened, and began stammering apologetically. "I'm werry sorry, werry," said he; "but if you please, sir, it was mester's horders to let 'im hout o' nights, before 'e wer took ill, sir; and we didn't think as 'er ladyship, 'ud be hout quite so hearly for 'er walk, or we'd ha' certainly 'ave 'ad 'im chained up sooner, sir."

"I see this cur is pretty well done for for the present," said Fairleigh; "but mind you keep a sharper eye on the rest of the snarling pack, and don't let one of them loose after daylight to molest any one who happens, like her ladyship, or this gentleman, who was opportunely on hand, to be out for a morning walk."

"Yes, sir, I'll remember sir," said Pilkins, bowing; "'e wouldn't ha been let loose at all, sir, only there were considerable many pillagers 'round here o' nights, and it wer mester's horders to let Tyke there loose, so's 'e might catch any stragglers as 'appened to be prowlin 'round;" and with another bobbing obeisance, and a few more expressions of regret, addressed to Lady Winnifred, he lifted the dog Tyke, which was already beginning to revive, and trotted off.

Fairleigh leaned against one of the sturdy young birches, and began chatting in a merry strain. His lively humor was always contagious, and in a wonderfully short space of time, stately Lady Winnifred and quiet Ernest Willoughby were chatting together as gaily, as animatedly, and almost as freely as if they had known each other all their lives.

"And now I must take myself off," said Fairleigh, at length; "I have an appointment to meet before starting for London. I'll meet you at your hotel immediately after dinner," he continued, addressing Willoughby, who was engaged in the restoration of Winnifred's scattered wreaths and blossoms; "and," he added, "as my path lies in an opposite direction from both your own and Birchbrook house, the honor of seeing her ladyship safely back will fall to you."

Lady Winnifred, who had already risen to depart, accepted the escort which Willoughby eagerly offered; and parting from Fairleigh they walked on together.

She was so lovely—so very lovely, this graceful Lady Winnifred; and Willoughby's gray eyes were full of a worshipfully, admiring expression whenever he looked at her.

The lesser charms of stately, coquettish Ida Chesley, faded—paled to nothingness, compared with this most beautiful lady; and the banker's handsome young clerk was insensibly, but nevertheless surely falling wildly in love with her.

She was not like his golden-tressed fairy of a little sister, although she was gracefully slender in figure, and there were myriad flecks of bronze light in her abundant hair. She was taller, with

a more queenly air and bearing; and her silken locks were not the pure, yellow, Titian gold, like Mabel's, but nutty brown, bathed in 'red, red gold.' Her eyes were not deeply, purply blue, but black; neither were they flashing, soulless black like Glencora Chessom's, but soft, like liquid jet, with a pure light shining out of them; and they harmonised exquisitely, with the delicate tinting of pearl and pink.

It was a breezy, sunlit morning, and they walked slowly along, over the rustling carpet of yellow fallen leaves, till they reached the lawn gate. During their walk Lady Winnifred informed Willoughby that she and her mother had been visiting in France for the past year, and since their return had been invited by Mrs. Leigh Chessom, with whom Lady St. Ayvas was on intimately friendly terms, to visit Maplewood; and as soon as her brother was convalescent Lady St. Ayvas would accept the invite.

Ernest would fain have danced at this information, but he expressed his pleasure that they should so soon meet again, after a more conventional fashion, and opened the gate for Lady Winnifred. Having many matters to look to before leaving Islington he heroically denied himself the pleasure of accepting her invitation to enter.

"Will you give me a souvenir?" he asked, pointing to her flowers. She broke off an odorous blossom, with pearl white petals and crimson heart, and with a pleasant, bright smile, gave it to him. He took it—his heart thumping the while, and blundered into uttering a pretty compliment as he fastened it in the button-hole of his coat.

Lady Winnifred gave him her hand for a moment, it was duly pressed, bowed over and released, and they parted—Willoughby in an extatic sort of state—Winnifred with a rosier tint than was wont on her cheeks, and the impression on her mind that her cousin's handsome friend was interesting—very.

"Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?"

CHAPTER VI.

A JOURNEY INTO WALES, AND AN ACCIDENT.

They had had a long pleasant ride—the merry equestrian party which left Maplewood on the morning upon which young Willoughby started for Islington, and, after a lunch partaken of in gypsy fashion, under the flickering shadow of autumn foliage, returned in time to dress for dinner. After that lengthy meal ended all assembled in the great purple drawing-room. There were quite a number of guests at present stopping at Maplewood. There were the Mansfields, the Cheveneys, Judge Harcourt and his pretty little wife, who was nearly twenty years younger than himself, and something like a year younger than her twin step-daughter—two languid fashionable belles. There was Captain Chesley's stately daughter Ida, and his ward, the rich heiress Trissie Locksley; two or three London friends, including Charlie Polsdon, and the banker's nephew, Bertram Waldegrave.

Glencora Chessom was dazzling in velvet and diamonds—was sparkling, piquant, brilliant; and yet Mabel Willoughby out-rivalled her in sweet, fresh loveliness, if not in vivacious brilliancy.

Jarvis Chessom sauntered over to where the latter was seated, at work on some fairy complication of bright colors, and began a teasing conversation with her.

He was fond of his orphan cousin, if we may so call her, feeling for her a more really genuine regard and respectful admiration than for almost any other woman of his acquaintance. Like many other men of his class he looked upon a pure hearted, womanly woman, as a creature beyond his comprehension; but half wished, sometimes, he were less of a scapegrace, that he might venture to worship her nearer by.

"You look very charming to-night, Meb," he whispered. "Glen, over there, in her glitter of ruby velvet and diamonds, and her marvellous headgear, she's a stunner, but she desn't make up as you do after all."

Mabel glanced up, about to make some laughing reply, but Jarvis interrupted. "Meb, little cousin," he said, "if I were less of a ruffian, do you know, not such a—well, if I were only half good enough for you, I should fall in love with you, as sure as fate. Do you

think it would be quite useless as it is? Suppose I refo.m? The days of miracles are not over yet,Meb!"

He laughed—his words were half jestingly, half seriously spoken.

"Come, tell me Mabel, wolud it be quite folly to think of such a thing?"

"Yes, quite," she answered laughing. "We should be the worst matched couple in the world, Jarvis!"

Jarvis laughed. "Well, I'm not prepared to dispute that," he said: "I fear it would be even so: you ought to have a better fellow, and I—oh, I dare say I shall marry and be tolerably happy with some little idiot like the Locksleys yonder, or some of the rest of them; but here comes cousin Bertram; he would suit you better than any other man I know. "Be careful," he added, "that Glencora does not petrify you with her Gorgonian eyes!" and he sauntered over to flirt with Miss Locksley.

Glencora was never so thoroughly in her element as when there was a goodly number of masculine devotees hovering about her; but though such was the case to-night—though she took a sort of savage delight in luring on, with her will-o'-the-wisp like eyes, her admirers, her radiant gaiety was only outward; within she was fiercely, furiously angry—angry with herself, angry with Bertram Waldegrave, and more savagely angry still with Mabel Willoughby.

For the first time in her life she was recklessly, wildly in love—in love with her tall, dark cousin; and he maddened her with his calm, cool dispassion.

Perhaps had he become hopelessly enamoured of her, falling down as a hundred others had done, to do her homage, she might—she propably would—have lured his love on, only to crush and torture it in the end; and would have laughed at his misery, adding him to her already numberless list of victims. But Waldegrave had not done this; his manner toward her had only been that of cousinly friendliness, save once or twice, when her flashing orbs and dazzling smiles had half turned his head, and he had been upon the point of love-making. Sometimes she had seen his eyes resting upon her with an expression which thrilled her heart, even when she was not certain that his glance meant love. But of late he had been noticeably attentive to Mabel, and now as he sought her side, Glencora dropped her white lids to veil the tigeress-like gleam of her eyes; but Col. Vivian, as he sat beside her, saw her red lips press together—heard her delicate fan snap, as she crushed it in the grip of her white fingers, and smiled grimly under his yellow-brown moustache. The Colonel had been making elaborate love to her that day, and in return for his pains had received only piquant words and saucy smiles of coquettry; and now he took a sort of savage pleasure in seeing her waxen fingers close so fiercely 'round the fragile fan; and for the life of him, he could not resist saying:

"Pray spare your pretty fan, Miss Chessom; your fair hands clutch it almost as mercilessly as if it were a lovely feminine throat!"

For an instant the black eyes were raised—a furious flame burning in them: but the next it had died out, and though a faint tinge of crimson mantled her white forehead, her set lips relaxed, and a soft little murmuring laugh rippled between them, as she uttered some light frivolous retort; and for the remainder of the evening she was more gaily, brightly charming than ever.

"Where is it you're going now, Jarvis?" inquired Mr. Chessom, glancing up from the whist table to his grandson, as he chanced to catch some remark of his, addressed to young Polsdon.

"With Polsdon, into Wales," said Jarvis, "we've made all arrangements, and purpose starting next week."

"Really," exclaimed Mrs. Chessom; "it is quite too bad of you and Mr. Polsdon to leave us just when you are actually indispensable!"

"Never fear, mother," answered Jarvis; "we shall be back with plenty of time to render all that is neccessay of our valuable assistance, in the getting up of that prospective bore, in the way of dramatics, which I heard you ladies discussing a little while ago."

"Bore!" exclaimed Miss Locksley: "how can you call them so, Mr. Chessom? I think private theatricals, when

properly conducted, simply charming!"

"Can you wonder, Miss Locksley, that they are all a bore in my estimation, when I hear that I am not to have the privilege of acting even one o the parts with you?" said Jarvis; "I hope," he added with a mock savage air, "that I shall be enabled to restrain myself from assassinating Vivian yonder. I shall be terribly tempted when I behold him as Romeo to your Juliet?"

She laughed back some gay, coquettish answer, and Mr. Chessom remarked:

"You will be able to make some fine sketches, Jarvis."

"Yes, that is half my object in going," said he.

For a wonder Jarvis was fond of painting; he wanted to make some sketches of the fine scenery in the west, which was particularly fine in the autumn season, especially such a glorious autumn as this. He was, for once, a little wearied of fashionable revelry, and Wales, with its quaint, beautiful picturesqueness, would be a change. Mr. Polsdon's journey thither was one of business; but Mrs. Chessom was annoyed that for a mere caprice, her whimsical son had taken it in his head to run off, just when there was a throng of guests at the house, and more were, ere long, expected to arrive, among whom, Mrs. Chessom was hoping to welcome Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter.

The St. Ayvas family was one of the oldest and best in England; and though Lady Muriel's husband, by reckless extravagance, had squandered the most of his property, Mrs. Chessom declared that Jarvis' wealth was already ample, and that an alliance with the beautiful Lady Winnifred would be a very suitable one. But as no remonstrances, which she afterwards could make, availed to dissuade him from taking the projected jaunt, Jarvis and his friend started together upon the day set for their departure.

A great billow of gorgeous clouds of amber and purple, and firey gold aglow with sunset glory, was floating behind Cwmdaron bay, when they arrived at the queer little town of Cwmdaron where they were to remain over night at one of the odd little inns, with its equally odd proprietor.

The young men partook of supper, and then sauntered out under the weather-beaten sign that hung above the main entrance door of the little establishment. The moon had risen now, and the heaving bay was all a sparkle with its reflected light. Jarvis glanced up at the queer little building, remarking: "Our worthy landlord has chosen a romantic spot—look to your westward, harlie" Mr. Polsdon looked toward the rippling bay—its headlands, and the far-away peaks of the mountains, dim and shadowy in the moonlight; it was a wildly, dreamily, beautiful scene.

On the morning ensuing our friends started for a horseback gallop through the rough Welsh country. Unfortunately their ride had an unpleasant termination. Mr. Polsdon's horse taking fright, that gentleman was thrown from his saddle, his ankle badly sprained, and he was carried back to the inn insensible.

CHAPTER VII.

BIRDIE WYLDE.

Polsdon soon recovered consciousness; his ankle was bandaged, and he was strictly enjoined by his physician not to leave his couch for at least a fortnight. He raised his eyes dispairingly to the dim ceiling.

"Think of it Chessom!" he said, with a groan. "To be cooped for a fortnight in this dingy hole! Why I shall be rubbed out by that time!"

He lay for half an hour or so, growling over his surroundings and his pains, anathamatizing the clownishness of Welsh peasantry, particularly that of the individual who, with his awkwardness had frightened his horse, and then fell asleep. Chessom, smoking, reading, yawning, sat beside him for what seemed to him a very long time; then he rose and walked to the window, which commanded a fine view of Cwmdaron bay. He bethought himself of his sketch book, and fishing it from his satchel strode forth, after giving to his landlord some directions in reference to his friend, in case he should waken ere his return. The afternoon sunlight was warm and golden; the quaint town was astir; for it was market day, and Chessom wandered on,

leaving the odd little shops, with their confused variety of wares, and the throng of peasantry behind—strolled on till he was a mile away from Cwmdaron, and within sight of Nanteroyd—a dismal old ruin upon the brow of a bleaky hill, its grim face set seaward.

Sitting down in the shadow of a great rough rock by the stony high road, he drew forth his portfolio and began sketching the gloomy, darksome old place, and a portion of its wild surroundings.

The crimson of sunset was fading into the soft gray of twilight as he finished his sketch and rose to depart. He walked briskly along, for the October evening was chilly, and the rough, stony road, with the great dim sea on one side, and a gray mountain on the other, made a half dreary, though wildly picturesque scene.

When about half a mile from Cwmdaron he encountered a trio of peasants; two were men—tipsy boorish creatures—the third a girl, shabbily dressed in the usual style of the peasant women's attire. Around the girl's waist one of the clowns had thrown his brawny arm, and, despite her struggles, was endeavoring to embrace and kiss her. Jarvis was passing on without, after the first glance, paying any attention to their carrying on, thinking that the girl was coquettishly affecting a coy wish to escape; but her shrill, distressed cry for help, the moment she caught sight of Jarvis, stopped him.

"Oh! sir, please drive them away!" cried the girl. "Pray, make them let me go!"

A sharp rap on the head from Chessom's cane caused the tipsy idiot, who had clutched the girl, to immediately release her; and muttering, they shambled out of the way, and precipitately took themselves off.

The girl sank down on a rock by the roadside and drew several long breaths as she surveyed her wrists, which were red and swollen with the marks of the brawny peasant's coarse grip. Chessom looked curiously down at her.

She was certainly a curious figure. Her short, dark green linsey dress was old and worn; her short crimson shawl rough and faded; and her tall hat, which was tied under her chin, had lost its gloss, and was battered and shabby.

"Do you live in Cwmdaron?" asked Chessom.

"No, sir; but I am on my way there," answered the girl; and in a moment she rose to go on. Chessom looked at her again as she did so, with an amused smile. She looked like some wierd witch in the dark; the red color which had, in her fright, forsaken her sun-browned face, had not yet returned; her great dark eyes—though Chessom could not tell whether they were black, gray, blue, or brown—had a strange sullen look in them; and her black hair hung from under her high hat, lustreless and tangled, far below her waist.

She glanced up, and through the twilight saw his smile, and reddened, and dropped her eyes sulkily. This handsome gentleman, with his drooping moustache, polished boots, and air *distingué*, was visibly laughing at her. Chessom had not intended that she should see the smile which he could not repress; he understood the sullen droop of the great black eyes—the drawing in of the short upper lip, and tried to conciliate the odd girl. She was dressed after the fashion of Welsh peasant girls; but she was evidently English. Chessom cared little about who this girl was, and yet she puzzled him a little, too.

"Well," he said, "as I am going there too we shall be fellow-travellers for a half mile or so, at least—shall we not? There are more drunken ruffians coming along. You see it is not safe for a young girl like you to be out in this lonely place alone, and at this hour. The next time you come here you had better get some of your friends to come with you, who can protect you."

The girl looked at him half sullenly, half sorrowfully, as she answered:

"I haven't any friends to come with me anywhere."

Chessom was not a philanthropic young gentleman; he had no sympathy in common with shabby Welsh peasant girls, or any peasant girls; but somehow this slim, tall creature, with her great, strange, black eyes, aroused a something in his heart which, if not

sympathy, was akin to it; and he looked half pityingly—half curiously down at her as he said:

"No friends? where are your parents? Do you not live with friends?"

"Father and mother are both dead," answered the girl; "and I have always lived with Dame Polley till a week ago, when she died; and I am going to her sister, now, who lives in Cwmdaron."

"Yes, I see," said Jarvis, who took it in his head to keep up the conversation. "This Dame Polley brought you up; you are a relative of her's, I suppose. Is your name Polley too?"

"Oh, no sir," said the girl, "Dame Polley was no relation to me; though she brought me up, as you've said, but my name is Wylde—Birdetta Wylde; though they always called me Birdie."

"Birdie Wylde!" exclaimed Chessom. "What a euphonic name, to be sure!" Mentally, he added: "What an odd birdie, forsooth!"

They walked on, Chessom idly questioning her as they proceeded; and the girl, looking up with shy admiration into his face, told him in brief all she herself knew of her history. She was fifteen years of age, of English parentage; her father and mother she knew nothing about, save that Dame Polley had told her they were both dead. Before her death Dame Polley had desired that Birdetta should go to her sister, who lived in Cwmdaron, and whom she was in hopes would give shelter to the girl until she could find some means of supporting herself. They reached a little dingy house.

"Perhaps this may be the house," said Birdetta; "I'll inquire anyhow;" and she turned toward the hut.

Chessom drew forth a handful of sovereigns, and held them towards her saying:

"Here, you can purchase finery, with these."

The girl reddened and remonstrated; but Jarvis forced them upon her; and bidding her good-bye went back to his lodgings, and soon forgot her.

CHAPTER VIII

"IN THE WIDE WORLD ALONE."

The next two days following Jarvis' walks to Nanteroyd were dark and chilly; the third was bright and breezy, with great downy clouds sailing softly athwart the horizon; and Cwmdaron bay was all agleam and sparkle with sunlight. Young Polsdon was rapidly gaining, and was also becoming horribly impatient for his freedom.

Chessom, who had sat by his side all the morning talking, or reading aloud the contents of the London papers, glanced up with a long breath of relief as his friend's heavy breathing announced that he had fallen asleep, and rising he left the chamber, and was soon galloping away on horseback. When something over a mile beyond Nanteroyd he discovered by the roadside, in a half-sitting, half-crouching posture, an odd figure—a figure clad in a worn green linsey dress—a faded crimson shawl, and a queer, high hat It was unmistakably Birdetta Wylde.

She had not obtained a shelter then under the roof of Dame Polley's sister. Chessom drew rein and looked down at her. Somehow this creature's very outlandishness had taken his fancy

"Are you still homeless, my girl?" he asked.

She looked up—a faint light brightening her shadowy, dark eyes, and told him all that had occurred to her since they had met last.

The little hovel, at the door of which she and Chessom had parted, was not the one she had wished to find; but learning that she was still some distance from her destination, she had paid the woman who kept the shanty for her supper and night's lodging, and on rising the next morning discovered that the handful of sovereigns which the strange gentleman had tossed into her hands the previous night were gone—they had been stolen. There was nothing to do for it, however, but to go on, leaving her gold in the clutches of the woman of the hut, whom she was certain had taken it, and search till she should find the old woman to whom her former protectress had bidden her go, hoping that for a short time at least she would shelter her. But from that worthy woman's door she was roughly turned away, and found herself out in the world

again, a more hopeless wanderer than before.

Jarvis listened patiently to the girl's sorrowful narration.

Had she been an ordinary beggar he would probably have tossed her another handful of coins, and ridden on without heeding or waiting to hear her story, but she was not an ordinary beggar—she had never once asked him for alms; there was a quaint air about her that seemed to be a sort of blending of sullenness, pride and dignity, and whimsical Jarvis was interested in her. He looked down thoughtfully for a moment, and then, as if a thought had struck him, suddenly tore a leaf from his memorandum book, and wrote a few lines which ran as follows: "Nurse Gimp. The bearer of these lines is one of the world's homeless waifs; by giving her a home at your cottage for a few days you will confer a favor upon your old nursery rebel, Jarvis Chessom.

P. S.—I am at present lodging at the "Lion" inn, in Cwmdaron, and will see you in a day or two. J. C."

Jarvis folded the slip of paper, remarking:

"There is a Mrs. Gimp—an English woman who lives something like a quarter of a mile from here—do you think you could find her cottage?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Birdetta: "I have been there twice on errands for Dame Polley."

"Well then," said Jarvis reaching her the paper, "go to her and give her that note, and she will take care of you till I see you again, which will be in a day or two. Good-bye," and tossing several pieces of gold into her lap he rode on.

Near nightfall he returned to the Lion inn to learn that Polsdon, in spite of his physician's injunctions not to leave his couch for some time longer, had that day attempted to cross his chamber with the assistance of a chair which he shoved ahead, and in so doing had succeeded in twisting his ankle and thus spraining it afresh; and three days passed, and the fourth was half spent ere he had time to again think of Mrs. Gimp or his curious protege; then he ordered his horse and rode off in the direction of the Gimp cottage.

Years ago Mrs. Gimp had officiated as children's nurse at Maplewood, but for the past twelve years had lived in Wales, in a snug cottage, a mile or two distant from Cwmdaron.

Jarvis, who had stopped one stormy night at her house some three years before, knew whereabouts she lived, and that she would gladly entertain a dozen homeless peasant girls, provided that each came bearing notes from himself desiring her to do so.

Her broad figure stood in the open doorway of her little cottage when Chessom rode up. She advanced courtseying, and bid him welcome to her "'umble habode," as she expressed it. Chessom dismounted and shook her hand, saying:

"Meant to have come sooner, but couldn't. Where's our protege?"

"In the house, sir—and oh, sir, such a change! you wouldn't know her, sir—but pray come in, sir; you must be fertigued harter your ride, poor dear young gentleman;" and Mrs. Gimp ushered him into her fussy little best room.

Chessom opened his eyes and pursed up his lips as if about to whistle when he beheld the bright dark, peasant girl, whom Mrs. Gimp presented as Birdetta Wylde. She had discarded the old green linsey and donned a new, bright grey of the same material; 'round her shoulders was wrapped a gay plaided handkerchief which was pinned across her breast; her hair, no longer limp and lustreless was arranged in shining plaits in a fantastic fashion that became her finely formed head immensely.

Her dark eyes were bright now, the sullen expression had nearly all faded out, and a sweet, soft light had come in its place. She was another creature from the half famished waif whom he had encountered twice before. Not really beautiful, Chessom thought, yet very pretty too, after a singular fashion.

CHAPTER IX.

BIRDIE'S LOCKET.

Birdetta looked up on Chessom's entrance with a shy smile and a courtesy.

"Why! by Jove!" he exclaimed, sitting down opposite her, and giving her

an admiring stare; "this can't be the same little brown elf whom I found by the roadside!"

The girl's color deepened, and her fringy eye-lids drooped on her cheeks. It was a rude speech, though rattle-tongued Chessom did not intend it for such.

He noted her look of embarrassment, and, remembering that she was not like ordinary peasant girls, who would have been more likely to have felt flattered than embarrassed at his words, thought that something in the way of an apology was required.

"Don't look that way, my dear," said he; "I didn't mean to be rude; but you see I wasn't prepared for such a metamorphosis. Mrs. Gimp," he added, looking up at the wide-awake clock, "it seems to me that, in consideration to my famishing appetite, you ought to immediately get ready your supper."

"Bless your 'art, master, I'll 'ave it ready just in a minute," said Mrs. Gimp. "The kittle's on the boil now," and she bustled out of the room.

Chessom leaned lazily back in the stiff-backed arm-chair, and watched Birdetta's slender brown fingers, as they flitted deftly among the bright worsted she was knitting, now and then chatting to her. He did not expect to find his protege grown in the short space of three days, to be so beautiful.

"Have you then no remembrance of your parents?" he asked, as the girl, in accordance with his request for her to do so, was relating to him more particularly her previous history.

"No sir," answered Birdetta; "at least I'm not certain that I have, though sometimes I think that I remember them both."

She looked thoughtfully down for a moment.

"Sometimes I think I remember them both," she repeated. "Perhaps it may be only a foolish dream—Dame Polley told me that it was,—but it seems to me that I can distinctly recollect living somewhere where everything was nice and pretty, where there was a lady whom I called mamma and a tall gentleman whom I called papa; but all this can't interest you, sir; I am wearying you."

"No, no, not at all; go on," said Chessom, who felt in the mood to listen. "What more do you fancy that you remember?"

"I only remember one other person clear," said Birdetta; "it seems to me he was a great tall, dark gentleman, and I was afraid of him."

"Do you recollect how your parents looked?" asked Chessom.

"I don't remember much about this gentleman, sir, whom I spoke of first; but the lady was pretty and dark—that is, dark hair and eyes; and I remember her best in a dress that—I can't tell you just what color it was; but it was light and had a purple tint in it."

"Lavender, perhaps," suggested Chessom.

"I don't know, sir, what color that is," said Birdetta; "it might have been; it was very pretty anyhow."

She put up one hand and untied a bright ribbon that hung 'round her neck on which was suspended a small locket.

"I've had this ever since I can remember," said she; "but it never would come open; there was a little key belonging to it, but it got lost, Dame Polley told me; and she forbade me trying to open it, for fear I should break it. Mrs. Gimp bought me this ribbon to hang it on, the other day," she added; "and she said it might have a picture of something in it. Maybe I'd better break it open."

Chessom held out his hand:

"Allow me to examine it," he said.

Birdetta gave him the locket.

"Yes, it's locked," he said, after a minute's investigation of the trinket. "Shall I force it open? If it breaks I'll buy you a new one." The girl assented, and Chessom with the aid of his penknife sundered the tiny gold lock; and the locket with a snap flew open, disclosing two miniatures and two little coils of hair, one glossy black, the other nutty brown. One of the pictured faces was that of a woman—fair, bright, with great dark eyes and singularly beautiful. In delicately graved characters beneath the vignette was the name 'Birdetta!'

The other picture was that of a man—

handsome, with fair hair rippling away from a wide forehead; a pleasant face with eyes that were deep and bright and truthful; the clear cut, firm mouth and chin, shadowed by a silken, blonde moustache and beard; and beneath this picture wat the name 'Reginald.'

Perceiving another spring, Chessom pressed it back, this time revealing two sweet baby faces—those of a boy and a girl. The face of the former was fair and earnest, closely resembling that of the gentleman, who was evidently the father of the children; that of the latter was bright and sweet, and very like the mother's.

There were two little silky curls of hair with these miniatures also, and like the lady's, the baby-girl's hair was much the darker of the two. The boy was apparently the eldest of the two children—evidently somewhere about four years of age—the girl about two years. Underneath were the nicknames 'Redy' and 'Birdie.'

Birdetta, who had been gazing with parted lips at the contents of her locket, looked up in a bewildered sort of fashion at Chessom.

"What does it mean, sir?" she asked.

"Mean? why it means that these two first pictures are those of your parents," said Chessom; "and these"—pointing to the pictures of the children—"must one of them be your own, and the other somebody's—a brother's perhaps. Did you, are you sure, never have a brother?"

"Not that I know of, sir. Oh! surely," she exclaimed, looking admiringly at the bright pictured face of the little girl, "this can't be a likeness of me. I could never have been pretty like that!"

Chessom laughed.

"Why, Birdie," he said, "if a new winsey frock and a bright ribbon or two can change you from a hideous—I mean from a queer little brownie, into the most charming little peasant girl in Wales, what do you suppose a cloud of foamy lace and a jewelled necklace, such as this little fairy has on, would be unable to do, in the beautifying line for you? Yow *are* rather brownish," he added; "but I see you're already getting the better of that." He picked up the trinket again with a puzzled air, saying as he examined it more closely than before:

"It beats the dickins! there's a mystery here as sure as fate; and I've seen a lady somewhere—though goodness knows where, who's very like this picture!"

"Oh! if my parents are only living!" said Birdetta; "if I could only see them!"

Mrs. Gimp bustled into the litt e parlour announcing supper; and was shown the contents of Birdie's locket.

"Goodness-gracious!" ejaculated she, after examining, with much surprise, the pictures; "who knows but she's some grand ady after all? I allars thought that old Dame Polley was a sly old critter, anyhow."

Birdetta's dark eyes, as the good woman spoke, grew bright with sparkling animation. A grand lady! She had a dim idea that to be a grand lady meant to be a creature very beautiful, very happy and very elegant; to be wealthy with hosts of friends; and always to be richly arrayed in costly silks and laces, and jewels, like the fair patrician daughters of the Glencroftons of Glencrofton—a fine old estate within sight of which stood Dame Polley's tumble down hovel.

Chessom, looking half laughingly down at the girl, divined something of her thoughts.

"Would you fancy being a grand lady, Birdie?" he asked.

"Oh, it would be so nice!" said Birdie. I should have friends—so many friends, and a father and mother perhaps. Oh! if I only had a father and mother, I should be so happy! But"—and her face was overshadowed again—"they can't be living, or else I shouldn't have been left with Dame Polley all these years."

Jarvis turned to Mrs. Gimp saying:

"If there pictures, as they of course are, are those of Birdie and her relatives, there is a mystery about the affair as sure as Christmas. And this old creature, Dame Polley, Birdie—was she kind to you?" he asked.

"Mostly always, sir," said Birdie.

"Do, pray, 'ave your supper now, master Jarv," interrupted Mrs. Gimp. "You must be a famishin'; and everything I've gone and cooked 'll be *all spiled!*"

"All right Gimpy," said Chessom. rising; and the bustling Dame was a few moments later serving the carefully gotten up meal from off her queer, old fashioned china, brought out for the occasion.

Chessom rode back to Cwmdaron that night, thinking more than he had probably over taken the trouble to think before in the course of his aimless life.

"What the dickins does it mean?" he said mentally. "It's my opinion that this old witch, Dame Polley, for some motive best known to herself, has stolen little Birdie from her relatives or lawful guardians. Who knows but I've picked up a great heiress, or some wonderful creature in disguise? How pretty she's got to be!"

He reached his lodgings, and gave Polsdon's inquiries, as to where he had been, evasive replies, not mentioning his 'queer little Birdie', as he mentally called her. He didn't care to hear any of Polsdon's sarcastic speeches about philanthropy, and so wisely held his tongue.

CHAPTER X.

The afternoon sunshine was softening the chilliness of the briskly blowing breeze the following day as Chessom rode toward Mrs. Gimp's flat-faced little white house. Birdetta, standing by one of the chintz-curtained front windows, smiled a shy welcome as he rode up. He nodded gaily as he caught sight of the bright face in its frame of glossy braids, and dismounting entered the cottage.

An odd smile of amusement played beneath his black moustache as he pictured his mother's dignified horror, and the curl of sarcastic contempt on his sister's ripe lip; could they behold this untutored peasant girl—this homeless, nameless creature whom he, in a freak of generosity, had picked up by the rough Welsh road-side, coming to meet him, her face all aglow with pleasure.

"Holoa, Birdie," he cried as he advanced; "are you all alone? Where's Gimpy?"

"Only gone of an errand sir," said Birdetta; "she'll be back in just a little while. Won't you walk into the parlour, sir?"

Chessom walked into the little apartment thus designated and sat down in the stiff-backed arm-chair. There had been a sort of bazaar in Cwmdaron that day, and, having nothing better to do in the way of killing time, Chessom had spent an hour or two among the throng of towns-people and peasantry in attendance.

There was a sprinkling of rollicking young country gentlemen among the crowd, who passed the time in drinking, and dancing and flirting with the gayly arrayed peasant girls. Chessom joined in this sort of revelry until weary of the wild carrying on; and then, declaring the whole thing 'a confounded bore', left, after purchasing, as presents for Birdie, a number of the least gaudy, and most tasteful of the many articles for sale.

"How that muff Polsdon would chaff if he could only have the sport of watching me just now," thought Jarvis, as he looked on with a smile, half of pleasure, half of amusement, at Birdie's unbounded admiration of her gay gifts.

Mrs. Gimp coming in soon after was delighted with the numerous presents which Chessom had also brought her, among which was a fine shawl, the handsomest and warmest which he had found for sale in Cwmdaron.

"How do you spend your time here Birdie?" asked Chessom a little while later, watching the girl as she sat busily sewing. "Don't you find things rather pokey sometimes?"

"Oh, no indeed," said Birdie, "I've something to do 'most all the time, and when there isn't anything I can read."

"Read!" cried Jarvis, "what do you find here to read, pray? I suppse," he added, "there are four standard volumes in Gimpy's library, namely: that dog-eared Bible, which she has thumbed daily and nightly ever since I can remember; the life of John Bunyan, and his Pilgrim's Progress, which, by the way, is mightily slow, and the life of

Mrs.—— Mrs. ——. Oh, some painfully good old woman or 'tother—I forget her name. Anything else—a few *good* tracts perhaps."

Birdie glanced up at him, a reproachful look, which she could not hide, in her eyes. For all the wild life, which the girl had led, she had, for religious things, a reverence which one, considering her training, would never have thought possible.

All along she had been fancying this handsome gentleman a sort of demi-god; and now his careless half scoffing words were dispelling the illusion.

Alas for Birdie! she had yet to discover that Chessom, instead of being anything like an immaculate individual, was only a fashionable young man of the world, with quite as many faults and failings as the generality of that class possess.

"There are other books," said Birdie; "Mrs. Gimp has several which belonged to her son, who, she says, was drowned. There's a history of England—I'm reading that"—counting the volumes on her fingers—"and a history of Rome, and a Comstock's Philosophy—I don't understand all that; and a Natural History, and a Geography"—Birdie caught her breath—"and oh! I should just love to see all the places it tells about!"

Chessom laughed. "Would you fancy visiting all the outlandish places?" he asked.

No sir," said Birdie, "I shouldn't like going to Africa nor to the North, where its so awfully cold; but I'd like to visit all the beautiful places."

"Then you like to read, do you?" said Chessom.

"Oh, yes, so much," said Birdie; "I should like to be reading nearly all the time if I had the books."

"Oh, you must have the books, by all means; you shall have a small library of your own in a few days of my selection; I shall not send any *good* books," he said teasingly; "but I will send you some instructive as well as some amusing ones. Tut, tut! never mind that," he added, as Birdie began uttering her thanks.

"I must go now Birdie," he said, rising;" maybe I will be over to-morrow; good-bye," and he took Birdie's slender little hand in his own. "Do you know that you're growing to be a downright pretty little thing, Birdie?"

Birdie blushed and smiled, and when he rode away she stood between the chintz window curtains and watched his handsome figure disappearing in the distance, with big bright eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

But he who stems a stream with sand,
And fetters flame with waxen band,
Has yet a harder task to prove.
By firm resolve to conquer love.—SCOTT.

Let us, for a time, leave Jarvis Chessom and his protege, and go back to Twickenham. The soft golden haze of October atmosphere has faded to the dim gray of November. At Maplewood there is the usual pervasion of pleasant gaiety; several guests have departed, and quite a number have lately arrived; among the recent arrivals is Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter, and the former's nephew, Harvey Fairleigh. On the evening of which we write the great purple drawing-room is nearly filled with the guests of the rich banker. There is a group seated about the grand piano, and Mrs. Chessom is saying to Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas:

"I have been telling your friends how exquisitely you play and sing, my dear Lady Winnifred. Pray favor us to-night; here is that brilliant composition of Verdi's—you really do that divinely!"

Lady Winnifred sat down before the instrument and played the brilliant piece indicated by her hostess. At its ending there was a polite little storm of exclaimings of admiration, and she was importuned to sing. She sang—and sang as she played, purely, gloriously. Ernest Willoughby, standing beside her, turning the pages of her music, while her sweet, exquisite voice floated melodiously through the room, felt his heart thumping passionately within him. This lovely Lady Winnifred! he was beginning to realize how deeply and hopelessly he was learning to love her.

A little frown contracted Mrs. Chessom's high arched brows as she detected the admiration in the glances which Willoughby bestowed upon Lady Winnifred; and when that young lady had

ceased playing she managed, with smiling adroitness, to send him from her side on some trivial pretext.

Rose Castlemaine, whom our readers will perhaps remember as having, once before, been mentioned, ran up to where Mabel Willoughby was seated:

"We want you to sing now, Meb," said she; "come along."

Mr. Waldegrave advanced.

"Pray, come Miss Willoughby," he said; "I am impatient to hear those pretty Scotch ballads which you promised me."

Mabel smilingly arose and took the seat which Lady Winnifred had a few moments before vacated. Her voice was sweet and birdish,—not so powerful nor as faultlessly glorious as Lady Winnifred's, but very pretty, very sweet and charming.

Glencora Chessom shrugged her shoulders and made a yawning grimace as Mabel sat down before the instrument. Glencora never sang, and was a very indifferent player. She had been all her life too idle to acquire much in the way of lady-like accomplishments

"Charming voice Miss Willoughby has," drawled Col. Vivian, addressing Glencora, as Mabel ceased singing; "not so grand, and all that sort of thing, as her ladyship's, but very charming, very."

Glencora smiled scornfully.

"Her frantic screaming of those bagpipeish Scotch ballads is sufficient to set one wild," said she spitefully.

Vivian smiled; he was shrewd enough to understand that Miss Chessom's dislike of Mabel arose chiefly from envy and jealousy.

"Your cousin Waldegrave looks as if he thought differently," said he; "indeed," he added maliciously, "he seemed quite enwrapt, especially while Miss Willoughby was singing so sweetly that pathetic thing 'I'm wearin' awa Jean.'"

Miss Chessom felt very much like scratching, with her pretty pink tinted fingernails, the Colonel's saucily smiling blue eyes; but she refrained, with an effort, from the unlady-like action, and coolly shrugged her white shoulders, and contented herself by unmercifully snubbing the blonde *militaire* a few minutes after.

Lady Winnifred bent with a smile toward Mabel as the latter turned from the piano. Haughty Miss Chessom had tossed her head disdainfully that evening and declared to Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter that "that Willoughby girl was the most deceitful, designing creature in the world," adding that "grandpapa had taken an absurd fancy to her wishy-washy prettiness, and was deluded into believing her very angelic and all that, simply because the shy little milksop was always so attentive and devoted and ready to read to him or sing or play chess with him. Just deceit, my dear Lady St. Ayvas, and nothing else; you see she is in hopes grandpapa may will her a snug fortune some day," and Glencora laughed scornfully.

Lady Winnifred looked admiringly at the fair, girlish face. There was an irresistable charm in the manner of this pretty protege of the Chessoms—a frank ingenuousness about her that proclaimed Glencora's disparaging representations of her false; and Lady Winnifred, warm-hearted and impulsive, was beginning to take a real liking for pretty Mabel.

"Your voice is sweetness itself, Miss Willoughby," said she with real admiration.

"But it's not perfectly glorious like your's, Lady Winnifred," said Mabel, smiling.

"Not so powerful perhaps," said Winnifred, "but very pretty and birdishly sweet." And they went on conversing, discussing music and favorite musicians.

"Really provoking of poor Polsdon," said Mrs. Chessom, addressing Lady St. Ayvas, "first to carry Jarvis off on that stupid journey, and then to meet with such an annoying accident, detaining them both, goodness knows how long; and dear Jarvis, he must be moped to death in that horribly tame little Welsh town. He writes me, however, that in a fortnight at farthest, Polsdon will have recovered sufficiently to have finished his tiresome business in the town next to the little one they are now in; and

then they will immediately start for England."

Lady St. Ayvas was herself a little impatient for the return of her hostess' son. That young gentleman, as we have already stated, was considered a very desirable 'catch,' and Lady St. Ayvas was now manœuvering to obtain a wealthy, if not a titled husband for her beautiful daughter.

Lady Winnifred had had many admirers, and several offers of marriage, during the two seasons since her coming out; but none of them had been considered by her ambitious mamma as quite suitable. Thus far none of her suitors had been sufficiently wealthy.

Among her admirers that season had been a young Welsh nobleman who had sued in vain for her hand. Lady St. Ayvas had forced her daughter to reject him, saying regretfully:

"Such a pity his lordship is so terribly poor! Such a good family—one of the very best in Wales, but poor—poor as church mice, my dear!"

So his lordship married, instead of Lady Winnifred, a wealthy young heiress, not long after, and returned to his estate in Wales, off of which Lady St. Ayvas informed her daughter, with a shrug, it was rumored he had been all along struggling to pay a heavy mortgage. And Lady Winnifred had sighed a little over the remembrance of her bright, dark-eyed Welsh wooer, and looked on listlessly while her mother manœuvred for a wealthier match for her.

Miss Chessom disengaged herself from a group seated about a table, looking over a pile of beautiful colored drawings, and swept over to where Lady Winnifred and Mabel were still sitting near the piano conversing animatedly together.

Glencora glanced haughtily at Mabel.

"Mabel you are boreing her ladyship to death with your tiresome prattle," said she insolently.

Lady Winnifred flushed a little and answered hastily:

"Oh, no indeed! we have been chatting delightfully; and I have found Miss Willoughby *very* entertaining. Indeed," she added, "we have so many tastes and opinions in common, I am sure we are destined to become the best of friends!"

The carnation tint in Glencora's cheeks deepened a little.

"Indeed!" said she with a half sarcastic little laugh, "then I am sorry to have interrupted such an interesting *tete a tete*. But I'll warrant you'll have sufficiently frequent opportunities of hearing Mabel prattle while you're here; so it's no real deprivation. Shall I show you that prettily contrived automatic toy which I was describing to you?"

And she carried Lady Winnifred off just as Waldegrave walked over to Mabel, saying:

"Will you come over with me, Miss Willoughby? We wish to consult your taste concerning some of those lovely pictures yonder."

Mabel walked over to the group about the little table and joined in looking over the pictures, among which were some exquisite bits of French scenery, over which was being held a laughing dispute.

Mr. Chessom, sitting not far away, playing chess with Judge Harcourt, looked on with a hidden half smile. He did not fail to perceive his nephew's evident preference for pretty Mabel, and he watched the young couple serenely, all unmindful of the glowering of Glencora's black eyes, or the uneasiness in her mother's restless, furtively, glancing ones.

"Just suited to each other," he soliloquized. "Bertram's a fine lad; and he can't find a sweeter little fairy for a wife than Mabel, in the country."

Very different were Mrs. Leigh Chessom's mentally uttered thoughts. That manœuvring lady had all along been desirous that her brilliant daughter should wed the banker's handsome, wealthy nephew; and, now that she plainly saw how madly Glencora was learning to love her cousin, her desire strengthened to a determination.

"Was he infatuated?" she asked herself, that "with bright, beautiful Glencora's lavishing, bewitching, flattering smiles upon him, he could find eyes or ears for any other woman.

Alas! the perverseness of humanity! Here was quiet, almost slyly reticent

little Mabel, who never flattered, and whose smiles, though bright and winning, were not the enchanting smiles of a siren; and, in her presence, Waldegrave forgot all the manifold charms of the brilliant heiress—the bright, piquant, haughty young beauty, with whom half the *elegantes* of London were wildly enamoured, and hovered most devotedly about the pretty, penniless orphan.

Lady Winnifred and Glencora were examining the handsome toy on the etagerie when the latter said, with a supercilious glance at Willoughby, who was gaily replying to some lively *badinage* of merry Rosie Castlemaine's.

"How that insufferably conceited fop yonder must have annoyed you, my dear Lady Winnifred—grandpa's clerk, I mean. He is such a dignified specimen that I designate him the Grand Duke. That idiotic little Castlemain," added she, "has just sense enough to listen with her little eyes wide open to his dry discourse, and smirk at his occasional insipid witticisms, but I was really relieved when mamma invented some pretext for ridding you of the tiresome dolt. Of course, mamma saw, as I did, how awfully bored you were."

"But if I looked bored, Miss Chessom, my looks told a very naughty falsehood, for I was much interested instead," said Winnifred smiling calmly.

Glencora laughed sarcastically.

"Indeed," said she; "of course then, mamma and I were stupidly mistaken, and merely imagined that you looked so, perhapa, because—for me at least his—shall I call it gentlemanly gravity, or stiff platitude—would be sufficient to bring on an attack of the dismals were I compelled, for an hour, to listen to him. You see, my dear Lady Winnifred," she continued lightly, "I am a very commonplace person—not romantic or sentimental in the smallest degree. I should languish now where there was not a liberal sprinkling of masculine humanity; but they must be fellows of the jolly, agreeable sort. Nothing bores me so horribly as a specimen of the lofty, intellectual kind."

Certainly Miss Chessom was what is termed 'slangy,' and Lady Winnifred was now and then somewhat shocked, and considerably amused.

"Now there is Col. Vivian and Major Castleford, and your cousin, Fairleigh, they have life and vivacity. Your cousin is charmingly jolly, Lady Winnifred—awkward as a clown"—mentally. "Ah, here he comes, and Willoughby with him," she added; and in a moment or two both gentlemen had crossed over, and were beside them.

Glencora was always flirting. To-night she had snubbed the blonde Colonel; and he was just now quite devoted to Miss Locksley. Major Castleford at present was flirting with one of Judge Harcourt's languid daughters; and Bertram Waldegrave Glencora was pertinaciously treating with superlative indifference. So at present Fairleigh was the only available flirtee; and that young gentleman, half bewildered by her enchantments, was uncertain as to whether the lovely heiress was an angel with whom it would be presumtion to fall in love, or, as he had heard say, a heartless, alluring siren.

Toward Willoughby Glencora was haughtily indifferent. She rarely ventured to snub or, in his presence, ridicule him; the calm air of chillingly polite indifference which he always maintained toward her, generally repelled the insults which she would frequently have liked to utter.

Lady St. Ayvas glanced a languid disapproval at her daughter, as she sat pleasantly conversing with Willoughby. Not that Lady St. Ayvas thought of such a thing as her aristocratic daughter falling in love with the banker's clerk. Such a ridiculous idea never entered her mind; but, as she afterward expressed it to her daughter, "that Willoughby girl and her brother were quite sufficiently assumptive without encouragement."

Long after Maplewood house, on the night of which we have been writing, was silent, and its inmates had retired, Earnest Willoughby paced to and fro in his chamber—his brain whirling—his heart thumping tumultuously. He had fallen in love with all the fervor of which a nature like his is capable, with Lady Winnifred; and his passion was all the deeper that it was hopeless—for hope-

less it was; he would as soon have thought of wooing and winning the cynosure as Lady St. Ayvas' beautiful daughter; and he told himself resolutely that he must and would conquer his love of her. We shall see how he kept his resolve.

CHAPTER XII.

Something like a week has slipped by since we left Wales. It is near sunset of a chill November day on which we now write, and Jarvis Chessom has just dismounted his horse before the door of Mrs. Gimp's cottage. Within there is a crude yet sweet girlish voice caroling some quaint anomalous tune; and Chessom pauses to listen At its ending he enters.

"'I heard the wee bird singing,'" he exclaimed gaily; and Birdie turned 'round with a blush and a bright smile.

"Sing again, Birdie," said he, sitting down and thrusting his hands in his pockets with an air of attention.

Birdie hesitated and said with a blush:

"But I can't sing pretty like the ladies you are used to hearing sing, sir. No one ever taught me how, only Dame Polley's brother; he was valet or something to an Italian gentleman who was a great singer and violinist, Signor Gn—Gn—. Oh, I forget what he called him.

"No matter," said Jarvis; "but you have a fine voice, Birdie, if it isn't cultivated. Sing again. Don't you know any songs?"

"I know this one," said Birdie; and she sang the old ballad:

"'How can a poor Gipsy maiden like me
Ever hope the proud bride of a noble to be?'"

Her voice, tremulous at first, grew sweeter and steadier as she proceeded. She sang clearly, powerfully, and, considering the very small amount of cultivation which her voice had received, with a marvellous sweetness and purity.

Chessom was really astonished.

"Why Birdie," he said when she had finished, "you have what will be one of the very finest voices I ever heard, if properly cultivated. That was really well rendered."

Birdie blushed and smiled, and they chattered on.

"But I've come to bid you good-bye for the present, Birdie," said Chessom a little while later; Polsdon's well enough to attend to business at last."

"Going away?" Birdie asked faintly.

"Don't look aghast little girlie," answered Jarvis, twisting one of her silken curls 'round and 'round on his finger. Polsdon's estate is only a little way from Cwmdaron; and we shall not be gone much more than a week; so you see it's nothing dreadful after all, and I'll search Kilravoch through for pretty things for you. What do you particularly desire me to bring you, Birdie?"

For reply Birdie dropped her face on her hands and smothered a sob. Chessom drew her gently toward him.

"Why my dear little Birdie," said he; "shall you miss me so very much? A week isn't very long you know—though by Jove! it will seem so to me without you, my little girlie."

Birdie sighed.

"A week will seem very long, sir, but ——"

"But what Birdie?" Jarvis asked.

"But I was thinking of after that sir," said Birdie. "Don't you remember, you said the other day that you shouldn't stay in Cwmdaron but a day or two, after you and Mr. Polsdon returned?" and Birdie's face dropped on her hands again.

"But I shall though, Birdie," said Jarvis; "I'm not going back to England for ever so many weeks."

Birdie's face grew radient.

"Oh! I am so glad!" said she.

Chessom laughed gaily.

"That's right, Birdie; brighten up," said he "Why your face is like an April day, all showers and sunshine. And now tell me, what shall I bring you? A picture, eh? Oh never mind the thanks and all that. Yes I'll bring you a dozen or so of the prettiest I can find. And now what else? What?—more books? Why you're a regular little book-worm; but I'll bring you another case of them And now what in the way of finery? A new cloak perhaps, and a pretty set of furs—how would those suit Birdie?"

Birdie's eyes sparkled:

"Oh! those would be delightful sir," said she.

"And the pretticst gold locket I can find," added Jarvis. "All right, it's settled then; and here comes the Gimp."

Mrs Gimp entered with a courtsey, and presently Jarvis rose to depart, saying:

"Polsdon and I are going to take ourselves off to-morrow, Gimpy. Be sure and take good care of little Birdie, while I'm gone, which will only be for a week or so."

Mrs. Gimp promised to do so to the best of her ability, and, bidding Master Jarvis a hasty good-bye, bustled out of the little parlour to attend to her cookery, which, she declared, was "all a burnin' up!"

"Chessom took Birdie's slender little hand in his own. He was growing strangely fond of his protege. Her womanly ways somehow made him forget how much a child she was in years

"Good-bye, little girlie," he said

"Good-bye sir," faltered Birdie

Jarvis looked down at the singularly lovely face, with its liquid dark eyes full of such a troubled expression; and the next moment Birdie found herself in the arms of this aristocratic young gentleman, receiving his impulsive kisses.

Ten minutes later, as he rode away from the Gimp cottage he shrugged half impatiently at the recolleetion.

Birdie pressed her crimson cheek against the window pane and watched Jarvis Chessom's figure disappearing in the gray twilight.

"When there is love in the heart," we are told, "there are rainbows in the eyes." Surely there must have been much love in the peasant girl's heart that dim November night, or such a passionate glory could never have beamed from those unfathomable eyes of her's.

"By Jove! Chessom, you must have a sweetheart somewhere in Cwmdaron or its vicinity. These horseback rides mean something, as sure as fate. Did you bid her good-bye to-night?"

Charlie Polsdon said this, sauntering up to Chessom, as the latter entered the little parlour of the 'Lion' inn that evening.

Chessom looked supreme contempt.

"Pooh! what a muff you are, Polsdon," said he. "Who do you suppose she is?—our worthy landlord's squaretoed daughter?"

Polsdon smiled calmly.

"Not exactly," said he. "By the way, who is Birdie Wylde?"

Chessom scowled savagely.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Nothing particularly," said Charlie, coolly, "only I found this beside your writing desk, and I was a little curious to know who the young lady was—that's all."

Chessom took the slip of paper which Polsdon held out, with a curious air, and read the words which were written upon it in his own handwriting: "Birdie, Birdie Wylde," was scrawled, "little Birdie."

"I say, my dear fellow, who is she?" pursued Polsdon.

Chessom crushed the slip of paper and tossed it into the fire, only deigning Polsdon another scowl in reply.

"By Jove!" said Polsdon, assuming an injured expression; "but you needn't level such a scowl as that at a fellow, my dear boy."

"At what time are we to start to-morrow?" asked Chessom, without noticing his friend's remark

"At half-past eight o'clock, A. M.," answered Polsdon; "but my dear fellow, don't you know it isn't according to the rules of etiquette to change a conversation with such abruptness? If you won't tell me who Birdie Wylde is, tell me is she handsome?—she ought to be, with such a deuced pretty name. Has she golden hair?—I've a weakness for Titian colored tresses."

"Will you go to Guinea?" asked Jarvis, walking stiffly over to a window opposite.

Polsdon smiled, and pulling a newspaper from his pocket began perusing its columns.

CHAPTER XIII.

It is just a week since Birdie stood at the little parlour window last, watching Chessom, as he rode away in the dull November dusk. It is evening again, and she parts the chintz curtains and

looks dreamily out into the gray twilight.

"Who knows but he has come to-night," she murmurs, "and will be here to-morrow?—Oh! I hope so."

Presently she discerns, in the gathering darkness, a figure mounted on horseback coming toward the cottage. She watches steadily for a moment or two, and then murmurs breathlessly:

"It is he! it *is* Mr. Chessom!"

The next moment the horse is reined before the cottage porch, and Birdie runs excitedly out to meet its rider.

Jarvis sprang from his saddle, crying gaily:

"Holoa! Birdie, you weren't expecting me so early—were you little girlie?"

"No indeed," answered Birdie; "but oh! I'm so glad you've come sir."

Just then Mrs. Gimp appeared at the door courtesying, and they entered the cottage. Chessom threw himself carelessly into the big arm chair, with its stiff back and puffy chintz covered cushions; and Birdie sat down on a cricket at his feet, and looked up at him with bright black eyes.

"I'm famished, ravenous, Glmpy," said Chessom. "I didn't stop at the 'Lion' longenough for supper, and I've a wolfish appetite."

"Bless your life Master Jarvis, 'ow thoughtless of me not to a thought of it," said Gimp, and she bustled off.

Chessom looked down at Birdie.

"Were you quite well during my absence, little girlie?" he asked.

"Oh, yes sir, quite; but it's been such a long, long week."

"Did you remember to dream of me missey?" he asked laughingly.

"I dreamed of you every night sir," Birdie answered artlessly.

Chessom slipped a glossy ringlet between the leaves of his pocket-book, as Mrs. Gimp entered to lay the table for supper. Birdie, with a blush and a bright little smile, had severed this jetty tress from her head, at his request, and in return, Chessom had given her a miniature likeness of himself, at which the girl gazed half worshipfully.

After the evening meal was partaken of, Chessom resumed his seat in the old arm chair, and looked down at Birdie, who had taken her seat on the cricket again.

"Little girlie," he said, seriously, "I've something to tell you. I received yesterday, a telegram from London which informed me of the illness of my grandfather; so you see, Birdie, I am compelled to leave Cwmdaron at an early hour to-morrow. I'm sorry to leave you, little girlie; and I dare say you'll find it pokey enough here; but I'll send you books and pretty things every day or two; and sometimes Birdie, I'll come over and see you again."

"Is your grandfather very ill, Mr. Chessom?" asked Birdie, trying to be calm, though the bright carnation in her cheeks had faded to the palest pink.

"Very ill at present, though, as he is somewhat subject to those attacks, hopes are entertained of his recovery," said Chessom.

Birdie sighed. In all her life before she had never had any one to care for her, excepting crusty Dame Polley's lame brother, who had taken a fancy to her bright face and quaint old-fashioned ways, and had taught her to read and sing; and at his death had bequeathed her two or three old books and a little gold ring which he had purchased years ago, he told Birdie, to adorn the finger of a bright-eyed peasant maiden, who proved to be a faithless coquette, and disdainfully returned the bright little circlet when a swain, possessed of more of the world's goods, happened along.

Whimsical, capricious Jarvis Chessom had been very kind to this homeless orphan, and she had learned to regard him with a species of idolatry.

"Don't look so sorrowful, Birdie," said Jarvis. "Sometime I'll drop into Cwmdaron again when you're least expecting me."

Birdie made a desperate effort to choke back her tears and failed; with an irrepressible storm of sobs and weeping she buried her face in her hands. Jarvis was always in an agony when witnessing a woman's tears. He caught Birdie in his arms with passionate impulsiveness.

"My darling, my precious little

Birdie!" he cried; "I shall feel like a brute to leave you in this mopey, outlandish place."

Birdie looked up, saying falteringly: "It isn't that, sir. I have been very happy here, and Mrs. Gimp has been very kind to me; but ——"

"But what, little Birdie?" Jarvis questioned.

"But I feel as if I were never going to see you again, sir. Oh! I am sure I never shall!" and Birdie broke down again.

"Nonsense, Birdie," answered Chessom; "when the pater recovers I'll march straight back to Wales on purpose to see you; and I'll get some nice sensible lady or other to take you to her house and teach you music and French and drawing, and all the ladylike accomplishments. Cheer up little girlie."

So Birdie brightened up as he bade her; and when he bent to kiss her good-bye that night, she choked her sobs bravely back, and smiled up brightly through her tears, even when her heart kept whispering mournfully: "He will never come back! I shall never, never see him again!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"What an idiot I am! One would think I was really in love with the queer waif—a mere child too; and yet she is not at all childish, but very womanly and marvellously pretty, too, if she were only fashionably arrayed."

Jarvis Chessom soliloquized thus, while being whirled in the railway train, away from gray little Cwmdaron and Birdie Wylde.

"Poor little girl, how portentously," she murmured; "I feel as if I were never going to see you again," Chessom went on soliloquizing. "What a fancy the little creature has taken for me to be sure. I was an idiot to promise the little thing that I'd journey all the way back to that stupid Welsh village; but she really looked woebegone, poor child; and now I am in for it. I must keep my word and go back to Cwmdaron as soon as grandfather recovers."

It was raining disagreeably when the train set Jarvis down at the railway station, from whence he was driven in the travelling carriage to Maplewood house by old Perkins the coach-man.

"A little easier, sir, but very ill indeed, still," was Perkins' reply to Chessom's inquiry as to whether his grandfather was any better.

Mr. Chessom was suffering severely from an attack of pneumonia, to which he was subject, and which now, as well as on several previous occasions, threatened to prove fatal.

"Home at last, thank fortune," said Jarvis springing from the vehicle, as it stopped before the door of Maplewood house, and entering he ran up stairs.

Glencora, who was descending the stair-case was the first to welcome her brother.

"So you've returned," was her first greeting, after a stare of surprise at the abrupt rencontre. "I thought you were never coming back. How like a fright you look. You must be famished. I'm always ravenous after a journey."

"Simply starved!" answered her brother. "How is grand-father? — any better?"

"A very little, Dr. Crawford tells us: but dangerous still. Poor, dear grandpapa—too bad, really—just as we were about getting up our dramatics, too."

"Oh! bother your dramatics. Ah, here comes the mater."

Mrs Chessom, perceiving her son, advanced. She was a handsome woman, still elegant and well preserved.

"My dear boy," exclaimed she, extending her hand; "I thought you would never return. Did you leave that stupid Polsdon in Wales?"

"Yes, at his own estate. Can I see grandfather at once?"

"No, not at once; he is sleeping at present. Do go to your chamber and make yourself presentable. You cut a sad figure in those travel-soiled garments. Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas, who is in the drawing-room yonder, would really be quite shocked were she to see you as you appear just now; she is so fastidious."

"Oh! so she's that kind of damsel, is she?—one of the over-nice, exact sort, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind," replied Mrs.

Chesssm. "She is simply an elegant, graceful young lady; and for once Jarv, pray, endeavor to be more gallant, and less outlandishly *bizarre*."

"Oh! bother gallantry!" growled the heir of Maplewood. "Heloa! here's Meb."

Mable, who had learned from a servant of Jarvis' return, came forward with a merry smile of welcome.

"Back again Jarv; I am so glad to see you," she cried gaily.

Chessom caught his little cousin, saluting her with a hearty kiss. Glencora tossed her head scornfully, and swept on down to the drawing-room.

Something like an hour later the banker awoke, and was pronounced by Dr. Crawford very much better after his long and refreshing sleep. On learning that his grandson had returned he expressed his desire to see him, and Jarvis, who was summoned, went up to the apartment wherein his grandfather was confined.

Jarvis sat by his bed-side for something like a half hour, and then Mr. Chessom said:

"There my boy, go down to our guests. I need not detain you longer in this dismal chamber with its shaded lights and overpowering odor of camphor and liniments. "And Grace," he added, addressing Mrs. Chessom; "pray proceed with your ordinary amusements in the drawing-room. I shall not be in the least disturbed if you play and sing as much as you please. I think I shall try another nap now. Good-night, Jarvis my boy."

Five minutes later Jarvis was in the purple drawing-room, and being formally presented to stately Lady St. Ayvas and her graceful daughter.

"By Jove!" said he, mentally, as he sat near Lady Winnifred, endeavoring to do the agreeable: "but isn't she a stunner though? Lofty and grand, and exquisitely graceful—too much so for me; she'd suit Ernest much better. She's superb though, and puts even Glen in the shade. How Glen is flirting with that bluff little Fairleigh. Poor wretch, I pity him."

"Is not Lady Rozenthrall about to sing?" asked Lady Winnifred, glancing across the drawing-room to the piano, around which quite a group had gathered.

Lady Rozenthrall, who had lately arrived as a guest at Maplewood house, we have until now, omitted to mention. She was the late Lord Rozenthrall's widow. A singularly beautiful woman, with a pale, proud face; and so young and fair, in appearance, that one would scarcely have believed her to be five and thirty years of age Her marriage with Lord Rozenthrall, it was rumored, was a compulsory one; her father, the late baronet Sir Montfort Windham, having forced his daughter into this union with his lordship.

Lady Rozenthrall was very wealthy, and an occasional visitor at Maplewood house. She took her seat at the instrument as Lady Winnifred spoke, and sang and played "Lucia di Lammermoor."

There was a deep passion—a thrilling intense sadness in the rich, unfaltering tones of her beautiful contralto voice. The hush which pervaded the drawing-room, as she sat down before the instrument, burst into an enthusiastic little vociferation of applause as she ceased singing and turned away.

Lady Winnifred glanced curiously at Chessom as Lady Rozenthrall sang. He was gazing so fixedly at the latter, with such an expression of puzzled perplexity; and even after the lady's voice had ceased, still regarded her with such singular intentness that Lady Winnifred half wondered if the gay, nonchalant young heir of Maplewood had not fallen suddenly in love with this cold, proud lady.

"What a suberb voice Lady Rozenthrall has," remarked Lady Winnifred.

Chessom turned with a slight start. He had evidently forgotten Lady Winnifred's presence

"Yes," replied he; "a magnificent voice, truly; and I once heard a voice so very like her ladyship's that, had it been a little less crude, and more fully cultivated, it would have been precisely the same."

"Indeed that is singular; there are very few voices just like Lady Rozenthrall's; her's is so gloriously ringing,

so passionately, mournfully, sweet."

"The voice of which I speak," said Chessom, "was quite as ringing and as passionately sweet, but the sorrowful pathos which characterizes her ladyship's rendering of such pathetic songs as the one which she has just been singing, though much the same, was not so mournfully deep and touching."

Glencora, glancing at her brother at that moment, wondered that he was conversing thus seriously.

"After all," thought she, "who knows but Jarv may fall in love with her stiff, stately, gold tressed ladyship. How delighted that silken toned hypocritical old cat, her mother, would be. Men have queer tastes; but I should have given even Jarv the credit of possessing better sense. I hate that stately personification of dignified elegance already. They have come here—the sly, mercenary, poverty-stricken creatures—for the purpose of entrapping Jarv into marriage with Winnifred. Mamma thinks it would be a very suitable match; but I detest the girl already. I hate keeping up a semblance of civility toward her. And I do believe the idiot is becoming, in spite of herself, in love with that beggarly Willoughby. How the elderly party would fume were she to discover the fact. I can imagine her scornful—"*my* daughter and a clerk indeed!" I hope Jarvis will disappoint them in the end. What sport it would be now, if the never-ending visit, which I see they purpose making, should amount to nothing after all!"

CHAPTER XV.

MR. RIMMELTON.

The days sped swiftly by, and the banker, after his sudden turn for the better, speedily convalesced. Preparations for the proposed amateur theatricals progressed with rapidity. They were to take place at Christmas, and there was all the confusion of rehearsals, scene-painting, fixing, etc. Glencora Chessom was in anything but an agreeable frame of mind. Instead, she was in a decidedly savage humor on the particular night of which we are writing. Artimise, her French waiting-maid, who, in three years service of her capricious young mistress, had grown very much accustomed to her freakish fits of furious temper, was fully aware, as she combed out Glencora's long black tresses that night, that that young lady was in an unusually unamiable mood.

Most people could find very little that was attractive about this slender, cat-like French girl, Artimise; but Glencora had taken a peculiar fancy to her from the first, when she came in answer to an advertisement for an experienced waiting maid, which the banker had caused to be inserted in one of the London papers; and such a decided fancy did Miss Chessom take for the French girl, that she at once determined to engage her without one reference. She had marvellous skill and tact, exquisite taste and deft, nimble fingers. In short she was all that could possibly be desired as a lady's maid; and the longer Miss Chessom retained her the more indispensable she found her.

"Artimise," demanded Miss Chessom suddenly, after a few moments' silence, during which she had sat, looking discontentedly at her reflection in the mirror opposite, while her maid unbound and combed out her hair, "tell me what you think of our guests?—of my cousin, Mr. Waldegrave, for instance?"

"Oh, I think him very elegant, very *distingue*, Madamoiselle," said the girl, smilingly.

"Bah! one can see all that at a glance; but what more, Artimise? Speak freely; you are quick at reading faces."

"I think him keen-sighted, Madamoiselle, and a very little cynical, and intensely proud; but I never should have thought his taste so—so very *lizarre*, my lady."

"What makes you think his taste so odd?" inquired Glencora carelessly.

"Oh, he is attentive of late to that insipid little creature, Miss Willoughby. He will marry her yet—depend upon it, Madamoiselle."

"What nonsense, Artimise!" exclaimed Miss Chessom, scornfully. "I gave you the credit of possessing more shrewdness. My cousin sees, of course he cannot help it, how determinedly the girl is bent upon captivating him; and he merely amuses

himself by occasionally flirting with the little imbecile. That is simply all. But we are to receive a new guest to-morrow—a Mr. Rimmelton. Grandpapa is enthusiastic about him. His father was a very intimate friend, and a college chum of papa's, I believe; and Belle Harcourt, who met him at the house of a mutual friend in London, declares he is really exquisite. Of course she is no judge; but I mean to be splendidly gotten up when he arrives, anyhow. I shall want you to take two hours for my head."

"I suppose the gentleman is wealthy?" said Artimise, interrogatively.

"Bah! no, poor as anything," said Glencora contemptuously. "His father, who resides in Morcombe, was once immensely wealthy; but lost nearly every farthing a year or two ago, in some speculation or other. So he now sends his son and heir from Morcombe to Twickenham in search of a wife, in the person of the granddaughter of the wealthy banker. Won't I disappoint the clan though? I must look superb to-morrow night, Artimise. I shall wear the richest toilette, suitable for the occasion, in my wardrobe, and it must be something which will look well with rubies—I must wear my rubies; they become me marvellously."

"Your black velvet, Mademoiselle," suggested Artimise.

"Yes, that will do. You may go now, Artimise," and the French girl glided away.

Glencora sat down before the fire, her long black hair streaming down over the crimson cushions of the rocker into which she had sank carelessly.

"Oh! how I detest that little simpleton, Judge Harcourt's wife. I could have strangled the little idiot when she told me, with one of her detestable giggles, that if I said another word against Mr. Waldegrave acting as Corsair to Miss Willoughby's Gulnare, she should actually believe me jealous."

Glencora's black eyes flashed as she soliloquized.

Judge Harcourt's energetic little wife had at Mrs. Chessom's request, undertaken the management of the private theatricals. She selected plays, listened to rehearsals, planned various costumes for the various participants in the dramatic amusements, and searched the family jewel casket for gems most suitable for the adornment of the actors.

That evening the merry little lady had summoned her troupe to the library for their first rehearsal, and, much to Mrs. Chessom's annoyance and Glencora's disgust, selected Bertram Waldegrave as Corsair to Mabel Willoughby's Gulnare.

"They will do it splendidly together—do you not think so, my dears?" she exclaimed, running up to where Glencora and Lady Winnifred were seated.

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Harcourt!" exclaimed Miss Chessom; "that childish creature will be sure to spoil everything; besides, Waldegrave will be awfully bored."

"Bored! oh, no, I am certain not! He expressed himself delighted, and seems, I am sure, marvellously interested already. Now don't you agree with me, Lady Winnifred, that they will do it charmingly together.

"Why, yes, admirably, I should think. Mr. Waldegrave looks dark and haughty enough for a Corsair; and I am sure Miss Willoughby will do Gulnare delightfully."

Glencora's lip curled.

"That silly child will make some *faux-pas*, which will render both herself and Bertram awkwardly ridiculous. depend upon it, my dear Mrs. Harcourt. Can you not find some part for the Willoughby girl which no one else wishes to take?" she asked with a laugh.

Mrs. Harcourt was a shrewd little woman. She quite understood Miss Chessom, and replied with a wicked little laugh:

"Now Glen, dear, there isn't another part better suited to Mabel, and if you say another word against it I shall really believe you are jealous." She flitted away with another merry little laugh, not giving Glencora time to retort, and the next moment was drilling Major Castleford and her languid step-daughter Belle, who were to act as Romeo and Juliet.

Glencora rocked to and fro among her crimson cushions that night, with

wrathful vehemence. That she, the magnificent belle, who turned the heads of men by the score, with her beauty and brilliance and wealth, should find all her manifold charms and luring smiles lavished for naught upon an individual so insensible as to be indifferent to them all, when in the presence of one slender, blue-eyed, penniless orphan girl. Oh! it was outrageous!

Had Waldegrave paid his addresses to another than Mabel Willoughby, and had there been at present another, as she phrased it, 'decent flirtee,' whom she might dazzle with her flashing eyes and encouraging smiles, the brilliant heiress could have borne with some less degree of chagrin, her stately cousin's dispassion.

But as such was not the case, as Waldgrave seemed inclined to fall head and ears in love with pretty Mabel, and as she declared, there was 'not another man worth looking at,' the fair Glencora was in an exceedingly unamiable mood.

To be sure there were gentlemen innumerable, but most of them had learned to beware of the dangerous beauty, their metaphoric wings having already been singed.

She had flirted lavishly with our friend Fairleigh, since his arrival at Maplewood half bewildering that individual with her many fascinations. But she tired of that pastime at length, declaring that it was 'a bore, endeavoring to tame such a savage.'

Col. Vivian was now consoled by the smiles of Miss Locksley; and dashing Major Castleford, having vainly sued for the hand of the rich banker's coquettish grand-daughter, was fluttering about dreamy Belle Harcourt, whose papa was known to be considerably wealthy. So Miss Chessom was impatient for the arrival of Mr. Rimmelton.

"What will he be like, I wonder?" mentally queried the young lady. "Terribly common place, doubtless; but, I hope not so hideous as that barbarous little Fairleigh. Ha, ha! All the way from Morcombe in search of the thousands which are to be mine. Oh, I shall have him making most vehement love to me shortly, and then—" and the amiable Miss Chessom laughed lightly.

The next day came, and with it came Mr. Rimmelton. Glencora was resplendant in rich black velvet and rubies that glowed magnificently; and Artimise had certainly gotten up her young lady's head wonderfully.

Mr. Rimmelton was dazzled when presented to the brilliant, bewilderingly, charming heiress; and that coquettish lady discovering that her grandpapa's new guest was not only quite handsome but very entertaining and witty, bestowed her brightest, most alluring smiles lavishly upon him, and did her utmost to captivate him.

Sprightly little Mrs. Harcourt summoned her histrionic troupe to the library, the next evening after Mr. Rimmelton's arrival, for their third rehearsal. Of course that gentleman was enrolled among the *dramatis personæ*.

"We are to play 'Mueh Ado About Nothing,'" Mrs. Harcourt said, addressing Mr. Rimmelton. "You will favor me by becoming Miss Chessom's Benedict."

Of course Mr. Rimmelton was delighted with the privilege of acting with Miss Chessom, especially as that young lady was so flatteringly gracious toward him.

"Mr. Rimmelton is so *debonarie*, so vivacious," whispered the Judge's wife to Glencora; "I am certain he will do the part of the lively bachelor capitally."

"I am immensely relieved," laughed Glencora. "Do you know," she added, "that I was fearful lest you might select that brusque, savage little Fairleigh as my Benedict; I should never have forgiven you, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, had you done so. He acts with that Willoughby girl's friend and confident, Rose Castlemaine, does be not? What a charming couple they will make, to be sure," with a scornful little laugh.

Mrs Harcourt chattered on.

"How delightfully your brother does Claudio. He makes a capital jealous lover; and Ida Chesley does Hero very nicely."

After rehersal they adjourned to the blue drawing-roum.

"The plays are all selected now," cried Mrs. Harcourt; "and there are

quite as many as we shall be able to attend to."

"To-morrow, my dear Lady Winnifred, we shall decide what part you shall take; though I opine at once, you had better join in the 'Merchant of Venice,' as *Portia*, with Mr. Willoughby," nodding with a smile toward Earnest, "as Lord Bassanio. Miss Grandon acts as Nerissa. There, that will do admirably, will it not?"

Mr. Willoughby smiled and bowed eager assent, with an odd little thrill that was a mingling of pleasure and uneasiness, at his heart. Mrs. Chessom remained gravely silent, Lady St. Ayvas coughed slightly, and looked haughtily disapproving, while Glencora's arching dark brows lifted in disdainful surprise.

By all the rest the proposal was carried *nem-con.*

Mr. Chessom was now able to descend for an hour or two's chat in the drawing room, and a game of whist with Judge Harcourt; and the remainder of the evening passed pleasantly with its usual routine of music and merry conversation.

CHAPTER XVI.

Two or three days have passed, and the one on which we now write is a bright and pleasant November day. It is morning, and Mabel is engaged in the floral decoration of the vases. She stands in the breakfast parlour with the bright blossoms scattered about her, and makes a charming picture, with her yellow gold hair looped up, and a spray of white rose buds tangled in among its mellow ripples of light. Mr. Waldegrave enters with a graceful bow.

"Good morning, Miss Mabel," said he.

Mabel turned with that bright smile of hers.

"Good morning, Mr. Waldegrave; is it not a lovely morning?"

"Charming," replied Bertram, advancing.

"How exquisitely you have arranged those flowers, Miss Willoughby. You are the household Flora."

Mabel smiled. "Oh, I adore flowers," said she; "I think I could scarcely exist where they were not."

There was a light step on the threshhold, and Glencora entered, superb in a *recherche* morning toilette.

"Sentimentalizing?" she asked sarcastically, catching something of Mabel's last words.

Mr. Waldegrave glanced smilingly around as he finished fastening a velvety blossom in the button-hole of his coat.

"*Bon jour*, my dear cousin," said he. "No, we were not sentimentalizing; but we were admiring those charming flowers. Can you wonder when your cousin has arranged them in such an exquisite manner?"

Glencora glanced indifferently toward the boquets which Mabel was preparing for the vases and, carelessly picking up a crimson moss rose bud that lay among the gay blooms in the fanciful basket, in which Mabel had gathered them, passed over to an opposite window.

Mrs. Chessom entered presently, and her daughter turned from the window, saying:

"Mamma, whatever in the world is the meaning of this last freak of Jarv's?"

"What freak, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Chessom.

"Why, I actually heard him last night, endeavoring to persuade Captain Denham of the Scots Greys to represent him, and play Claudio, and begging Mrs Harcourt to accept the Captain as a substitute, as business of importance, he said, would call him back to Wales. And he declared to Lady St. Ayvas, a few moments later, that he really found it necessary to start within a week."

Mrs. Chessom looked surprised and annoyed.

"Is it not too provoking of Jarvis?" she asked, addressing Waldegrave. "To think of his wishing to run off again in this rediculous fashion, and the house full of our guests. Oh, he really must do nothing of the kind."

So, later in the day when Jarvis broached the subject of his intended trip back to Wales, he was met by his maternal relative, with such determined opposition that, declaring himself, for the sake of a quiet life, willing to place his own inclinations quite out of consideration, he decided for the present, at least, to relinquish the idea of a second jaunt into the west.

Preparations for Christmas progressed with much rapidity.

The bustle involved by the getting up of the dramatic scenes was immediately followed by the grand Christmas decorations.

Mr. Rimmelton, after remaining at Maplewood for a few days, quite contrary to the expectations of Miss Chessom, fell in love—not with the banker's grand-daughter, but with his protegé; and, strange to record, Glencora did not for once, seem inclined to be resentful that the gentleman failed to accord her the devotion which she received from many as a matter of course. Indeed, she no longer strove to attract him, but relinquished him instead, and flirted indiscriminately with the gay *militaires* of the —th.

Sturdy, little Harvey Fairleigh was now beginning to be seriously enamoured of Mabel's merry little friend Rosie Castlemain; and Glencora smiled scornfully at their incipient love-making, declaring that, if it were not such tame pastime she should 'take that little cub Fairleigh away from her,' meaning Miss Castlemaine.

It is now December, about a fortnight before Christmas, and, on the evening whereof we are writing, Lady St. Ayvas is seated before the mirror in her dressing room, critically surveying her reflection, while her maid puts the finishing touches upon her hair, and arranges her *coiffure*.

"That will do, Henrietta," said her ladyship, as the maid fastened back the last smooth coil with a jewelled ornament. "You may go now," and Henrietta departed.

Lady St. Ayvas turned toward her daughter, who had entered the apartment a few moments before, saying:

"My dear, the more I think of it the more provoked I become, that Mrs. Harcourt should so absurdly cast you in for a part to be played with Mr. Chessom's clerk. I think, my dear, you had better withdraw altogether, even at this late hour."

"Withdraw, mamma?" exclaimed Lady Winnifred in surprise.

"Certainly, my love, withdraw. Mrs. Harcourt has coupled the players most absurdly. The idea of your acting with that Mr. Willoughby; and that silly child, his sister, playing with Glencora's elegant cousin. I am sure Mrs. Chessom very much regrets having intrusted the management of the affair to that chattering little creature. You should have heard Glencora remarking upon the *faux pas*. The dear girl is so charmingly satirical."

"But mamma," said Lady Winnifred, "I am certain Mabel Willoughby will do Gulnare very nicely. I think they, at least, are paired off admirably; and, in my opinion all the rest go equally well together."

Lady St. Ayvas smiled contemtuously, as she remarked:

"Yourself and the grand Duke, as Glencora very aptly designates that conceited clerk of her grand-papa's, for instance."

There was a little deepening of the bloom in Lady Winnifred's cheek as she replied.

"Well, mamma, I am assured that Mr. Willoughby will do his part quite as creditably as any of the other gentlemen."

"Very possibly," replied her mother. "I have no doubt that the young man's histrionic abilities are very fair. Indeed, I think both brother and sister are quite good at acting, under any circumstances. I positively dislike those young people. The girl, especially, Glencora informs me, is a most consummate actress. A credulous person might easily be persuaded into believeing her a paragon. Mr. Chessom for instance, is really deluded into the belief that she is perfect, immaculate. So absurd of the dear old gentleman, not to be convinced that the girl's wheedeling ways are all acted through politic motives. Glencora was remarking last night upon her manœuvres to entrap Mr. Waldegrave—so ridiculous! I really wonder the girl does not atttempt captivating Mr. Chessom's grandson as well as his nephew; but perhaps she possesses shrewdness enough to comprehend that such an absurd attempt would be quite useless. Jarvis really detests her forward ways, Glenie tells me, and no wonder."

Winnifred replied resolutely.

"Mamma, Miss Chessom is unreasonably prejudiced against the Willoughbys, simply because they are poor. I am very sure that she altogether misrepresents them; and I cannot believe that they are such artful, mercenary creatures. I think Mabel one of the very sweetest little creatures in the world; so pure hearted and ingenuous."

Lady St. Ayvas smiled sarcastically.

"There, my dear, is where you, like Mr. Chessom, are deceived by her pretended sweet artlessness. Of course Glencora must know all about them, they having resided here for so long a time."

"Glencora Chessom is anything but an amiable young lady, mamma," said Lady Winnifred. "Instead she is heartless and rude, and arrogant, and terribly coquettish. I do not like her at all, mamma," she added positively.

"Really, Winnifred," replied her mother, "you are quite as unreasonable in your dislike of Glencora as in your equally absurd liking for the Willoughby girl. I admit that Glencora is slightly *bizzarre*, and a little unconventional, but not rude, my dear; that is too strong a term."

"Not so toward us, mamma, nor toward any other of her friends, to be sure; but rude and most unladylike in her treatment of those who are poor. She is positively insulting to all with whom she comes in contact, whose station and circumstances are inferior to her own. It may seem ungrateful to speak thus of our hostess, mamma, but there is a something almost repellant about Mrs. Chessom, as well as her daughter."

Lady St. Ayvas arched her brows in surprise.

"How unreasonable, Winnifred. I consider Mrs. Chessom the most amiable person in the world. What, pray, do you find to dislike about her?"

"I do not know, mamma, just what it is about her that seems to me disagreeable. She is certainly much more *suave* and lady-like in demeanor than Glencora; but still, mamma, you remember the lines:

'I do not like you, Doctor Fell—
The reason why, I cannot tell;
But I do not like you, Doctor Fell.'

"There is something fierce and burning, and glowering, in the eyes of both mother and daughter; something that makes me shiver when I look into them."

"How very absurd, Winnifred," said Lady St. Ayvas, looking slightly annoyed. "But there is the bell for dinner. Why, did you not wear that charmingly gotten up blue faille, which Jarvis admires? It really becomes you very nicely. That mauve is very pretty, but not so effective as the blue—you must wear it tomorrow, my dear." And mother and daughter descended to the dining-room

CHAPTER XVII.

Night and her ugly subjects thou dost fright,
And sleep, the lazy owl of night,
With 'em there hastes, and wildly takes th' alarm
Of painted dreams a busy swarm.
—*Cowley.*

It was late on the night of which we have been writing, in our last chapter, and for hours the inmates of Maplewood house had been soundly sleeping, when Ernest Willoughby awoke from slumber, with strong smoke half strangling him, and the sound of blazing woodwork crackling in the corridor without.

He sprang up, and opening his chamber door looked out. There was a roll of smothering smoke, a glare of crimson blaze; and Ernest shouted fire at the top of his voice, and then shutting the door rushed back in search of his clothing. Two minutes later the whole household was astir, and all was wild confusion.

The great upper corridor in the south wing was enveloped in flame. The feminine portion of the household assembled in a frightened group upon the lawn, looking up in terror as a sheet of flame burst from a window of the corridor

"Are all hands out of the burning portion of the building?" shouted Mr. Waldegrave.

"Yes, all out and uninjured," cried Jarvis Chessom; but Lady St. Ayvas sprang forward, crying in alarm:

"Where is Winnifred? Where is my daughter?"

There was an excited, terrified bustle

Lady Winnifred was nowhere to be seen! She had returned to her chamber, Glencora Chessom declared, for the purpose of recovering some article or other, and had not returned. Lady St. Ayvas screamed frantically.

Ernest Willoughby placed a ladder against the side of the building and rapidly ascended to the window of Lady Winnifred's sleeping apartments. He sprang into the room, and looked about him. Winnifred was not there! With white lips, and a sickening feeling of horror at his heart, he dashed on, and wrenched open the door that opened into the blaze enveloped corridor.

The overpowering smoke stifled and blinded him, but lying upon the threshold, he found Lady Winnifred. He lifted and carried her gently to the window, and then descended to the lawn with his burden.

"Oh, she is dead—I know she is dead!" sobbed Lady St. Ayvas, bending over her insensible daughter, and wringing her hands wildly.

Mabel Willoughby knelt beside the inanimate Winnifred, saying:

"I am sure she has but fainted, Madam. See, she is already reviving," as Lady Winnifred's eyes slowly opened.

After the first signs of returning consciousness Lady Winnifred was very soon able to sit up among a pile of tapestry, which had been thrown upon the lawn.

"My dearest child!" exclaimed Lady St. Ayvas, "whatever in the world did you go back to that terrible chamber for? —so very dangerous!"

"I returned for the purpose of saving my turquois jewels. They were dear Aunt Montford's gift, you know, and I could not think of losing them," said Winnifred. "They were upon my toilet table," added she, "and I had secured them and reached the door when a great cloud of fire and smoke prevented me from crossing the corridor. But pray tell me how I came here? Somebody must have carried me from the corridor, where I suppose I must have fainted in the terribly suffocating smoke."

A little tint of pink bloom came into Lady Winnifred's cheeks when informed that Mr. Willoughby had been her preserver.

Belle Harcourt grew languidly enthusiastic as she described that gentleman ascending through flame and smothering smoke to the rescue of her ladyship.

Glencora Chessom shrugged disdainfully beneath her crimson wrap.

"Now Belle, dear, how absurd," said she. "You will cause her ladyship to believe that the young man has really committed some heroic action. Believe me, my dear Lady Winnifred, he merely did what fifty others would have done quite as readily had they been on hand."

Mr. Willoughby, who had been called away for a few moments, now re-appeared upon the scene.

The fire was by this time extinguished, and the ladies were taken back to the house, and assembled about the fire which was lighted in the dining room. Several of the ladies were prostrated by the fright and fatigue, and lay upon sofas and took cordials and sal volatile, and shivered hysterically for some hours.

Lady St. Ayvas from her sofa coolly echoed the thanks which her daughter warmly proffered Willoughby for having rescued her from so terrible a death.

Miss Chessom was decidedly out of temper

"How horribly annoying!" exclaimed the young lady. "My superb brocaded velvet, which I was to have worn at the Dresden's ball—the most elegant affair in my wardrobe—and to think of it being ruined by the barbarous smoke and black dust, before I had ever once worn it."

Several rooms were nearly destroyed in the south wing, and the wide corridor was terribly charred and blackened. Nowhere else had the fire penetrated; and, excepting a few articles in the apartments of Lady Winnefred and Glencora, but little of value was destroyed.

The dim, gray dawn gradually brightened into sunny daylight; the excitement subsided, and breakfast was partaken of.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The days have slipped by, and it is Christmas eve, and Maplewood house is gay with Christmas decorations.

"My dears, have you not yet finished those wreaths? How you must have dawdled, to be sure."

Mrs. Harcourt flits over, as she exclaims thus, to where her step-daughters are sitting, wearing wreaths of holly, their white fingers fluttering gracefully among the dark green leaves and vivid

berries, and smiling back replies to the pretty nothings which Jarvis Chessom murmurs as he stands near them selecting sprays for the wreaths. Five minutes later the little lady was flattering away with the garlands upon her arm.

"How charmingly you have arranged those others," exclaimed she, addressing Mr. Rimmelton, and pointing to the wreaths and festooning about one of the gasaliers. "Pray oblige me by adjusting these. And now our decorations are complete, are they not?" added she, running over to where Mrs. Chessom and her daughter were standing.

"Yes, quite, thank goodness," replied Miss Chessom with a yawn. "Nothing is such a tiresome bore," added she, "as the making and arranging of those elaborate wreaths and festoonings and bouquets. But suppose we adjourn to the drawing room below.

The Misses Harcourt were solicited to play and sing a certain fashionable duet, and an attentive group gathered about the grand piano as they took their places.

"Will not Lady Birdetta sing?" inquired some one a little while later. So after a moment's solicitation Lady Birdetta sang.

We have already described the singular sweetness of this lady's voice. Jarvis Chessom turned the pages of her music, with a curious expression in his indolent dark eyes.

"Will your ladyship favor me by singing this?" he asked presently. The piece indicated was a simple ballad beginning:

"How can a poor Gipsy like me
Ever hope the proud bride of a noble to be?"

Her ladyship smiled and sang: her clear tones ringing out in pure, rich melody.

Something over a month before the dark-eyed peasant girl, Birdie Wylde, had sung this ballad for Chessom; and now that young gentleman was marvelling that the homeless little creature whom he had picked up by the stony Welsh roadside should possess, not only a voice, but a face so singularly like this stately lady's. There was something in it which aroused Chessom's curiosity; and he determined to discover if Lady Birdetta Rosenthal and his protege, Birdie Wylde were not in some way related to each other.

Trissie Locksley bent toward Ada Harcourt, saying:

"Coming events cast their shadows before. I fear our hostess' pretty matchmaking manœuvre will fall through. Lady Winnifred smiles upon Mr. Chessom's handsome clerk, for all her mamma's frequent furtive glances of disapproval. Do you suppose they are in love with each other?—Willoughby and her Ladyship, I mean. If so, and Lady St. Ayvas really discovers the fact, she will be terribly annoyed, I am certain. Of course Lady St. Ayvas is just dying to get a match between Lady Winnifred and Chessom; and, though her ladyship will be quite dowerless, Mrs. Chessom seems to favor the scheme quite as much as her mother. Indeed, I believe she is very desirous that it should succeed. You see, if the St. Ayvas are poor, they are immensely aristocratic."

Miss Locksley laughed as she added: "And as for Chessom, I believe he is actually becoming devoted to pale, stately Lady Birdetta, who must be at least ten years his senior, in spite of her youthful appearance."

Something like an hour later Lady Birdetta Rozenthal was seated in the midst of the bloom and perfume of the brilliantly lighted drawing room conservatory. Jarvis Chessom was beside her, and they were talking of music. Chessom was saying:

"I think the very finest, or at least that which gave promise of being the very finest, voice I ever listened to, excepting your ladyship's, was that of an untutored peasant girl, whom I encountered in Wales last autumn. Indeed," he added, glancing carelessly, yet a little scrutinizingly, at her ladyship, "in ringing, pathetic sweetness Birdie Wylde's voice was not unlike your own."

Stately Lady Birdetta started perceptibly, and a slight tint of rose stained, for a moment, that marbly white face of hers.

"Did I hear you aright?" she asked. "Did you call this peasant girl of whom you have spoken, Birdie Wylde?"

"Yes; Birdetta Wylde. By the way," he said carelessly, "her christian name is the same as your own, is it not?"

Lady Birdetta turned toward Chessom, a startled light, a singular interest in the depths of her splendid dark eyes.

"I once knew a Birdetta Wylde," said she, "pray tell me about this one. Who knows but she may be in some way related to the Birdie of my acquaintance?"

There was a carelessness in the lady's

voice which Chessom half suspected was assumed.

"Scarcely probable, I think," said Jarvis, smiling; "as the Birdie whom I have mentioned is only an uneducated little peasant girl, who, upon the death of the old woman who brought her up—Dame Polly, I believe she called her—was left a homeless waif."

Chessom stopped talking and glanced curiously at her ladyship. She had arisen and was looking at him, with a face so white, so full of intense excitement, that Chessom was positively startled.

"Your ladyship is ill, I fear," said Jarvis, also rising hastily. "Allow me to bring you a glass of water from the *cafe* yonder."

Her ladyship sank into the seat from which she had arisen the moment before, saying:

"No, no; I am not ill, only my head aches, and I am a little nervous to-night. Pray go on. What does this Birdie Wylde look like, Mr. Chessom?"

Chessom smiled.

"She was hardly describable, Lady Birdetta," said he. "Looking into her wonderful dark eyes, you would think of angels and fathoms of liquid jet, and all that sort of thing, while her olive complexion and the wilderness of black hair that hung over her far below her waist, reminded one of some queer little brownie. She was a sort of cross, in fact, betwixt elf and seraph."

Lady Birdetta was singularly interested in the affairs of Birdie Wylde.

"I think there is just a possibility of my having once known something of this girl's parents," said she; "notwithstanding the fact that, as you have said, she is only an uneducated little peasant girl. But you have said she was homeless, have you not!"

"Homeless when I first saw her; but a certain old woman, who lives in Wales, and who, by the way, was once a servant in our household, kindly gave her a home after the death of the old woman—Dame Polly, as she called her," said Jarvis, not informing her ladyship that it was himself who had found a home for the bright-eyed waif.

"Are you certain that both her parents are dead?" inquired Lady Birdetta.

"No," said Chessom; "there seems to be a sort of mystery about the affair," and he proceeded to relate to her ladyship something of Birdie's history as she herself had told it to him.

"Then she has no clue by which to find out who her parents were, or to discover whether they are living or dead?" asked the lady, growing, as Chessom thought, a shade paler every moment.

"There is but one thing which is anything like a real clue," said Chessom; "that is a locket, at present in my possession, which contains four tiny pictures. Birdie, who is now something over fifteen years of age, has had it ever since she can remember, she tells me."

As he spoke he drew forth Birdie's little gold locket, with its tiny vignettes and silken coils of hair.

"You see," he added, holding the trinket towards her ladyship, "one of the pictured faces so much resembled a face which I was certain I had somewhere seen before, that I was a little curious, and made up my mind that if there happened to be a mystery, to unravel it if possible."

Lady Birdetta took the locket with a hand that trembled visibly, her face as white as the spotless petals of the pure white camilia that nestled among her abundant dark hair.

"Your ladyship will probably marvel," added Jarvis, laughing, "that I should thus take interest in the affairs of a wild Welsh peasant girl. I wonder myself, now and then; but perhaps the indefinable something about her which tacitly proclaimed her a born aristocrat, for all her shabby surroundings, accounts for it. If Birdie turns out to be the daughter of some great personage or other, and if I should happen to be the first discoverer of the fact, why I shall have to fall desperately in love with the little creature, and end the affair by a romance."

Chessom had rattled on with seeming carelessness, while his eyes were taking note of every change of the varying face of the lady. Wholly absorbed, she neither heeded or heard his laughing words, but gazed at the vignettes with eyes fixed and intensely bright—the light of a dawning consciousness of something, which the gentleman was puzzled to comprehend, in them.

"By Jove!" mentally said Chessom; "it's just as I suspected. Her ladyship knows more than she'll be likely to tell about all this. I wonder if she has seen

that locket before. She recognizes the pictures without a doubt."

The next moment he was enquiring in that careless, half indolent voice of his:

"Does your ladyship find any resemblance between those two first pictures and the parents of the Birdetta of your acquaintance, pray?"

The next he had just time to catch her ladyship, as she slipped from her seat in a heavy swoon.

His shout for assistace brought forth an excited group from the drawing room. Lady Birdetta was carried to her own apartments, and a physician summoned.

The medical gentleman pronounced the lady's sudden illness to have been brought on by sudden mental excitement, and advised undisturbed quiet for several days to come.

"Really, how very odd that her ladyship, with all her immovable dignity, should go into such tragics," exclaimed Miss Chessom to her mother that night. "Why, mamma, Artimese, while assisting Thompson about preparing that lotion which Dr. Denham left for her ladyship's head, actually heard her muttering all sorts of gibberish about 'darling Reginald,' and calling some one her 'sweet child,' and 'precious little Birdie? Exceedingly odd, isn't it? I wonder what in goodness it means. How immensely sentimental and tragical, and hysterical, and everything else silly, people are, to be sure. I detest that sort of thing myself," added the heiress contemptuously.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

Christmas day has dawned, bright, with clear golden sunlight. Not really a cold day, yet with the fresh, exhilirating atmosphere keen and bracing.

At Maplewood all are astir with pleasant anticipation. There is to be more than wont of music and mirth and merriment that night, and the gay decorations, which were completed the day before, makes the great old-fashioned house resemble some magnificent fairy palace.

Everywhere graceful wreaths of holly, beautiful garlands and festoons and bouquets of brilliant hot-house flowers, the air heavy with their deliciously fragrant odor.

A considerable number of guests are invited; there are to be present the officers of the —th, two or three of whom are to take part in the theatricals to be played that night.

Evening came, and the guests began to assemble in the gaily lighted rooms.

"What a splendid place it is," whispered the rector's youngest daughter to her elder sister, as she sat under a gasalier, half bewildered by all the light and magnificence. "How I envy that arrogant Miss Chessom, to be sure. As I live, here comes her magnificent brother. I know he is about to ask one of us to dance;" and the pretty little demoiselle was all aflutter.

On the other side of the room Mabel and Waldegrave were conversing together.

"Who is that gentleman yonder?" asked Bertram, glancing toward a tall, handsome gentleman, evidently about forty years of age, who stood near a door, engaged in conversation with the banker.

"Oh, a stranger—a Mr. Chesterton," replied Mabel. "He is lately returned from the Colonies, I believe, where he has accumulated a vast fortune. While in London a few days ago Judge Harcourt met with an accident by the upsetting of a cab, and this gentleman rescued him from being trampled to death by the hoofs of the horses at the risk of his own life. They struck up a friendship at once, and the Judge brought him here last night with profuse apologies. Mr. Chessom has also taken a great fancy to him," added she, "and no wonder, for is he not a noble looking gentleman?"

"He is certainly one of the very finest looking men I have ever seen," answered Waldegrave, "But do you know why I was curious to learn who the gentleman is?"

"No; why, pray?" asked Mabel.

"Because he so much resembles my great uncle. Look at those three as they stand near each other—my uncle Chessom, this Mr. Chesterton, and your brother. Do they not sufficiently resemble each other that a stranger might easily conclude them to be grandfather, father and son?"

Mabel looked at the three gentlemen for a moment, and replied:

"They certainly, all three, very much resemble each other. Indeed I have frequently observed some resemblance between Mr. Chessom and my brother; but is it not singular that our new guest should look so very much like him?"

"That who should so much resemble whom, pray?"

Mrs. Chessom had caught something of Mabel's words, as she was passing, and paused to ask this question.

Mrs Chessom was a very elegant looking woman to-night, in her regal robes of rich black velvet, and superbly flashing diamonds. Indeed, she looked scarcely a year older than her brilliant daughter.

It was an apparently casual question, carelessly asked; and yet there was eager inquiry beneath the smiling light in the eyes of the lady.

"We were speaking of Mr. Chessom and Mr. Chesterton," replied Mabel.

"Do you not also think there is much likeness between them?"

Mrs. Chessom glanced toward the gentlemen indicated, replying:

"Why no, I do not perceive the least They are very unlike, I think. Mr. Chesterton is much taller, and so very travel-bronzed. He is somewhat fine looking; do you not think so? By the way, Bertram," turning to Waldegrave. "I heard Glencora inquiring for you a moment ago. Something in the way of a slight improvement in the fixing of the scenery, I believe, about which she wishes to consult your judgment. You will find her in the conservatory;" and the lady swept away.

Waldegrave left Mabel by the side of Mr. Rhamelton, with some reluctance, and went in search of his cousin.

He found the young lady standing under some great tropical plant, its broad leaves rustling about her, and one of its vivid crimson blossoms drooping down and touching her dark hair. She looked up, on his entrance, with that gay, bright bewilderingness in her smile, which always half dazzled and fascinated Waldegrave.

"I'm glad you've come, cousin Bertram," said she. "I want you to come with me. I have suggested a different arrangement in the placing of the garlands for the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet; and I want to consult your taste as to whether it will be an improvement."

She swept on, leading the way, and chattering gaily. Sometimes, when she snubbed gentle, graceful little Mabel with such arrogant rudeness, or, in numberless other ways showed herself heartless and unfeeling, Waldegrave cordially disliked her; but when, as to-night, she was so bright, so piquant, so charming, when she smiled upon him more brightly than upon others, and listened with such flattering interest to his words, he felt bewildered, flattered, enchanted, while in her presence. She was in the gayest, brightest spirits to-night, and Waldegrave looked at her, and half-marvelled at her splendid beauty. It was no wonder that, now and then, for the moment, with all her glowing, sparkling radiance casting a bewitching spell about him, he half forgot the sweeter, fresher face of Mabel Willoughby.

"Fortunate we did not have the statue scene in the 'Winter's Tale,' as was proposed by somebody; for, of course, Lady Birdetta would have been chosen as Hermione, and then her illness would have made it so awkward. Mamma endeavored to persuade her to join us below stairs to-night; but she declined, pleading nervousness, and the symptoms of an approaching headache," continued Miss Chessom. "Odd, isn't it? Whatever could have so shattered her ladyship's nerves. Perhaps she saw a ghost—there is one haunts Maplewood, they say; but the servants declare that it is never known to stray beyond the south wing. However,' added the young lady, with a laugh, "since that part of the house has become so damaged by the fire, which occurred a few weeks ago, the ghost may have taken up quarters elsewhere in the house, objecting, also, no doubt, to the noise of the workmen, who are engaged in making repairs. But I do believe everybody is going mad. Even mamma was attacked with a sudden fit of faintness this morning, just as grandpapa presented Mr. Chesterton, and became so pale that I was at first inclined to believe that the gentleman was an old lover;" and Glencora laughed again. "But here are the garlands, cousin Bertram. Do you not think those pretty training vines will hang much more gracefully, and with better effect here than over there in the shadow? And that lovely wreath yonder should occupy a less out of the way place—should it not?"

"By all means; and I think that tall plant yonder should be placed a trifle more in the background," said Mr. Waldegrave.

So the re-arrangements were made, and Glencora invented so many other pretexts for keeping her cousin by her

side that there was not a moment in which, without actual rudeness, he could find an opportunity of slipping away, until it was time to prepare for the dramatic scenes.

Mabel sat listening absently to Mr. Rimmelton's agreeable conversation, a dull, pained feeling at her heart.

"She is so beautiful, so rich; and I am poor, and nobody in particular," she murmured to herself. "She is sure to win him. Perhaps Glencora told the truth, when she taunted me by declaring that her cousin was merely flirting with me for his amusement. No, I will not believe that; he is too honorable. But she is so handsome—such a magnificent woman. In her presence, I believe, he forgets my very existence"; and she glanced over to where Glencora sat, smiling up coquettishly into Waldegrave's handsome face, with its animated, half-ardent expression.

CHAPTER XX.

The great drawing-room conservatory was all ablaze with light and beauty that Christmas night.

Earnest Willoughby led Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas to a seat in the midst of the fairy-like place.

Alas! for our hero's resolve to conquer his love for Lady St. Ayvas's beautiful daughter. Never had he been so passionately in love with her as now. With the soft, yet dazzling light, the loveliness, the perfume of myriad sweet flowers, and the passionate throbbing of the music from the orchestra floating about him, he felt like one in an enchanted dream. Only by the sternest efforts could he, as he sat by her side that night, restrain himself from uttering the ardent, passioned words of love that sprang to his lips, and chatter, instead, gay, frivolous nothings. He was in the very heart of the enchanted garden, among the bloom and bewildering perfume of the red roses and passion flowers. He strove hard to be gay, and succeeded, and talked to her, in a lively trifling strain, about everything which happened to be nothing in particular after all.

Supper was announced, and all assembled in the great supper room, which was all a sparkle with the radiance of reflected light from the glistening of silver and crystal and gold.

When supper was over, and all had returned from the supper room to the drawing rooms, Mrs. Harcourt summoned her troupe to prepare for their respective parts in the plays to be acted; and, after something like a half hour spent in their dressing-rooms, all were ready, and the acting began.

We all know what private theatricals are like; to give a description of this particular affair would but tire our readers. Suffice it to say, therefore, that all passed off agreeably, and then came refreshments, and then music and dancing, and at length the gay party broke up.

"Take off all those laces and flowers, and jewels quickly, Artimise. I am tired, exhausted, fatigued, everything, and I'm dying to go to sleep."

Miss Chessom sank into a cushioned rocker, with a drowsy yawn, and Artimise let down and combed out her hair.

"And the dramatics were a success, were they not, Mademoiselle?—and you were the belle among all the fair demoiselles; I know you're always that."

Glencora smiled arrogantly.

"Yes, of course, I am always that. There was an odd little French nobleman—I forget his title, but he is an old friend of grandpapa's—and he was here tonight, and I overheard a remark of his, addressed to Mr. Chesterton."

"They are beautiful—all very beautiful—the ladies here," said he; "but Mademoiselle Chessom outshines them all. She is so brilliant, so magnificent, so unlike most women, with that enchanting air of piquancy, and then she is so gay, so vivacious; there are few women to compare with Mademoiselle Chessom." There, that is it, word for word. Artimise. I should never have given the little dried up atom the credit of possessing such very good taste. He looked very like a monkey himself," she added, with a laugh. "But the plays—oh, yes, they were very well. Even that milk-soppish little Mabel did some better than I expected. There you can go now, and I shall be fast asleep in a minute," and the girl left the apartment.

Mrs. Chessom, after dismissing her sleepily yawning waiting woman, sat down, with a little wearily-drawn sigh, before her mirror.

A little frown contracted the arching brows of the lady, as she rested her white forehead upon her hand, and gazed vaguely and abstractedly at her reflection. Something, evidently, troubled

Mrs. Chessom. She sat thus for some moments, and then rose up with sudden nervousness, and paced to and fro the apartment.

"Who is he?—this Mr. Chesterton," she murmured. "Oh! I would give the world—the whole world to know! Even others perceive the resemblance; and yet it cannot be he; he is dead—dead long ago. I am an idiot to worry myself thus unneccessarily; but he is so like him; and, more than once has he looked at me so strangely."

She stopped before her mirror again, and gazed, with the same abstraction into it.

"I am nervous, worn out with fatigue," she whispered. "I must sleep off this foolish freak of imagination, for such it is, it must be."

She prepared and drank, a sleeping draught, and shortly after slept. And while she sleeps with vague, uneasy dreams disturbing her slumbers, the dim gray of early dawn brightens into crisp, clear morning; and the sunlight has long been struggling through the ruby folds of the curtains at her window ere she awakes. Nearly all have assembled in the breakfast parlour, when Mrs. Chessom descends thereto.

The banker stands near the fire engaged in conversation with Judge Harcourt and Mr. Chesterton. Just as Mrs. Chessom enters the room the latter gentleman, in reply to some question of his host's, is saying:

"Yes, it is long years since last I saw England; and certainly," he added, "some remarkable changes have taken place during my absence."

There was an emphasis upon the last words, but so very slight that only one person in the room, Mrs. Chessom, noted it; but Bertram Waldegrave perceived and wondered a little at the momentary flush that mounted to his aunt's brow, receding the next instant, leaving her pale, with a singular light flashing in the strangely burning eyes, which, for a brief moment, were lifted to this Mr. Chesterton's face.

The full hazel eyes of that gentleman met the momentary gaze of the lady with clear steadiness; and Waldegrave fancied that, for a moment, the latter appeared nervously uneasy, and that her usual suave smile and dignified complaisance were regained by an effort; and he was curious enough to wonder a little what it meant.

Lady Birdetta was now quite recovered, and came down this morning to breakfast with the family. She was a little paler than usual; but otherwise was quite herself.

At the table Jarvis declared his intention of returning to Wales.

"I have just received a letter from Polsdon, desiring me to come, and informing me that if I start to morrow he shall be able to meet me in Cwmdaron. There are some matters which I wish to look after at Cwmdaron; and which have already been too long delayed," added he, in reply to his mother's protest against his undertaking a second journey into the west at this season of the year.

"By the way, Jarv," said Glencora, "is not that the same town in which you told me our old nurse, Gimpy, as we used to call her, lives?"

"The same," replied Jarvis; "and I visited her cottage, while there last autumn. She sent the whole family an unlimited amount of her very best and humblest respects when I left her house."

Glencora laughed.

"How outrageously we used to quarrel with her," said she; "and what numberless bowls of herb teas we demolished; and then how furious the old creature would become. Do you not remember?"

"Distinctly; but in justice to myself," laughed Jarvis, "I must declare that it was yourself chiefly who engaged in the overthrow and demolition of the said bowls of calomel and pennyroyal. My sweet sister always eclipsed me in the way of scratching and biting, as you will doubtless remember," he said laughingly to Waldegrave, who sat beside him. "I still bear upon both my arms the marks of those pearly, but nevertheless venomous teeth of yours," added he, with another laugh, and again addressing his sister.

Miss Chessom shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear brother, you were a deal too stupid to be actually quarrelsome," said she. "Nothing in the days of your early youth, it is true, ever really aroused you to anything like vehement wrath, unless, excepting occasionally, when not allowed too much apple jelly or a surfeit of plum pudding."

"Pray cease quarrelling," laughed Mr. Chessom; "and inform me, Jarvis, how you're to get clear of your engagement to go to Faversham with Vivian?"

"Oh, we settled all that last night—the Colonel and I," said Jarvis. "Vivian will make arrangements to delay going, until my return."

"Which will be, how soon?" inquired Mrs. Chessom.

"The last of January—perhaps earlier," replied her son.

Glencora made a grimace.

"The prospect of a journey to that stupid little Welsh town; and then a jaunt of some fifteen miles further to that dismally, lonely old estate of Polsdon's—and at this season of the year—must be supremely pleasant," said she.

"But Polsdon's place happens to be neither dismal or lonely," said Jarv; "and he writes me that he has invited a half dozen other fellows besides myself—all capital fellows too."

It would be difficult to say which was, inwardly, the most annoyed, Lady St. Ayvas or her hostess, that the latter's son, for the sake of what his mother designated 'one of his numberless whims' had decided to leave Maplewood, and her ladyship's daughter, merely to visit his friend Polsdon, in an out of the way place in Wales.

In vain did Mrs. Chessom afterward expostulate with the refractory heir of Maplewood.

"Really, Jarvis," said she, impatiently, "you are as insensible as a stick; and I might add, bearishly rude besides."

"My dear mother, will you favor me by pointing out the particular ways in which I have exhibited the insensibility, and rudeness to which you allude?" asked Jarvis, complacently.

Mrs. Chessom shrugged her shoulders.

"You are so insensible as to prefer the society of a half dozen 'capital fellows,' as you call them, to that of a very beautiful and very charming young lady; and so rude as to run away when the house is full of our guests."

Chessom smiled quaintly.

"Insensible! oh, by Jove! but I'm not—not to the loveliness of Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas, at all events; and I suppose it was her to whom you have just referred. She is a heap too good and sensible and angelic generally for a ruffian like me, though. There's Willoughby now, he's in love with her up to his eyes; and I think they'd suit each other remarkably well."

Mrs. Chessom smiled disdainfully.

"Ernest Willoughby is a very worthy young man," said she; "but he is a poor clerk also, and should he be foolish enough to forget the fact, neither Lady St. Ayvas or her daughter will be likely to do so, you may be quite assured."

"The elderly party won't—it's safe to stake one's life on that. She looks at him crushingly every time he ventures a word to her daughter. I've strong suspicions," he added dryly, "that her ladyship would prefer infinitely that her daughter should unite with the banker's grandson and heir instead of his clerk."

"And pray what could be more natural," inquired Mrs. Chessom, "than that her ladyship should prefer, for her daughter, a really advantageous match to one decidedly the opposite of that? What sensible mother would not?"

"Altogether very sensible for her ladyship to manoeuvre so adroitly; and you make a very zealous coadjutrix, by the way, to her schemes to inveigle your precious son into an alliance with the St. Ayvases. But I fear there will be a falling through of your pretty little arrangement. *Fata obstant*, my dear mother. You accuse me of insensibility to the fair Winnifred's manifold charms—that is unjust; I admire her immensely, but she is certainly supremely indifferent to mine. I'm convinced she cares more for cousin Ernest's little finger than for me; soul, body and prospective wealth, all put together. Not flattering, but 'sadly terribly true,' nevertheless."

Mrs. Chessom shook her head with contemptuous impatience.

"How very absurdly you talk, Jarvis!" said she. "It is really too ridiculous, simply because Lady Winnifred treats Willoughby with ordinary politeness to suppose that she returns any absurd fancy which he may have taken for her. Lady St. Ayvas would be sincerely annoyed were she to hear you speak thus."

"Doubtless," responded Jarvis.

"Willoughby is poor; and that is a crime which her ladyship wouldn't be in the least likely to forgive. You declare her to be quite indifferent to yourself," continued Mrs. Chessom, without appearing to notice her son's last remark. "How can you expect her to be otherwise when you are so *outre*, so *bizarre*?—when you exhibit no more preference for her society than for that of the rector's silly little sixteen year old daughter. Surely you intend to marry somebody—why not Lady Winnifred?—you will

never find a girl more beautiful or accomplished; and you might easily win her, if you only choose to try.

Jarvis yawned.

"Very well, mother, I'll think about the matter, after my return from Wales; but the lunch bell will ring in less than fifteen minutes; and I am in too famished a state to think or talk of love or matrimony at present; besides I've a host of things to attend to before leaving Twickenham."

Mrs. Chessom turned away impatiently and presently the bell rang and all assembled for luncheon.

CHAPTER XXI.

About an hour after luncheon Jarvis ascended to the library in search of his grandfather. The banker was not there when his grandson entered. He had gone out with Judge Harcourt and Mr. Chesterton a moment before, Lady Birdetta Rosenthral informed him.

She was there looking over a volume of American literature, and Chessom advanced as her ladyship laid aside her book.

"My dear lady Birdetta, are we to be positively deserted—forsaken—abandoned?" cried he gaily. "Must we lose all our friends at once? *Madame ma mere* is actually despairing. Not only does Judge Harcourt, with his merry little wife and fair daughters, together with the lively *demoiselles*—the Misses Chesley and Locksley—take their departure on the morrow, but your ladyship also, my mother tells me, intends leaving us shortly. Things will be desperately slow here at Maplewood house; and I'm not sorry that business will take me away for a month or so. You, I presume, will return to your friends in Morecombe."

"No; I am going to Wales—to the little town of Cwmdaron. I am going to visit Birdie Wylde, Mr. Chessom."

Jarvis pursed up his lips as if to whistle.

"The Dickens you—I mean is it possible, Lady Birdetta?"

Lady Birdetta smiled a little at the question, and then gravely replied:

"Yes, I am nearly convinced that I know something of the parentage of the little waif whom you have described to me; and I am very desirous of ascertaining if she is really the daughter of the Birdie Wylde whom I knew years ago, and who was as unfortunate, though in a different way, as her child, providing this Birdie be such."

Chessom leaned against a marble clio and looked, with a mingling of compassion and curiosity, at the lady's face, with its drooping eyelids and sorrowful mouth. There was such a depth of ineffible sadness in the sweet low voice.

She was a very beautiful woman, with wonderful, luminous dark eyes. She was attired in a rich dress of some softly flowing material, in lavender color of a beautiful shade.

Chessom looked at her, and recollected Birdie Wylde's words, "But the lady was pretty and dark—that is, dark hair and eyes; and I remember her best in a dress that—I can't tell you just what color it was, but it was light and had a purple tint in it.'

Lavender was evidently her ladyship's favorite color, as she so frequently wore dresses of that shade.

"Our errands to Wales, then, are much the same," said Chessom "My journey is also chiefly to visit little Birdie, who, I have omitted to inform your ladyship, is a sort of protege of mine. You look surprised, and no wonder. I am not naturally, I regret to confess, a philanthropical individual, and I'm not, as a general thing, in the habit of picking up wandering vagrants; but you see, little Birdie wasn't at all a specimen of the ordinary tattered mendicity, though she was homeless and forlorn enough, poor little thing, when I found her first on the dreary road between Nanteroyd and Cwmdaron." And then, at her ladyship's request, Jarvis went on telling her when and where he had first met Birdie—of the tipsy, boorish peasants who had attempted to molest her, and of his second *rencontre* with her; of how he had directed her to the cottage of Mrs. Gimp; and of how he, in accordance with his promise to revisit Cwmdaron and his protege, was now about to do so.

"Of course it's a bore, and I was an idiot to promise; but the little lonely thing seemed so woe-begone at the prospect of my departure, that nothing else which I could say approached consolation."

"You have been very kind to the poor little thing, Mr. Chessom," said her ladyship. "It was very good of you to care for the friendless orphan."

Chessom looked at her curiously.

"May I enquire, if Birdie—providing

her parents are the persons whom you believe them to be—is really an orphan? Are both her parents dead?"

Lady Birdetta's voice was low—tremulous with stifled emotion.

"Not both; I believe her mother is still living."

The next moment her ladyship was murmuring in the ear of her companion words which caused him to start, and utter a sudden exclamation of astonishment.

Below stairs, in one of the elegant rooms, with its costly furnishings of rich green satin, were assembled Mrs. Chessom, her daughter, and a number of their guests.

Presently the banker entered, accompanied by Judge Harcourt and Mr. Chesterton.

A little while later the latter gentleman crossed over to where his hostess was seated by a chess table, idly toying with the pieces.

"Are we to have our game of chess?" he inquired. "The young people yonder, at their game of whist, remind me of it. You see, my dear Mrs. Chessom, I sustained such heavy and frequent losses last night, during our contests, that I am desirous of retrieving myself now, if possible."

Mrs. Chessom expressed her willingness to play; and so they played, chatting pleasantly the while.

"Check, Mr. Chesterton," said the lady at length.

"Checkmate, Mrs. Willoughby—I beg pardon, Mrs. Chessom," said Mrs. Chesterton.

Mrs. Leigh Chessom, for some reason, glanced up with sudden abruptness, into the smiling face of her opponent; and something in the steadiness of his polite glance more than ever disconcerted her.

She murmured something about having overlooked her antagonist's queen, and swept the pieces together. In a few moments she pleaded weariness, and arose. Mr. Chessom took the seat which she had vacated, and the two gentlemen played on together.

The next day was the one on which the banker's guests and his grandson departed.

Judge Harcourt *et famille* left, to return to their own home in pretty, quiet Loamshire.

Ida Chesley and her papa's ward, Trissie Locksley were going home to the residence of the former's father, and Jarvis Chessom was this morning *en route* for Wales.

Lady Birdetta Rozenthral, having an engagement with her London lawyer, who was to visit her in a day or two at Twickenham, was not yet ready to start for Wales, whither, she informed her hostess, she had decided to go, for the purpose of visiting an old friend residing in Snowdon; and so it was not until a week later that her ladyship also departed.

Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter remained at Maplewood still, as did Mr. Chesterton also. The banker would not hear of the latter's leaving Twickenham just yet.

"It would be quite too bad of the Judge to take you to Loamshire just now. Pray don't think of leaving us just yet at least."

So his host's cordial invitation to remain being politely, if not pressingly, seconded by his hostess, Mr. Chesterton remained.

Although that gentleman had been at Maplewood house a few days only, and was as yet almost a stranger to its inmates, its owner had already taken an earnest liking, and felt sincere regard and high esteem for him. There was an irresistible air of geniality about him. He was noble, refined, and possessed high intellectual powers. He was a man after Philip Chessom's heart, and they had many thoughts and feelings in common. He was a most agreeable companion for either young or old. Glencora declared him a heap too learned; but Ernest Willoughby and his sister found him highly entertaining.

He talked politics with the banker and his clerk; they all three played chess and whist and cribbage together. He related to Mabel stories of the toilsome adventurous life of the fortune-seekers in the great mining districts, and described thrilling scenes which he had witnessed in some of his many wanderings, for the rich colonist had travelled much, and in many lands.

It is about a fortnight after Christmas at the present time of writing. Glencora threw herself into a rocker that stood near her dressing table, exclaiming to Lady Winnefred, who had volunteered to arrange the heiress's *coiffure* after the fashion of her own.

"I am so charmed with your hair, Lady Winnifred; it is gotten up divinely.

I shall be infinitely favored if you can only get mine to look like it. Do you know, Artimese tried vainly for more than an hour to fix it up just like yours, and failed. How odd that you can arrange your own hair, without assistance too, in such a charmingly bewildering fashion. I'm sure I couldn't for anything. By the way,' exclaimed Glencora presently, "didn't grandpapa look frightfully grim at the breakfast table?"

"I did observe how grave he appeared," replied Lady Winnefred. "I hope nothing unpleasant has occurred to annoy your grandpapa."

Glencora laughed scornfully.

"Oh! nothing which one might not have expected," said she. "But poor grandpapa is so—so much in his dotage, and has reposed so much confidence in him—Willoughby, I mean. Why, my dear Lady Winnifred, he has actually been detected in a theft—has stolen from grandpa to the amount of several hundreds! Outrageous, isn't it?"

The pearl inlaid hair brush which Winnefred held in her hand fell to the floor.

Glencora moved forward slightly, pretending to survey her own reflection in the pier-glass, and stole a sly glance at that of her ladyship, and then hid the disagreeable little smile that flashed across her ripe, handsome lips.

"Of course, those Willoughby's are sly and mercenary and generally detestable," went on the young lady, "I always knew that; but who would have imagined either of them capable of committing such a contemptible crime—such hideous ingratitude—after all grandpa's goodness—did you ever hear of anything so preposterous?" and Miss Chessom's black eyes flashed sharply into her companion's face.

There was a cold chilliness at Lady Winnifred's heart—a blinding dizziness swam before her eyes. She looked into the restless black lights that were upon her so scrutinizingly; and, aware that Miss Chessom was expecting her to say something, steadied her voice with a heroic effort, and answered with quiet calmness:

"I am infinitely astonished to learn that so great a crime is alleged against Mr. Willoughby; and, if there is no mistake about the affair—if your grandfather has proof positive of his guilt, I am sorry—very sorry for his pure-hearted, sensitive little sister. It will be a most cruel blow to her."

Glencora laughed a sneering yet polite little laugh.

"You are such an ingenuous, unsuspicious creature, my darling Lady Winnifred, that—in the language of slang—it is'nt marvellous if, once in a while, you're 'caught by chaff.' Of course, that girl is so sly and intriguing, and all that, that one, unless thoroughly acquainted with her, is nearly certain to be deceived by her. Oh! one has to be extraordinarily sagacious to understand the saintly little hypocrite, with all her smiles and acted sweetness. But believe me, my dear Lady Winnifred, all your pity will be wasted—quite. The girl is quite as unprincipled as her brother—indeed, I believe Mabel is the most sly and deceitful of the two."

Lady Winnifred's white forehead was stained for a moment with a flush of haughty displeasnre. She was growing to cordially dislike this arrogant, heartless daughter of the Chessoms—this unconventional, unlady-like, half insolent beauty and heiress; and there was a touch of scorn in her even, lady-like tones as she coldly replied:

"I regret that our opinions concerning your cousins—the Willoughbys—does not, indeed, have never coincided, Miss Chessom. In my opinion, it is Mabel who is truly frank and ingenuous. I may be very credulous—even foolishly so; but I cannot esteem her as a creature so very detestable."

It was Miss Chessom who flushed this time; but she answered carelessly, with a shrug and an attempt to suppress a yawn

"Well then, dear, pray don't let us talk of them. What did you think of Dresden's last ball? That's absurdly abrupt, I know; but I thought it the very grandest affair gotten up this season—did not you?"

Winnifred made mechanic replies to the heiress's vapid chit-chat, and was glad when she had finished the last plait of her black hair, and could invent some excuse for slipping away to her room.

She was shocked—bewildered—had felt too dazed to make any inquiries into the affair. She only knew and realized that Ernest Willoughby—manly—noble—honorable—as she had all along believed him to be, had been detected in a theft! She could not, would not, believe it; there

must have been a mistake somewhere! She had wondered a little that morning that neither Ernest or his sister had appeared at breakfast; and on making inquiry about the latter, was informed by her hostess that Mabel had complained of feeling ill the night before, and had not yet left her chamber. Poor little May!—was she grieving over the disgrace which had fallen upon her handsome, noble brother, of whom she had hitherto been justly proud?—and Ernest—where was Ernest?

CHAPTER XXII.

A SUDDEN DECLARATION.

There came a little tap at the door of Winnifred's sleeping room. She sat up with a sudden start, and brushed back her dishevelled hair as her dignified mamma entered.

"Winnie, darling, you're sure to be late for luncheon; the bell will ring in less than twenty minutes," said her ladyship.

Winnifred rose up and walked over to the pier glass, glancing at her reflection therein.

"You are looking pale, my dear," said her mother. "It will do you good to go out with dear Glennie this afternoon. She is going to do some shopping in the city, she tells me, and she is so desirous that you shall accompany her. There are some brocaded velvets at Mindorn's, and Glennie wishes to consult your taste about which particular pattern she shall purchase."

"Our tastes are so very antipodal in all things," replied Winnifred dryly, "that I think it improbable that they would be likely to concur even in the selection of material for a ball toilette. Besides, my head aches; and I much prefer remaining at home to driving to the city."

"Why, my love, it would do you good, and freshen you up a litile," said her Ladyship; but Winnifred shook her head.

"Well then, pray make haste; the lunch bell rings in just eight minutes," said her ladyship, consulting her watch. "But"—and Lady St. Ayvas' jewelled hand was lifted quite tragically—"have you been informed of the shocking crime which that person, Mr. Willoughby, has committed?—have you heard that he has actually robbed Mr. Chessom—his benefactor."

Winnifred turned her face away, and her "yes, Glencora informed me of the affair." was spoken very faintly.

"Really," said her ladyship, scornfully, "I dare say the contents of our jewel case is unsafe. I missed my heavy emerald bracelet which your dear uncle Lowder gave me las year, and have not seen it for several days. I trust now, my dear Winnifred, that you will comprehend the wisdom of my remonstrances against your intimacy with Mabel Willoughby. That simple, chattering, little Rosie Castlemain—I don't wonder that she should take the girl up; but you—especially after having been warned of her true character—I really do wonder at you, my dear."

Lady Winnifred looked wonderingly at her mother.

"Has Mabel done anything?" she inquired. "Do you accuse her of theft also?"

"Accuse her of theft?—certainly not, my dear. I believe I have said nothing which sounded like an accusation of that sort.

"No mamma; but you mentioned having lost your emerald bracelet; and immediately after spoke so disparagingly of Mabel that I inferred——"

Lady St. Ayvas interrupted with a short, dry laugh.

"I have lost the bracelet, certainly; but I don't accuse Miss Willoughby of having stolen it; it may possibly turn up again; but, if the brother is a thief why not the sister also?"

Lady Winnifred turned resolutely.

"Mamma, I don't believe it," said she firmly. "Whatever Mr. Willoughby may have done I know not; but it is cruel to suspect Mabel of a mean paltry crime, simply because her brother has erred. I believe poor little May is as good and honorable as any of us."

Lady St. Ayvas yawned and shrugged "There is the lunch bell," said she; and they descended together.

It was a somewhat silent repast despite the efforts by all present to render it agreeably otherwise.

Mr. Chessom—usually the most genial of hosts—was, in spite of himself, grave, distraught, almost silent. He was more pained and sorrowful than he could have told, that his clerk—the young man in whose honor and integrity he had placed such full and entire reliance—such implicit trust—should have proved himself so utterly unworthy of his confidence.

Could it be possible? Sometimes he felt inclined to believe it all a mistake—to disbelieve his own senses even; but then the conviction that there was no doubt of his guilt forced itself upon him; the proofs were so undeniable—it was so indisputably evident that none other than Ernest Willoughby had surreptitiously abstracted from his—the banker's—escritoire the sum of £600; and he had believed this bright, handsome young fellow to be all that was upright and honorable. Certainly it was humiliating to discover that he had been duped and deceived; and the banker was terribly angry; still he would—strange to record—have relinquished half his great fortune gladly to have had the young man all he had believed him to be—honest, honorable, truthful and pure-hearted. Ay, even much the greater portion of his wealth would he have given, *not* to have had his faith in his clerk's integrity thus ruthlessly shattered; and then he was angry with himself for his weakness.

Had his own grandson, instead of his clerk, committed this crime the banker was forced to acknowledge to himself that he should have felt not one whit more sorrowful, unnatural as it seemed, nor so disappointed.

He had always been obliged to admit that Willoughby possessed—or seemed to possess—many more sterling qualities than Jarvis, with the latter's half dissipated, indolent habits—his fondness for wine and turf and gambling, and his disregard for more useful things; and yet he was really not, by any means, the worst sort of fellow in the world—this frivolous, heedless Jarv Chessom; he was good tempered, generous, and possessed real talents too, had he chosen to let them see the light; but the banker sighed now and then as he thought how different in character and disposition was Leigh's son from Leigh himself.

Lady St. Ayvas and Glencora Chessom were the only ones who seemed thoroughly at ease during luncheon that day.

Mrs. Chessom was not quite herself; indeed the stately lady was slightly unlike herself all along of late. There was a certain uneasiness in her manner, not usual with her; and more of restlessness than was wont in her dark, bright eyes.

Lady Winnifred was silent, restless, and glad when the meal was over. Bertram Waldegrave, Mr. Chesterton, and Mr. Rimmellton were in London, whither they had gone a day or two previous, and were not expected to return for several days.

Harvey Fairleigh, having received a summons from his uncle, Lowder Fairleigh, had gone to Islington; so that Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter were the only guests stopping at Maplewood that day.

Mabel was still unable to leave her chamber, Mrs. Chessom said: and Ernest, where had he gone? How Winnifred longed to ask the question. The day dragged through wearily enough to Winnifred. She longed to go to Mabel, to sympathise with the poor little orphan, and—and Winnifred's heart gave a sudden throb at the thought—to learn if Mabel believed him innocent or guilty. Innocent! she would believe him that; it would be but natural that she should do so, Winnifred thought. How could he be guilty? She could not—would not believe it herself; there was some great mistake surely. Some one else even might have committed the deed; but not Willoughby, so frank and honorable as he had been.

In a vague sort of way she wandered out into the corridor, and met Mabel near the door of the latter's dressing room.

"Mabel, my dear little friend," Winnifred exclaimed, advancing impulsively toward the fragile little figure.

Mabel sprang forward.

"You don't believe," she began, "you do not despise me, Lady Winnifred. I might have known you better."

"Despise you, May? Why should I? and who has said so?"

Mabel hesitated.

"I—something which Glencora said this morning caused me to believe thus," said she; "but I might have known better. Glencora is always unkind; but it is cruel—so cruel of her to be glad that poor Ernest has been charged with this dreadful, despicable crime, and to taunt me so insultingly. They—you have been told all about it—you know all the affair?" she asked.

"I only know that your brother has been accused of having taken wrongfully from Mr. Chessom a considerable sum of money," said Lady Winnifred hurriedly; "that is all I know of the affair."

"And he is innocent—the accusation is so unjust!" Mabel broke forth vehe-

mently, with a storm of tears and stifled sobs.

Winnifred drew her gently to a window seat and knelt beside her.

"My poor darling little May," she said, soothingly; "pray do not grieve so. The sum which your brother has been charged with having taken may not have been taken by any one, and may yet turn up, or the true culprit, if there be one, may yet be found, and your brother proven innocent. Cheer up, May, dearest, all this darkness will—it must—clear away.

"He *is* innocent—I know it—I feel it!" her heart whispered passionately, as she murmured soothing words of hope to the fragile little girl whose golden head lay trustingly upon her breast.

Mabel looked up with sudden gladness.

"Then you—you do not believe him guilty, Lady Winnifred?" she asked eagerly. "Glencora told me that you believed him dishonorable and a thief."

Winnifred flushed with indignation.

"Miss Chessom has no reason to believe that I have ever considered your brother, otherwise than as an honorable gentleman," she said, "and has, therefore, not the slightest grounds for an assertion of that kind."

There was a footfall on the velvet carpet, and Ernest Willoughby stood before them—Ernest, but so pale and worn and weary that, in appearance, he was ten years older than when Winnifred had last seen him.

A little exclamation, half of pity—half of astonishment rose to Lady Winnifred's lips. She rose up, looking clearly, searchingly into the young man's handsome face.

He was innocent! Something in the bright, clear eyes told her this—assured her more fully than could all other evidence in the world have assured her to the contrary. With a sudden impulsiveness she extended her hand toward him. He caught it eagerly in both his own.

Mabel slipped softly away; but in the absorption of the moment neither noticed when she went.

"You do not believe it then?" were Willoughby's first words, spoken in low, glad tones.

Lady Winnifred looked up suddenly into his eyes, so full of passionate eagerness, of burning fervor. More than once before had she beheld something of that look in their depths, but never so intense—so impassioned as now.

He loved her then—this man whom she had deemed cold and indifferent to her. He loved her; and all along she had been angry at herself that, unsought, she had learned, in spite of herself, to feel for him more than mere friendly regard.

Sometimes, as I have said, she had beheld for a brief moment a flash of that worshipful light in his eyes—had detected a hidden tenderness in his tone and manner; but it was momentary only, and the love-light vanished—was resolutely smothered, and in its place a half sombre shadow would sometimes creep into his eyes, and he was calmly and gravely polite again.

But now his looks were telling her as unmistakably as did the passioned words which, a few moments later she heard him utter, that he loved her dearly—dearly.

He bent toward her so closely that the wavy locks on his temples touched her white forehead.

"Then you *do not* believe?" he asked again with intensest eagerness. Winnifred's eyes met his clearly, trustfully.

"I believe, fully, that you are innocent of all this charged against you," she said.

Willoughby had been striving hard to retain control of himself; but now a something—a great impulse, stronger than himself, came to him and was fast dashing aside the calm restraint which, in his pride, he had placed on himself. The clear cadence of her voice floated like sweet low music in his ears; and forgetting all, save his great love of her, he caught her in a passionate embrace.

"I love you, love you, love you!" were his vehement words, involuntarily uttered. "I meant never to have told you this—to have hidden my hopeless love always," he went on hurriedly; "but that which impels me to speak—to tell you that I love you madly—is stronger than my very self."

There was a soft rustle of silken robes, a slight cough, and Winnifred raised her crimson cheek from Willoughby's shoulder, and gazed, half aghast, at the horrified face of her mother, who stood, both hands uplifted, and with an expression upon her face that was a mingling of terribly shocked dignity, contempt of the most withering sort, and concentrated rage.

"Really!" was all her ladyship at first managed to gasp. But her vocal powers did not for long desert her; and then her indignation found vent in words, calmly, cuttingly, contemptuously spoken. Never for once did her well-bred tones lose a particle of their lady-like, unruffled silkiness.

"If you're innocent of this crime—this—theft, as you claim, would you, were you possessed of one atom of truly refined feeling, distress her ladyship by professing an affection for her which, to speak ever so mildly, is insanest folly? You! a beggarly clerk! accused as you are, too, of a most despicable crime—the disgraceful stain of that crime clinging to your name! Would you, I say, had you one spark of gentlemanly honor, address her ladyship in such terms, under the existing circumstances, even though she were insane enough to listen to you—even though you loved her as madly as you profess?" and Lady St. Ayvas' haughty lips curled scornfully.

Ernest and Winnifred were standing apart now; the former's face haughty and flushed with the anger to which Lady St. Ayvas' arrogant words had stung him; the latter pale, silent, sorrowful.

Her ladyship turned to her motionless daughter next, and haughtily desired her to seek her own apartments, thus waiving the hot reply to her contemptuous speech which was trembling on Willoughby's lips.

Winnifred lifted those wonderful eyes of hers to his face, an ineffable sweetness in their sorrowful depths. Willoughby sprang toward her involuntarily.

"My love, my darling!" he murmured eagerly. "You will—you do love me, do you not? With that assurance I can endure all things else."

Lady St. Ayvas grew white beneath her rouge with scornful anger; she spoke almost fiercely now.

"Winnifred, are you mad? Go at once to your room."

Never before, in her nineteen years of life, had Lady Winnifred defied her dignified mamma. Lady St. Ayvas had no thought of such a thing as defiance on her always dutiful daughter's part now.

"Go," and her ladyship waved her jewelled hand peremptorily in the direction of Winnifred's chamber.

Willoughby was standing close beside the latter now, his eyes full of passionate pleading bent upon her. She was hesitating. Would she go away—leave him thus—without one word of farewell?

He watched her sweet face eagerly. Lady St. Ayvas did so, curiously, angrily. The eyes of the mother and daughter for a brief moment met. Something in the latter's steady glance startled her ladyship, and the scornful words upon her lips remained unspoken. She stared, angry and aghast, at her—for the first time—refractory daughter.

Winnifred was standing now before Willoughby, and placing both her hands trustingly in his,

"Good bye, Mr. Willoughby," she said, in sweet, low tones. "I do love you truly. Good bye; and may God bless you, and prove you innocent to all others as I believe you to be."

Her stately ladyship could only gasp hysterically.

Willoughby's heart bounded with an exquisite thrill of happiness. She loved him—she had just said so—this beautiful, peerless Lady Winnifred. He was parting with her—he might never see her again; but she loved him—she trusted him; he could bear all other things with that precious knowledge. He pressed the slender little hands to his lips.

"Good bye, my life—my sweet darling," he murmured. "With that assurance I can never be very unhappy, whatever else comes to me."

He pressed his lips to her white forehead for a moment, and then was gone.

Lady St. Ayvas sank down upon a seat in the great shadowy corridor and wriggled in violent hysterics. Her daughter bent over her, but was fiercely waved off.

"Leave me! Send Gretchen to me; and then go at once to your own chamber, you mad girl!" exclaimed her ladyship in a subdued shriek; and Winnifred dutifully obeyed.

Gretchen came and assisted her ladyship to her chamber, which she did not again leave until late the ensuing day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ernest Willoughby went in search of his sister after having left the long corridor, and the scene which we have above described. She was in the conservatory below, he was informed by a servant; and thither he went and found her.

There was earnest inquiry in her lovely purple-blue eyes as her brother bent down, kissing her lips.

"*She* loves me, May, dearest," he said,

his voice half tremulous with gladness; "she loves and trusts me, despite them all. She is an angel, like you, little sister."

Mabel looked at him with a tender, half glad, half sorrowful little smile. He was pale and worn still; but what a world of dreary wretchedness had gone out of his eyes; what an earnest, eager, hopeful light had come, instead, into their clear hazel depths.

"And you have come to say good bye, darling?" she said, with an effort to keep back a sob.

"Yes, love, good bye, and heaven bless you, my precious little sister," replied Willoughby, clasping the fragile little figure to his heart.

"You will go where?" asked May.

A shadow passed across her brother's face.

"Almost anywhere, so long as I leave England," he said. "I read this morning that a sailing vessel, the Victor, leaves Liverpool on the 6th of next month for Montreal. I think I shall take a passage in her. I am sure to be more contented anywhere away from here; and I know I shall like Canada."

"Canada!" repeated Mabel. "Oh, Ernest, I do not believe I shall ever see you again. I do not believe you will ever come back to dear old England!"

Willoughby looked down at her with sorrowful tenderness.

"No, May, dearest, I shall never return" he said, with something that was like a sob in his voice. "Never; even though this cloud be driven from over my name; but it can never be quite that; a shadow will remain always; there will be some who will refuse to believe me innocent—such persons as Lady St. Ayvas for example—however conclusive the proof of my innocence may be. But there will be no proof of my innocence; it is folly to hope for even a slight palliation, let alone a total obliteration of the miserable stain upon my character."

Mabel heaved a sobbing little sigh. Her heart was aching with sympathetic sorrow for this idolized brother of hers, who stood beside her with such a stern pale face; with sorrow and anger, and wounded pride and honor battling at his heart, only the faintest throb of a pitiful hope—the half mournful, half glad thrill of that which was a mingling of passionate, hopeless love and something that was akin to happiness—something that told him that that love, however hopeless, was returned—serving to lessen the darkness of the shadow which had fallen so suddenly upon his life with all its youthful, hopeful ardency—its bright, noble aspirations and anticipations.

"But I shall go to Canada, and settle down in some business there," he went on, trying to speak hopefully; "and then you shall come to me, and if you like it—if you can give up old friends and associations, you will remain with me always, and make brightness for my dull life.

Mabel leaned her golden head upon his breast.

"I can go anywhere with you, dear Ernest," she said. "Indeed I shall be glad to leave here. The old associations can never, henceforth, be anything but painful to me; and I shall regret parting with very few of our friends. I almost hate them," she added bitterly. "They are all so cruel—so cruel to believe you guilty, as if you could be that!"

Willoughby clasped her closely in his arms. It was a sorrowful parting, and Mabel wept long and bitterly after he had gone—gone out into the world to battle alone; and then what would it be in the end? No bright goal for his ambition to look up to; nothing at last but a blighted name and a saddened life.

"Oh, it is cruel, very, very cruel," she murmured. "So good, so noble. Poor Ernest."

Ernest Willoughby went forth from the home of the Chessoms, receiving a fare well from only two of its inmates; he did not even see the banker—had no thought that by him he was watched as he drove away from the great house—away from Maplewood forever.

Somehow this departure brought back to the memory of the master of Maplewood that other banishment, when Leigh, his only son, had also gone forever, with a bitter curse hurled after him. He had been so dear to him—this bright young fellow—so dear to him; more so, he felt at this moment, when Ernest was going for good, than ever his own grandson had been. He watched him, as he drove down the leafless avenue, and something within him urged him to—innocent or guilty—recall him; but what if, after all, his clerk should repel him? The pride of the banker could never endure this. No, he would not be so weak, he told himself. Was he, he wondered angrily, in his dotage?

CHAPTER XXIV.

Harvey Fairleigh, having executed a score or so of his whimsical uncle Lowder's commissions with a degree of patience that was praiseworthy, left Islington and returned to Twickenham the day ensuing Ernest Willoughby's departure from thence.

Lady Winnifred, sitting by the window in her dressing room, which overlooked the great leafless avenue, drew a relieved long breath as she saw her merry cousin alight from a cab that was driven up, and stopped for a moment before the door of Maplewood house.

She was glad to see brusque Harvey back again; his gay conversation would be enlivening; and the hours that hung so heavily upon her hands would be rendered less intolerably dismal by his return. Not that there was the smallest lack of gay society at and around Maplewood. The great drawing rooms were nearly always in receipt of gay guests; always callers and afternoon visitors, and pleasant throngs in the evenings; and yet they had all suddenly grown tiresome, even irksome, to Winnifred. It was all so hollow and heartless and frivolous; and she was so tired of it all—so thoroughly weary.

She had absented herself from a gay skating party that day, pleading a headache as an excuse. She wanted to be free from envious belles, and the gallant attentions of dashing *militaires*, and fashionable, frivolous chit-chat for at least a little season.

After the merry party had gone, and she had bathed her mamma's temples with *eau de cologne*, and administered to that fretful lady a soothing restorative when she showed symptoms of incipient hysterics, she found an opportunity of slipping away to her own apartments, being informed, with a reproachful sigh, by her ladyship that she was no longer required to remain, and that she would try to obtain a little sleep.

She sat down and looked out vaguely, listlessly, from between the velvet curtains at her window. It was a relief to be alone—to be free to lay aside, for a brief interval even, the mask of light-hearted gaiety which, only when unseen by others, she was obliged to wear.

"Poor little May," she murmured drearily; "she is less miserable than I; she may grieve for him, but I—oh, it is so cruel—I must be outwardly gay and careless, for what the world will say."

She leaned her head wearily against the frame, and wondered sorrowfully, vaguely, if the great shadowy cloud that enveloped the present would clear away ever, or if its dreariness and darkness would always follow her, dimming all the brightness of the future.

Harvey Fairleigh ascended the broad main staircase a few moments after his entrance of Maplewood house, and, meeting his cousin Winnifred in the corridor, embraced her, exclaiming:

"Back, you see, cousin Winnifred, safely in the flesh, and without having had my precious head bitten off by our 'poor dear uncle;' but he was in no need of a temper when I arrived, that I did not get there earlier."

"I suppose uncle Lowder is as well as usual?" inquired Winnifred.

"Oh, quite," responded Fairleigh; "and I was compelled to execute something less than fifty fussy, bothering commissions, while there, to which he condescended to entrust me. I must needs go a horrid journey of more than a hundred miles on some tedious business, when a letter or telegram would have managed the affair quite as satisfactorily as my own person; and, on my way back, became dripping and drenched in a beastly rain-storm, receiving from my beloved relative, on presenting myself before him with some mild complaint of my water-soaked condition, the comforting assurance that I need apprehend no serious danger from the horrible chills, which were the consequence of my wetting, as those born to be hanged seldom came to their end in any other fashion—ugh! I haven't got clear of those creepy chills yet," he added with a shrug. Then he rattled gaily on:

"But what in the name of all wonderful things," he inquired presently, "has happened down yonder? Mr. Chessom has grown thinner than the average curate during my absence, and though he endeavored to do the cordially hospitable on my return just now, there is a sort of moroseness and reserve about him which certainly didn't characterize him previous to my departure from Twickenham. And it seems to me," he added, "that our hostess, also, is not exactly her former self. There seems to be a sort of nervousness in her manner which isn't at all in accordance with her accustomed dignified complaisance. Why, she actually started so visibly, on meeting me a mo-

ment ago, that an observer might have concluded that I was a grim official, just offering her a pair of manacles with the stern words, 'Madam, you are my prisoner!' instead of merely presenting, with one of my finest bows, my small and aristocratically white hand," continued Fairleigh, contemplating for a moment one of his not very fair and somewhat chubby little fists.

Winnifred had not time to reply ere Mabel Willoughby and her friend, Rosie Castlemain, crossed the corridor; and Fairleigh came forward to greet them, his heart set all a flutter by the pressure of Rosie's dimpled little hand, and the brightness of her eyes.

Kind-hearted little Rosie had persuaded her friend to go with her over to the 'Oaks,' the residence of the former's father, which was only a little distance from Maplewood.

"It will do you good, May, dear," Rosie had said coaxingly. "And we shall be quite alone. I have given the servants sweeping orders to admit no soul to my presence during the remainder of the day, and the evening. Even aunt Howard and cousin Honora are to be excluded for to-day. Come, child, it will brighten you up; my charming society always dispels the 'blues;' it's sure to enliven you Come along;" and Mabel, bestowing a grateful little embrace upon her friend, prepared to go with her to the 'Oaks.'

"I am carrying May off with me," Rosie exclaimed gaily. "I am dying to have her over at the house, and papa is dying to hear her play all those lovely ballads, which she does so sweetly. My performance of them is execrable. Papa declares he can never distinguish the difference between my execution of Von Webber's last and Flying Galop; and cannot tell if I am playing 'If you could come back to me, Douglass,' or 'Johnny Sands;' but Mabel does them all so divinely," she added.

They chatted for a few moments longer, and then merry Rosie tucked Mabel under her arm and tripped away.

"How pale and thin Miss Willoughby looks," remarked Harvey, as the two young ladies disappeared.

"Has she been ill during my absence?" he inquired.

"Yes, so ill as to be unable to leave her chamber for several days," said Winnifred.

"Too bad, poor little thing," commented Fairleigh; "how mournful those sweet, purple-blue eyes of her's looked, to be sure. By the way," he added, "where is Ernest?—in London I suppose; do you know if he returns to-night?"

A flush came into Winnifred's fair face. Her cousin was ignorant of the painful affair which had transpired during his absence from Maplewood. He and Willoughby had long been the firmest friends; would he trust the latter now, or join in his denunciation?

Lady Winnifred spoke hesitatingly:

"Mr. Willoughby has left Twickenham, and will not return," she said.

Fairleigh pursed up his lips.

"Left Twickenham, and will not return?" he repeated slowly, and staring interrogatively at Lady Winnifred; then an idea struck him, and he jumped to a conclusion. "That is one way of acknowledging that you have jilted him, I suppose," he said grimly. "By Jove! Winnifred, what heartless frauds women are; but I believed that you were an exception to the general rule."

Lady Winnifred looked into her cousin's suddenly clouded face, at a loss, for a moment, to quite understand his meaning; then, comprehending that he was mistaken, she shook her head half impatiently, saying:

"Pray do not rush so rashly at a conclusion, Harvey; I have not jilted Mr. Willoughby, as you say, but something has happened."

She went on then, telling him all she had learned about the very unpleasant affair.

"But he is innocent—I am sure he is that, she concluded eagerly.

"Why, of course he's innocent," broke in Harvey. "Such a fine noble fellow as Willoughby's been, ever since the first hour I knew him. There isn't a more honorable fellow, nor a manlier one in the country. It's a confounded shame!" he went on savagely; "and I'll let Mr. Chessom know what I think of the whole miserable transaction, host or no host."

Fairleigh was in a towering passion; scarcely the evidence of his own eyes could have induced him to believe his friend guilty of any dishonorable deed; and he was furious that this charge was preferred against him. And yet he was forced to own that, however innocent Ernest might be, appearances were certainly strongly against him. Only the banker and his clerk possessed the pe-

culiarly wrought keys which fitted the lock of the escritoire, from which the missing £600 had been abstracted. Therefore the said escritoire could not have been opened by any one else than Earnest, save the banker himself, and the six hundred pounds were certainly gone. Smaller sums had more than once before been found unaccountably missing; and, the very day succeeding the one on which the last sum had been taken, it was ascertained that Ernest had invested, in a certain speculation, to the amount of £500, for the possession of which he could not satisfactorily account. It was undeniable that the circumstantial evidence was very conclusive.

"But I don't believe a single word of it," Harvey stoutly declared. "There's a mistake somewhere—somebody else took the missing amount, or maybe the banker's a somnambulist or something of that sort; anyhow, I'd wager my life that Willoughby has not done this thing."

Winnifred caught at the sugestion of somnabulism offered by Harvey. She had heard of such things as people becoming victimized by the pranks of a sleep walker; who knew that this case might not be one of that sort?—and perhaps, after all, the mystery would be eventually cleared up.

CHAPTER XXV.

Harvey went to his aunt, Lady St. Ayvas, after having parted with Lady Winnifred in the corridor.

Her ladyship, with the assistance of her maid, had dressed, and would appear at dinner, which was to be announced in half an hour.

She greeted her nephew languidly, inquired solicitously after the health of the crusty brother, whom she always designated "poor, dear Lowder," and was exceedingly annoyed, when Fairleigh informed her that in something less than an hour he should start for Camberwell.

"I have a friend, a young artist, residing there," he explained, "and I shall probably remain with him most of the time until the termination of your visit here at Maplewood; then, I shall be in readiness to accompany you and my cousin back to Fairleigh house."

"But why this unreasonable haste, Harvey?" her ladyship fretfully inquired; "you can remain until after dinner, at least. It is positively impolite to rush off so abruptly, without any good reason."

"Hang politeness," growled Harvey.

Lady St. Ayvas's brows lifted amazedly.

"Really, Harvey, what would our host think of your bearishness, I wonder?" she remarked, with dignity.

"Hang our host," grimly responded Fairleigh; "but good-bye, Aunt Muriel, I must make my adieux to the rest, and be off."

Her ladyship shrugged her shoulders.

"What a veritable bear you are, Harvey; your brusqueness always sends nervous shivers through one," said she

Harvey replied only by a quaint grimace, and ran down stairs. He met Mr. Chessom in the hall, and announced his intended sudden departure.

"But you will not leave us until after dinner, my dear Fairleigh?" urged Mr. Chessom. "The bell will ring in fifteen minutes; pray remain for the present."

"Thanks, but I must deny myself the pleasure," was Harvey's curt reply. Fifteen minutes," he added; "I shall barely have time to make my adieux to Mrs. Chessom."

"But we shall see you frequently—you will come often to Maplewood while Lady St. Ayvas remains with us, at least?" inquired the banker.

Fairleigh shook his head.

"I think it is doubtful if I find time to return until my aunt wishes to depart," said he; "indeed," he added, "I may possibly not return at all. My cousin informs me that my friend Willoughby purposes sailing, fifteen days from to-day for Canada; and, providing I can obtain the consent of the pater, I think I shall accompany him. I shall enjoy it immensely, and return in something less than a year; and I can persuade father to come for my aunt and cousin, when they are ready to leave Twickenham."

Mr. Chessom bowed gravely, and seemed about to speak; but Mrs. Chessom just then appeared, and Fairleigh turned to bid her good-bye. She was politely regretful that he must leave so suddenly; Harvey shook hands with host and hostess—very frigidly with the former—and departed.

A week slipped by. Glencora sat in her dressing-room, yawning over the latest novel, while her maid arranged her hair.

Thank heaven!" exclaimed the heiress, at length, tossing aside her book, "the men have returned. I want to be charming to-night." Then she laughed. "Dear

me, I can imagine Mr. Chesterton's look of consternation on hearing of this affair about Willoughby. I believe he's in love with Mabel," she added, "and she, the sly, mercenary creature, encourages him, though he's old enough to be her father, in case Mr. Waldegrave fails to propose. What very diverse tastes men possess. There is Rimmelton would like to fall in love with the little idiot, it only he could afford to wed for love instead of money, while my cousin Waldegrave—why, I believe, he actually detests her."

Glencora was fully aware that such was not, by any means, the case; but she said so, spitefully, because she was desirous that it should be so, and was determined to make it so, if it were within her power.

"Glencora, my dear, the bell has rung, are you ready?"

It was Mrs. Chessom who thus addressed her daughter, opening, as she spoke, the door of the latter's dressing room.

"Quite ready;" and the heiress floated from the apartment, magnificent in a rich myrtle-green dinner toilette.

"Goodness! mamma, how unearthly you are looking. Has anything dreadful happened? You are pale, and your hands shake as if they were smitten with palsy," exclaimed Glencora.

A surge of color came into Mrs. Chessom's face, which had certainly been unusually pale a moment before. She spoke as if annoyed by her daughter's observation.

"How very absurd, Glencora. I am not aware of any unusual occurrence. I have a slight headache, which accounts for the palor which you term unearthly; but pray let us make haste," and mother and daughter descended together.

There was no paleness in the cheek of the hostess as she entered the dining room, but a close observer might have detected a hidden but feverish restlessness in her manner. Bertram Waldegrave observed it, and wondered; Mr. Chesterton observed it, but if he wondered, he did not appear to do so.

After dinner the ladies adjourned to the cosy blue drawing-room, while the gentlemen lingered in the dining-room over their wine, conversing upon the topics of the day.

Miss Chessom threw herself indolently into the soft recess of a blue velvet divan, and glanced superciliously at Mabel, who had taken an opposite seat.

Certain it was, that Mabel had occupied too large a share of the attention of the gentlemen, who had that day returned, not to have incurred the jealous contempt of the haughty heiress.

She was sagacious enough to see how jealously Waldegrave and Rimmelton regarded each other; and how, ever and anon, the eyes of each would wander toward Mabel's pale pure face—did not fail to perceive how frequent and earnest were Mr. Chesterton's toward her, also; and wondered scornfully if it were possible that this splendid, middle-aged Adonis was becoming likewise infatuated by the orphan's "milk-sop prettiness" as she termed it. She leaned back now, among the saphirine-hued cushions, with a politely insulting little laugh, exclaiming, in tones slightly lowered, yet sufficiently audible to reach distinctly the ears of Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter, who sat near:

"Upon my word, Mabel, the dramatically doleful expression of countenance which you assume of late is wonderful—you do it to a surprising degree of excellence; and really, you attracted quite as much of the attention of the gentlemen to-day as even you could possibly desire. Mr. Chesterton regarded you quite wistfully," she added, sarcastically smiling. Then her black eyes flashed insolently at Mabel, and she went on with mock sincerity:

"By the way, Mabel," her words were a trifle lower spoken this time, "I perceive that Mr. Chesterton is actually becoming devoted to you of late. Now there is a charming opening for you—you are ambitious, and Chesterton's rich, if somewhat gray; and you are very well suited for each other—both stupid, that is, intensely intellectual, which is all the same. Better avail yourself of the opportunity than lose all in waiting for a greater prize—like my cousin, for instance. Believe me, girls in your position—unless a deal more charming and beautiful than you are—rarely secure all the cardinal virtues—youth, beauty and wealth, together. Like Mr. Rimmelton, for example, who possesses a fair share of the two former desirable qualities, but very little of the latter. Heigh-ho! what a pity now, that he cannot afford to marry for love instead of riches. His solicitous glances toward your puling face, as well those of Mr. Chesterton, were observed by all, I am sure. I could see how vastly amused cousin Bertram was; he inquired

the cause of your woe-begone appearance, asking if you had been ill recently. Of course I was obliged to explain the reason of your affecting such tragic airs, and inform him of your brother's disreputable conduct; and he was really astounded to learn of such hypocrisy and base ingratitude on his part."

A firey flush of wounded pride and anger dyed Mabel's hitherto pale face, suffusing even her white throat with its stain. She looked up into the heiress' scornfully mocking eyes, an angry retort on her lips; and then felt her fortitude deserting her—dared not trust herself to utter the words, for the sobs which, only with an effort, she could restrain. Fortunately, however, she was spared the necessity of replying, not only by the entrance of the gentlemen, who appeared at that moment, but also by Lady Winnifred, who—appearing not to have heard the insulting remarks of the haughty Glencora, of which, however, she had not failed to hear every word—arose, and in spite of Lady St. Ayvas' haughty, displeased frown, approached Mabel, saying pleasantly:

"Do you know, dear, I have been endeavouring most dilligently to do that pretty pattern of lace, which you were trying to teach me last eveniug, and cannot get it just right after all; I fear I shall need a little more teaching. It is so very pretty," she added; "and I am desirous of making a yard or two for the edging of the fanchon which I am making for mamma."

Lady St. Ayvas drew herself up haughtily, saying, in tones that were crushingly dignified:

"Then, my dear, pray don't trouble Miss Willoughby to instruct you, as I admire much more the kind with which you edged the fanchon which you made last autumn for Mrs. Mansfield."

Lady Winnifred sat down by Mabel's side, saying, with an unconscious smile:

"Very well, mamma, then I will only make it for myself, as I consider it much prettier.'

Lady St. Ayvas made no reply, but worked on at the hand-screen she was making, in dignified silence for a few moments, and then turned her attention to Glencora's trifling chit-chat.

Mabel bestowed upon Winnifred a bright, grateful glance, and then bent her still crimson face lower over the delicate conglomeration of frail silken threads, as Mr. Waldgrave made his way to the spot where she and Winnifred were seated. There was more than wont of tenderness in his manner toward the former to-night. Was he as cruel as Glencora depicted him? Mabel wondered; and was he—assured of that which she had so striven to hide—that she could not—could not but love him—was he so ungenerous—so unmanly, as to trifle with her, merely for his amusement? Surely not, and yet how could she tell? But we almost all experience some time in our lives what it is to endure "Love's alternate joy and woe."

She was glad when Glencora invented some pretext for calling Waldegrave from her, and disappointed Mr. Rimmelton, who had been casting frowning glances at the former, and, on seeing him depart from her side, was about to politely disengage himself from Mrs. Chessom, with whom he was conversing, and cross over to where she was just now seated alone, by rising and complaining of the warmth of the room, and withdrawing.

She went into the conservatory which adjoined the purple drawing-room, and sat down by a great rustling cactus. Unconsciously she broke off one of its thick, cool, leaves, and pressed it to her burning cheeks. Then, with a great flood of tears, that would no longer be repressed, she slipped from her seat to the floor, and buried her face in her hands; and thus Mr. Waldegrave found her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

My love is so true that I can neither hide it where it is, nor show it where it is not.—*Dryden.*

"My poor little girl—my precious little Mabel; I knew I was sure to find you here." It was Mr. Waldegrave who spoke thus, lifting as he did so the slight, drooping figure from its abandoned position to the flower embowered seat.

"My stately cousin has been insulting you again; I guessed as much from both your faces when I entered the drawing-room a few minutes ago. It is mean, cruel, everything that is unwomauly and unlady-like; and Mabel, darling"—his voice was lower now, and intensely earnest—"I have come to plead for the right, henceforth, to shield you from all her arrogance and insults. I love you little Mabel, dearly. Will you marry me?—be my own darling little wife?"

Mabel raised her blue eyes, in incredulous astonishment, to the handsome, eager face bending so close to her own. So sudden! Was she dreaming? Did

he mean it? Scarcely could she have imagined Mr. Waldegrave—cool, unimpassioned, as she had hitherto believed him to be—addressing even bewildering Glencora in this passionately lover-like fashion, with eyes so full of great, deep, fervent devotion.

"You—you cannot mean it, Waldegrave," she faltered in doubt and bewilderment.

He caught her tightly in his arms, tenderly murmuring:

"Not mean it! my precious darling; don't you know I have been loving you all along?—and you—I am sure you love me in return, May; you cannot hide it, your sweet face is full of it," he said smiling triumphantly.

Was all this a delicious dream? No, it was a reality—a reality that Mr. Waldegrave loved her—was asking her to become his wife. One word, and she was his own forever; and yet—

A little cold shiver that seemed to thrill her heart icily, passed through the slender figure. She never could—never would marry this man who was dearer to her than all the world beside.

She had received freezingly polite bows and chilling touches of gloved fingertips, from more than one of Miss Chessom's friends, since the affair of the missing six hundred. Only an evening or two previous, while concealed by the curtains of a bay window, she had overheard from the lips of two of the banker's guests, sneering remarks relative to her brother and herself. Ought she then, with this shadow of disgrace upon her, to wed a man in wealth and name, and station, so far above her? She, poor, nobody in particular, and the stain of her brother's dishonor—for dishonor it was, however unmerited—reflecting upon her. No, no! a thousand times no!

She drew away from his embrace with a weary little sigh that was half a sob.

"You are very—very kind and generous, Mr. Waldegrave; but I can never be your wife, never; and you do not love me: you only pity me, because I am so utterly forlorn."

She spoke wistfully with—oh, such a sorrowful light in the sweet blue eyes.

"But I do love you, May, with my whole soul," he said, in passionately earnest tones; and you will be my wife—my own wife, for you love me, I am sure you do love me."

Mabel freed herself from his clasp, and rising, murmured hastily:

"You must not love me, Mr. Waldegrave: I can *never* be your wife."

"But why?—you will tell me why, Mabel? It is not that you do not love me—you will not say that," Bertram asked eagerly.

There was a shadow of pain in the fair young face; and the low tones were rendered steady by an effort; but they were steady when she answered, looking up sorrowfully into Mr. Waldegrave's face:

"No, Mr. Waldegrave, I will not say that, for I do love you; but you know all that has happened during your absence—Glencora has informed you, if no one else has done so, and do you think, after all that, I will allow you to wed me?—no, indeed, no! I might have done so," she added, "when I was only poor, with no one to care for me but Mr. Chessom, and poor dear Ernest: but not now, with this shadow of disgrace between us; for disgrace and shame it is, though I believe my brother to be as innocent of the crime alleged against him as the saints in heaven."

Mr. Waldegrave clasped her two hands in his own.

"My dear Mabel," he said; "in spite of all circumstantial evidence, I also believe implicity in your brother's innocence. I believe firmly in his honor and integrity: and some day, I doubt not, his innocence will be proven."

Mabel looked up with a glad, grateful smile.

"Oh, you are so good and generous, Mr. Waldegrave," she murmured.

"And Mabel," Mr. Waldegrave continued, "even if he were guilty of all that is charged against him, no blame can possibly attach to yourself; you are morbidly sensitive my dear little girl."

Mabel sighed.

"Others are not so magnanimous, Mr. Waldegrave," she said gravely. "By your cousin's friends at least I am coldly regarded of late. Were you to marry me, you would be pityingly regarded as duped and infatuated, and I looked upon as a sort of mercenary *intriguante* who had inveigled you into an unequal match with myself."

Mr. Waldegrave frowned haughtily.

"The opinion which those vapid masculine and feminine adorers of my fair cousin, of whom you speak, hold in regard to myself, is of but little moment; but they had better have a care that no aspersions from their lips, against my wife, reaches my ears," he said, with

scornful determination. "For you will be my wife, Mabel; promise me that you will."

And Mabel, half glad, half reluctant, promised.

Too much absorbed were the lovers to hear the faint rustle of a silken dress, nor did they perceive the figure that slipped past them, on the opposite side of a gay little wilderness of bright tropic flowers, and passed into the drawing-room beyond.

Presently a servant appeared. There was a gentleman, an old college chum of Bertram's who, hearing of the latter's stay at Twickenham, had made it in his way to call and see him, and was now waiting inone of the reception rooms for his appearance. So the servant announced, and Bertram went out to meet him; and Mabel remained in the flower wreathed conservatory, with her heart and eyes full of exquisite happiness; and yet there was a little blending of uneasiness in her bliss that would not be banished.

Twenty minutes later somebody, lightly whistling a bar of some popular melody, entered the conservatory. It was Mr. Chesterton; and he did not at first perceive Mabel. He had unconsciously reached her side, and was plucking a spray of scented blossoms ere he noticed her. He laughed, in his gay, good-humored fashion.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed; "you are such a wee fairy, I believe I should not have perceived you at all, only that I caught the gleam of your golden curls in the gaslight."

He glanced down smilingly as he spoke into the pretty still flushed face, upturned toward his own.

"A penny for the thoughts which were occupying your brain when I unconsciously intruded. They must have been unusually pleasant, judging from your face, when first I perceived you," he said, and then laughed at her teasingly.

Just then Miss Chessom's maid entered the conservatory, coming upon pretence of plucking two or three moss rose-buds for her mistress; but, in reality sent by the latter, for the purpose of spying.

The French girl's sly black eyes scanned the pair furtively; Mabel, sitting in her bower-like seat, with its cushions of emerald green velvet; and Mr. Chesterton bending over her, and just fastening a shiny spray of ivy among the yellow mazes of her hair. Artimise glided in, apparently taking very little notice o either of them; but not failing to take accurate note of every word and look of both.

Neither Mabel or Mr. Chesterton noticed the girl particularly, nor were they aware that, instead ofleaving directly she had accomplished her pretended errand; but, as she disappeared, Mr. Chesterton said:

"My dear Miss Mabel, I am glad to find you here, and alone. I have been wishing this evening to speak a few words with you, but scarcely expected an opportunity to offer thus early."

There was some slight sound without, and the French girl, fearing lest she should be caught eavesdropping, glided on and upstairs to the main corridor where Miss Chessom awaited her.

"Well," said the heiress interrogatively.

"Monsieur Waldegrave was not with Madamoiselle Willoughby when I entered," said Artimise; "he had gone, but Monsieur—what is his name?—the tall, middle-aged gentleman, with the fine eyes?"

"Mr. Chesterton," said Glencora, "was he making love to the Willoughby?" with a contemptuous laugh.

"Yes, it was him," said the girl, and"—nodding sagaciously—"I am sure he was about to propose, for he looked very lover-like standing beside her, and fastening Colliseum ivy in that horrid yellow hair of her's; and besides, I overheard a few words of his,"—and she repeated the last words of Mr. Chesterton which we have quoted.

"Wishing to speak a few words with her, indeed," laughingly drawled Miss Chesson... "I can easily imagine what they will be;" and she lifted her flashing black eyes dramatically, exclaiming in pompous tones with much earnestness:

"Sweet Mabel! I adore thee. One word from thy beautiful lips can make me eternally happy, or eternally miserable? Take me, I pray thee, riches, gray hairs, fifty years and gouty symtoms, altogether."

She burst into a gay laugh.

"There, that's about it, I suspect, Artimise. What do you think?"

The girl smiled and shrugged.

"I dare say," said she; "but surely, Madamoiselle, Mr. Chesterton is not fifty years of age; he doesn't look like for y."

"Oh, I am sure I don't know," said Miss Chessom; "but he's old enough to

be the girl's father, anyhow. You may give me the rosebuds, Arti, and I will go down at once, or my absence will be remarked."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A REVELATION.

"It is of this painful affair, in which your brother is inveigled I would speak, my dear child," said Mr. Chesterton, gravely, as Mabel looked up, waiting for him to proceed.

All the glad, bright light faded out of the sweet young face; and a little shiver ran through the slender frame.

Mr. Chesterton saw the wistful, pained look that came into the blue eyes, and his next words were very gently uttered. "I know all about it my dear little girl," he said; "and only because it is necessary do I mention the affair at all, knowing that it cannot be otherwise than painful to you; but Mabel," and there was deep earnestness in his voice and look as he spoke—"I can and will prove your brother innocent."

Mabel sprang to her feet involuntarily.

"Oh! Mr. Chesterton, are you *sure* you can do this?" she cried eagerly.

"Aye, and I will," he answered firmly; "and the real culprit shall own his guilt."

"Then there is a culprit—some one has really taken the money?" said Mabel; "I thought there might be some mistake."

"Yes, there is a culprit," said Mr. Chesterton, "who is cowardly enough to suffer an honorable man to be banished for his guilt. I would have waited for a day or two before telling you these things," he added; "but I could not bear to see you grieving when it were possible for me to restore your peace and happiness at once."

"And Ernest," said Mabel, "when is he to be recalled? Oh! Mr. Chesterton, I shall be so happy for poor dear Ernest's sake."

"If on the day after to-morrow the person who stole the sum, of which your brother has been accused of having wrongfully taken, does not appear, or clear Ernest by writing to Mr. Chessom, stating the whole affair truthfully, then I shall speak," Mr Chesterton said with decision.

"And Ernest's name will be cleared of all dishonor," Mabel exclaimed joyously. "Oh! I can scarcely think how happy the assurance makes me Mr. Chesterton."

Presently she asked suddenly:

"And the name of the real culprit, Mr. Chesterton, may I know that now?"

"He is called Jarvis Chessom!" said Mr. Chesterton.

Mabel's eyes dilated.

"Jarvis! can it be Jarvis?" she asked in astonishment.

"Jarvis, and none other," said Mr. Chesterton; "and the sum was stolen by him for the liquidation of a gambling debt. I found all this out quite easily while in London. Listen and I will inform you how;" and thus he proceeded:

"A day or two after my arrival in London last autumn, which was something like a week previous to my accidental meeting with Judge Harcourt, I encountered the son of an old friend. He is a wild, somewhat dissipated young man, as opposite in character and disposition from his father, as day and night. He has succeeded in running through with nearly every penny of the really large fortune which his father bequeathed him, only a small estate in Faversham remaining of the amount of sixty thousand pounds in cash and real estate to which his father's death rendered him sole heir.

"I am in a scrape," he told me, a day or two subsequent to my first *rencontre* with him. Said he: "Suppose you loan me five or six hundred for a month or so Chesterton, and take a mortgage on the old place at Faversham? I'm in a desperate pinch," he added; "and five or six hundreds just now would pull me through bravely. Come, what do you say to it?" So I gave him a check for six hundred, and the already involved estate at Faversham I took as security.

A day or two before my last trip to London I received a letter from him. "I shall be able to pay you four or five hundred in a week or two," he wrote me: "as that amount or more will by that time be paid me by your rich host's lucky grandson and heir prospective." I called on him at his hotel a few days after reaching London," Mr Chesterton added, "and found Jarvis Chessom with him, and just placing in Walraven's hands the sum of six hundred pounds in bank notes.

Chessom had been imbibing somewhat freely, and was slightly muddled, so that I had little difficulty in learning from his conversation how he, without his grandfather's knowledge, obtained that sum for the payment of his gambling debt. It was he, instead of your brother, who took the missing amount from Mr. Ches-

som's escritoire; but I had no idea that Ernest was accused of the crime, or I should have returned at once."

"But is there not a lack of sufficient proof?" Mabel asked. "Will hot Mr. Chessom refuse to believe ?"

Mr. Chesterton smiled.

"Scarcely I think," he replied; "I have proofs quite too convincing to admit of his doing so. The bank notes which Chessom paid Walraven in my presence, or at least five of them in notes of one hundred pounds each, he (Walraven) immediately handed over to me; they are in my possession at present, and as I learned from Mr. Chessom about half an hour ago, are numbered the same as the missing ones."

"And Mr. Chessom, does he know this ?" Mabel inquired.

"No, he knows nothing," Mr Chesterton replied; "I merely suggested that if the numbers of the notes were ascertained some trace of them might yet be found; he happened to know the numbers, and informed me, and, as I have said, they were the same as those now in my possession."

Mabel's blue eyes were dewy bright.

"Dear Ernest, all this blot will be taken away and his good name restored. Oh! Mr. Chesterton, how can we ever sufficiently thank you for all your kind interest ?"

Mr. Chesterton laughed gaily, and would not listen to thanks.

"But little girlie," he said, "I have been waiting for some expression of triumph over the fair autocrat Glencora. Is there not enough woman-nature in you to cause a felicitous feeling at being able to return those taunting words of her's, and declare her brother, and not your own, to be the guilty one ?"

Mabel looked up with a smile.

"I am too happy to think of revenge," she said; "but I am sorry for Mrs. Chessom and Mr. Chessom, and for Jarvis—poor Jarvis. Somehow it is unlike him, this cowardly silence. Are you sure," she added, "that he is aware that Ernest is accused ?"

"There is a possibility that he may not be aware of that," Mr. Chesterton replied, "though his grandfather informs me that, immediately after the discovery of the theft he wrote him—Jarvis—telling him of the affair. He has received no reply as yet; and it is just possible that Jarvis may not have received the letter; or that he may deem it best to return, and in person confess himself, instead of Ernest, guilty. However, in a day or two, we shall be able to judge of the correctness of this latter conjecture, as by that time he will have had more than time to return from the west."

"It will be a sad blow to his grandfather," Mabel said sorrowfully. "He knows how wild and reckless Jarvis' habits have become of late; but I am sure he does not deem him capable of a really dishonorable action."

Mr. Chesterton was looking thoughtfully down, as Mabel spoke, and seemed scarcely to hear her words. Suddenly he glanced up saying:

"Mabel, has Mrs. Chessom always treated you with the same coolness which she has exhibited toward you since my coming here ? It seems to me," he added, "that she grows more cold in her treatment of you—as if she positively disliked you—each day."

Mabel knew very well what prompted the haughty coolness which, of late, characterized Mrs. Chessom's manner toward herself; but she answered Mr Chesterton's question very quietly, saying:

"No, until six months ago Mrs. Chessom, though she was never affectionate, treated me kindly. She is very much changed in her manner toward me."

Mr. Chesterton smiled a little oddly.

"One seldom meets a woman just like Mrs. Chessom," he said.

"She must have been very beautiful as a girl," Mabel remarked; "she is so beautiful now. No wonder Mr. Chessom's son loved her; and still—"

"Still what ?" Mr. Chesterton asked.

"Still," Mabel half hesitatingly went on, "there is sometimes a look in her eyes, in her whole face even, and of late especially, which startles, almost terrifies me; a look that—"

"That reminds one of what ?" Mr. Chesterton asked; "of a beautiful, at sometimes, and at others of a splendid, tigeress at bay ?"

Mabel glanced up in astonishment. Only that very day while at the table she had seen Mr. Chesterton bend forward and utter some smiling, low-spoken remark to the stately hostess; and had wondered at the look which the latter flashed up at him, as he ceased speaking. Truly there was that in the black orbs very like the fierce glare of a hunted tigeress, though the smile on the lady's

lips never vanished or grew less suavely urbane.

"You are apt at physiognomy, Mr. Chesterton," Mabel said; "and the tigeress like expression of which you speak, I never perceived until to-day at dinner; then Mrs. Chessom glanced up at you, replying to some words of your own. Your remark must have been very disagreeable," she added, smiling.

"Only a very common-place observation I assure you," Mr. Chesterton replied. "But, though trivial, it might, perhaps, have recalled some unpleasant reminiscence," he added, dryly.

There was a moment's pause and then Mr. Chesterton asked:

"About Leigh; I should like to see his portrait. Is there not a portrait of him any where in the house?"

"There is a picture of him hanging in Mr. Chessom's study; but I have never seen it," Mabel replied. "In his anger, Mr. Chessom, after his son's marriage, was about to distroy the portrait, but, instead, had it turned, and screwed face to the fall; and since his death I think he has never had the heart to have it again touched. A year ago Mr. Waldegrave's mother, who is Mr. Chessom's niece, told me that my brother was very like her cousin Leigh. 'Enough like him to be Leigh's own son,' she declared."

"Yes, I once knew Leigh, and Ernest is very much like him, both in look and manner," said Mr. Chesterton. "Mr. Chessom, also, has perceived the likeness, and more than once remarked it," he added.

"He was so good and noble," Mabel said sorrowfully; "if Jarvis were only more like him."

Mr. Chesterton did not reply; he was just drawing from an inner pocket of his coat a small case, beautifully inlaid and mounted, as Mabel spoke. He opened the case and held it toward her. Mabel took it half wonderingly. It contained two pictures: one, that of a youth of perhaps twenty, with a face bright and handsome; the other of a delicately beautiful girl, of not more than seventeen or eighteen summers.

"Do you recognize either of those?" Mr. Chesterton inquired, as Mabel, after studying the vignettes intently for a few moments, looked up at him questioningly.

"Why," said she, "I should say this one"—indicating the gentleman's picture—"was a likeness of my brother, as he looked two years ago; or else it is your own picture, taken perhaps twenty years ago."

Mr. Chesterton smiled.

"That is a fac-simile of Leigh Chessom, and painted just twenty five years ago."

Mabel uttered an involuntary exclamation of astonishment.

"So like Ernest; and so *very* like yourself," she said. "And who is the lady, Mr. Chesterton?"

A tender, half mournful light came into the clear, dark eyes of the gentleman, as he answered:

"His wife. She who was once sweet Grace Windham!" he said.

Mabel gazed in perfect amaze at the vignette.

"Oh, Mr. Chesterton, surely there must be some mistake. How *could* anyone so dark, so brilliant, so haughty, as Mrs. Chessom has been, ever since I can at all remember anything, have ever been a lovely, dove eyed creature like this?"—pointing to the vignette. "Surely Mrs. Chessom, in yonder, and the original of this picture, are not one and the same."

"Surely not," he answered calmly. "Leigh Chessom's sweet young wife died years ago. Yonder queenly woman is—" he looked at astonished Mabel with a grave earnestness that was convincing—"an imposter!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A JEALOUS LOVER.

"I am perfectly bewildered, Mr. Chesterton," Mabel said.

"And yet I have still more astounding revelations to make," he answered, smiling slightly. "Listen, child, Mrs. Chessom is an imposter; and Leigh Chessom is not dead, but living!"

"Living?—is Mr. Chessom's son living?" Mabel asked, after a moment's pause of utter bewilderment.

"Living and in the flesh," was the answer.

"And this Mrs. Chessom then, who is she?" asked Mabel, wonderingly.

"She is the widow of one Ernest Willoughby—daughter of the late Captain Islington, and step-sister of Grace Windham, whom Leigh Chessom married!"

Mabel sprang to her feet with an involuntary cry.

"My mother!—she is my mother then!" she gasped.

"No, listen," Mr. Chesterton said, gently drawing her into the seat again over which he was still bending. "Agatha Willoughby is not your mother, but the mother of Jarvis and Glencora; Ernest and yourself are the real children of Leigh and Grace Chessom!"

Mabel had been astonished before, she grew positively dizzy now with the utter amaze which Mr. Chesterton's last words created in her mind. Would she not waken ere long, she half wondered again, and find that all the marvelous things to which, during the last hour, she had listened, were but the passing fancies of a dream? No, she was not dreaming; and there was convincing earnestness in Mr. Chesterton's look and manner.

"*Can* all this be real, Mr. Chesterton?" she asked, her limpid eyes wide open and gazing at him.

He smiled at her bewilderment.

"Every word, little Mayflower," he said, looking down tenderly into the sweet young face as he spoke.

Mabel sat in wondering silence for a few moments, then a sudden thought came to her. Leigh Chessom was her father. Mr. Chesterton had, but a moment ago, declared him to be still living—where was he? She looked up, saying eagerly:

"You say he is still alive, my father and Ernest's, pray tell me where he is, Mr. Chesterton; shall we ever find him?"

Mr. Chesterton toyed caressingly with her golden hair, saying:

"Can you not *guess*, little Mayflower? Have you no idea *where* your papa is at present?

What a mystery it all was. She looked up wonderingly, eargerly, for a moment without replying; then arose with a sudden cry. Could it be?

"You—you are not?—" she began, a light of the whole truth breaking in upon her.

The next moment Mr. Chesterton was holding her closely in his arms, fondly kissing her.

"I am your father, little May," he said tenderly; "and you—my precious little darling—you are my own sweet daughter! Now you know all, dearest," he added; "a week later the world shall know, also."

"Look yonder!"

Glencora Chessom, as we for the present shall continue to call her, whispered those words, leaning on the arm of Bertram Waldegrave, in the door of the conservatory.

She pointed one white gemmed finger, as she spoke, toward an opening among the flowers, through which Mr. Chesterton's, or rather Leigh Chessom's form was distinguishable, under the soft glow of the gas-light, and Mabel's slight figure, also, fondly clasped in her father's embrace. Her golden head lying on his breast.

"Listen!" softly whispered Glencora; and Mabel spoke softly at that moment.

"Oh! I am so happy—so very happy," she murmured; and her slender white arms were twined lovingly about her father's neck.

"I think I shall never know again what it is to be lonely or sad," she said joyously, reaching up to touch her rosy lips to the dark, slightly silvered locks; a caress which was fondly returned, with the words:

"Heaven bless you, little darling, and grant that you never may. You never shall, so long as it lies in my power to avert it."

Glencora turned her splendid eyes, with a flash of mocking triumph toward Waldegrave; a bright, dazzling smile on those haughty, ruby lips of her's.

An hour ago, standing just where she now stood, with Mabel's affianced beside her, she had played the eaves-dropper, and listened unseen while Waldegrave declared his love, and begged the lonely little girl to become his wife—had watched the twain with eyes that were like liquid flame, while Waldegrave clasped Mabel in his arms, bestowing upon her sweet tremulous lips an accepted lover's kiss. Then she had swept away to her chamber, and paced to and fro, in a fierce rage that was all the fiercer for being silent.

"The artful intriguing Jezabel!" she hissed at length; "she shall never marry him, *never!*"

Then she summoned her French maid.

"Go down to the conservator Artie," she said; "I want two or three more rose buds for my hair. If Mr. Waldegrave and that Willoughby girl are there, you may hear if you can what they are saying. Go at once if you please;" and Artimise went down, and returned presently with what information we already know.

Glencora placed the buds among the coils of her black tresses, and went

down to the drawing room, which Waldegrave entered a minute later. She beckoned him to her side.

How marvelously beautiful she looked; and there was more of gentleness, less of piquant, arrogant coquetry, than was wont in her manner. There was a wonderful, almost pathetic sweetness in her smile, too, that was very sweet, very winning.

Truly, her's were 'lips that could smile, and murder while they smiled?'

"Grand-papa tells me that he purchased to-day a beautiful species of lily, which is very rare I believe," she said, after a few moments conversation with Bertram. "Come, let us look at it," she added, rising. "Grand-papa had it placed next to the great calla; so we shall be able to find it;" and Waldegrave followed her to the conservatory.

Bertram was in a mood too exstatic to indulge much in discourse of the frivolous nothings to which only Glencora cared to listen; and Glencora herself, for once, was not chattering; so they crossed the drawing room in silence, and reached the door of the conservatory just in time to witness Mabel, as she sat encircled by her father's arms, to hear her softly murmured words:

"I am so happy—so very happy."

Even Glencora was more than astonished. In her heart she knew Mabel to be all that was innocent and ingenuous in heart and mind; and as far above mercenary intrigue as heaven is above earth; and this unwomanly deception on her part seemed incomprehensible.

"The girl is a fraud after all," she thought; "and hasn't she played the sweet saint superlatively?"

The brilliant heiress was supremely triumphant. How her black eyes flashed forth from their silken fringed lids.

"What a fine manœuverer the girl is, to be sure," she whispered; "you see she has entrapped the rich colonist at last. Come, let us go; it would be a pity to spoil so charming a tableau."

Waldegrave followed her in silence. His face was so sternly set, so unearthly in its pallor, that Glencora was awed, half startled; and yet she found a sort of catlike delight in torturing him.

Her silvery laugh rippled out musically, as they emerged from the purple drawing-room.

"How utterly devoted the elderly Adonis appears," she said gaily. "And the girl, is she not a marvellous actress?"

He laughed so carelessly, so lightly that Glencora looked up into his white face, and wondered if he were wholly heartless, or if this gay indifference of manner was assumed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"The spell is broke, the charm is flown!
Thus is it with life's fitful fever:
We madly smile when we should groan."

There was a sick, dizzy blindness before Waldegrave's eyes, a vice-like, suffocating grip at his heart and throat that, for a moment, half checked his utterance. He conquered it though with an effort that was superhuman, and kept on meeting Miss Chessom's flashing, scrutinizing glances calmly, and talking to her in a lively strain that caused him to half marvel at himself.

He bent his handsome head toward his companion, as he made reply to her laughing, supercilious remark, and his lightly uttered words were as carelessly, *nonchalant* as his smile.

"Pray, what young lady would not condescend to employ her histrionic skill for the purpose of attaining so golden a prize?" he asked.

Glencora laughed contemptuously replying, with a little toss of her shapely head:

"No girl would hesitate, I suppse, who was as mercenary and ambitious as Mabel—and really," she added, "half the girls—especially girls in Mabel's position—poor, I mean—make it their chief aim to trepan a wealthy husband—to inveigle a man into marrying them, if he happens to be unfortunate enough to possess a considerable fortune; but Mabel excels in that sort of thing; she *is* such a complete actress, and so hypocritical. Just to think, my dear cousin, of her bestowing upon her elderly adorer such lavish caresses, and declaring herself—as she phrased it—'so very, very happy.' Professing such gushing sentiment for a man who is quite old enough to be her father. Oh, it's too absurd!" and Miss Chessom laughed out disdainfully.

Mr. Waldegrave smiled satirically.

"Really now, my dear Glen," he said, "I am inclined to believe that your cousin spoke quite truthfully when she de-

clared herself *very* happy. What fair demoiselle would—could be so unreasonable as to be otherwise under the circumstances existing. Miss Willoughby is quite portionless; Chesterton lays at her feet, along with his heart, a princely fortune; and why should she not graciously accept both offerings? To be sure," he added, "their union will be a sort of 'May and November' one; but what signifies that? Think of the immense wealth—the rich colonist's income is considerably larger than your grandpapa's even—the superb establishment and magnificent diamonds. What more, pray, could the feminine ambition crave?"

Glencora laughed.

"You are becoming cynical cousin Bertram," she said, lightly, as they reentered the blue drawing-room.

Waldegrave went out on the balcony, presently leaving his cousin chattering with Lady St. Ayvas, to whose remarks—though Glencora disliked, and slyly ridiculed her ladyship—she felt a sort of arogant gratification in listening, for the haughty heiress was weak enough to be fond of flattery, and Lady St. Ayvas always flattered those whom she was desirous of pleasing.

Bertram paced to and fro, out in the chill night air with rapid nervous strides; his haughty face white in the pale, uncertain glimmer of the twilight. The mask of light indifference was dropped now; and what a stern, almost fierce face it was, so rigid in its set and outline.

A great stormy battle raged furiously within his heart. Angry mortification, pain and bitter disappointment, all engaged in the passionate conflict.

She was so beautiful—this golden-haired little orphan girl, and he had loved her idolatrously—had believed her so gentle, so loving—so everything that was womanly and honorable.

Good heavens! a cheat—a heartless, intriguing fortune-huntress! He had been duped, deceived, and by a woman unwomanly, conscienceless enough to break her vows scarce an hour after they were uttered, because a still greater fortune was laid with its owner's heart at her feet.

He flung himself into a seat, feeling a vague sense of relief as the cool night-wind fanned his hot, throbbing temples. He had been an ediot—he told himself—a dupe; he would be one no longer. At least this faithless siren should have no opportunity of laughing at her victim. He would ignore her carelessly, and on the morrow would sue for the fair hand of his cousin Glencora; and with this rash resolve he returned to the drawing-room.

Mabel was sested at the piano, playing a bewitching, half dreamy waltz that was a favorite of Mr. Chesterton's; and Mr. Chesterton was standing beside her when Waldegrave entered.

She finished, and turned from the instrument presently; and their eyes met. There was a sweet shyness in her glance, a cold, utter indifference in his, that pained and puzzled her. The next moment he rose and crossed over to where Glencora sat. She made room for him beside her on the divan; and for the remainder of the evening he devoted himself to her.

Lady Winnifred, sitting near Mabel, saw and understood the change that crept into the sweet girlish face which, but just now, had been so bright. There was the same sorrowful droop to the full ripe lips, the same wistfulness in the blue eyes, the same weariness that had marked the fair face a few hours back.

"Is he so cowardly?" Lady Winnifred mentally wondered. "Has he caused this sweet young girl to believe that he loves her, and now trifles with her by flirting with his arrogant cousin? It surely looks like it."

Miss Chessom's flashing eyes watched the lovers furtively. She saw how hard Mabel was striving to appear carelessly calm, and inwardly triumphed.

"She is barbarously mercenary after all, her affected sweetness," she said, mentally. "She will marry Chesterton because he is wealthier than Waldegrave; and yet she loves him madly; it is torture for her to see him thus attentive to me."

Waldegrave found it a miserable task sitting there, struggling to keep a smiling front, and flirting recklessly with his coquettish cousin to revenge the woman he loved for having, as he thought, played him false.

He wondered desperately how he should stand it for the time to come. He could not—would not endure to remain at Maplewood longer. He would relinquish his first rash intention of marrying Glencora, and go away somewhere—anywhere where a woman was a creature unheard of—if such a haven could be found.

Presently Glencora said:

"There is to be a kettle-drum at Mrs. Vavasor's a week from to-night; of course

we shall all be invited; and of course we shall all attend, and assist in picking to pieces those of our acquaintances who don't happen to be likewise present. Doubtless we shall be able to hear all about the romantic marriage of Lady Rosevell's brother with the governess of her ladyship's children," she added, addressing Bertram.

Waldegrave laughed carelessly as he answered.

"How I regret," he said, "that I must be excluded from the delightful priviledge of listening to all the newest scandal with which you will be treated just a week hence."

"But why are you not going?" inquired Glencora.

"*You* will go?" nodding toward Mr. Rimmelton, who came their way at that moment, in search of a book of charades which he had that day brought home, and which he wished to show to Miss Willoughby.

He bowed.

"I am hoping to have that pleasure," he said. "Nothing but a material obstacle should ever prevent me from attending a kettle-drum, to which I have received an invitatiou. I really couldn't," he added, "afford to miss so much charming amusement."

Glencora turned, with playful deprecation, toward Bertram again.

"We cannot permit you to do otherwise than accompany us," she said, laughingly. "Indeed, I don't believe there's a shadow of pretext for your remaining away."

Waldegrave's shoulders contracted in the least possible shrug. He bowed gallantly, however, smilingly replying.

"Believe me," he said, "I, like Rimmelton, should not allow any obstacle but one of immense magnitude to prevent my attendance of so delightful and enlivening affair as a kettle-drum, particularly at Mrs. Vavasor's; but I learn by my friend, who called a little while ago, that it is not only necessary but imperative for me to return to London early tomorrow morning."

"How very provoking!" exclaimed Miss Chessom, with an annoyed little pout.

The banker, who was seated near, playing whist with Mr. Chesterton, looked up at his nephew, saying:

"This is really too bad, Bertram, that you are forced to leave us again just after your return."

"How long shall you remain in London?" inquired Mr. Chesterton.

"I don't purpose staying longer than two or three days," Waldegrave replied, so stiffly that Mr. Chesterton—as we shall call him for the present—noted the sudden change in the young man's manner, and wondered.

"But," added Bertram, turning and addressing his uncle again, "I regret to inform you that I shall be obliged to return from thence home."

Glencora Chessom gave a sudden start in spite of herself. She was well aware why Waldegrave had determined to leave Maplewood for good. If only they could persuade him to alter his determination, and remain? But no; he would not remain, she was certain, under the same roof with the woman whom he had loved and who had proven herself so false. But he *must not* leave Maplewood on the morrow. She would persuade him to stay just one day longer; and on that day Mabel should be ousted, she mentally declared. She would effect the orphan's speedy banishment from the house by informing her mother and grandfather of the latter's unwomanly and heartless conduct toward Bertram.

"Why, my dear boy," Mr. Chessom said in surprise, "this is a real disappointment. We expected you to remain some time longer." "Grace," he added, addressing Mrs. Chessom, who until that moment had been so engaged in conversation with Lady St. Ayvas as not to have heard Waldegrave's announcement of his sudden prospective departure, "Waldegrave leaves us for good, tomorrow!"

Mrs. Leigh Chessom looked up on hearing her father in law's words, with a face full of an expression that was more like a combination of disappointment and consternation than that which she endeavored to make it alone appear, of regretful surprise. She came forward, adding her persuasions to those of her daughter, for Bertram to remain.

But, though politely and sincerely expressing himself grieved at thus being forced to so suddenly and prematurely end his pleasant visit at Maplewood, he was firm in his resolve to leave early the ensuing morning.

Mabel Willoughby heard her lover thus calmly announce his intention of depart-

ing on the morrow; and Lady Winnifred beholding the rose-leaf tinting fade so suddenly out of her face, half rose, fearing that she was about to faint.

"May, dearest, you are ill, I fear," she murmured in tones too low to reach other ears than those of her friend. "Let me fetch you a glass of water from yonder carafe," she added in alarm, as Mabel caught nervously as if for support at the arm of the chair in which she was seated—"you look as it about to faint."

"No, no, dear Lady Winnifred," Mabel whispered in reply, "I am better now: it was but a momentary faintness, and I shall not be so foolish as to swoon," she added with a little poise of haughty pride to her graceful head. "I must, *I will* be calm," she thought desperately, and then turned to Mr. Rimmelton, who returned to her side at that moment, with a pleasant little smile, though it was a very forced one, and wreathed lips that trembled and were paler than wont.

Of course, general regret was felt and expressed that the banker's handsome relative and guest was about to leave Twickenham. Even Mr. Rimmelton, who had been horribly jealous of the rival whom, until now, he had believed the favored one, felt half inclined to be sorry that Waldegrave was really going away, the while he rejoiced that the field would then contain no other really formidable contestant for the lovely prize which he was striving to win, but which he felt, with a sort of uncomfortable uneasiness, as he thought of his father's heavily mortgaged estates at Morcombe, he could but ill afford to possess himself of. "Hang it!" he would mentally ejaculate, "why in the name of Creosus am I not like Waldegrave, rich enough to afford the luxury of such a dear little jewel of a penniless wife? Oh, dear! if love wasn't so much like lightning, or if I could have fallen in love with the coquettish Glencora, and won her, instead of making an idiot of myself by allowing my stupid head to be turned by the loveliness of her dowerless cousin. What the plague, I wonder, would the frater say if he knew what an imbecile I have become? But, confound it! what fellow's head is philosophical enough to remain unturned with the smiles of such an angel to bewilder it?"

CHAPTER XXX.

"For Love is like a careless child,
Forgetting promise past;
He is blind or deaf whene'er he list—
His faith is never fast."

—*Old Ballad.*

Half an hour later, when the hostess and most of her guests were occupied in looking over a pile of new music, and the host had resumed his whist playing with Mr. Chesterton, Waldegrave took advantage of the opportunity thus presented to slip away for a few moments. He wanted a breathing space, and rising he crossed over to a bow-window at the opposite end of the long room and stood looking out gloomily into the starlit February night.

Presently a soft touch fell on his arm, and a dulcet voice murmured: "Cousin Bertram!" and Bertram turned and looked into the enchanting black eyes of his cousin Glencora. "Are you taking a farewell look at Maplewood by starlight?" she inquired, pushing further aside the sapphire folds of the heavy velvet curtains and looking out also at the lovely, quiet scene. "We are all so very much disappointed that you are going away, so unexpectedly," she continued, adding: "But you will grant me just one favor ere you go, Bertram?" and she looked up at him almost pleadingly. She looked—oh, so marvelously fair, standing thus in the subdued half light, half shadow, her waxen fingers clasped lightly on his arm.

Waldgrave's eyes rested upon her in a sort of enchantment. He half forgot for the moment his incipient belief that all women were alike false and heartless, as he looked into the alluring eyes of this most coquettish and heartless of her sex.

"Grant you a favor, cousin Glencora?" he said, "I shall be most happy to do so, if it is at all possible."

She smiled winningly, dazzlingly.

"Then remain here at Maplewood just one day longer," she said, "just to please me, cousin Bertram."

A shadow of pain crossed his handsome face. Could he remain in the same house with Mabel Willoughby another day?

At that moment a sweet girlish voice floated in soft melody through the room. It was Mabel's birdish tones; she had been solicited to sing, and was singing the quaint, old song of the unreasonably jealous lover, beginning—

"How can she, how *can* she be other than true?
There is truth in her limpid eyes marvelous blue;
And yet, well I know she is falseness itself:
She will fling away love for a handful of wealth."

Waldegrave set his teeth hard and looked over at the group about the piano—looked over just in time to see Mr. Chesterton turn a page in Mabel's music, and to perceive the latter glance up into the pleasant, handsome face of the former with a bright smile that was unmistakably fond.

Mabel was brave and intensely proud, and, though the paleness that overspread her face at first gave place in her cheeks to a feverish glow of rich carnation, though her slender hands trembled a little, and to be calm and altogether her natural self cost her a desperate effort, she maintained her usual serenity heroically, and, when urged, sang without ever a tremor in her blithe, clear voice.

Did ever more truth, or love, or constancy shine forth from "limpid orbs of marvelous blue" than had looked out from Mabel's bright eyes that very night into those of Bertram Waldegrave? and now—oh! heartless, cruel, shameless!—she could sit, coolly singing that frivolous song, with Mr. Chesterton bending in tender devotion over her and returning sweetly, innocently, the fond glances which he bestowed upon her; and all this under the very eyes of the man whom she had deceived!

Waldegrave looked, and for the moment forgot the presence of the beautiful woman beside him—forgot the momentary enchantment he but just now, though not for the first time, experienced when looking into those superb, flashing eyes, when listening to the melodious music of her clear voice. And Glencora watched him, and devined the current of the thoughts that whirled through his brain with wonderful accuracy.

Again Mabel sang:

"So brightly enchanting, so wondrously fair,
Such fleckings of gold in her rippling hair.
Ah! fair, yet I know she too surely will prove
All false to her promise—all faithless to love."

Waldegrave turned away his head with savage abruptness, as if to thrust from his ears the sounds of the sweet voice which carolled so bewitchingly the quaint old ballad. He felt that he was becoming half maddened. No! he would not, could not remain here another day, even for the sake of a hundred enchanting cousins with bewitching black eyes and smiling ruby lips.

He remembered now that he must answer his cousin's request, and turned toward her, saying:

"My dear cousin, I am sorry, very sorry, that circumstances render it impossible for me to remain even one day longer here. I *must* deny myself that pleasure. Anything else," he added, "I will promise anything else."

Glencora bit her lip, replying coldly with heightened color: "There is another favor I would ask, cousin Bertram."

Then her vexation vanished, or she concealed it, and she spoke again with a sweet smile: "It is to obtain a promise that we shall not be deprived for a very long time of seeing you. We shall miss you so much, cousin Bertram, so very much; and we are all so sorry to lose you—Grandpapa is actually in despair."

Waldegrave looked again, with a mingling of odd sensations, into those singularly smiling eyes.

Almost any young man has vanity; very few young men are quite proof against all flattery; and here stood Glencora Chessom, the brilliant heiress of the rich banker's immense fortune, or at least of a magnificent portion of it, the coquettish rejectress of numberless suitors, the most courted, sought after young beauty anywhere in London or its environs; and she stood beside him—she who had trampled on the hearts of a hundred luckless swains—with her white hands clasped on his arm, her face lifted toward him and aglow with a radiance that must have been born of love.

She loved him—this proud, fair heiress. He knew it; for she scarcely strove to conceal her love. Well, and why not marry her and revenge Mabel, as he had at first resolved?

A miserable pang clutched his heart at the thought of wedding another than the gentle, loving little girl whom he had loved so dearly, and whose love and faith he had so trusted. Ah! how could she—how dared she deceive him so? He choked back a sigh that was nearer a sob, and detested himself for his weakness

He was proud—not guiltless of a little of masculine vanity, and out from amongst his misery and sickening disappointment his vanity made plaints of its wounds; and he vowed again to wed his cousin. A sudden impulse, born of pride, prompted him to then and there ask her to marry him; but the beautiful, dead idol, which in its sweet, brief reign he had so worshipped, lay cold and still in its desecrated temple; and his heart murmured sorrowfully, "Not now, not now; wait until this beautiful, dead thing is hidden, buried, if not forgotten."

And all the time Glencora was furtively watching him from beneath those white, silken-fringed lids.

He bethought himself presently, and strove to appear naturally, and hypocritically declared himself much disappointed that his visit must be thus summarily cut short, the while he felt like plunging madly out of Maplewood House, and away from Twickenham and Mabel Willoughby and everything that reminded him of her.

Directly he proposed joining the group at the piano, where Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas was now playing a lively *valse*.

Glencora reached up to toy lightly with the moss rose-bud, which, a few moments before, she had fastened in the button-hole of his coat. "Not until you have made me one promise," she declared playfully; "you know you have promised to grant any other request I may choose to ask."

He smiled, replying:

"Anything, as unreasonable as you please, my dear cousin, even if it be a request as unconscionable as that of the fair daughter of Herodias." His voice was so light and careless again that Miss Chessom wondered, as she had wondered before, if this perfect *nonchalence* was all a cover for the passionate heart-pain which he was striving to conceal.

"If so, he acts well," she thought, "and, in any case, he bears being jilted with marvelous fortitude; most men would have leaped into a frenzy, and stormed outrageously." She smiled up brightly at him.

"My request shall not be at all an unreasonable one," she declared sweetly; though, inwardly, she would not have disrelished saying: "Give me here Mabel Willoughby's head in a charger," had the prospect of the fulfillment of her request been as probable as was that of the belle of King Herod's birthday *fete*. "Promise me that within three months you will return to Twickenham."

Waldegrave started. What if Mabel were still at Maplewood at the expiration of that period? It took so long usually for young ladies to have their trousseau gotten up, and other preparations for their nuptials completed. It might be a good while before Miss Willoughby became Mrs. Chesterton. But he had heard Mr. Chesterton a few days previous announcing his intention of visiting Paris in the month of June with a number of acquaintances who were going thither; and before that time would he not be likely to wed his lovely bride, and take her there first on their bridal tour?

Something clutched savagely at poor Bertram's heart strings at the thought; but he hoped, nevertheless, that it might be so; for here stood his handsome cousin, who was actually making love to him, smiling up into his face. And he was bound to make the promise which she craved. So he did so, replying with elegant gallantry to the flattering desire of the young heiress; and touched his lips to her white, jewelled hand; then they crossed the drawing room.

Mrs. Chessom was speaking of her son as Bertram and Glencora came over and sat down near the piano.

Lady Winnifred had just ceased playing the enlivening German *valse*, and the hostess was saying to Lady St. Ayvas: "Dear Jarvis, that charming thing was such an immense favorite of his. He first heard it played by dear Lady Winnifred last autumn, and he really seemed quite entranced while listening." "Dear fellow," she added, "I am really growing quite impatient to see him; and I am sure I shall never forgive that horrid Polsdon for detaining him in Wales so long. Why, he promised me most faithfully to return by the last of January, if not earlier, and this—why, this is the eighth of February; it is quite too bad."

Mr. Chessom, whose game of whist with Mr. Chesterton was now terminated by the defeat of the former, turned from the whist table, remarking:

'Ah! I had forgotten until just now to tell you something astonishing, which I heard to-day. I think you will find my bit of news infinitely more surprising and interesting than anything you will be likely to hear at Mrs. Vavasor's kettle-drum." "Your speaking of Wales,'

he added, addressing his daughter-in-law, "reminds me of the affair." "Doubtless," he continued, "we all distinctly remember how suddenly our agreeable guest, Lady Birdetta Rozenthall, decided to leave us, and visit a friend at Snowden. Well, her ladyship went to Wales, not, as I learn, so particularly to visit her friend as to seek out a daughter whom, until the past few weeks, she has believed to have died in early childhood; and this daughter of her Ladyship's is by a former marriage, about which, until within the same limited space of time, the world has known nothing."

Unbounded astonishment was felt and exhibited at this revelation by all. Glencora exclaimed:

"Really! a romance—an out and out, charming romance! How delightful! Pray proceed, grandpapa—who was her ladyship's former husband?"

"His name, I believe," continued Mr. Chessom, "was Wylde—Reginald Wylde. He was a physician, and quite poor; and very much disfavored by Sir Montford Windham—her ladyship's father. Lady Birdetta, who was then simply Birdetta Montfort, was from infancy looked upon as the wife prospective of her cousin Hugh, who, being an only son, at his father's death succeeded to the latter's wealth and title.

The young lord—I have a distinct remembrance of him—was bluff and plain, almost rude in his manners, besides being insufferably conceited; in fact, he was anything but a lady's hero; and at seventeen her ladyship met this young Wylde, who, being a surgeon as well as a physician, was, upon occasion of the former sustaining a severe accident by being thrown from a carriage, summoned to attend her. Of course the young fellow was unfortunate enough to fall in love with the fair Birdetta; and she, who had been kept somewhat in seclusion all her life, returned his affection fully, and contrasted him with her wealthy cousin—almost the only young gentleman whom she had known hitherto—in a manner not exactly flattering to his youthful lordship.

In some way or other the baronet got wind of the young people's incipient attachment, and was terribly angry. He suspected them of meeting secretly, after having forbidden their meeting under any circumstance, which suspicion it seems was unjust; and, more angry than ever, he locked his daughter in her apartments.

The girl grew weary of her imprisonment, and the strictness of both her parent and affianced, and after a while, escaping, eloped with young Wylde. They were married secretly, and went immediately to Germany. The young man, I believe, was of English and German parentage. The affair was not allowed to gain the least publicity; it was given out by the baronet himself that his daughter had gone to make a long visit with relatives in the south of France; and when, a few weeks later, Sir Montfort and his nephew left England in search of the fugitives, no one so much as suspected their errand.

For five years, I am told, their search proved unavailing; but one day at Leydon the young lord was taken suddenly ill, and a physician was sent for.

Doctor Wylde came, and the baronet, as well as his nephew, at once recognized him. It seems, however, that the recognition was not mutual; Wylde had no conception of who his patient was; or that Hubert Rose—that was the name under which his lordship travelled—was his old rival.

Lord Rozenthall rapidly recovered, and managed not to lose sight of his cousin's husband. One day, in public, his lordship took occasion to insult the young physician, who replied by dashing in the face of the former a glass of wine. Of course, a duel was the upshot of the affair; and his lordship, who was a fine swordsman, succeeded in mortally wounding his antagonist.

Mrs. Wylde was then visited by her father and cousin, who informed her of their resolve to take her back to England. Her ladyship was quite passive, I am told, seeming to have sunk into a state of almost imbecility.

She must have suffered cruelly, being doubly bereaved, for her eldest child, a boy of four years, was also taken from her, dying suddenly on the very night that her husband was killed. Her remaining child, a little girl, Sir Montfort brought with them on their return to England, scarcely knowing how to dispose of it at the time.

After her return to England Mrs. Wylde was taken terribly ill, and for many weeks was not expected to survive from one hour to another. She recovered, however, and was informed by her father that her little girl had died

during her illness. She received the intelligence without the slightest outward signs of emotion, merely inquiring where the child was interred. She was shown a mound somewhere in a secluded part of the grounds. This grave, over which her ladyship has spent so many hours of agony, is now believed to be an artificial one; at all events, her ladyship will as soon as possible have this proven by causing it to be opened.

His lordship still desired wedding his cousin, and so the marriage was consummated something like a year after Lady Birdetta's return to England.

Her ladyship's daughter, I am told, was taken to Wales and placed in care of an old woman who had once been a servant in Sir Montfort's household, and then lived something like a mile or two from Cwymdaron—the little town in which Charlie Polsdon met with the accident that detained him there for so many days, last autumn. The little girl is now nearly or quite fifteen years of age, and all requisite proofs of her identity have been obtained. Sir Carter Daneslea, who was my informant, was told the whole story by Lady Birdetta herself. Her ladyship is just arrived in London. In a day or two, doubtless, we shall have a minute account of the affair in the London papers, with facts, proofs and embellishments," concluded Mr. Chessom.

"Poor Lady Birdetta," said Lady Winnifred to Mabel; "what a sad story."

Mabel replied sorrowfully:

"Sad, indeed. What terrible torture all those years have been to her."

"Oh, dear me; it was dreadful, of course," said Miss Chessom, in reply to the sympathetic remarks uttered by Lady St. Ayvas, and the former's mother; "and it's no wonder her ladyship became a stiff petrifaction; I think I should have gone mad. But this young girl, her ladyship's daughter," she added, "has she not been brought up very rudely among the boorish peasantry of Wales?

"Doubtless," responded her grandfather; "but two or three years of Parisian education and accomplishments will be certain to efface all traces of hoydenism."

Glencora shrugged her shoulders.

"If I were in her ladyship's place I should be careful that the world saw her not, until after the refining process had been gone through with," she said with a laugh.

"The little girl is very beautiful, Sir Carter informs me," said Mr. Chessom, "and, he declares, infinitely more graceful in manner than are many of the daughters of our aristocracy at that awkward age."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Our hands have met, but not our hearts;
Our hands will never meet again.
Friends, if we have ever been,
Friends we cannot now remain.
I only know I loved you once,
I only know I loved in vain;
Our hands have met, but not our hearts;
Our hands will never meet again.
—*Thomas Hood.*

It were difficult to say which strove most heroically to appear unconcerned and indifferent to each other that night, Mabel or Bertram. Both succeeded, however, the only fault being that the unconcernedness of each was just a little too perfect.

As Waldegrave found it necessary to start at an early hour on the morning ensuing, good-by's were said that night before the hour for retiring.

Mabel had at first resolved to excuse herself, on the plea of weariness, and slip away from the drawing-room before that ordeal should take place. Then she thought, proudly:

"No, for he will think that I have gone because I have not courage to remain. He shall see; he shall believe that I do not care enough to do anything but despise him. Oh! how cruel—how base and cruel he is!"

"And so we must bid good-bye to you to-night, dear Bertram," said Mrs. Chessom; "we are very sorry to lose you."

Mrs. Chessom spoke the truth; she was exceeding sorry that Waldegrave was about to depart. For many years she had been scheming for an alliance between this rich young heir of the aristocratic Waldegrave's of Falmouth and her daughter, when they should have become old enough for a union. Now that the time had arrived this determination became fixed in the lady's mind.

It is needless to tell our readers that Mrs. Chessom had felt a vague terror of their rich colonial guest ever since his first appearance at Maplewood.

This terror, she endeavored to assure herself, was but mere silliness. Again and again she told herself that Lancelot Chesterton was not—could not be—Leigh Chessom, her step-sister's husband; the man whose dead wife's place

she had wickedly usurped, whose children's name and rights her own son and daughter were enjoying. No, no, it could not be. Leigh was surely dead. If he were living, and this was he, would he not have revealed his identity before this? It was a very common thing for people to resemble other people to whom they were not at all relative; and after all there was nothing wonderful in the fact that Mr. Chesterton was much like what she thought Leigh would have been had he lived to be five-and-forty years of age, with his dark chestnut hair grown just a perceptible shade darker, and threaded here and there with silver.

And yet, after all this very sound reasoning, Mrs. Chessom's mind was far from being at ease. She had manœuvered hard, of late, to bring about this alliance between the son of Mr. Chessom's niece and her fair daughter; had treated Mabel, the real heiress, with marked coldness, because she saw that Waldegrave was falling—if he, indeed, had not already fallen—in love with her.

"She shall not remain here another week," declared the angry lady mentally, not more than two hours previous to Waldegrave's announcement of his projected leave of Twickenham.

"She shall go back to Ambleside, or anywhere, so long as she is too far away for meddling. Bertram *must* wed Glencora. She is so beautiful; surely he soon must learn to love her; and this childish May, for whom he seems to have taken a foolish, fleeting fancy, she shall be removed, and he will speedily forget her, and be able to discover that he *loves*—not merely fancies—my daughter. And then, after they are betrothed, whatever happens, Bertram will be too honorable to ignore her.

And Jarvis—Oh! why does he not return and wed Lady Winnifred? They are poor now; but old Colonel Fairleigh will die some day, I suppose, and then they will be enriched; and if anything occurs"—Mrs. Chessom shivered nervously—"it will be for the credit of all to have the affair blazoned as little as possible. If this Mr. Chesterton be really Grace's husband returned from the dead, why does he not reveal himself? But Heaven grant that during the delay—whatever it be for—I may see my children advantageously wedded; and then, I think, I could bear the rest."

Thus ran Mrs. Chessom's thoughts while gracefully doing the duties of hostess at dinner that evening; and now, at the thought of his departing—not to return for at least months—her heart sank involuntarily within her.

"But cousin Bertram has promised to visit us again in, at least, three months," exclaimed Glencora gaily; "and, assured of that, we shall not languish during the interim."

'Indeed," said her mamma, smiling; "then I am sure we shall wait with impatience the elapse of that time."

Inwardly her heart whispered portentiously—"Three months, oh! what direful things may not occur long ere their expiration?"

Waldegrave shook hands all around; to avoid being noticed by others, he even condescended to touch his finger tips to the hand which Mr. Chesterton cordially extended toward him; but his manner was so chilling that that gentleman drew back in indignant astonishment, and expressed no regret at parting. Lady Winnifred's farewell to him was formal and quite cold. She was quite convinced that he was acting dishonorable toward Mabel, and just now, he was very much lowered in her, hitherto, really high opinion of him. Miss Chessom's just perceptible smile was hidden behind her filmy handkerchief, as Waldgrave, having shaken hands with all the rest, stepped toward Mabel, saying:

"Good-bye, Miss Willoughby."

"If she would only faint, or do something equally absurd and ridiculous now," thought the amiable Glencora; but she was somewhat surprised, though scarcely more so than was Mabel herself, at the latter's calm, icy demeanor.

Waldegrave spoke and extended his hand with cold, haughty constraint.

Mabel, appearing not to notice the outstretched hand of her *fiancee*, her own hands were full of the sheets of music which she was arranging, simply replied, in a voice of cool indifference:

"Good-night and good-by, Mr. Waldegrave."

Then she turned, with a smile that was heroically bright, toward Mr. Chesterton, remarking serenely—

"Ah, here is the brilliant song which you so much admire, 'Esmeralda,' and your favorite sonata—that lovely thing of Haydn's composition. The latter I will play for you to-morrow: but Lady Winnifred can do 'Esmeralda' much better justice, I think," and she turned toward the latter, saying:

"You sing this fashionable song divinely, Lady Winnifred; you will favor us all, will you not, by singing it to-morrow for"—for papa, she was about to have said, but she stopped herself and added, with a blush—

"For Mr. Chesterton, in my stead?"

Lady Winnifred smilingly, assented, adding—"And yet, I dare say, Mr. Chesterton will deem my rendering of it less excellent than your own, May."

Mr. Chesterton smiled.

"Impossible, your ladyship," he said; "your singing is not less excellent than anything; there is in your voice such vast compass, such ring and sparkle, and withal such power and sweetness that a surpassing voice would be difficult to find. May is right," he added, "in her opinion that you sing with more striking effect such brilliant songs as this," pointing to the richly illustrated sheet of music which Mabel held; "there is not the splendor in her voice which characterizes your own; and yet, May's voice is so clear and sweet, and so perfectly adapted to the caroling of those simpler, yet none the less sweet gems of song, that it were difficult, after all, to decide by which of you one is most charmed and delighted."

Thus chatted those three, and then general good-nights were exchanged and the household retired for the night.

Mr. Chessom was puzzled, even displeased, that two of his most honored guests—Lady St. Ayvas' beautiful and charming daughter, and Mr. Chesterton—for whom the banker's feelings were those of warm, fast-growing friendship—should so coldly and indifferently part with his agreeable and entertaining nephew and guest, Bertram Waldegrave. The banker had not perceived that the coldness between Waldegrave and Chesterton was the fault of the former; but he had remarked how frigidly their fingertips had met, and that Mr. Chesterton—though Bertram had contributed much to the entertainment and pleasure of all—offered not the smallest regret at losing him, though they had seemingly regarded each other in a manner most friendly hitherto.

Then the cool formality of Lady Winnifred—and Mabel—Mr. Chessom was really annoyed at what he afterward declared to his *protege* was absolute rudeness on her part.

That his nephew regarded May with feelings of more than ordinary friendship Mr. Chessom was very certain, and though her brother's supposed crime had stained their name, yet, in his heart, the banker could not regret that his handsome young relative loved the orphan sufficiently to one day make her his bride, and thus insure her protection from the cold glances and politely worded insults which the arrogant and unfeeling in their circle bestowed upon her with such polished insolence.

Of Ernest's dishonor Mr. Chessom would fain have kept the world in ignorance, but his grand-daughter had given the story full circulation; and the banker's clerk was regarded by the banker's friends as a most dishonorable and basely ungrateful youth: and the cold shoulder was turned very relentlessly upon his sister.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Our lives seem all a mist, and in the dark
Our fortunes meet us —*Dryden.*

We will now return to Ernest Willoughby and his friend Fairleigh. The latter found Ernest in London, where he was busy with preparations for his journey to Canada.

"By Jove!" Harvey exclaimed, "of course you're in a scrape, and all that; but you'll come out all right in the end. I'm sure of it; innocence always does; and this journey of which you're talking is a deucedly pleasant thing to contemplate. What do you say to a *compagnon de voyage?*"

"That I shall be delighted, if you intend becoming my fellow traveller; will you go?"

Harvey nodded: "If the pater's agreeable, yes," he said.

"Have you business which will detain you here much longer?" inquired he.

"No, nothing of moment," Ernest replied.

"Then suppose you accompany me to Lancaster, and our united persuasions will be the more successful in getting a consent from my worthy progenitor? We shall have plenty of time for a day or two's stay at Fairleigh House before going to Liverpool."

To this arrangement Ernest, after a moment's deliberation, acquiesced, and on the morning ensuing the young men started for Lancaster. Harvey rattled and talked on, after his usual gay fashion, during the journey.

"Don't look doleful, man alive," he exclaimed, after several ineffectual efforts

to dispel Ernest's moodiness by his own merry nonsense.

"It's a confoundedly scaly trick they've played you, old boy; but I've a sort of premonition that, in the end of it, all will turn out nobly. You'll amass a pile in Canada, or some rich old chap—like my uncle Fairleigh, for instance—he has promised a clumsy, scrubby old writing desk as his legacy to me; but it's a curious old affair, for which I always had a sort of admiration, and its older than any hill in the vicinity: served as a cabinet for a certain ancestor of mine during the conquest, said ancestor being distinguished for a marvelous amount of what my father designates pride and warlike bravery; but, by all I learn of the revered individual, his vaunted pride was much like arrogance, and his bravery another name for a sort of merciless fierceness: but, however, his writing-desk eventually will descend to me from uncle, and uncle's fortune goes, I suppose, to Aunt St. Ayvas and cousin Winnifred. But I haven't the slightest doubt that you'll be rich as Creesus some of these days, and, though you don't believe it, I can positively tell fortunes capitally by cards; and remember what I told you last autumn, that you were to be wealthy, and honored, and famous, and all the rest of it, before you were many years older. It will all come out correctly, or I'm a muff and no prophet. As I began to say, you'll make a fortune in Canada, or somebody 'll will you a castle and wealth to keep it up, or something as unexpected as fortunate will occur to make amends for the present difficulties, as sure as fate."

Ernest smiled and endeavored to be himself, and to shake off as much as possible his gloom and abstraction.

The society of his gay companion was enlivening, and by the time they reached Lancaster and Fairleigh House, Harvey, with much satisfaction, declared him quite metamorphosed from the downhearted, gloomily inclined young fellow whom he had sought out in Soho Square.

There were times, though, when Ernest would have given much to escape for a few hours from the society of those genial friends, the inmates of Fairleigh House, and to be alone, for a season, with his own mournfully brooding thoughts. But it was better that the Judge and his gay family so engrossed his time and attention during his stay as scarcely to grant him thinking space of ten consecutive minutes in the course of each day.

Harvey's three sisters, Agnace, Blanche and Ada, were lively, good-natured demoiselles, who took pains to assist in rendering the visit of their brother's friend an agreeable one, and to make him, for the time, at least, forgetful of the painful events of the past few weeks.

It is the evening of the fourth day since Ernest's arrival at Lancaster whereof we write.

All that day, Ernest had felt more than usually depressed and disheartened; but he strove to surmount the feeling, and appeared so lively and agreeable that the Misses Fairleigh were deceived into the belief that their handsome guest would, as Harvey expressed it, "get all over this soreness in a few days."

The dim shadow of twilight was settling, with slowly increasing deepness over the earth, when Willoughby escaped from the drawing-room out under a great shadowy portico, and sat down with a long drawn breath, looking out abstractedly at the dim, gray gardens where a few crocuses slept after having peeped forth all day, telling of rapidly approaching spring.

It was the evening of the 28th of February, and on the next morning Ernest and Harvey were to start for Liverpool, from whence the vessel bound for Canada was shortly to sail.

A few short days and he should leave England forever.

Forever! A strong pang smote his heart at the thought. The beautiful face—pale and sorrowful as he had seen it last—of Lady Winnifred rose up before him. How like saddest, sweetest music her last, trusting words still sounded in his ears.

Oh! he would give worlds to see her again—to hold her again in his arms for just one brief moment.

There was a footstep, and Ernest turned as a servant who had been searching for him approached bringing with him a telegram which, with a bow, he presented to his master's guest.

It was from Twickenham, and ran as follows:

"Return to Maplewood without fail, and at once. All is cleared up.

PHILLIP CHESSOM."

Ernest read it twice, thrice, and then sat half dazed and bewildered for several

minutes. Presently Harvey came in search of him.

"Oh, here you are," he exclaimed, as he came suddenly upon him; "but what on earth's the matter, man?—what's happened?"

"Harvey, I am not going to Canada after all?"

Harvey heard this reply, and gave a stare and a long whistle.

"The—deuse you're not?" he queried; and why this sudden change, my friend?"

For reply Ernest gave him the telegram.

Harvey read it twice over and then exhibited his delight by giving his friend's hand a tremendous shaking.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he cried. "I knew you'd come out all right after al; but I wonder, won't they feel somewhat ashamed of having accused an honest man of committing a theft? By jove! I've a mind to return with you; I'm in a hurry to hear what explanation Mr. Chessom will offer."

"Come back with me, by all means," Ernest urged, "since we are not going to Canada together, at least, not speedily."

"Too bad, altogether too bad!" growled Harvey with a sort of momentary ruefulness. "Just think of the amount of eloquence which it took to convince the frater that, in the present depressed state of finances, he could afford, and really ought to offer no remonstrances against what he termed my whim, mere whim, of spending a year or two in Canada; and now its all up—ugh!"

"Never mind, Harvey," soothed Earnest; "after all, we may go to Canada in a month or so."

Poor Earnest, within the last few moments, had grown to take a far more hopeful view of things. It was all cleared up—this horrible affair of the stolen six hundred pounds, so said that brief telegram; and there was something now worth living and striving for.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

We will now return to the night on which Bertram bade adieu to the Chessom household.

It was late, past twelve o'clock, and yet the banker's nephew found it impossible to sleep; indeed, he didn't go to bed at all, but wandered from his chamber after a while, out into one of the great corridors, and flung himself into a seat by a window that overlooked the bare, dim copse of maples, and drew about him the crimson folds of the heavy Utrecht velvet draperies. He rested his head upon his hand, and looked out moodily with a sigh upon the moonlit scene before him.

Half an hour passed, and still the young man sat, his pale face whiter, gloomier than ever in the palid glory of the moonlight.

At length a light noise in the corridor arrested his attention, and he determined to listen.

Two little white hands parted the flowing curtains, and Mabel, his betrothed, stood before him.

Mabel, enveloped in a white cashmere dressing-gown, with her golden hair floating over her shoulders, and her sweet face spirit-like in its pure palor.

"Mabel!"

"Mr. Waldegrave!" burst simultaneously from the lips of those most oddly estranged lovers.

The former turned, and would have fled; but a sudden impulse, involuntary and uncontrolable, induced her fiancee to spring forward, detaining her by laying his hand upon her arm.

Those two pale, excited faces silently confronted each other for a moment, and then, in low, suppressed tones, full of anger and pain, Bertram spoke

He reproached her, calling her cruel, heartless, false.

Reproaches from his lips! how dared he utter words like those to her? What effrontery he possessed.

She withdrew the beautiful betrothal ring, with its exquisite setting of pearl and diamond from her finger, remarking with a quiet scorn that maddened him:

"Your ring, Mr. Waldegrave," extending it toward him; "I purposed sending it to you by one of the servants in the morning."

He hesitated, and, bending forward, she laid the bauble on the window-sill,

"Adieu, Mr. Waldegrave, I wish you all the future happiness and success which you merit," she said. She turned, but again he stayed her.

"Mabel, there is—there must be—a mistake. Oh! Mabel—" but he was fiercely, haughtily checked.

"Release me, sir, instantly," she exclaimed: "how dare you? Yes, there has been a mistake: I was credulous enough to believe you—to trust you as I

wou'd trust a man of honour. It was I who was mistaken."

Again he essayed to speak, saying excitedly:

"Mabel, explain for the love of heaven—there is a mistake."

But she swept away from him with a scornful gesture; and Bertram, in the excess of his anger, snatched up from the window sill the lovely little ring which he had placed on Mabel's finger, as a pledge of their troth that night, and flung it from him. It struck one of the walls far down the corridor, and Mabel heard its sharp ring as she laid her hand on the handle of the door which led to her own little suite of apartments.

She had been grieved and deeply offended by her lover's seemingly extraordinary and dishonorable conduct; but this audacious piece of acting was an addition of insult to what was already insult and injury combined.

Unable to sleep, she had left her chamber and sought the bow window in the corridor, all unconscious that its velvet cushioned seat held another restless occupant. She would have surrendered all the Titian gold curls that rippled over her shoulders *not* to have had this *rencontre* taken place. He—this false lover of hers—would know *why* she was wandering restlessly about at this hour: and so base, so contemptible was he she thought, that he would triumph.

"Papa, dear papa," she murmured, with hot tears of pain and indignation blinding her, as she reached her chamber and threw herself again upon her couch; "if only you knew how basely your little girl has been deceived by the man you so highly esteem.

She dashed away the burning drops, and rising crossed over to her bright, gracefully draped mirror.

"Thank heaven!" she exclaimed proudly, "my turn to triumph will come next. What will you say, Bertram Waldegrave, when you learn that you have deceived, insulted—not your uncle's humble protege, but his grand daughter, and a far richer heiress than you have believed haughty, heartless Glencora to be."

Until now Mabel had never thought of the great triumph, which in a day or two would be hers, as a triumph. Indeed, she had felt very sorry for the pain and shame, however well merited, that must come to the woman who had passed as her father's wife and her children, when happiness, a proud name and wealth came to her.

"But why need I care?" she asked herself, gazing at her fair reflection in the silver-frosted mirror "They are all so cruel, so selfish; would they pity me were the tables turned? No, indeed. And this woman—this step-sister of my mother, having stolen my brother's birthright and mine, that her own son and daughter might possess them, could she not, at least, have treated the two whom she had so deeply wronged with justice in other matters? But how true it is that we always hate those whom we have injured. Was it not her suspicions, subtly worded, which first induced my grandfather to cherish doubts of Ernest's honor? Yes, and why should I grieve for the downfall of a trio so cruel, so utterly, entirely selfish and heartless. Even Jarvis, of whom, for all his wildness and frivolousness, I had believed better things, is cowardly enough to allow a good, honorable man to suffer for a crime which he has himself committed; and yet, somehow, this seems to me unlike Jarvis. Who knows but that he may not have received grandpapa's letter containing the information of Ernest's dismissal from Maplewood?"

And while Mabel, with a vengeful feeling, unusual in her loving, gentle little heart, now so full of pain and bitter disappointment and distrust that it was growing for the time hard and unloving, triumphed in the knowledge that a disclosure was speedily coming which would cause Bertram Waldegrave, who was *her* cousin, *not* Glencora's, to be dumbfounded and ashamed; which would bring the frivolous votaries of fashion and wealth, who now politely snubbed or ignored her, fluttering around her, which would bring a whole retinue of wealthy suitors to her feet, paying her court and ready to offer her wealth uncounted and coronets innumerable; and she thought contemptuously: Perhaps Bertram would have the audacity to come, metamphorically, to her feet again. She smiled bitterly. If so, she would laugh him to scorn.

While all this was passing through her aching heart and throbbing, whirling brain, Bertram, having gone back to his chamber, paced savagely to and fro there, half beside himself with pain and anger. For a moment, looking into the pure face of his betrothed, as she confronted him, in the soft moonlight—that

face so full of reproach; the clear eyes so innocent, with such depths of quiet scorn looking up at him from beneath their golden brown lashes, he had felt inclined to discredit his own senses to believe that there was some mistake, which she could explain. But he told himself now that he was an utter idiot to trust her again for a single moment. All this anger, these reproachful glances were affected; she was a most consummate actress. How *could* she find an excuse for receiving the kisses and embraces which with his own eyes he had seen Chesterton bestowing upon her? How could she—his promised wife?

Had either confessed to the other his or her falseness and penitence, the probability is that the other's forgiveness would have been given; though all thought of love and their brief betrothal must have been, in consequence, relinquished; but this evident acting on the part of each was alike maddening to each.

Were ever two hearts more deceived in each other?

At Maplewood House that night, as for many previous nights, there were others than the estranged lovers who found it impossible to sleep. Restless hours and disturbed dreams visited the banker oftener of late than healthful repose.

It is needless to add that it was chiefly dreams of Ernest which worried him. Sometimes he dreamed that he was on shipboard, and in a moment of anger, had flung his clerk overboard into the surging ocean; and later, when looking remorsefully over into the waves, two white, acusing faces looked up at him from out of the spray—two faces nearly alike: but one was the face of his clerk and the other that of his long-lost son Leigh: and each reproached him as their destroyer.

Mrs. Willoughby as we shall henceforth designate the lady who has so long passed as the widow of the banker's son, was visited by dreams scarcely more refreshing. At times she was flying over rocks and through muddy pools—fleeing from Leigh Chessom, or Mr. Chesterton, who had assumed gigantic propertions, and was savagely pursuing her. At others she fancied he had captured her and was about flinging his victim over a yawning precipice where, far below, she could see and hear horrid inky water bubbling and seething furiously; and where he had already thrown the fair Glencora; and while the mother thus dreamed, her daughter paced her chamber, or tossed on her pillow, and murmured angrily the name of the girl whose place she had unconsciously usurped.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FULL CONFESSION.

It is a long time since we have written a word of Jarvis Chessom, whom we will now call Jarvis Willoughby and his protege, Birdie Wylde.

Jarvis reached Wales and the little town of Cwmdarran after a tiresomely rough journey. Altogether "too deusedly jaded," he afterwards informed his friend Polsdon, to continue his journey to the latter's bachelor establishment without stopping at the "Lion" for a few days rest.

On reaching the above mentioned establishment near night-fall of one blustery winter day he was shown into the parlour whose dinginess reminded him familiarly of his former visit, and the landlord and his wife were as odd—"odder," Jarvis declared, than ever.

Supper gotten up in a style more elaborate than was ordinarily afforded at the little inn, was placed before our traveller: and after doing justice that was ample to the carefully prepared viands he lounged for a few hours before the blazing fire, smoking, reading and soliloquizing alternately.

"I will go over to the cottage to-morrow morning, that is, if I don't happen to lie in bed until noon," he thought.

"Won't Birdie's bright eyes dance when she beholds me this unexpectedly. How singularly beautiful she is; and if she is *really* her ladyship's daughter what a sensation there will be among her ladyship's friends. By jove! there ought to be a romance at the end of the affair. What if I, who first discovered the lovely waif, should be mad enough to fall in love with her? I can see those calm, dark eyes of Lady Birdetta's fairly dilating at a proposal of anything so preposterous; and who could blame her. Her ladyship would never consent to her daughter's wedding a scapegrace like myself, however wealthy he might be; she is no Lady St. Ayvas."

"And yet," he said to himself oddly, "there are worse fellows after all than I; and an angel, or at any rate a good woman such as Birdie is sure to develope into, might, were she to wed me, be the

making of me; but, good heavens! what a downright fool I'm growing to be."

On the following morning Jarvis, at quite an early hour, for all his natural indolence, and the slight fatigue occasioned by his journey, arose, and, after breakfast, drove over to the Gimp cottage in a vehicle owned by the landlord of the "Lion," which conveyance, Jarvis mentally commented, was as queer and stiff, and the animal which drew it, as wheezy as its worthy proprietor.

The winter day was cold and bright and frosty; and handsome Jarvis looked handsomer than ever in his heavy fur wrappings, with a healthful glow overspreading his fine face; and his dark eyes were brighter, with more of animation in them than was wont.

Birdie Wylde, looking out over the bright, sunlit winter landscape, saw her hero, of whom she had dreamed night and day, since his departure from Cwmdaron, approaching the cottage, and uttered a cry of delight.

"Lor' sakes! my dear young lady, what's the matter?" inquired Mrs. Gimp, looking up in surprise from the linsey gown which she was making for herself. Mrs. Gimp always addressed Birdie as "my dear young lady," or "Miss Birdie." Perhaps that undefinable, yet nevertheless unmistakeable 'something' which characterized the peasant girl's manner, that "repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere," impressed the good woman, or she had a sort of preconception, strengthened by the certainty that a mystery of some kind was connected with the latter's birth, telling her that 'Miss Birdie' was a lady.

At any rate she treated the young girl with the same deference which she would have maintained towards her had she been the acknowledged daughter and heiress of Lady Birdetta Rozenthal.

Birdie flew from the window at which she had been standing, toward the outer door, exclaiming joyfully in reply to Gimp's interrogative:

"Mr. Chessom—he is coming!" and she ran out to meet him.

Jarvis alighted, responding heartily to her shy glad greeting, after which his first comment was:

"So you've grown a lovelier Birdie than ever, haven't you, little girlie?"

"By Jove!" he mentally ejaculated, "What a glorious woman she will make. Even her ladyship could never have been quite so beautiful I think."

Together they entered the cottage and the little parlor where Gimp was seated at work. She arose with a curtsey on Master Jarvis' entrance, which was repeated profoundly as the latter flung his riding gloves on the floor, and extended his hand toward her.

The old woman remained long enough to assure the young gentleman of the 'pride and 'appiness' which was hers at being honored with the privilege of again entertaining him, and to make numerous inquiries concerning the welfare of all at Maplewood, and then hurried from the little room to make some preparations for the guest whom she delighted to entertain, thus leaving Jarvis to chat undisturbed with his protege.

"Have you enjoyed yourself since I left here, Birdie?" Jarvis inquired presently.

"Yes sir, very much, only I was foolish enough to fear that I should never see you again, and sometimes I could not help feeling oh! so very lonely," Birdie answered *naively*.

Jarvis smiled.

"And you would really miss me enough to feel very lonely if you were never to see me again, Birdie?" he said, looking down at her.

"Oh! Mr. Chessom."

The words, and the accompanying clause, was a reply quite eloquent enough, and Jarvis smiled at her ingenuousness.

"Well Birdie," he said, I'm sorry you were troubled with the fear that we shouldn't meet again; and yet I should'nt like you to have given me one less thought, or to have wished less to see me, for perhaps you know the lines:

"'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming, and look brighter when we come."

"I am selfish enough Birdie, to wish you to be always lonely when I am not near you."

"Oh! I am sure I shall always be that; for how could I help it?" she answered softly.

And then Jarvis remembered that his left arm encircled Birdie's slender waist, that he had kissed her white forehead tenderly, that all this was very like genuine love-making and that he was "making an idiot of himself;" and he released her, saying, "I've something of importance to tell you Birdie, so listen." And Birdie listened.

"A lady will visit you in a few days, Birdie," Jarv. began; a lady who is al-

most certain that she once knew your parents."

Birdie's eyes dilated with astonishment and delight.

"Oh Mr. Chessom, is it possible?" she exclaimed eagerly; "pray tell me who is this lady?"

"A widow lady of wealth and high rank; by name, Lady Birdetta Rozenthal," answered Jarvis.

"Birdetta!" said Birdie in surprise; "how singular that her name should be the same as my own."

"You may learn things much stranger ere long, Birdie," he said with a smile; and just then Mrs. Gimp's footsteps were heard approaching the door.

"Oh! Gimpy," cried Birdie, as the good woman appeared; "what do you think Mr. Chessom has just been telling me?—Why there is a lady—a real lady, who is coming here to tell me about my papa and mamma; for she is nearly certain of having once known them."

"Gracious! Master Jarv, is this so? or is Miss Birdie so glad to see you that it's made her a little flighty?" enquired Gimp, who, though she was certain that her charge was of far finer clay than the peasantry with whom she had been reared, was not quite prepared to understand how a "real lady" should ever deem it worth her while to visit homeless, nameless Birdie for the purpose of enlightening her upon the subject of her birth.

"All a fact, my good Gimpy!" Jarv's answered with a laugh; "and Miss Birdie's joy at my return has not caused her wits to stray."

He was interrupted by Birdie, who gravely asked:

"Do you know, Mr. Chessom, if his lady can tell me if my parents are living, and if so, where they now reside, and why they never have claimed me? Surely they could not have loved me, to cast me off thus."

"Lady Birdetta," Jarv replied, "believes your mother to be yet living, but not your father; and if she is right, as I am certain she is, you were taken from your mother by those to whose interest it was to part you from her; and your parent was led to believe you dead."

"Oh! cruel, who could ever have committed such a wicked act?" Birdie exclaimed, with horror and indignation.

"I am not at liberty to particularize, Birdie," Jarv answered; "so you must muster patience to wait until her ladyship's arrival, which will be in a few days, at most."

And so Birdie waited, though it can scarcely be said with patience.

A week passed, and every day Jarvis rode over to the cottage; and every day he grew more in love, though insensibly so, with his protege, while she, as the time passed, grew to worship her hero yet more devoutly.

One evening, just seven days subsequent to Jarvis' arrival, Birdie, who had just returned to the cottage from a lesson at skating on a neighbouring lake, with Jarvis as her instructer, stood by the little parlour window looking out at the gathering twilight, and busy in thought. She was thinking, perhaps, of the mysterious circumstances connected with her birth, which, perchance would be speedily made clear; or it might have been that she was dreaming of Jarvis, and the fond good-night kiss which he had imprinted upon her forehead only a few moments previous at the cottage door. At all events, so absorbed was she that she did not see or hear the approach of a carriage until it was within a few yards of the cottage door.

To whom, Birdie wondered, could this elegant vehicle belong?

Then flashed the thought—it must be Lady Rozenthal—the patrician dame who was to make known to humble Birdie who and what she was. The surmise was correct; it was her ladyship; and directly she was ushered into the little parlour by Mrs. Gimp, who announced with a curtesy:

"If you please, my lady, this is Miss Birdie," and withdrew. Birdie arose with a quiet dignity that was innate as her ladyship advanced. But she recoiled, and was startled when, with a sudden cry, the lady exclaimed:

"Truly, my own little Birdie, and a woman grown! Thank heaven! I see my precious child once more, whom I have all those years believed dead and buried under that dreary little mound. Birdie, my child, I am your mother!"

Birdie uttered a cry, scarce knowing whether she were awake or dreaming, or if the outstretched arms of the lady were really meant to receive her. She came nearer, saying with childish yearning:

"Oh! is it true?"

Lady Birdetta clasped her daughter fondly in her warm embrace—

"True in every blessed particular, my

own precious child," she was assured fondly, and her ladyship added:

"One glance at your face, and, without other proof, my heart would have told me that you were my daughter, whom I have mourned as dead all these weary, weary years."

In all her life before Birdie had never even dreamed of so great a happiness coming into her path. She, who never, until the day in which Jarvis, in a freak of generosity, had spoken kindly to her by the roadside, and directed her to the cottage or Mrs. Gimp, had known what it was to be otherwise protected than to receive the rough fare and poor shelter afforded by Dame Polley, to be thus suddenly lifted from her present humble condition to a position which she had often, though hopelessly, longed to attain, that of a 'real lady,' like the daughters of the Glencrofton's of Glencrofton, who were so fair and stately, and wore such sparkling gems, and training robes of shimmering silk and rich velvet; and more than dainty apparel, and costly jewels and high station, far more delightful was the precious assurance that she should possess many friends who would welcome her as the beloved daughter of this beautiful, gentle lady, who was really her mother, strange and almost too great happiness though it seemed.

Lady Birdetta remained that night, as well as for a good many days and nights after, at Mrs. Gimp's cottage, whose astonishment was only equalled by her delight when apprised of the fact that Birdie, as she had herself prophesied, was to be suddenly elevated to rank and station.

The day following her arrival, at Cwm daron, Lady Birdetta sought out the sister of the woman whom Sir Montfort had bribed to take charge of the little Birdie.

The old woman confessed her knowledge of the share which her deceased sister had taken in the plot which Sir Montfort had designed for parting his daughter from her child. Lady Birdetta even recognized in the description which the old creature gave minutely, the very dress—a delicately embroidered little pink robe, which the child wore when carried to her sister's hut.

A day or two after the events above recorded Jarvis drove over to the cottage to bid her ladyship and her ladyship's daughter adieu for the present.

"I start for Polsdon's place to-morrow," he said; "but I shall not remain there long. As it is your ladyship's intention to remain for some weeks in London," he added; "I shall hope to have the pleasure of meeting you there, directly I return, which I shall do ere many days."

Her ladyship smiled graciously.

"Nothing could give us greater pleasure Mr. Chessom." said she; "pray visit us as soon as you reach London. We shall spend five or six weeks in the City, ere we go from thence to Morcambe."

There was a thrill at Jarvs' heart as Birdie, with shy eagerness, seconded her mother's cordial invitation.

Had one ventured to rally him upon having fallen in love with this womanly child of only fifteen years he would have "pshawed" so absurd an idea: and yet during nearly every hour of each day she was not out of his thoughts.

"Confound Poldson," he growled mentally, as he drove towards the Lion: after having shaken hands with Lady Rozenthall and Birdie, and listened to a multitude of Gimp's best wishes for his safe arrival at Oakwood, his friend's residence.

"Hang Polsdon," he again grumbled.

"I was an idiot to promise that I'd journey to his place; but I suppose there's no backing out now. I shall stay but one week, however, instead of four or five."

Lady Rozenthall sat by the fire in Mrs. Gimp's parlor. It was evening, a few hours after Jarvis had departed. She was gazing with smiling content at the beautiful face of her newly found daughter, who sat a little way from her, looking at pages of an illustrated magazine.

Suddenly an affrighted cry reached their ears

"Mamma!" exblaimed Birdie; "what can it be?"

Ere her mamma had time to reply, the door was thrown unceremoniously open, and Gimp with a pale face, and her apron to her eyes, appeared.

"Oh! my lady—poor Master Jarv!" she gasped.

"My good woman, whatever has happened?" cried her ladyship much alarmed; while Birdie, too terrified to speak, grew colorless to her lips.

Before Gimp's shaking lips could

frame a reply to the question, four of the neighboring peasants appeared bearing on a rough litter Master Jarv's insensible figure.

Lady Rozenthal bent over him.

"Good heavans! what does this mean?" she cried.

The men hurriedly explained, and were understood both by Birdie and Gimp; but the dialect of the Welsh peasantry being quite unintelligable to her ladyship, Birdie, for Gimp was far too excited to be coherent, was obliged to translate.

"Oh mamma," she cried tremblingly as she knelt beside the inanimate form or her hero, "there has been a fire in Cwmdaron, and in saving somebody's life, poor brave Mr. Chesson has been dreadfully hurt. There is a doctor from Kilravoc who happens to be in Cwmdaron to-night; he will be here presently. And Oh! - they say his arm—his right arm is broken, mamma. And he is so white, and does not move!—Oh! mamma, it cannot be that he is—

She could not say *dead!* the terrifying word died on her lips, and she sank, with a gasping sob, to the floor by the sofa.

"No, no, dear child, he has but fainted," her mother soothingly assured her, and a minute later the doctor from Kilravoc entered the little parlor.

He pronounced Jarvis in no danger. His arm was broken, though not badly The most serious of his injuries being that his eyes were badly weakened by the smoke and flame through which he had struggled.

In less than an hour he was lying in bed with his right arm and his eyes bandaged, and doing as well as could be expected under the circumstances.

The circumstances of the affair were as follows:

On reaching Cwmdaron Jarvis found the village in an uproar, and resounding with the cries of fire. Two or three houses standing near together were wrapped in flames which the excited villagers were vainly trying to extinguish.

Jarvis would have driven on without heeding further the fracas; but excitements of any description were rare in Cwmdaron, and he decided to join the crowd who were energetically, if hopelessly working. Accordingly he started for the scene of the conflagration.

The roofs of two of the cottages were already about to fall, and the third was so enveloped in flame that egress—excepting through a small window just above the blazing doorway—was soon rendered impossible. All the inmates had not been able to effect their escape, for a horrified urchin was seen, frantically jumping up and down, with wild screams of terror, at the window above mentioned.

Someone placed a ladder against the building, but no one seemed inclined to run the risk of ascending it, until Jarvis, moved to pity by the cries of both mother and child, did so, and broke in the window, which was so warped by the weather as to make it a difficult matter to raise it.

The next minute he descended and dropped into the trembling arms of the mother her howling offspring.

And now another cry of terror arose as another face appeared at the window, looking down beseechingly at the crowd.

It was an old woman, this time, the mother of the cottager.

Jarvis shrugged his shoulders. To again ascend the ladder was a decidedly dangerous experiment: but it was clear that if he did not attempt it no one else would do so.

He was no coward; but, as he afterwards expressed it, "It was a tremendous bore to inconvenience one's self so mightily, for the sake of one old wrinkled witch of a woman."

The old creature was in most imminent danger, however, and her white face and piteous cries were not to be withstood; and though the effort was one of great risk, Jarvis again started to the rescue.

He reached the window to discover that the woman had disappeared. Terrified, and half suffocated, she had turned, evidently in the vain hope of finding some other means of escape; and had fallen to the floor senseless.

Jarvis thrust his head into the aperture from which a cloud of blue smoke was now issuing, and gave a fleet, rueful glance about, then dashed into the little "hole in the wall" which served the old woman in the capacity of a sleeping apartment. He found it desperate work to fight his way through blaze and smoke to the spot a few feet off, where the old creature lay. He reached her, however, and caught her up, wrapping her shawl about her head, and forced his way determinedly out to the ladder, dropping his burden into an upheld blanket.

Then he staggered and fell, with his right arm awkwardly doubled under him.

A portion of the burning structure at that moment tumbled, falling very near the spot where Jarvis had himself fallen; and those who rushed forward to his rescue were but just in time, for the next moment another blazing mass descended, from which, had it not been altogether impossible, it would have required more skill and daring than those around possessed to extricate him.

He was at first unconscious; but the pain of his fractured arm brought him for a few moments back to consciousness, and he requested those who had placed him upon a litter to take him to the Gimp cottage, instead of to the 'Lion.' He was obeyed, and placed in the vehicle which he had himself driven a little while before; and ere they reached the cottage he had again relapsed into insensibility.

The days went by, and though his broken arm was still in a sling, Jarvis, after the elapse of three weeks, would have been himself again, had it not been for his eyes, from which he was still unable to remove the bandage.

It was about this time that Charlie Polsdon, learning that Jarvis was in Cwmdaron, and quite ill, came, accompanied by two or three of the fellows to visit him for a day or two. Polsdon declared he, having once been laid up in same stupid little town, knew how to pity him. But, after remaining a few hours, the young Welshman exclaimed to his companions, as he sat by the lounge on which Jarvis reclined:

"Faith, boys, I don't see that our presence here is at all necessary. Jarv seems to be doing capitally. A vastly different time I had of it last autumn, when cooped up over at that wretched hutch, the Lion; nursed by the landlady, who was as deaf as if her ears were wooden, she being occasionally assisted by her lovely daughter, whose fairy-like footfalls were very like the steps of an elephant. There was no romance in my condition. My horse shied; and I didn't save anybody's life. It's a pity though that instead of a horrid old witch and a squalling urchin, it couldn't have been a lovely damsel for whom you took the trouble to risk your life and singe your locks and scorch your liquid orbs, Chessom. But you have one to attend upon you who is beautiful as a siren. "St. David!" added the young man, "what will London say when it finds out about this romance of Lady Birdetta's youth, and beholds her charming daughter? I am nearly capsized with astonishment and admiration myself. But boys, I propose that we return to Oakwood to-morrow. Chessom will thank us, no doubt. I see our coming here out of pity was commiseration quite unnecessary; and I'm delighted that I shall not be forced to remain at the 'Lion' longer than for one night."

So a little while later the young men took their departure.

"Oh, by the way I was quite forgetting," said Polsdon, returning to Jarvis' side, after having shaken hands with and bidden the latter good-bye. "Here are a pot-ketful of letters which came from England to you. Of course all your friends believe you to be at Oakwood; and are doubtless wondering why they do not get a word from you;" and he tossed his friend a half dozen or so of letters and papers. "Of course," he whispered, "the lovely, dark-eyed, little heiress will read them all to you. Ah! just contrast your situation now, with mine last October. Under the circumstances you're in it's a delight to be lame and halt and blind, and the like. But I'm off: good-bye, again."

"Good-bye," and the young men left the cottage.

"Birdie, will you read my letters to me?" Jarvis asked, a little while after the departure of his friends.

Birdie came with a ready assent and sat down by his chair.

"I will hear the letters from home first, if you please," he said, for, of course, there must be at least one from Maplewood."

He pushed aside the bandage from his eyes for a moment, and glanced at the several superscriptions.

"This one first, if you please, Birdie," he said, handing her a letter addressed in the handwriting of Philip Chessom, and re-arranging the bandage.

Birdie broke the seal and read aloud.

The epistle was quite a lengthy one, and toward the last contained an account of the stolen six hundred pounds; and Jarvis learned that honorable, upright Ernest was suspected—even banished, for his own thoughtless, unmanly act.

"Good heavens!" he cried excitedly, as Birdie finished the perusal of the letter; "to accuse Ernest, of all others, of a dishonest act or even thought. What a scoundrel I am, and how stupid they are! Poor Ernest, he is so sensi-

tive and honourable, he can ill brook anything of that kind."

Birdie grew alarmed, for Jarvis was flushed and excited, and pushing the bandage far enough from his eyes to enable him to see his way, paced the little room rapidly.

"Pray do not walk so fast, Mr. Chessom, you will be so tired: do sit down," urged Birdie. "If this gentleman is innocent his innocence will be proven before long of course. Is he your friend, Mr. Chessom?"

"Friend!" muttered Jarvis, more to himself than aloud. "Poor Ernest, if he knew all, he would class me among his worst enemies."

Then he happened to glance at Birdie's perplexed, troubled face and recollected himself.

"I am worrying you Birdie," he said, sitting down and drawing the shade over his eyes again; "but don't look so troubled. The fact is, a good, honourable fellow is charged with a crime which a bad one has committed; and the stupidity of them all, in believing him capable of anything of the sort has vexed me."

And after that Jarvis feigned a more quiet state of mind; and when he appeared quite himself again, Birdie was satisfied and left him to attend to other duties as he did not at present care to hear any more letters read.

When Birdie's footsteps were beyond his hearing Jarvis rose from his seat, pulled the bandages altogether away from his eyes and bolted the door. His next move was to take the bandages from his arm also. Then he took writing materials from a case in his portmanteau and began a letter which commenced as follows:

"Dear Grandfather,—I have met with an accident this time, which has detained me in this little town of Cwmdaron for more than three weeks. I received a visit from Charlie Polsdon to-day, who brought me your letter. I have had my right arm broken, and my eyes so severely damaged by a fire which occurred here that I only remove the shade from them to pen these lines, because I *must*. I wish to heaven that I could have been cognizant of the painful event, which has occurred during my absence, earlier, Grandfather. It was not Ernest, but myself, who abstracted that six hundred pounds from your escritoire. I will confess all. I took it for the purpose of settling a gambling debt which I owed in London. I had made such frequent calls upon you for funds, only a short time before, that I was fearful of being questioned. I knew the amount would be missed; but I had not a thought that anyone in particular—least of all Ernest—would be charged with having wrongfully appropriated it. I bitterly regret now this act—the basest, most unmanly which I ever committed: but I do not tell you this, hoping for your pardon. I do not merit it, and don't expect it. When I'm a little further recovered I shall leave England, and go to—"

A sudden dizziness seized him, a great fierce pain, that seemed to rend his eyeballs, so intense was it, surged through his head; and moaning faintly he fell from his chair to the floor.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LETTER IS DISPATCHED.

Jarvis' moan and heavy fall was heard by Mrs. Gimp as she was passing the door of the little parlor wherein he lay, prone upon the floor.

In alarm the good woman hastened to the door, calling:

"Master Jarv, whatever's the matter?"

There was no reply; and, to her dismay, the door was locked.

Several times again she called without receiving an answer, or hearing the slightest sound from within; then, looking through the keyhole, she beheld his prostrate form upon the floor.

Too much frightened to think of finding any other way of ingress Mrs. Gimp raised her right foot and placed it with no weak force against the panel of the door; and, being a woman of strength, one repetition of the blow sufficed to break the lock, and the door flew open.

Jarvis soon recovered consciousness; but suffered intense pain in his eyes, which had become much inflamed and weakened by too early removing the shades from them, and overstraining them in the effort of writing.

He was unlike himself too, after that, being nervous, and often gloomily abstracted.

Lady Birdetta still continued to remain at the cottage, as she had remained during the last three weeks, instead of returning at once to London, according to her intention ere the accident, with which Jarvis met, took place.

More than once did her ladyship volunteer to write to Mr. Chessom, informing him of the serious accident which

had befallen his grandson; but Jarvis negatived her offer with such ill-concealed nervousness and constraint, each time the subject was mentioned, that, after the second time, she said no more about it.

"They might believe me worse off than I really am," he said once, trying to speak with carelessness; "and might even take the trouble to come all the way here to nurse and take care of me, which your ladyship and Miss Birdie having kindly done, until I am nearly well, would be an unnecessary worry. If they sometimes wonder that they hear nothing from me, why, of course, they find a reason for my neglect in the belief that I am so highly enjoying myself with Polsden and his friend, that I have, for the present forgotten them. So, you see, my dear Lady Birdetta, it is wisest not to undeceive them until I have quite gotten round, which I am now in hopes will be ere long."

And the unfinished letter the—writing of which had rendered poor Jarv's weakened eyes so much more inflamed and weak that the doctor who attended him was fearful of ultimate blindness—lay among other papers in his writing-case, and Jarvis lacked the courage to send it, certain of the consequences. And so the days slipped by, until Lady Birdetta received a London telegram, informing her of the dangerous illness of a dear friend and relative, and requesting her to return to England at once if possible

Lady Birdetta read the telegram aloud to Jarvis.

"Poor aunt Gwendoline, I must go to her immediately," she said sorrowfully, as she finished the perusal of the brief message.

Jarvis turned his shaded eyes toward her ladyship, saying with a lugubrious smile :

"If something imperative had not called your ladyship away, I wonder how much longer your kindness of heart and your patience could have withstood the *ennui* of this dreary place, and caused you to remain here for the sake of such a good-for-nothing individual as I. I shall find it miserably dull here after you are gone; and Birdie, how shall I ever get along without seeing her bright face every hour of the day ?"

"My dear Mr. Chessom," said her ladyship earnestly, "Neither Birdie or I can ever render to you attentions or services great enough to repay you for the priceless blessing which you have brought to us both; and, dearly as I love my aunt Gwendoline, I should not feel it my duty to go away, knowing that you remained here alone, blind for some time to come, and 'miserably dull,' as you have said."

Lady Rozenthal was secretly wondering at the silence between Jarvis and his family, and which was causing the latter to wonder not a little, as testified a second letter, written by Mr. Chessom, who also sent this letter to Oakwood, the same as the first, Jarvis receiving it from Charlie Polsdon, who again visited him in Cwmdaron. Her ladyship was beginning to suspect that the reticence, which was on Jarvis' part, was something singular, though she was at a loss to divine its meaning.

"Pray, let me at once write or dispatch to your family, Jarvis," she continued. "Your silence is really unjust, both to yourself and your friends; you really ought to apprise them of your serious condition."

For several minutes Jarvis did not reply, a fierce struggle was going on within him.

When first he had learned that Ernest bore the blame of his own unmanly act he had manfully resolved that, cost him what it might, he would confess all, and that he should bear it no longer. But, within the last few weeks a knowledge had come to him, a conviction, at which he at first smiled incredulously, that he was learning to love—and to love madly—Lady Rozenthal's dark-eyed, singular, beautiful daughter. Two months ago he would have laughed at the idea; but now he could not, but acknowledge that, henceforth, life without Birdie Wylde, would be to him a miserable void. Sometimes he half-wondered how and when this love had come to him. He knew not that it was but a deepening of the interest which he had felt for the friendless waif on their first meeting, in the dreariness of the chill autumn dusk.

'Tis said that "love will make cowards as well as heroes of men." Certainly it was Jarvis Willoughby's incipient passion which made him keep cowardly silence now.

One day—the very one upon which he received his supposed grandfather's letter, containing an account of the dishonourable deed, of which Ernest was

accused, Jarvis sat listening while Birdie read aloud a spirited American novel.

And while she believed him wholly absorbed in the hero and heroine of the tale, and the history of their love, with its 'alternate joy and woe,' he was, in truth, far more deeply engrossed in contemplation of her own fair face, with its shadowy framing of rich dark hair, its haunting dark eyes and soft red lips.

She had been quaintly beautiful in her plaided short-skirted wincey, her plaited hair and gay kerchief; but she was far lovlier now in a softly flowing dress of mauve cashmere, with frosty lace at neck and wrists, and her hair arranged in a simple, girlish fashion that was very charming.

And Jarvis, now and then dreamily looking from beneath the shade that covered his eyes, admired her fresh young beauty, whose chief charm was in the blending of dignified womanliness and childish naivete that characterized her, and owned that he had grown to dearly love her—this little Birdie; and wondered if he would ever be able to make himself worthy of her love in return.

Rich, with little heed or thought of the value of money or how lavishly he used it, he was a general favorite among the young men of his set. He drank, gambled, though without the knowlege of Mr. Chessom, and joined in all the gayest, and not always the most reputable revels, if not in the maddest orgies of his fast, dashing friends.

His was an odd disposition, not unmingled with some good traits; and he possessed notions of honor, with which one would scarcely have credited him.

"I am a sort of scoundrel, little girlie," he said mentally, glancing from under the shade, at the fair young reader, who read on, unconscious of how much more absorbed he was in thoughts of herself than in the pleasant novel which so much delighted her.

"I have been about as worthless an individual all my life as ever my litle Birdie will be likely to encounter; but, by Jove! I'll be one no longer, I'll turn over a new leaf and "and paste it down," as somebody said once; and when my little girl returns from her Parisian training, if she is then as sweet and lovable as now, which I hope to Heaven she will be, I shall be worthy to sue for her love. But what shall I do with time while she is gone?

A few hours before, Jarvis had heard Lady Rozenthal announce her intention of sending her daughter to a first-class Parisian seminary for young ladies, at which she intended her to remain for three years; and Jarvis began to feel that he should miss terribly the little girl who was now his constant companion who sang to him in her lovely if crude voice; who read to him and chatted to him. His next thought was:—

Would—after the three years of 'refinement' at Madame De Chellis' establishment, which was to be gone through with—there be any characteristic resemblance between Miss Wylde, the 'finished' young lady and rich heiress, who would be one of the most beautiful belles in London, when she chose to reign there, and the simple unconventional, yet innately eloquent, graceful little girl who now flitted about him—his devout worshipper?

He half doubted it; and an ugly feeling thrilled him as he wondered if she would develop into a young lady, all trifling airs, and shallow, prettyish affectations, like scores of the fashionable *demoiselles* with whose acquaintance he was honoured. And then he told himself that Birdie was too sensible, and too much like her mother to be likely to ever become either a silly, arrogant belle, or a vapid, frivolous doll. She would come back the same sweet, sensible little Birdie, only more beautiful and graceful; she would love him as devotedly as he loved her now—should always love her; and they would marry and—like the lovers in the fairy tales—"live together happily forever after."

It cost Jarvis a great struggle to write the letter which, if finished and sent, would be certain to bring Mr. Chessom's sternest anger upon him, and, in all probability, cause his disinheritance.

"Grandfather is so strictly honourable," Jarvis told himself; "and I took this sum for the payment of a gambling debt to one of the wildest, fastest fellows in London; I shall expect no mercy."

Nevertheless, upon the impulse which his better self prompted, he began, as the reader is already aware—the letter which was to clear Ernest and implicate himself; and that letter he would have finished and dispatched had it not been for the sudden weakness and severe pain which blinded and prostrated him for the time. But hours after, when Lady Birdetta and her daughter were moving gently, in devoted attention about him,

the manly resolve became weaker. He dared not send up to Mr. Chessom the written confession which Mrs. Gimp, upon his inquiring, informed him she had put away carefully in his writing case.

"He cursed and sent adrift his only son for marrying against his wishes," thought Jarvis; "will he be less incensed when he learns that his grandson has committed a really dishonorable deed? He writes me that he would sooner have lost in any other way six thousand pounds than that Ernest should have proved thus unworthy. In truth, I believe he would gladly have lost much more, could he have lost it in *some* other way; but will he feel relieved when he finds his clerk innocent and his grandson guilty? Good heavens! I cannot confess—I *cannot*. It is base, cowardly; but my sweet Birdie and her love, I would sooner die than lose."

And so the time passed; the selfish fear, that if he manfully bore the blame of his own deed his happiness should be forfeited, detering him from adopting the only honourable course, and the course to which he had at first been prompted.

Lady Birdetta stood waiting for his reply and wondering whatever it was that, of late, had come over this heretofore careless mannered *nonchalant* young man.

"Yes, I may as well allow her ladyship to write; but *can* I send that letter? Good heavens! no. And yet, if I don't —if I permit Ernest to bear this shame, how shall I ever dare to face him or sweet, innocent little Mabel again? Surely never; and I will not be so mean and cowardly, even if by acting otherwise I lose friends, inheritance, everything, even little Birdie and her love. No, by heavens! I will not: I *will* be a man."

All this was passing through Jarvis' mind while her ladyship waited for him to speak.

Suddenly he turned his blindfolded eyes toward her; and she saw about the handsome mouth the firmness of some sudden resolve.

"Your ladyship is right," he said in a voice rendered carelessly steady by an effort, of which her ladyship knew naught. "I am really in a serious condition. Dr. Glenfaithe told me this morning that he had but little hope that I should ever wholly recover my eyesight. My friends, as you remarked, ought and must know all. I shall feel grateful if you will kindly send to my grandfather the letter which I began, and was unable to finish—it is in my writing case: also, if you will yourself write seperately telling him why I did not fimish my letter."

Lady Rozenthall began the task at once.

She wrote to Mr. Chessom, informing him of how Jarvis' attempt to write the partly finished letter which she enclosed, had resulted in so aggravating his already inflamed and weakened eyes that his physician was beginning to fear ultimate blindness. That she had before desired him to have word of his illness sefft to his friends at Maplewood: but that—sanguine of his speedy, convalescence—he had refrained from doing so, and unnecessarily alarming them.

"You will wonder why I am here," she wrote; "I will briefly inform you. When I left England, ostensibly, to visit a friend who lives in Snowden, I came instead to this dull little town of Cwmdaron; and for the purpose of finding my daughter—for I have a daughter by a former marriage, of which all my friends are in ignorance. I have found my dear little girl, and later you will learn all that lack of time and space prevents me from informing you of at present. I start for London to-morrow to visit a relative whom I fear is dying," she continued; "and I have no doubt Jarvis will await the coming of some of you with impatience. Dear boy, had it not been for him I should never have found my child, or even have known that she yet lived. Can I ever be sufficiently grateful to him?"

A few more words and then Lady Rozenthal had finished, and the double letter was given into the hands of Jarvis' valet to despatch. Jarvis heard the servant depart, and then buried his face on his pillow with a stifled groan. Birdie, who sat beside him, rose quickly and bent over him solicitously.

"Are you suffering so much, Mr. Chessom," she asked in a sorrowful voice.

He turned toward her and caught her hands in his own.

"I am suffering no pain, Birdie; at least none bodily," he said in tones that were so full of smothered pain and passion, while his face was so white, so worn and haggard that Birdie uttered a little cry of alarm.

"Oh! Mr. Chessom, you must be very ill; let me call mamma and Gimpy."

He held her hands and detained her saying:

"No no Birdie, you are needlessly alarming yourself. I am no more ill than I have been, only"—and there was a sob in his utterance—"Oh! Birdie, I am wretched."

Birdie's voice trembled, and Jarvis knew that there were pitying tears falling when she murmured softly:

"Oh! I am so sorry. Can I do nothing for you, Mr, Chessom?"

He clasped still more tightly the cool little hands in his own feverishly hot ones.

"You can do so much, my Birdie—almost everything, if you only will," he said eagerly.

"Oh! then pray tell me what it is at once; I shall be so very, very glad to do anything that will prevent your becoming ill or unhappy," she cried.

He drew her closer towards him.

"It is this, Birdie," he said, "that let happen what may—even after I am blind—disgraced—disinherited—and I shall be all these ere long—you will not grow to despise me, even if all others despise and cast me off. Will you say this, Birdie?"

"And is this all, Mr. Chessom," Birdie asked softly.

"All, Birdie," he replied: "but you do not know all that has happened; when you do, you may deem it much."

"Then, Mr. Chessom, I will promise. Whatever has happened I know not; but nothing should make me despise you, for I *couldn't*; I—I worship you, she said in her girlish, enthusiastic fashion; "and I should hate any one who did despise you or cast you off," she added with a sudden indignant flash in her bright dark eyes.

He smiled faintly at her enthusiasm.

"But, if I were to tell you, Birdie, that I had committed a mean, dishonourable action—so mean and dishonourable that my friends are justified in despising me and casting me off, would you—if I were to tell you, also, that I repent bitterly my former contemptable follies—still try to think kindly of me?" he asked still eagerly.

"I shouldn't have to try," Birdie answered confidently. "I shall never think otherwise; and I don't believe that there's anybody who hasn't some sins or follies to repent of. Everybody sins sometimes, though of course they hadn't ought to," she added philosophically.

"Then I may trust that whatever others do, *you* will never grow to dislike and think coldly of me?" he asked.

"Never, how can you think otherwise; and when I am gone away I shall think of you, and pray for you, and long to see you, until we meet again."

"That may be for a very long time, Birdie; but heaven bless you for the assurance."

He drew her down to him, and kissed her tenderly and would not let her go when she blushed and strove to free herself.

"Oh, pray let me go. Gimpy is coming; what will she say?" she whispered in confusion.

"He smiled and released her as the good woman's footsteps approached, whispering, as he did so:

"I have your promise little girlie; and it makes me more reconciled to becoming, like Cain, 'a wanderer and a vagabond.'"

Her slender fingers tightened 'round his own for a moment, and then she left him. And Jarvis buried his face again, and inwardly cried with passionate vehemence:

"I love her—I love her, my little Birdie. I want what I dare not ask—her love—her sweet love!"

The day following Lady Rozenthal left Jarvis reluctantly, and started with her daughter for London.

"I dislike to leave you here alone so much," she said, uneasily, the night previous to her departure. "Indeed, I think we had better remain until your mother or grandfather arrives. You are sure to be so lonesome and moping, after we are gone, and you will have no one to read to you or amuse you, that I think it is positively wrong to go away until some of your friends come."

"Of course it would, mamma," broke in Birdie eagerly. "We ought not to go and leave Mr. Chessom before the arrival of his friends. He will be terribly dull, I am sure. We really ought not to go, mamma."

But Jarvis would not listen to their proposition to remain on his account.

"No, no, your ladyship," he told Lady Rozenthal, "It would be most selfish in me to detain you from the beside of Lady Berkley for a moment longer than is actually necessary. I have been such a nuisance," he added, with an attempt to

smile, "that surely your kindness and patience must already be taxed to their utmost."

Not for the world, he told himself, would he have her Ladyship remain until a reply came—providing one came at all to that fatal letter.

Birdie sobbed hysterically at parting.

"Oh Jarvis, there has something dreadful happened to you, has there not?—and you said it would be a long time ere we meet again," she whispered; "are you sure of that? you know I shall come home once a year; and I shall not leave England until you have returned there; and you must come to Morcombe to see us, will you not?"

Jarvis tried to make an evasive reply that would comfort her: and tenderly kissing her bade her good bye.

Then Lady Rozenthal came in, bidding him a reluctant adieu; and, after charging him not to be dull, or *ennuied* until the arrival of his relatives, and giving Gimp many directions as to taking proper care of her charge, her ladyship drew her daughter gently away, and Jarvis was alone.

He listened until the last sound of the vehicle in which they were driven died away, and then covered his face, and uttered a sigh that was nearer a groan.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

APPROACHING THE DENOUEMENT.

Let us again return to Maplewood.

We left Bertram Waldegrave in his chamber awaiting, with restless impatience, the appearance of daylight.

The hours dragged with such wretched slowness; it seemed as if the day was years in dawning, to the impatiently restless man who, through the long hours, either paced gloomily to and fro, like some savage animal in its cage, or sat looking moodily out into the night, in dreary meditation.

He had planned so differently, had dreamed of the happy day when he should bring to his mother—with whom Mabel (though the former had but seldom seen her) was a favorite—a beautiful, loving daughter, whose pure love was a fortune, though she was herself dowerless.

What a mad, foolish dream—what a credulous dupe he had been.

At length the slowly rolling hours dragged in the tardy, longed for daylight; and, before any, excepting a few servants, were astir, Bertram and McInch, his valet, departed.

Waldegrave gave one brief, half savage, half mournful look towards the great, handsome house, and saw something like a faint flutter of the lace-ornamented draperies about one of the upper windows as he did so. It was one of the windows that looked out towards the lawn gates from Mabel's boudoir, a fairy-like little nook, fitted up in rosy pink, like the heart of a rose or a sea shell, with delicate festoonings and edgings of frost-like white lace. Was it the touch of Mabel's hands that stirred the draperies? he wondered; and, from behind the filmy lace and blush-rose satin, was she watching him depart?

He would not deign another glance, though; and five minutes later he was driven out of sight.

Breakfast was not the most cheery of meals at Maplewood house that morning.

The hostess was nervous and *distrait*, the host gloomy and almost silent in spite of his best efforts to be pleasantly urbane. Glencora, slightly more negligent in the arrangement of her morning toilette than was her wont, was silent—one might almost say sullen—and decidedly, and scarcely concealably out of temper. She glanced up carelessly, half insolently at Mabel, as the latter, who was the last to enter the breakfast parlour, appeared.

The glance was returned with a quiet dignity that had in it a slight touch of defiant *hauteur*.

Lady St. Ayvas, growing impatient at the protracted absence of her hostess' son, and, having received an invitation to spend a few weeks with a wealthy and agreeable friend residing in New Brentford, and mother of two grown up sons — either of them really eligible matches—who, if they were not heirs prospective to wealth as great as the banker's, were, at all events, not stupid enough to run away from the Lady Winnifred's manifold charms as the errant Jarvis had done; her Ladyship decided to go, and at breakfast announced her intention.

"I did not read Mrs. Walsingham's letter until this morning," she told her hostess; "but she is so dear a friend, and she so urgently pressed me to go to her that I at once decided to do so. Though," she added, "dearest Winnie and I have enjoyed so delightfully our visit here that we are loth to leave you."

"And we," was the reply, "shall be

very sorry indeed to lose you. Glenine and I have counted so very much on your remaining some time longer with us. Really," she continued, "we shall be trebly bereft. Waldegrave has rushed away from us so suddenly, just when we were beginning to think it impossible to get along without him; and now we are to be deprived of your ladyship and our dear Winnifred almost as suddenly."

Glencora emerged from her sulks long enough to express her regrets quite civilly.

Afterwards she exclaimed, with a grimace, to her mother:

"Thank goodness! her ladyship is weary at last of vainly waiting the return of my vagrant brother. It is to be hoped that her efforts to effect a match between Lady Winnifred and one of the young Walsingham's will end less provokingly inefficient. Of course it will be Charles, the eldest, for whom their sails will be set. You see, there is only a gouty old man of something over sixty winters between him and a baronetcy," she added sarcastically.

"How provoking you are," was the annoyed retort of the young lady's mamma. "You have a most disagreeable habit, Glencora, of imparting to even those whom you profess to love, the most selfish or mercenary motives for their slightest actions. I sincerely wish you would endeavor to conquer that habit. One would suppose, were they to draw their inference from your remarks," she added, "that her ladyship was a veritable fortune huntress." Her daughter's arching brows were lifted in an amused fashion.

"And if one chanced to be very credulous, they might perhaps, were they to witness your indignant astonishment at such an idea, be persuaded to believe, otherwise, my dear mamma," she replied satirically. "But you really ought, mamma, retract that about imparting disagreeable things to those whom I profess to love," she added; "for I never pretend to love anyone; at least, I make no such protestations for any of my own sex"

"Not even for your mother; I am aware of that," was the dry retort.

Glencora shrugged her shoulders and smiled coolly.

"I believe it is always ruleable to except present company," she made answer, and the subject was dropped.

The gentlemen evinced much regret that Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter had decided to leave Maplewood so soon.

"We are to receive a visit from the Marquis and Marchioness of Dunkeat," Mr. Chessom told her ladyship. "He had hoped you would be here when they arrived. They are very agreeable people."

"And we are very loth to leave you," was her ladyship's response: "but dear Mrs. Walsingham's request for us to come was so urgent, and she is so terribly lonely since the death of Marie, Lady Redesvale, who was her only daughter. It is more than a year since the accident took place which caused her ladyship's death; but poor Mrs. Walsingham has never recovered from the shock which the sad affair occasioned. She scarcely receives any visitors; but she is very fond of my daughter, who, she fancies, bears some resemblance to poor dear Marie: and, though we shall enjoy none of the pleasant gaiety which has made our visit here so delightful, I think we really ought to go to her."

After the conclusion of the morning meal, while the family yet lingered in the breakfast parlor, Mabel stood near a window in the farther end of the room, conversing in her low sweet tones to Lady Winnifred, who sat idly toying with the silken tassels of her morning dress, on an ottoman between the warm-hued velvet curtains.

"I am so sorry you must go, dearest Winnie," May was saying regretfully, I shall miss you sadly, though we scarcely more than speak to each other nowadays."

Lady Winnifred glanced up quickly.

"Do not blame me, May," she said. "It is through no fault of mine that we have not of late been the same—even more to reach other than we were before—" she hesitated, not wishing to add:—"before your brother's name was dishonoured, and my mother forbade any intercourse between you and I."

But Mabel fully understood; and with an impulsive gesture—they were hidden from observation by the folds of the heavy curtains—bent and kissed Lady Winnifred's white forehead, receiving a loving embrace and a fond touch of the latter's lips in return.

Lady Winnifred looked into her companion's pale, calm face, and wondered if she had not been too hasty in judging Bertram Waldegrave the previous night. She knew what it was to suffer and be

outwardly calm and gay and self possessed; but Mabel, with the exception of slight paleness, was apparently so entirely herself—had chatted with such careless pleasantry with Mr. Rimmelton that morning, and gaily rallied Mr. Chesterton—that Winnifred was at a loss to decide whether all this cool unconcern was being bravely acted, or if Waldegrave had proposed—been rejected, and in disappointment and anger at her coquettery, had gone away.

It was difficult to credit this last idea, for Mabel had always appeared the opposite of an unfeeling coquette. But presently Winnifred ventured to say with a slight smile:

"How suddenly Mr. Waldegrave departed; you must have given him a most decided refusal, May."

Mabel grew so deathly pallid that in remorseful annoyance at her own thoughtlessness, Lady Winnifred threw her arms about her, whispering regretfully:

"Forgive me, May, darling; I thought he must have proposed and been rejected by you. I thought so because he left so suddenly."

Mabel's now burning face dropped on Lady Winnifred's shoulder.

"I did not reject him," she murmured in a low, pained voice. "Oh, Lady Winnifred, I am very miserable."

Lady Winnifred started in angry astonishment.

"Is it possible, May, that Mr. Waldegrave has behaved so basely?" she asked indignantly.

Mabel started quickly from the kneeling position which she occupied beside Lady Winnifred at that moment.

"Hush!" she whispered; "I hear Lady St. Ayvas inquiring about you. I would not for the world be discovered thus; least of all by your mamma or my cousin Glencora."

She rose and was her quiet self again when Lady St. Ayvas parted the curtain and looked coldly in upon the twain

"My dear," began her ladyship, after a slight cough and a glance of displeased surprise from under her high brows, which were arched a trifle more than usual, "had you not better assist Edwina in packing your trunks properly. You must remember that we have little time to waste, if we are to reach Mrs. Walsingham's at the time upon which we decided. Pray go at once; you must be forgetting yourself my dear," she added with slight significance.

Lady Winnifred rose, saying quietly:

"Yes, mamma, I will go at once; only Edwina has the lace to arrange on my myrtle green and mauve silks before beginning packing."

"I dare say you will find quite enough to fully occupy your time until she has finished," was her ladyship's dry response as she drew her daughter's arm through her own, and swept away.

Mabel was alone in the breakfast parlor now, the rest having left when Lady St. Ayvas and her daughter did so.

She sat down on the ottoman which Lady Winnifred had occupied, and for a moment her blue eyes were proudly, triumphantly bright.

"How one is despised for being poor," she said contemptuously. "Oh, well, I can bear with fortitude Lady St. Ayvas' disdainful frowns until the *denouement*, after which I presume both Ernest and myself will be favoured with her most lavish smiles. "It will be a brilliant triumph for the banker's poor clerk and for his humble little sister. And not only will it be a triumph for dear Ernest, but it will bring love and happiness back to him," she mused; "but I— oh! I am so very wretched—so very wretched!"

She bowed her head upon the window sill, and wept silently.

Half an hour passed, and Mr. Rimmelton came in search of a novel which he fancied he had seen lying somewhere in the breakfast parlor, where Glencora had carelessly thrown it.

Mabel did not hear his footsteps when he entered, nor did she know when he parted the draperies and looked in upon her. It was his voice that aroused her.

"Miss Willoughby, are you ill or only sleeping?" he asked in concern.

Mabel looked up with a violent start to find him bending beside her.

"Forgive me for intruding," he said; "I did not know you were here. But alone and in tears. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing; there is nothing you can do; you are very kind: but I have only a severe headache, and I am afraid I am a little foolish," she said trying faintly to smile.

Mr. Rimmelton's heart was thumping tumultuously.

He had been what he fancied was in love a score of times during his four-and-twenty years of life. He had come to win the supposed heiress of the banker, and had fallen in love with his *proteye*

instead; and his fondness for her was about as ardent a feeling, about as near akin to the *grande* passion as anything he had ever experienced.

"Poor little lonely thing," he thought; "why am I not rich enough to marry her? I wonder why the plague that con founded Waldegrave did not propose to her. Perhaps he did, and was rejected; though that seems scarcely probable. And yet," he mused, "I could have sworn that he worshipped the ground she trod upon; and I fancied she was not wholly indifferent to him. If the family wouldn't get into such an unconscionable rage, as I'm certain they would at the very idea of such a proceeding, I'd make her my wife if she'd have me, and be prouder of her a thousand times, with her goodness and beauty, than I could ever be of that black-eyed Juno-like grand-daughter of old Chessom's. But what need I care for the pater's wrath? If he chooses to cut me off with a shilling, why, it will only be a trifle less than my poor, dear, poverty-stricken papa will have to bequeath me in any case."

All this ran quickly through Mr. Rimmelton's head. He looked down at the lovely, pensive face—forgot that it was a cherished hope, that he, the oldest of a family of seven, should form an advantageous alliance—forgot—or rather was reckless of what his reason—had he chosen to listen to its warnings—would have told him would be the inevitable consequences of his rashness – and, straightway, offered his heart and hand to the fair girl whom he believed to be an orphan and penniless.

Mabel listened with a beating heart to his proposal. He loved her—this handsome August Rimmelton—she was certain of this; and she must wed somebody. It would be but a day or two now ere she would be the acknowledged daughter and heiress of the banker's long lost son. Bertram would hear of it at once, of course; and, if her betrothment with Mr. Rimmelton was at the same time announced, it would be a double triumph. With her riches, her rare, delicate loveliness she might easily make a wealthier and more brilliant match; but the Rimmelton's were one of the best, if not now one of the richest families in Lancashire, and this eldest son, who now stood before her pleading for her hand in marriage, was handsome and bright and clever, and she liked him, if she could not return his love. But on the other hand ought she to wed him, knowing this—that she did not—never could return the affection which he professed for her?"

"Would it not be wrong?" she asked herself; "and, in any case, I must ask papa's consent ere I accept him."

There was a rustle of silken draperies, which Mabel and her companion were too much engrossed to hear, and Glencora swept into the room in time to overhear Mr. Rimmelton saying:

"I have loved you from the first, my dearest Mabel, will you be my wife?"

"Good heavens! another proposal," mentally exclaimed Glencora. "I wonder, is the girl a siren, that she bewitches men thus?" and she listened silently for Mabel's reply.

The low-toned answer was not all audible to the listening beauty's strained ears; she could only catch the last few words.

"It is so unexpected, Mr. Rimmelton, pray give me time to consider; only wait until to-morrow."

The listener did not tarry to hear more. She glided out of the room; and muttered to herself as she swept up the staircase:

"Good gracious! and good heavens! was there ever such another creature as that girl is? Betrothed to two men, and asking of a third time to consider his suit, and all within twenty-four hours. Preposterous!"

She went to her boudoir and waited there until she heard Mr. Rimmelton whistling to the dogs in their kennel; then she went to the library where Mr. Chessom sat reading.

"Grandpapa," she said, approaching his chair, "I have come to speak to you about Mabel Willoughby – to beg you will put a stop to such disgraceful proceedings as she is guilty of. She is behaving most shamefully!"

Out from among the curtains of a bow window stepped the gentleman who passed as "Mr. Chesterton."

He was smiling, but there was an ominous flash in his clear dark eyes, a slight, haughty curve on his lip as he spoke.

"I beg pardon," he said; but I have been reading, and had nearly fallen asleep among those cushions when your entrance and your words aroused me, but—"

Glencora interrupted him.

"From what my cousin Waldegrave

and myself accidentally overheard last night," she said turning toward him, "I think that you, also, Mr. Chesterton, have a right to know Mabel as she is, not as she appears."

"May I inquire what you did hear, Miss— Chessom?" quietly asked the gentleman; though he certainly looked surprised. If Glencora knew all, he thought, she surely bore the intelligence with a marvellous degree of coolness.

The young lady shrugged her graceful shoulders and smiled serenely.

"I not only heard, but saw as well," she answered gaily. "I saw Mabel Willoughby receiving your embraces, Mr. Chesterton, and your caresses, as graciously as an hour previous, I saw her receiving the caresses and embraces of my cousin Waldegrave, who was infatuated with her acted sweetness, and had begged her to become his wife, and she promised—accepted him. She was Bertram Waldegrave's affianced wife, Mr, Chesterton, when listening to your words in the conservatory last night!"

Mr. Chesterton only smiled and asked:

"And Mr. Waldegrave, did he witness the bitter scene of which you speak?"

"Yes," she said, "and he as well as myself heard her declaring herself very happy."

"Then that that is the reason he so abruptly departed, I suppose," Mabel's father remarked with another quiet smile.

Glencora bowed in the affirmative.

"May I ask if you have any further charges to prefer against your grandpapa's *protege?*" he asked calmly.

Glencora answered with a slightly contemptuous smile.

"Nothing more serious than that—having received a proposal from Mr. Rimmelton this morning—she has now his suit in consideration, and will give him a decided answer to-morrow. By the way I am curious to hear what it will be."

In astonishment and indignation Mr. Chessom had remained silent until now.

"Is all this true?—has Mabel behaved thus shamefully, disgracefully?" he asked,

"Every word, grandpapa; her duplicity is much greater than even I imagined, you have been horribly duped like many others," Glencora answered.

The library door opened at that moment, and the lady of the house appeared. She did not perceive that anything unusual was going on, but exclaimed:

"Lady St. Ayvas has received the saddest of news."

"What can it possibly be?" asked her daughter in languid surprise.

She has just got a telegram informing her of the sudden death of her brother, Col. Fairleigh, of whom we have so often heard her ladyship make mention."

"The idea of going to Brantford is, of course, abandoned then," said Glencora. "That would be most provoking, I suppose, only for the pleasant fact that the crabbed old creature leaves her ladyship a remarkably fine fortune."

"Her ladyship is grieving deeply," the lady replied, with a rebuking glance at her daughter. "It is a dreadful shock—so very sudden."

"'*Haeredis fletus sub personâ risusest,*'" said Glencora with a mocking little laugh.

"What is it Byron says about being made to wait, 'too—too long already'?"

The young lady's mamma looked positively angry.

"I comprehend the force of your last sarcasm, she said: but, as your first is unintelligible to me, of course I fail to understand." She turned toward her, as yet unknown brother-in-law.

"Will you translate for me, Mr. Chesterton? what does she mean?"

Mr. Chesterton smiled.

"Your daughter quoted a Latin proverb which is often very beautiful: 'The weeping of an heir is laughter under a mask.'" he told her.

"How absurd, Glencora; your remarks upon her ladyship are more satirical than either flattering or just. You have no right to discuss Lady St. Ayvas in her absence as you would not care to do it in her presence," the mother said reprovingly.

Glencora shrugged slightly and presently asked:

"How long before her ladyship starts?"

Her mother glanced at her watch.

"In an hour exactly."

Glencora yawned, and Mr. Chessom said, turning towards his guest and granddaughter:

"Perhaps, then, we had better delay any further discussion of the unpleasant subject broached a few moments ago, until her ladyship has taken leave."

"Unpleasant?—has anything of that character occurred?" asked the hostess, with concealed nervousness.

"Yes, something that shocks and causes me pain and indignation," she

was told by Mr. Chessom, and he added: "It is concerning Mabel's conduct."

"Indeed, I am very sorry to hear it," was the reply, but there was a gleam of triumph in the lady's eyes, for all her gravely uttered words.

A few more words of consultation and an adjournment was made.

"Pray enlighten me, Glencora: what heinous crime has that girl committed?" queried Glencora's mamma when they two were alone in one of the corridors.

"Nothing very astonishing, for her; though I confess I was somewhat amazed," was the daughter's reply. "She has merely accepted two offers of marriage, and has a third in contemplation, and all since last evening after dinner."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed her mother, "are you positive of this, Glencora?"

"Quite"

"Who are the gentlemen, pray?"

"First, my cousin Bertram, second, Mr. Chesterton, and third, Mr. Rimmelton."

"Mr. Chesterton, are you sure, Glencora?" her mother inquired with such eagerness, almost excitement, in her manner, that Glencora started.

"Of course, why not? You must be dull of perception, mamma, if you have not noticed his marked preference for her from the first."

"Glencora, how do you know this?" was the next question; and Glencora—wondering, and half impatient at her mamma's display of intense excitement, which, to do her utmost, she was unable to conceal—repeated the words she had heard Mabel and her father utter the previous night, and described the little tableau as she and Bertram had witnessed it.

"But what on earth ails you, mamma? are you going to faint?" she exclaimed as she ended.

The question was unheeded; and her mother's white lips gasped:

"Then that is all you heard?—you did not hear Mr. Chesterton ask Mabel's hand in marriage?"

"No, I did not hear him ask 'will you wed me?'; but we came on the scene just a few moments too late for that. Had we reached the conservatory a little earlier, of course we should have heard the whole impassioned avowal," was the reply in a languidly contemptuous tone.

Mrs. Willoughby was utterly colorless now. She swept on, leaving her astonished daughter standing alone. The latter shrugged, murmured petulantly about 'tragics,' and sauntered, with a careless yawn, to her boudoir.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ALL IS OUT.

Subdued voices—a hurried, grave parting, and Lady Ayvas and her daughter took their leave.

Shortly after, a group, consisting of the banker, Leigh Chessom, the widow of the real Ernest Willoughby, and Glencora and Mabel, met in the library.

"Glennie," began the banker, addressing Glencora, and glancing slightly at Mabel, who, knowing herself to be on the defensive, stood pale and defiant, "will you be good enough to repeat the unpleasant facts which you stated in connection with Mabel this morning? I hope," he added, "that she may be able to offer some suitable explanation, when you have finished."

Glencora hid a maliciously triumphant little smile by a careless yawn; and then, in an indifferent manner, as if the whole thing were a decided bore, began the recital of all she had heard and seen in the conservatory the previous evening, and then of the proposal behind the breakfast-parlour window-curtains, of which Mabel was the recipient.

A swift glance passed between Mabel and her father, and the hostess grew more ashen white than before, as Leigh Chessom stepped forward, at the conclusion of Glencora's sarcastically worded details, and placing one arm about Mabel's waist, said calmly:

"Allow me to save your ward the trouble of explaining, Mr. Chessom. Your granddaughter has given, *verbatim*, all that she was in time to overhear, between Mabel and I; but she should have taken the trouble to listen earlier. She is mistaken in believing that I offered May my hand in marriage. Instead I"—but Mrs. Willoughby had mechanically risen, and now interrupted him.

"I know what you are about to tell," she hissed through her white lips. "I shall not stay to listen. Come, Glencora," turning toward her daughter as she was about to quit the apartment. But that young lady preferred remaining where she was. "I couldn't think of it for a moment. If there's anything horrible—as I suspect there is—to come out I must hear it. My curiosity is immense,"

she told her mother, and so, without her, the lady withdrew.

Our time will not permit us to write the long interview that took place after the abrupt withdrawal of Ernest Willoughby's widow, nor of Philip Chessom's delight at once more beholding his long lost son.

"Can it be?—and oh, Leigh! can you ever forgive the great wrong?" was his first cry.

"That was long ago forgiven, dear father; and I, too, must beg forgiveness for my headstrong, boyish rashness," was the son's reply.

A hand clasp, a look more eloquent than any words, was the reply.

The two girls, Mabel Chessom and Glencora Willoughby—the real heiress and the haughty usurper—watched the scene with intensest interest. The face of the latter seemed growing whiter—her eyes more passionately lurid every moment. She could scarcely refrain from uttering a frantic scream of anger.

Suddenly a cloud shadowed the banker's face.

"Oh! Leigh," he said sorrowfully, "what of Ernest?" Glencora's silvery voice broke in mockingly.

"While my mother's act of avarice elicits such severely condemnatory speeches from you, Mr. Chessom"—looking with ladylike insolence at Leigh, as she spoke—"would it not be as well to recollect that there are others, whose deeds would scarcely bear the light? Pray what will society say, when it learns that it is the rich banker's grandson, and the rich colonial gentleman's son, instead of the former's humble clerk, who was expelled from Maplewood house for committing a theft—for stealing a paltry six hundred pounds?"

"Miss Willoughby," Leigh said gravely, it would have been wiser had you adopted your mother's course and withdrawn. I am forced to utter more facts, which will add painfully to what you have already heard. Had you not better leave us now?"

"Pray give yourself no unnecessary solicitude on my account. I think I shall be able to bear with fortitude anything more you may have to tell, after having sustained, without fainting, hysterics, or anything else ridiculous, what I already have. I am anxious to hear the rest," she told him with defiant hauteur.

Leigh bowed gravely, and proceeded—proceeded to exhonerate fully his son Ernest; and to prove Jarvis Willoughby guilty.

Let us lay before our readers a brief sketch of Leigh Chessom's life after quitting England.

As is already evident, Leigh did not perish on board the fever smitten ship. He was terribly ill though—almost dying when the vessel landed; and for many weeks no thought of his recovering was entertained by those who attended him. He did recover, however, though his convalescence was wearyingly slow and tedious; and it was months after reaching the colony ere he was strong enough to attempt work of any discription.

At length, though still suffering from bodily weakness—disheartend, and nearly moneyless, Leigh went bravely to work, and resolutely toiled until the news of his wife's sudden death came to him, like a terrible blow, stunning for a time, nearly every faculty.

An English acquaintance who had been a clerk in the same banking establishment in which Leigh, ere he left England had been employed, and who had also visited the mining district in the hope of wining a fortune, brought to Leigh the sad intelligence.

Mrs. Chessom had died suddenly of heart-disease, on reading the announcement of Leigh's death on board the emigrant ship Gladiator.

After partially recovering from the heavy shock which the sad news caused him, Leigh's first thought was of his children—the little Jarvis and Glencora, whose names were afterward transferred by the widow of Ernest Willoughby to her own children—and his quondam fellow clerk—though undertaking the task with sore reluctance—was forced to inform him of what he believed to be a fact, that they also were dead.

This latter was of course a mistake, and happened in this wise:

The children, to the knowledge of Leigh's English acquaintance, were dangerously ill with scarlet fever; and, the day previous to his taking leave of England, he heard—what he supposed to be true—that they had both expired the day before.

"After that double loss," Leigh told his father, "I gave up all idea of ever returning to England: I was fortunate in nearly every business transaction which I entered into. I succeeded in almost everything—so far as accumulati g ich-

es went—which I undertook. But I would have cheerfully tossed to the winds all the wealth which poured in upon me, for a tithe of the old Threadneedle street happiness.

After many years a longing to return to England seized me, and, impulsively, I started. I had no anticipation of the welcome of friends on my return. I came, and was a stranger in my native land. No one knew me, or recognized in Lancelot Chesterton—gray-haired and changed—the Leigh Chessom of twenty years back, unless excepting my wife's step-sister. I believe she suspected my identity from the first. Fortunately I was the accidental means of saving the life of Judge Harcourt, as you are aware. We both stopped at the same hotel. He was genial, jolly, the best of company, and seemed to have taken a liking for myself. He told me that he was a guest at your house, that business had called him for a few days to London, and that he must return to Twickenham in time for the Christmas festivities; and urged me in his hearty, not-to-be-denied fashion to accompany him. In vain were my fears that I should be an intruder expressed. Said he:

"My dear sir, I'll wager fifty guineas that Chessom will rather lose any other of his guests than yourself after you've been at Maplewood a day or two. And I can't think of leaving you here to put this coming merry season through in the dull fashion you were anticipating a few hours ago. Come along, and I'll promise you the most genial of hosts, and the most gracious of hostesses to be found throughout the county. Mrs. Chessom is a charmingly agreeable woman; and she has a daughter much like herself—all brilliance and vivacity; only that *la belle* Glencora is more unconventional and delightfully *piquant* than her more stately mamma."

"Can it be possible?" I asked; is Mr. Chessom again married?"

The Judge looked at me, a little surprised.

"You know Mr. Chessom then," he said.

"I was once well acquainted with his son," I told him evasively.

"How long has Mr. Chessom been married for the second time?" I asked.

"You are mistaken," he told me; "the Mrs. Chessom to whom I allude, is the widow of Leigh, the son you speak of."

I nearly sprang from my seat at those words; but the Judge was looking out of a window, and not perceiving me, went on calmly.

"She is a beautiful woman;" he said; "dark and brilliant, with an empress-like statetiness and imperiousness about her, and yet, withal, she is wonderfully suave and pleasing."

A suspicion of foul play flashed across my mind. My gentle, golden-haired Grace could never have grown to be a woman like the stately dame whom the Judge was describing.

I quietly questioned, and learned from my new friend enough to cause me to suspect what I afterward found was true, that the lady who claimed to be my widow was, instead, the widow of the young artist Ernest Willoughby.

"But you'll come with me," the Judge added, after replying to my several apparently casual questions; "and I'll apologise elaborately for dragging you there. We'll reach Maplewood in time for the Christmas ball; and Chessom will be grateful to me for bringing you to him."

"I trusted to my changed appearance to baffle recognition, and came. You did not know me; but you will doubtless remember the startled look with which Mrs. Willoughby first greeted me on my arrival."

To the whole of Leigh's recital Glencora Willoughby listened with such supreme carelessness that it would have been difficult to believe her as stormily angry within as she was. There was a cool, indifferent little smile on her ruby lips; and the savage gleam in her restless black eyes was hidden by the soft, fluttering white lids that drooped over them.

"So this is the *denouement*, is it?" she said lightly, when Leigh ceased speaking. "Well, it has been so distressingly tangled that I am weary of trying to make it all out; but I believe I fully comprehend now. It is I who am the humble daughter of the humble artist; and Mabel who is Miss Chessom, the rich heiress. Heigho!"—and she swept Mabel a graceful, mocking little curtsey.

She turned toward Leigh.

"Are you prepared to be magnanimous, Mr. Chessom?—because I have a favor to ask."

"Anything reasonable, which is in my power, I shall be most happy to grant," Leigh answered; with a grave bow.

"Then, pray defer explanation and an-

nouncement of this unpleasant affair until my mother and myself are fairly out of England. Will you oblige me thus ?"

"Certainly, Miss Willoughby. I should be ungenerous if I did otherwise, remembering that you are suffering innocently the consequences of your mother's act."

"Thanks, I am grateful for your consideration," she answered calmly.

"But, Glennie," interposed the banker, "you need not leave us. You are as dear to me as when I believed you my granddaughter; and dear little May will be most glad to receive you as her sister."

Glencora uttered a short, scornful laugh.

"If all the world were as generous as you, my dear sir, what oceans of misery people would be spared; but, unluckily, such is not the case; and I can't imagine Mabel Chessom—by the way, how oddly that sounds—I can't possibly imagine her as my loving and affectionate foster-sister. Indeed, I should never be so presumptuous. Besides, I am not a patient young person. I could not endure with the fortitude which Mabel has evinced, all the snubbings and cold shoulders and supercilious glances which Mabel, for the sake of a luxurious home, has so passively sustained. I should kill somebody, or commit suicide, or do something horrible, I am sure. My position would be far more intolerable than Mabel's has been; for, while she was only a nobody, I should be somebody far worse than nobody. Consider, there is not one of my friends of to day who would not regard me with the most withering contempt, after they knew all. But, I dare say, I shall be able to take care of myself. Perhaps your granddaughter may generously condescend to exert her influence in obtaining a situation as Lady Somebody's waiting maid for me; or I may even be exalted to the position of a companion. At any rate, my pride will prevent me from accepting anything more at your hands, my dear sir."

With all her waywardness, her imperiousness, her proud arrogance, the banker was fond of the handsome, queenly girl, who had been brought up from babyhood to believe herself his heiress and granddaughter. It is true, there was less real affection in his fondness of her than in his tender love for sweet Mabel; but she was dear to him; and he was troubled on her account. He turned toward Mabel, saying:

"May, dearest, can you not persuade Glennie to think differently ?"

May arose timidly. There was no thought of triumph in her kind little heart. She forgave the ill-natured speeches which the disappointed girl had so satirically uttered. She advanced, laying her taper fingers gently on Glencora's arm.

"You are paining grandpapa, Glencora," she said gently. "Remember, this revelation has not lessened his love for you; you are as dear to him at this moment as you ever were. You will not grieve him, I am sure, by refusing his affection, even if you will not accept that of—others."

The flashing black eyes met the soft, violet ones mockingly, and Glencora drew away from the light touch disdainfully.

"It is generous of you to patronize," she told Mabel coolly, "and, of course, I feel duly grateful and flattered; but really I——"

An interruption, in the form of a servant bringing a letter for the master of Maplewood, came at that moment.

The letter was from Wales, and had been delayed many days. Mr. Chessom tore it open, and drew forth Lady Rozenthal's note and Jarvis Willoughby's confession, both of which he read aloud.

"Poor Jarvis," Mabel said, sorrowfully, when Mr. Chessom had finished the perusal of both missives. "He was ill and dispirited at the time her ladyship wrote; and the letter has been delayed for so many days. He may be worse, and how cruel he must think us all."

The library door was thrown open, and Mrs. Willoughby entered. She was extremely pale, her lips twitched nervously, and her bright, dry eyes were singularly wild and glittering in their expression.

"My daughter come with me at once. Poor Jarvis is dying!" she said in a gasping voice.

Glencora uttered a cry, and snatched the telegram which her mother held toward her.

It was from Mrs. Gimp:

"Master Jarvis is dying, pray come at once," it ran; and Glencora read it aloud.

"Good heavens! Poor Jarv," she ejaculated the next moment, letting the brief

despatch fall from her fingers to the carpet.

"Miseries always come in throngs, don't they, mamma?"

Mrs. Willoughby linked her arm within that of her daughter, and turned to quit the room, but Mr. Chesson's voice detained her.

"Stay," he said, "you will start immediately for Cwmdaron, will you not?" he inquired.

"Certainly," replied the lady; "does not that telegram state that my son is dying?" she asked in those strange, unnatural tones.

"But you must not undertake the journey alone—that is, you and Glencora," he told her. She smiled bitterly.

"I do not flatter myself that I have any kind friends who will care sufficiently for a fallen wretch like myself to take the trouble of accompanying me to the sick bed of my disgraced, disinherited son," she said coldly.

"Agatha"—it was Leigh who spoke now, calling her as he was wont to do five and twenty years ago, when she was his sister-in-law, and they all resided in one house.

"Agatha, this is no time to remember wrongs, however grievous," he said gravely. I am ready to accompany you to Wales, or to do anything which is in my power, to aid your son's recovery. Let us hope that there is yet a chance of his recovery. I will telegraph to London for Sir Egbert Eversly; and if medical aid can save his life Eversly will bring him 'round."

The hard look died out of Mrs. Willoughby's eyes; she covered her face and burst into tears.

"Heaven knows how little I deserve your generous forbearance and kindness, Leigh; but, for Jarvis' sake, I must render myself more despicable in your eyes by accepting the aid you offer me, after all the injury I have done you and yours," she said humbly.

Ere Leigh had time to reply, two lovely purple blue eyes were lifted to his face, two little hands were clasped pleadingly around his arm, and his daughter was saying softly:

"Poor, poor Jarv. I may go with you and help to nurse him, may I not? Oh, please let me go, too."

"You make the dearest little nurse in the world," he told her. "I haven't forgotten how completely you once charmed away a most violent headache from which I was suffering. I think there must have been something magical or mesmeric in your touch."

And so it was decided that Mabel, as well as her father, should accompany Mrs. Willoughby and her daughter to Wales; and in little more than an hour they began the journey.

A few moments ere they started, however, Mabel found time to search in the corridor for the lovely little betrothal ring which her lover, in his angry, unfaith, had flung from him the previous night. She—Mabel—understood all now.

"Dear, dear Bertram," she whispered as she caught the gleam of the jewelled circlet among the sweeping folds of a curtain, and hastily picked it up, slipping it—after pressing her rosy lips upon it—upon her finger. "How wicked of me to believe him faithless. I might have known better."

She arose from her kneeling position, and came face to face with Mr. Rimmelton. He had heard that she was going to Wales, and was seeking her.

"Is it possible that you are going, Miss Willoughby?" he asked.

"To Jarvis?—yes," she told him.

"But I have not forgotten your question, Mr. Rimmelton. The turn which events have suddenly taken has expedited my answer. I sincerely thank you for your honorable proposal; but something has occurred within the last few hours which renders it impossible for me to accept that proposal. Besides, I should do wrong, in any case, to wed you, knowing as I do that I could never regard you with feelings warmer than those with which I esteem other kind, generous friends."

A servant came to inform Mabel that all was in readiness for their departure; and she was hurried away, leaving poor Rimmelton to bear his disappointment with whatever of fortitude and philosophy he could muster. Fortunately, for the peace of his heart, he was pretty fairly gifted with both.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—

A DEATH-BED REQUEST.

Five weeks have passed since the conclusion of our last chapter; and Jarvis Willoughby is not only still alive, but on the high road to recovery; though even the eminent Sir Egbert Eversly can do nothing to cure his totally blinded eyes.

The yellow, spring sunshine was bright

and warm on the morning whereof we write. Jarvis sat among a pile of cushions in Mrs. Gimp's little parlour. Ernest Chessom, who has been with Jarvis for the last four weeks, is seated beside him now, reading aloud scraps and various items from the last copy of the *Times*. Mrs. Willoughby pale, sorrowful, subdued, sat looking out of a window. Mabel was employed upon some trifling work, and Glencora, thinner than usual, paler, and decidedly sulky, was trying to amuse herself with a popular novel; and now and then glancing with savage contempt about her.

"Haloa!" exclaimed Ernest; "what is this;" and he read aloud: "If the heir, or heirs—providing there are any living—of the late Ernest Angus Willoughby will communicate with Crofton and Keating, No. —, Great George street, Westminister, they will learn something infinitely to their advantage."

Glencora dropped her sensational novel.

"Whatever is the meaning of it, mamma?" she asked, looking wonderingly at her mother. Has anybody been obliging enough to will us a fortune, do you suppose?"

Mrs. Willoughby looked agitated, she rose, and walking over to where Ernest was seated, read the brief advertisement over his shoulder.

"I am sure I cannot tell what it means," she said, in reply to her daughter's question; "but I shall immediately write and find out if possible."

"If it were not too good fortune, I should be inclined to believe that there was somebody's wealth just ready to tumble into our hands whenever we choose to stretch them forth," Jarvis said. "But, pshaw! it's all folly to dream of such a thing," he added.

"At any rate, I shall write," his mother declared; and accordingly she did so, receiving an answer within a week from Crofton and Keeting, assuring her that her son and daughter, providing their identity could be proven, were heir and hetress to a considerable large fortune which fell to them from a maternal uncle of their father's.

Undeniable proofs were brought forward, and their right to the property fully established in a short apace of time.

And now came the time to return to England, and for the rights of Leigh Chessom's children to be also established.

Mrs. Willoughby grew more strangely nervous and excitable nearly every hour during the last two days previous to the day on which it was decided that they were to leave Wales.

"Horrible!" exclaimed Glencora to her mother, on the evening before they were to depart. "What does it signify whether we are rich or poor? We are disgraced—hedeously disgraced. Let us go to France or Germany, or somewhere—anywhere, so long as it is out of England. Oh! dear me, we are exiled forever from Twickenham. Mamma! what on earth has happened?"

Mrs. Willoughby was writhing as if in terrible bodily torture. Glencora's shrill scream brought Leigh Chessom and his son and daughter hurriedly to the side of the struggling, agonized woman, who, in a few minutes, more, was wholly insensible. It was more than two hours ere she regained consciousness.

"I have but little time to live, and much to do ere I die. Will some one bring me writing materials quickly?" were almost her first words after recovering sensibility.

Pen, ink, and paper were fetched. She asked to be propped up in bed, and then desired to be left alone for an hour.

At its expiration she asked to see Leigh; and he came to her side.

"Leigh, in my wicked avarice, I did your children a grievous wrong; but I am dying now, and I want you to forgive me, if you can, and to grant my last dying prayer. You can do so without harm to you or yours, while it will save my children from shame—disgrace. Will you promise?"

"If to do so will be consistant with honour, yes," Leigh replied.

Mrs. Willoughby drew a deep breath, and extended a paper toward him.

"Here is my dying confession. It is a false one, but not a wicked one. It will do no harm—but good—infinite good," she said, hastily perceiving Leigh's shocked glance.

"A false, dying confession! For heaven's sake! Agatha," Leigh exclamed.

"Only read it, Leigh," she cried, eagerly; and Leigh read it, and wondered what manner of woman Agatha Willoughby was.

It was brief, but as clear as if all true. She declared herself *not* the mother of Ernest Willoughby's children, but a school girl friend of their mother's; and asserted that both their parents were dead, that her real name was Geraldine

Lesden—which was a fictitious name, of course. That Mrs. Willoughby died long ago she also affirmed, stating that she lay in an unmarked grave in the suberb where she resided at the time of her death. The grave, in reality contained the remains of a female servant of Mrs. Willoughby's.

"I read the advertisement which Mr. Chessom inserted in the *Times*," she wrote, and my ambitious longing to become a rich woman prompted me to commit the crime I am now confessing. I passed myself off as Leigh Chessom's widow; and I led Philip Chessom to believe that the children of my friend were his grandchildren. I did so because I felt more interest in Agatha's children than in those of her step-sister, Grace. When Leigh Chessom returned to England he mistook me for the dead Agatha, because my appearance was similar to hers. We were both dark, and many thought that we resembled each other remarkably."

There were but few words more. Leigh finished the skillfully concocted false confession, and stared at the sick woman in utter astonishment.

"Agatha, I should be doing wrongly to allow this. Remember, you are writing these falsehoods upon what you yourself, as well as the rest of us, believe to be your death bed."

She raised herself to a sitting posture and gasped pantingly:

"You will not contradict my confession—you will keep all secret that you know? Oh! Leigh Chessom, for the love of heaven, do not be so cruel as to do otherwise!"

She was so white—so agonized that Leigh—shocked, and pitying her, acceded to her passionate entreaty.

"Thank heaven!" she sighed, "the world shall believe their mother long ago dead, instead of the miserable creature she is still living to be; and they shall be wealthy, and spared disgrace. I think I can meet death calmly now."

A minister was summoned, and Leigh Chessom shuddered as he beheld Mrs. Willoughby calmly sign, in the presence of the clerical gentleman, her name to the truthless fabrication which was her dying confession.

It was the last act of her life. She expired ere the clergyman left the cottage.

After her funeral the paper with her confession written upon it was, according to Mrs. Willoughby's earnest request read in the hearing of her children, who of course were led by it to believe that she was not their parent.

Jarvis was shocked—grieved, for his mother with all her faults and follies, was still dear to him. Glencora exhibited neither heart or feeling. She was amazed, and selfishly glad that the "hideous disgrace," as she termed it, was to be averted.

"For mercy's sake! Then mamma was a somebody or other whom we know nothing about, instead of being really our own mother. And if she had have lived, why, I suppose we should have been forced to have borne her disgrace with her. What a blessing poor mamma—of course its natural to call her thus—but what a blessing that she did not die as suddenly as we feared she was about to, ere she had time to write down all those horrid, dreadful things in black and white," and Glencora winced at the idea.

"Glencora, for heaven's sake! let us hear no more such horribly selfish and unfeeling remarks. They are shocking—even disgusting to your listeners, and derogatory to yourself—Jarvis told her sternly.

"Selfish! indeed, as if it was not the most selfish thing in the world for poor mamma to hide all those things after affairs turned so embaressingly, making you and I as deep in the marsh as herself."

Leigh Chessom touched her arm now, and spoke sternly.

"Peace! you are the most utterly heartless creature in existence; and you chatter of what you know nothing," he said. An insolent stare was the young lady's reply, as she turned from him.

Mrs. Willoughby was quietly buried in the little gray town of Cwmdaron; and Leigh Chessom went back to Twickenham, and Jarvis and Glencora went also.

"I have no right to allow myself to be a burden upon you," Jarvis told Leigh Chessom and his son. "I am a miserable, utterly useless creature, a blind mole; and after the mean act which I allowed myself to be guilty of, I have no right—and feel it to be cowardly to accept your care and kindness. My fate is better than I deserve. If I am to be blind the rest of my days, my deceased uncle's property will save me from being a dependant pauper also. I shall own a fine place in Kent; and I can go there and live, and if it is very lonely some times I ought not to wish for anything better."

"My dear boy," Leigh said, "do not let us speak or think of the past now. You have atoned by fully confessing, the while you were nearly certain that, for the man whom you supposed to be your grandfather, to know you guilty of gambling with one of London's wildest young scapegraces, would be almost certain to result in calling down on you his deepest anger."

Ernest broke in pleasantly.

"Yes, Jarv, let us think no more about disagreeable things, or of shutting yourself up to perish of dullness in that great rambling old house of yours away in Kent; and don't descant upon our magnanimity, but come back to Maplewood, and let us all be happy," he said, cheerfully.

Jarvis suppressed a dreary little sigh. To the knowledge of the world, there was no dishonour attached to his name; and, if he was not the rich banker's grandson, he believed now that the woman who had usurped another's place, for the greed of wealth was not, as he at first—as well as others—believed his mother.

But a sweet girlish face was ever rising before his sightless eyes; and Birdie Wylde's sweet voice was ever sounding in his ears. If he was not a penniless outcast, he thought bitterly, he was blind—a mere helpless mole. It would be madness for him to dream of loving Lady Bozenthal's bright, beautiful daughter, henceforth.

It was nightfall, after a somewhat tedious journey, when our party reached Maplewood.

Mr. Chessom met them with some surprise; and Glencora, as she was passing up the stair case paused to exclaim:

"I don't wonder that you look astonished, to behold us here again, my dear Mr. Chessom—she could not to say grand papa—but the most astonishing things have happened. It will take a whole week, I'm sure, for your son to explain all that occured in just one day. Come, Artimese. Gracious! how dreadfully jaded I feel," and the young lady went on to her dressing room.

"My poor boy, how sorry I am for this misfortune which has befallen you," Mr. Chessom said, clasping Jarvis Willoughby warmly by the hand.

"And so you are as generously forgiving as your grandson, Mr. Chessom It is more—much more—than I deserve or hoped for," Jarvis said humbly.

"Not a word, my boy, not a word of that," the banker exclaimed, pressing the young man's hand again; "but I see you're looking weary, and Ernest is waiting to go with you to your old room. There, take him along, Ernest."

He turned then to kiss his granddaughter, and shake his son's hand.

"And what of Mrs. Willoughby?—where is she?" he inquired, as Ernest and Jarvis disappeared.

"I have many things to tell you which, as Glencora remarked, will take some time to relate," said Leigh; "let us go to the library."

"But not until you are rested and have had some refreshment, Leigh," the old gentleman said.

"I am not tired nor as famished as Miss Willoughby has been declaring herself during the last two hours of our journey: and my mind is struggling under so prodigious a load that I am anxious to relieve it at once," said Leigh.

They went to the library accordingly: and Leigh Chessom informed his father of Agatha Willoughby's death, and the singular circumstances therewith connected.

The banker's astonishment and perplexity may be more easily imagined than described.

"Am I really to understand that Mrs. Willoughby's children have been deceived into believing that she is not their mother?" he asked, half in bewilderment.

"Really and truly, dear father," Leigh told him. "It is a painfully complicated affair."

He drew a document from his pocket book.

"Here is the confession which, with her dying breath, Mrs. Willoughby affirmed to be a true one; and her last act was to sign to it a fictitious name which she positively asserted to be her real name."

"Aed in her last moments then, Mrs. Willoughby deliberately perjured herself. Leigh, ought you have permitted it?"

"I did so sorely against my will," Leigh answered. "At first, like yourself, I was horrified; but her wild, appealing look, in her passionate entreaty, forced me to accede, partly from pity, and mainly from fear lest, if I refused, a sudden and violent death might be the result. But I now sincerely regret my weakness."

Mabel—for she was still called so, old Mr. Chessom declaring that he should

never be able to remember his grand children otherwise than as Ernest and Mabel, and deprecating a second transfer of their names—reached her apartment, removed her travelling apparel, and brushing out her golden hair, and donning a soft half sombre dress of mauve cashmere, at down to await the tray of refreshments which she had ordered a servant to fetch.

How like a dream those last few weeks had passed. What changes! why, it was like a fairy tale.

"Dertram, dear Bertram," breathed the rosy lips. "He shall know all soon, very soon. Dear, foolish fellow. How immoderately papa laughed when he learned that he mistook that little scene in the conservatory for one of love-making, and was terribly jealous in consequence. But oh!"—and May's cheeks paled at the thought—"what if in his angry disappointment he had left England forever, or if not already gone, might depart ere he learned the truth? Oh! he must know, very very soon."

Eladah appeared, bearing a tray of toast, delicate sponge cake, jelly and a dainty cup of Mocha.

"If you please, Miss May," said the maid, placing the tray and lifting the D'oyley therefrom," there's a gentleman in the blue drawing room who begs to see you when you are quite rested enough to come down."

"Very well, Adah, I am not very much fatigued. Tell the gentleman that I will see him in less than an hour," Mabel told the maid; and within that time she descended to meet the gentleman whoever he might be.

The blue drawing-room was not brilliantly lighted; only one or two jets glimmered from a half-lit gassalier.

Mabel's sylph-like figure floated in.

"Mabel, dearest?" and she was in the arms of the gentleman who had requested to see her, and receiving the kisses of her betrothed, Bertram Waldegrave, for he it was.

"Bertram! and here so soon; how did you find out about papa being my father instead of a lover?" she inquired with a teasing little laugh.

"I will tell you all, darling, only say first that you quite forgive my churlish doubts of you, and pardon my stupid jealousy. Will you, dearest? Remember, the strong should be merciful."

"Yes"—with an arch little smile—"only you must promise to never doubt me again."

"Doubt you again?—never dear. I was an idiot to ever do so at all; but, henceforth, the whole world's evidence could not make me again cherish doubt of you, my precious Mabel."

Of course, that was not a tithe of the nonsens—such as lovers delight in—that they talked ere Bertram proceeded to relate to his affianced why and wherefore he had so soon returned to Twickenham.

We will explain to the reader in our own way, without any of the lover-like ejaculations with which Mabel's betrothed interjected his recital.

Bertram was driven into the smoke and fog of great "London town" in a frame of mind that baffles description.

For two or three days he wandered aimlessly about the city, attending the opera, the theatre, and fashionable club rooms, in the fruitless hope of finding something enlivening.

Then, worn out, mentally, if not physically, he fell ill. A friend was dispatched to Twickenham, and Mr. Chessom immediately started for the city. When his great uncle reached him Bertram was feverish and somewhat delirious; and from his sometimes stormy ravings the banker discovered to a certainty what he before was tolerably sure was the cause of his sudden departure from Twickenham. A few days of judicious medical attendance and careful nursing brought him safely over the crisis of his illness; and he was ere long able to listen to his uncle's recital of the startling things which transpired on the day of his (Bertram's) leave of Maplewood.

The young man's convalesence was not tardy after that. In a short time he was strong enough to be carried back to Twickenham, where he remained until the return of our party from Wales, Mr. Chessom saying nothing in his letters to his son, while in Cwmdaron, of Bertram's having come back, as he wished for a pleasant surprise to be given his grand-daughter.

Lady St. Ayvas was more chagrined than she would have cared to admit when she was made aware of all that took place in the affairs of the rich banker after she left Maplewood. Indeed, the news reaching her soon after learning, with bitter disappointment, that her eccentric brother, Col. Fairleigh, had bequeathed to Harvey Fairleigh—instead

of to Lady Winnifred St. Ayvas, to whom he only willed a handsome legacy —the bulk of his large fortune, her ladyship grew quite hysterical. She was decidedly upset, and very much out of humor for some time after.

"Such a horrible deception that woman has practised all these years! Is it not preposterous, my dear ?" she exclaimed, addressing Lady Winnifred, and speaking of the deceased woman whom, so very short a time previous she had been wont to address "dearest Mrs. Chessom" and "my dear friend." "An unheard of thing, really; and the most wicked part of it all was giving to her friend's children the birthright of old Mr. Chessom's grandchildren. What a blessing that Jarvis and Glencora have had a fortune bequeathed them. It would have been a dreadful shock to have fallen from so magnificent a position to real poverty, especially now that Jarvis is blind; but, of course, their fortune is trifling compared with what will fall to Leigh Chessom's children from their grandfather, not to mention the immense wealth which their father possesses. It is the most startling affair I ever heard of. Dear me, I wonder will that woman ever be able to rest in her grave after all the dreadful things she has been guilty of ? Of course, she would never in the world have repented and confessed; and had she not been forced to acknowledge, why, of course, the real heirs would always have been deprived of their rights."

Her daughter answered calmly:

"I am glad that the real heirs are no longer deprived of their rights. I fancy," she added, with a touch of satirical contempt, such as she rarely evinced, "that this sudden change in the order of things will occasion a wonderful revolution in the feelings and sympathies of Mr. Chessom's friends. One can picture it all without difficulty—the hosts of smiles, and bows, and painfully pressing invitations. Sweet little Mabel,—the looked-down upon dependent—will be a reigning belle, the recipient of numberless offers from numberless swains, who will eagerly fling the titles which they are unable to keep at her feet, beseeching for that pretty little hand of hers. And her brother—oh, he will be speedily metamorphosed from the penniless, dishonored clerk into the most eligible match in Twickenham. Shall I angle for him *now*, mamma ?"

Her ladyship visibly winced, and answered dryly, with a heightening of color beneath her rouge:

"Angle ? Really, I should hope that my daughter would never forget her dignity so far as to condescend to angle for any man."

The lady glanced furtively at her daughter.

"If he loves you as devotedly as he professed a short time since," she added, "he will, no doubt, again sue for your hand."

"And provided he does so, now that he is rich enough to *pay* for his bride, I may accept him. I suppose," Winnifred asked quietly.

"Now that his position is such as to warrant his asking, if he chooses, for your hand in marriage, I should not withhold my consent, were he to do so," her mother calmly told her.

Winnifred picked up the embroidery which she had let fall in her lap, with a feeling, inspired by her mamma's words, that was akin to angry disgust. It was so much in the language of slang—like handing her over to the highest bidder.

"The young man has also been fully exonerated from the charge of taking that paltry sum of money—six hundred pounds, wasn't it ?—by his father's undeniably proving that the identical bank notes which were missing were paid by somebody, whose name is not mentioned, to a fast young scion of a broken-down family—I am so stupid as to forget the name—for the cancelling of a gambling debt in London, on a certain day upon which it was known throughout the whole banking house that Ernest Chessom was on a business trip here to Islington. Very absurd of old Mr. Chessom to suspect him at all. I very much wonder that he did not—as I am inclined to do suspect Jarvis of abstracting the amount from the first."

"But why do you suspect Jarvis ?" queried Winnifred

"I don't think there could have been anyone else to take the money, is my reason for suspecting him, though I would not, for worlds, mention my suspicions abroad; besides, would it not be much easier to suspect Jarvis, who is —or rather was - wild, and drank, and, I have understood, sometimes gambled heavily, than Ernest, who is so steady and honorable."

"But mamma, I thought that this young man, who has passed for so long

as Mr. Chessom's grandson, stood high in your estimation. You have many times told me that you could not wish anything more advantageous for me than an alliance with him. You never before mentioned to me that he was fast or gambled, or that he was not honourable: but always the contrary," Winnifred told her mother, with a steady glance that annoyed and somewhat disconcerted her ladyship.

"How oddly you put things Winnie," she said, with a languidly surprised glance in return. "Of course there are very few young men who are not a little wild at Jarvis' age. Ernest is a refreshing exception rarely to be met with. But my dear," she added, somewhat abruptly, "I am thinking of living in Twickenham. There is a charming villa—Sir Charles Parkinson's. His wife is in a decline, and the baronet is going abroad with her. It is but a short distance from Maplewood, and you and Mabel will be able to visit each other as often as you please."

And so Lady St. Ayvas removed to Twickenham, and settled in the charming villa near Maplewood; and by her ladyship's unqualified consent Ernest and Winnifred were reunited; and, when summer breezes were fanning the fragrance of rose and lily and acacia over the gardens at Maplewood, there was a double wedding at Maplewood house, Lady Winnifred and Mabel being the lovely young brides—and 'twere impossible to decide which of the twain were the loveliest—and Ernest Chessom and Bertram Waldegrave the bridegrooms.

Harvey Fairleigh officiated as best man for Ernest, and not long after was himself wedded to pretty Rosie Castlemain, who was Mabel's bridesmaid.

Old Mr. Chessom gave way both brides.

Bertram took his young wife to the home of his parents, after their wedding tour. His father and mother are delighted with her.

Ernest and Winnifred are happily settled at Maplewood.

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Three years have passed since we last made record, and Jarvis Willoughby is ill—it is feared near dying. There are gentle nurses about him, more than one; but there is one whose soft touch seems the most cooling to his feverish forehead, whose pressure, more than all others, is soothing to him.

She is bending beside him now, in the shadowy sick chamber: and she listens while Jarvis mutters:

"Birdie! my sweet little Birdie! what will you have grown to be like in those three years, I wonder. Ah! I shall never know. I am a miserable, blind wretch. Oh! Birdie! Birdie! you will never know—for I dare not ever tell you—how dearly—how madly I love you—have loved you, all these weary years."

The lovely dark eyes of the beautiful listener grow wonderfully soft and pitiful: the warmth of a soft blush mantles the sweet, singular face with its rich tinting of cream and carnation. She touches his forehead with her cool, soft hand, and he is soothed, as if the touch were mesmeric.

For days there is but faintest hope, then he recovers—slowly, slowly; but he recovers, and learns that Birdie is beside him—has been, during all his illness. And one day, when the passionate impulse, that is stronger than himself, prompts him, he bursts forth, telling her all his mad, mad love of her,—all that he has striven hard to conceal; and lovely Bertie Wylde becomes his betrothed wife and will not listen to his self reproaches for being selfish enough to wish her to become the bride of one so utterly useless as himself.

Months after they are married at St. George's, and on their wedding tour visit Paris, where an emminent French physician is operating on Jarvis' eyes with decidedly beneficial results, for he is slowly, but surely recovering his eyesight.

Glencora is wedded to a savage-tempered French Count, with whom she quarrels almost incessantly.

Mr. Rimmelton has happily married a pretty little heiress, whose settlements are large enough to quite satisfy his family.

The banker's grandchildren are the happy parents of two little prattlers respectively, of which Leigh Chessom and his father are the delighted grandfather and great-grandfather.

THE END.