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HEART OF GOLD.

BY

L. T. MEADE,

Author of "A Girl of the People," "Frances," "Kane's Fortune," etc., etc.

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HEART OF GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

SEE, Jocelyn, we have got exactly fifty pounds a year. Mr. Frost says he will pay us half-yearly, on the 1st of November and the 1st of May. He says we shall have our money quite punctually—he won't charge anything for collecting it, not even for the envelope in which he encloses the cheque, nor will he oblige us to account to him for the penny which the cheque costs. Every half-year we shall have five-and-twenty pounds, all our own. Think of it, Jocelyn; it sounds quite comfortable for two girls, doesn't it!"

"Yes," said Jocelyn in a contemptuous voice; "it will about pay for our gloves. How unreasonable you are, Hope, to burst in with your dull, dry, technical news when I am reading! Don't you see that I am reading a letter? Can't you guess that I want to finish it? You are such a tiresomely matter-of-fact girl—— There, I don't want to fret you, darling."

Hope arched her rather marked brows very slightly.

"You never vex me, Joey," she said. "I felt so excited to see certainty and some sort of land at last that I forgot you were reading. I beg a thousand pardons. Oh, thank you, Anne—coffee and hot scones—how delicious! Come to breakfast, Jocelyn; I am dreadfully hungry."

Jocelyn moved slowly across the long, darkly wainscoted room. She took her place opposite the coffee-tray, but her eyes were still lowered over the voluminous pages of a closely written letter.

"Sugar, Hope?" she said, in a mechanical voice.

Hope was cutting bread and butter.

"Yes, darling—but please not more than five lumps. Jocelyn, I assure you that is the sixth which is about to drop into my already over-sweetened beverage. Thanks, dear. Bread and butter, eggs, ham, scones, wait your acceptance when you are ready. In the meantime I am too hungry to stand on ceremony."

"Oh, I'll be ready in a minute—such a long letter! Thrilling, though—quite thrilling. Don't talk to me for two minutes, Hope, and then you shall hear news."

"Jocelyn's cheeks are quite flushed,"—murmured Hope, as she devoured bread and butter. "Her hands shake; she is smiling. Can it be a proposal? She is so agitated, and in such a glow of delight, that it really looks like it. But who is there to propose? She won't have poor Cecil, and there really is no one

else. Fifty pounds a year—twenty-five every half-year. Could we live in London?—it isn't quite a pound a week. Yes, Jocelyn, what is it?"

"An egg, please," said Jocelyn. "I have finished my letter; it is from Aunt Margaret Seaton."

Hope's face was like her name, very bright and pliable. She had dark brows, hair several degrees lighter, and expressive grey eyes. Her eyes, which could express almost every shade of feeling, grew dark now; her lips took a straight and somewhat hard curve, and the rather fleeting color on her cheeks paled perceptibly.

"A letter from Aunt Margaret Seaton, and you look so happy, Jocelyn?" she questioned, "I wonder she could write. I wonder you can read. I—I don't understand."

"Of course you don't, darling; you have not heard a word of the letter. It's all right, I assure you; but we'll talk it over presently. Now what about that dreadful Mr. Frost and his dull epistle?"

Jocelyn was very like Hope—like her, with a difference. She was more brilliant, more beautiful. Hope's hair was only light, Jocelyn's was golden. Jocelyn's lips were not so firm as Hope's, but they were exquisitely curved, and gleaming white teeth showed between them when she smiled. She was not so tall as her sister, but she was beautifully made; the plainest dresses became her, and took a look of ease and

grace and beauty from the very way she put them on. She had an affectionate, bright, frank manner; and although Hope, too, was bright and frank, Jocelyn was, on the whole, the greater favorite. Everyone liked the Karrons, however, and all the old friends who had known the girls from their childhood were sorry when they heard that they must go away from the snug wainscoted house where, during their mother's time, they had lived, not in wealth, but in considerable ease and comfort, and face the world as very poor girls.

Still they had fifty pounds a year. Hope, who had half risen from her seat when Jocelyn made an announcement with regard to her correspondent, sank into it again, and taking up Mr. Frost's letter, spread it before her on the table.

"It's very short," she said, "He has addressed it to me."

"Of course—that goes without saying; you are the business one of the family."

Hope's eyes had not yet quite regained their usual undisturbed tranquil gaze. She loved Jocelyn with all her heart, but not quite understanding her at the moment, she rather avoided looking at her.

"I'll read the letter aloud," she said. "This is what Mr. Frost has written:—

"'DEAR MISS HOPE,—All your poor mother's unfortunate——' H'm, I needn't read aloud what he

says about mother, Jocelyn. Anyhow, the debts are all paid off; that's a comfort. He goes on, down here—'It is my painful duty to have to inform you that you and your sister are penniless; or, all the same thing, I find there is a thousand pounds left, which, as it happens, I can safely invest at five per cent. This will bring you in £50 a year. In a month's time I will send you a cheque for the first half-year's interest paid in advance. You may reckon on receiving a cheque from me to the amount of £25 on the 1st of November and the 1st of May regularly each year in future. This is the utmost I can do. I can scarcely express to you my consternation, or enough deplore——'

"Oh, now he's going off in another rigmarole. You can read the letter, of course, Jocelyn; but if I were you I wouldn't—it would only give you pain."

"Poor mother!" murmured Jocelyn. "I suppose he does feel rather irate."

"Irate! He's as rude as he can be. He's not a gentleman," answered Hope. "It's no affair of his if mother did—if mother couldn't help having pretty things, and making us the happiest girls in all the world. I'm nineteen, and I haven't had a cloud until now; and all my life I'll have my nineteen perfect years to look back upon. Don't talk of it, Jocelyn, for if you do I'll certainly break down."

"Poor mother!" again echoed Jocelyn. "What

sweet taste she had in dress too! No one ever made up lace ruffles like her. Do you remember the day she powdered my hair, Hope, and made me wear the old point and velvet, and Sir Digby Leroy made those ridiculous compliments! Why, Hope, you are looking quite pale. That will never do—you would be positively ugly if you were pale, Hope. You want that touch of color in your cheeks to darken your eyes, and make you worthy of your name. Oh, how thankful I am I hadn't the misfortune to be called after a virtue!"

Hope pushed aside her breakfast, and going over to the fire stood with her back to the old oak carved mantel-piece.

"We have got to face everything, Joey," she said. "We were waiting for Mr. Frost's letter—it has come, and now we must face the world. I am not low-spirited, and I always, always mean to be bright; but it is a grave subject, isn't it?"

Jocelyn raised her coffee-cup to her lips. She drank deliberately, her pretty eyes were lowered, and the fingers which shook when turning over the pages of Mrs. Seaton's letter now trembled again.

"It is ridiculous to be afraid of a creature like you, Hope," she said. "And of course I'm not—not a morsel. Still, I foresee a storm. Fancy a storm in a teacup between two loving twin sisters! However, it will soon blow over. Even *you*, darling, even *you*, pet,

must bow to the inevitable. Fifty pounds a year; it might keep us in gloves—I'm not sure. Now, look here, Hope: how much money have you in the house?"

"A five-pound note," said Hope, "half a sovereign, a florin, twopence, and four halfpenny stamps."

"What riches! I want you to lend me the five-pound note. I want to go to town to call on Aunt Margaret Seaton."

CHAPTER II.

THERE was no pleasanter or more sociable little village in all Chalkshire than Downton, and few of its inhabitants were more popular here than the Karrons. Oakdene was the most popular house for evening parties, for impromptu charades, for tennis, for all other amusements suited to the young, happy, and gay. Jocelyn and Hope Karron were in endless request, not only in their own house but in all other houses where the girls were young and the lads merry. Mrs. Karron was just the gentlest, softest, most picturesque of women, and the cares and perplexities of money seemed never to touch the lives of the Oakdene inmates. Now and then Mrs. Karron would say, in a graceful, indolent fashion, looking with her loving dark eyes at the two pretty girls—

"You know, darlings, I ought to deny it to you, for I have a kind of idea that we are shockingly poor. I had a letter from Mr. Frost only a week ago, and he really quite frightened me—talked about the workhouse, and said we would soon be beggars. I could not sleep the night I got the letter—but now I don't believe it."

"Did he send you the cheque you wanted, mother?" Jocelyn said on the last of these occasions. "After all, that is the main thing."

"Oh yes, he sent me the cheque."

"Then of course you need not believe a word of his tiresome talk. And now we can order that brown velvet from Marshall's."

Hope was standing by the fire when Jocelyn ran gaily over to open her mother's davenport. She had a very gay sparkling face in those days, but now it looked a little grave. She seemed to put a kind of constraint over herself, and then said slowly—

"I know you hate business, don't you, mother darling?—but if you like *I'll* write to Mr. Frost, and find out what he really means."

Mrs. Karron threw up her hands in despair.

"You don't want quite to tell me, Hope," she exclaimed. "Fancy that dreadful man going into details! He is a lawyer, and he would do it in that terribly confused way that only lawyers can aspire to. In your poor father's lifetime, Hope, he never could get me to understand figures. He was so gentle with me, trying to explain over and over those dreadful differences between compound and simple addition. He said I had plenty of talent, but not for figures; therefore what could Mr. Frost do with me?"

Mrs. Karron raised her handkerchief to her eyes as she spoke, and Hope bent her tall young figure and kissed her.

A few months, however, after this last exhibition of weakness and ignorance on the part of Mrs. Karron, the dreadful blow fell. It was a fortnight before Christmas, and the girls were preparing for even more than their usual round of festivities. New dresses were ordered, sashes, gloves, boots, a thousand and one trifles, which, as the mother declared with smiles and proud glances, could not be done without, and cost so little—so very, very little. Boxes laden with these indispensables came down from London, and then in course of post followed the bills. Whatever the necessary trifles may have been, the money to be paid for them was sufficiently large even to stagger poor sleepy, good-humored Mrs. Karron. Although she disliked Mr. Frost, she had learnt to lean upon him; and of late years, at his own request, he had arranged to pay most of her accounts from a reserve kept for the purpose in a London bank. The girls were upstairs, trying on their new evening dresses, when Mrs. Karron, with a queer foreboding and almost fear at her heart, put the obnoxious bills into an envelope and directed them to Joshua Frost, Esq., Lincoln's Inn Fields. The post carried them away, and the widow breathed freely once more. There should be no girls like Jocelyn and Hope at the gay party which was to see the old year out and the new in. Hope insisted on washing and mending her

mother's old point, and the mother was to accompany the girls to this special festivity.

Alas! man proposes. Two days before Christmas Jocelyn and Hope were away for the day, having joined a large skating party. Mrs. Karron was having a gentle *siesta* in her pretty drawing-room when the room-door was rather abruptly opened by Jane the parlor-maid, and Mr. Frost in the flesh—not a terrible letter of his, not even a still more detestable telegram, but the man himself—stood before the poor frightened lady. He was a quiet, grave man. Silly people were apt to call him stern; in reality he had one of the kindest hearts.

"I have come to see you," he said. "Don't look so alarmed. There is no help for it, however. You have got to face facts. I've brought you back these bills; there is no reserve to meet them with."

He stayed for about an hour; long before the girls came back he was half-way to London.

"Where's mother?" said Hope, as she entered the cheery square hall about six o'clock that evening. Jocelyn was following with young Cecil Grey. "Jane," continued Hope in a half-whisper, "Mr. Grey will stay to supper. Is mother in the drawing-room?"

She pushed her fur cap from her rather low forehead as she spoke. Her eyes were sparkling with pleasure and excitement.

"Your mamma isn't well, Miss Hope," said Jane, "Perhaps Mr. Grey won't mind going home, miss. And—and the doctor, he'd like to see you, Miss Hope."

"The doctor!" exclaimed Jocelyn, who had now come up. "I don't ever remember seeing a doctor in this house. Cecil, you had better go into the drawing-room, or home, just as you please. Come, Hope; we'll go and see poor mother. What *can* be wrong?"

"The doctor wants you first, Miss Hope. He's in the study; he won't keep you any time," murmured Jane. "Don't go up to your mother, please, Miss Jocelyn, until Miss Hope has seen the doctor."

"Oh! what a ridiculous fuss," said Jocelyn. "Mother was quite well when we left home this morning. You are an awful croak, Jane. It is hateful to have people about one who make the worst of things," she continued, pulling off her fur-lined gloves and glancing up at young Grey.

Hope looked from Jocelyn to Jane; then the bright glow left her face. She felt grave and queer. She was too inexperienced to be really alarmed; but she hurried down the little passage which led to the tiny and seldom-occupied study.

"What is it, Mr. Marvel?" she said, as the grey-haired old doctor came to meet her.

"How do you do, Hope?" he said. He took her hand; he had known her all her life. "Yes, I knew

you were a brave girl," he continued. "You have stuff in you. That's right, my dear; hold yourself erect, and look me full in the face. You won't break down; girls like you never do."

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" said Hope, impatiently.

"I knew you had the right sort of mettle in you. I always admired you very much, Hope."

"I am getting extremely impatient," said Hope. "I have got a temper, and you are trying it. I suppose mother is really ill. But do tell me what is wrong, and let me go to her."

"She is very ill, my dear child—alarmingly ill. She has had what they call a stroke; it is a bad one, and must have been occasioned by some sudden shock. She is most anxious to see you, Hope. She cannot speak; but there is something on her mind. Perhaps you can help her to interpret it. Anyhow, I want you to go to her at once, and to be very calm and quiet. Whatever you feel, you must on no account break down. If Jocelyn cannot control her feelings she must not go into your mother's room."

"You think, then," said Hope, opening her big eyes wide, and staring at the doctor, "you think that mother—our mother, who was quite well this morning, is in danger?"

"Why, didn't I say so, child? Or if I didn't say it, I meant it. People don't have serious strokes

without being in danger. Now, Hope, if you are going to break down——"

"I'm not. Will you tell Jocelyn, please? I'm going to mother this moment."

She ran out of the room, and brushed against Jocelyn, who, in her furs and richly colored dress, made a picture as she still stood chatting with Cecil Grey in the hall.

"Good gracious, Hope! what is the matter?" exclaimed her sister; but Hope did not utter a sound. She reached her room, threw off her hat and jacket, encased her feet in a pair of worn but noiseless old slippers, and calmly, with a pale face, but two brightly shining eyes, entered her mother's bedroom.

The stroke had come truly, and poor Mrs. Karron could not utter a word. She looked at Hope with a whole world of entreaty, and question, and despair in her eyes.

The girl's strong young hand clasped hers. She bent down over her.

"You want something, mother dear," she said, in a clear matter-of-fact voice. "You can't speak; the doctor says you won't be able to speak just yet; but I dare say I can bring you what you want."

The eyes grew more questioning and eager.

Hope gazed at her mother as if she would read her very soul. Then she went across the room, and returned with some paper and a pencil.

"You can write, mother," she said, in an encouraging voice.

She put the pencil into the feeble, almost powerless hands.

"You can write, mother," she said. "I will hold the pencil with you, and you shall write on this paper what you want me to do."

A caged spirit seemed almost to leap from Mrs. Karron's dying eyes. With a resolution which had never before been manifested by her, and aided by Hope, she managed to get the following message conveyed to the sheet of paper :—

"DEAR MARGARET SEATON,—Send me £2,000 by the next post, or I shall die."

"Yes, mother," said Hope. "This shall go at once. Mr. Grey is downstairs, and he will post it. Of course Aunt Margaret will give you or lend you the money. She is rich ; it is nothing to her. Rest easy, mother pet—mother darling ; your own Hope won't let you die."

The restless eyes certainly grew quiet and calm, and the feeble hand tried to return Hope's warm pressure.

"I must send off the letter at once," she said. "There is quite time to catch the post."

She ran downstairs and entered the drawing-room. It looked just as it did every evening. A bright fire

shone and crackled in the highly polished grate. A pretty shaded lamp stood on a little round table beside her mother's empty chair. Jocelyn had crouched up in one corner of a large Chesterfield sofa; she was sobbing bitterly, and the doctor and Cecil Grey were both trying to comfort her.

"Ah! here comes Hope," said Dr. Marvel.

Jocelyn raised her face, down which the tears were streaming.

"Come here, Hope; how unkind of you to go away from me!" she half-sobbed, half-screamed: and rising to her feet, she held out her arms to her sister.

"In a minute, darling," said Hope. "Dr. Marvel, I must write an important letter immediately. I must catch the post.—Cecil, will you fly with my letter to the post-office when it is written?"

"I knew you wouldn't break down, Hope," said Dr. Marvel admiringly. "Then she had a secret, and it is off her mind. Capital! Now no one must talk while Hope writes her letter. Would you rather write here, or in the study, Hope?"

"Here," said Hope impatiently. "There is not an instant to lose; I must not miss the post. Go away, everyone, please, for five minutes—I mean, leave me alone at mother's davenport. Go away, please, Jocelyn; I'll speak to you after I have written the letter."

"Oh! you are unkind," sobbed Jocelyn. "Oh, what an awful, awful evening this is!"

Hope did not take any notice. She scribbled away with burning spots on her cheeks:—

"DEAR AUNT MARGARET,—Mother had a stroke this afternoon. She is *very* ill. She cannot speak, but she wrote what I enclose. Please send it to save her life. It is the last chance.—Your affectionate niece, "HOPE KARRON."

CHAPTER III.

ON Christmas Day Mrs. Karron died. Jocelyn had been in an almost stunned state since the first evening of her mother's illness. She had wept so long and so violently that her pretty eyes were nearly lost to view; she had refused to be comforted by anyone. When she did sleep, it was from exhaustion. No one could doubt the genuineness of Jocelyn's grief; the Downton people spoke of it as tragic, and the pity and admiration felt for the beautiful young girl was universal.

"Although she never do go near her mother's room," Jane was once or twice heard to whisper. "She couldn't abear it, she says; and the poor dear lady always and always looking out for her. But there's no doubt she's broke down, poor Miss Jocelyn is; and she'll never be the same bright youn g lady no more."

Hope during the two days which intervened between her mother's sudden illness and its fatal termination kept up, in Dr. Marvel's opinion, bravely. She was never seen to cry. She ate her meals with composure; she did not sleep, it is true, for she had so much to do, and the terrible illess was so short and

so quickly over that there was no time for sleep. But she was alert, watchful, capable. Instinct made her a good nurse, and the doctor, at least, was never tired of singing her praises.

The mother and daughter were mostly alone. Both knew the danger which was approaching, but both thought that it might be averted, Mrs. Karron clung in a confused kind of way to the succor which must surely come, and which would not only bring relief to her clouded brain, but would avert that domestic calamity which was killing her. Hope used to stand by her mother's side and talk cheerfully.

"Aunt Margaret's letter will come on Christmas morning, mother; and I am sending a messenger early to the post-office, so that there shall be no delay in our getting it. Of course she will send us what we want; there is no doubt about it—she is enormously rich."

Mrs. Karron could only smile with her eyes when Hope spoke brightly to her, but her faith was strengthened by Hope's faith, and after these warm emphatic declarations of her daughter's she often dropped off into almost peaceful slumber.

Christmas morning came, and with it the letter. Jane brought it herself to her young mistress as she stood in the shaded light by her mother's side. Mrs. Karron was very weak at the moment. Hope gave her a restorative, then she tore open the letter, having

no doubt whatever in her own mind with regard to its contents.

There was no cheque within, however, and the large writing on the thick sheet of note paper was sufficiently brief to be quickly perused :—

"*Grosvenor Mansions, December 24th.*

"MY DEAR NIECE,—You must have taken leave of your senses to write to me as you have done, or to take any notice of the wanderings of a sick person. I am truly sorry for my poor sister; but what else could be expected? She has never lived on her income, and even a large capital comes to an end when people fail to deny themselves. I am sorry, of course—very sorry—for this illness; but I dare say you have exaggerated its serious import. Give my love to Sophia, if she is well enough to receive it, and write and tell me how she goes on.—Your affectionate aunt,

"MARGARET SEATON.

"P.S.—Lotty sends her love. She *does* look so sweet, dressed for her first party. By the way, I am sending a hamper with some game and fruit to your mother as a little Christmas remembrance."

"What is it, Hope?" asked the eyes of the sick woman. "What does she say? Where is the cheque which is to save us, Hope?"

Hope's face was almost deathly. She folded the thick sheet of paper, replaced it in its envelope, and bent down over her mother.

"She has said nothing, mother—nothing that you would care to hear. She—she—. Mother, what is it?—Jane, come here; my mother is worse."

But no—for the moment she seemed better; the imprisoned tongue was loosened.

"Your Aunt Margaret has refused to send me the money, Hope?"

"Yes, mother—yes. Don't let us talk of it any more."

"Never any more," whispered Mrs. Karron, in a confused way—"never any more. I'd," she said, looking up at Hope with a glazed look coming over her eyes—"I'd like you to read me the letter."

"Read it, Miss Hope," said Jane, who was standing behind the bed with her apron to her eyes. "Don't you refuse her; she'll never want much more from you, Miss Hope."

"I'll read you the letter, of course, dear mother," said Hope. "It is unkind, and I'd rather you didn't hear it; still, I'll read it if you like."

"Every word," whispered the faltering, failing voice.

Hope did read, from the first line to the last. When she began, Jane slipped out of the room, and returned with the frightened, shrinking Jocelyn. As Hope folded up her letter, Mrs. Karron's eyes rested with an expression of pleasure on her eldest daughter's face.

"Her first party," she began to murmur. "No, no, it's Jocelyn's first party, and there's lot of money, lots—and flowers—quantities, beauties. They're

bringing them in, in baskets; they are all for a girl's first party—no, they are for a bride. See, all the flowers are white, and Jocelyn is the bride—no, white flowers are for funerals, too. Never mind—flowers—money, all for Jocelyn and Hope. God bless them!"

The last words were almost whispered. A fleeting smile passed over the dying features, and Mrs. Karron never spoke in this world again.

"Come away, Jocelyn," said Hope.

Her sister was in a paroxysm of grief. Hope put her arms round her and led her downstairs. There was a snug fire burning in the cheery dining-room, and an over-officious servant had even put up some feeble Christmas decorations.

"Jocelyn," said Hope, as her sister sank into an arm-chair and pressed her handkerchief to her face, "I do wish you would stop crying for five minutes, and let me speak to you. I'll go away afterwards, and you can cry from morning till night if you fancy."

"You are unkind to me, Hope," sobbed Jocelyn.

"Oh no, darling, but my own heart is crushed; and I must say something to relieve my feelings. Do you know that when my mother was taken ill she got me to write to Aunt Margaret—our rich Aunt Margaret—mother's own only sister? Mother wanted some money from her—well, a good lot; but what was that? It was the last chance for mother. I sent off the letter—you remember? This morning came the

answer. She refused; she wrote scornfully. There, that is what has killed mother. This is the letter; I am putting it into the fire. Do you think, Jocelyn, that I would ever speak to Aunt Margaret, or take a farthing of money from her again after this? Do you, Jocelyn, do you?"

"I don't know, Hope; I wish you would not glare at me so. You quite frighten me."

"There goes the letter into the fire," said Hope. "Oh! my poor little Jo—my poor little Joey—we are motherless; and we are beggars, too; but we'll always cling to one another. No one can ever part us from one another, can they, darling?"

When Jane slipped into the room, she saw the two poor things with their arms round each other, and Hope tired, and white as a sheet, but with her head lying on Jocelyn's breast fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. KARRON'S death caused considerable excitement in Downton; and not only her death, but the news which immediately followed—that pretty Jocelyn and Hope Karron were, to all intents and purposes, penniless. No end of compassion and sympathy was shown. Notes of condolence arrived at all hours. Officious but kindly meaning matrons tried to see the girls; and so many offers of help came in, and so many invitations arrived, that had the Karrons cared they could have lived on their friends for at least a couple of years.

Jocelyn, however, was in bed ill with a feverish and nervous attack, and Hope steadily refused to see all visitors except the doctor and Mr. Frost. Mr. Frost came down on the day of the funeral, and had a long talk with the young girl.

"It was not only," he said, "that your mother lived for some years past on her capital, but she was lately tempted to invest small sums in most unsafe speculations. She was weak enough to read those silly prospectuses which seem to flood every country house, and to be guided by them. I expostulated, and did

all in my power; but as your father left her full control of everything, I could not do more than speak my protests. When I came to see her in a hurry the other day, it was not only to explain that all her reserve money had come to an end, but that £2,000 which she had rashly invested was irretrievably lost."

"That explains," said Hope, moving her lips slightly.

"The last news seemed to break her down; she cried out in the most heartrending way. Seeing what has occurred, Miss Hope, I am almost sorry that I paid that visit; and yet it seemed my absolute duty to warn your poor mother."

"You could not help it, Mr. Frost," said Hope; "it had to be told. I am only sorry that you did not come to me in the first place. I always had more taste for that kind of thing than mother and Jocelyn."

"Poor child! How old are you, my dear?"

"Nineteen. Jocelyn and I are the same age. We are twins."

"Poor children!—poor children! Your sister is dreadfully broken down, I hear."

"She is. I don't think she'll ever be quite the same again. Now, Mr. Frost, what are you going to do for us?"

"Anything in my power, Miss Hope."

"Will you try to put affairs straight? I mean, are there any debts?"

"Bless the child—yes, there are heaps and heaps of debts."

"But is there money enough to pay them?"

"Yes, but it would mean making you and Miss Jocelyn penniless."

"Never mind that; pay the debts first."

"You're a brave girl, my dear. You take after your father—one of the most upright, honorable men I ever met. I am only sorry your poor mother was not more like him——"

"Please say nothing against mother; no one could have been better for us, or have made us more happy. May I give you some tea?"

Mr. Frost went away, and from that day kept up a brisk correspondence with Hope.

Jocelyn had been in bed for a week. She was now lying on a sofa, close to a luxurious fire in the girl's pretty bedroom. She wore a soft morning-gown of creamy white, with little pieces of black ribbon introduced daintily here and there. Her lovely golden hair lay in a rich mass against a dark velvet pillow; her eyes were fixed in alarm on Hope's eager face.

"Who did you say told you we were penniless?" she interrupted.

"Mr. Frost, of course."

Jocelyn laughed in a relieved way.

"You almost frightened me," she said. "Those tragedy queen airs don't suit you, Hope. Please don't adopt the style, for it makes you forbidding. Mr. Frost told you all this? Then we can go on as we have always done; we need not believe a word of it. We are only poor in the kind of comfortable way we have always been poor. Mr. Frost has croaked as long as I can remember."

"It is true this time," said Hope. "It killed mother, and it will kill me too, if you don't believe it, Jocelyn."

Jocelyn stroked her sister's smooth cheek.

"Poor old worry?" she said. "Why, she will fret herself into an old woman if this kind of thing goes on. Frankly, however, Hope, whether your news is true or false, I am not strong enough to be teased about it to-day. Let us put it off for a week at least, and be as comfortable as we can be without poor mother."

Jocelyn's eyes brimmed with tears; Hope's grew wide and bright. She poked up the fire, and sat down with a resigned expression.

"That is right, darling pet. Now I'm going to ring the bell; Jane shall bring our tea up here. I feel better to-day, Hope; as if a kind of awful black cloud was lifted. It is not right to grieve without resignation, is it, Hope? I feel much more resigned to-day.—Is that you, Jane? Please bring our tea up

here; and let us have nice thick cream, please, and teacakes. That will do; we'll have tea as soon as you can get it for us, Jane. Oh yes, thanks, I'm much better."

Jane withdrew, and Jocelyn almost laughed as she turned to Hope.

"Well, Gravity," she said, pinching her sister's ear, "aren't you glad to have your poor old Jocelyn reviving a bit? I am quite sure, Hope—quite absolutely certain—that if I had felt poor mother's death even the hundreth fraction of an inch more than I did, it would have killed me. It's a dreadful misfortune to have such a sensitive nature. Dr. Marvel said he never saw anyone so sensitive. He was talking about you, and he said you were made of quite different mettle. Well, poor Hope, you take it out of yourself in other ways. Now let me tell you what I did this morning; you must not think that I am quite useless. I felt better; and I said to myself, I'll do something to help that poor fussy darling downstairs. So I wrote a long letter to Mme. de Pompadour—she has got our measures, you know—and I gave her a complete list of mourning to get for us both. Of course it pained me, Hope—yes, of course it pained me awfully; but I said to myself that you should not be worried about everything, and I did it; I wrote the letter. Good gracious, child, what an unpleasant habit you have of staring!"

"Is the letter posted?" asked Hope.

"Posted! Rather. Jane was going out, and I gave it her. That letter is almost in Mme. de Pompadour's hands by now. Poor little Hope! Why, you are quite trembling, darling. Yes, I knew this would be too much for you. I knew you did feel things, although you have scarcely ever cried, and you have kept up so; but I knew you missed mother and I said you should not be pained. I ordered just the same for us both, Hope. Everything of the *very* best, and lots of crape. I ordered evening dresses, too, cut just prettily round the neck, and elbow-sleeves. We are sure to be asked to go on some visits, and we must have something. Poor little Hope! why, your hands are like ice. I think it has rather done me good to exert myself; so you need not fret for me, Hope. There comes Jane with the tea.—You posted that letter for me, didn't you, Jane?"

"Yes, miss.—Miss Hope, you don't look at all well, my dear."

"Give Jocelyn her tea, please, Jane," said Hope, in a stifled voice.

And she ran out of the room. There were burning spots on her cheeks. She rushed to the davenport in the drawing-room, took out a telegram form, and filled it in quickly:—

"Miss Hope Karron begs Madame de Pompadour

not to execute Miss Jocelyn Karron's order. Letter willfo llow."

She had not shown herself in the village street since her mother's death; but this was no time to stand on ceremony, and she did not dare to trust her precious telegram to any other hands. She put on her hat, veil, and jacket, and went out.

It was growing dusk, and there was a slight sprinkling of snow when Hope reached the post-office. She sent off her message, and with a relieved heart hastened home. As she reached the little gate which led to Oakdene, Cecil Grey came up suddenly and spoke to her.

"You don't mind, do you, Hope?" he said. "I have been wanting to see you so often. You don't think that I am intruding, do you, Hope?"

"Of course not, Cecil. I am glad to see you again."

Hope held out her hand. The young man wrung it warmly.

"I know it's very soon," he said, "but I didn't want to go away without. How is Jocelyn, Hope? Is there any chance, any chance at all, of her seeing me?"

"Not at present, Cecil; she is only lying on the sofa in her room to-day, but she is better, and I will give her your message. I will say that you called to say good-bye."

"But that isn't my message. I—if there is no chance of my seeing her—I will send her a message. You will take it for me, won't you, Hope?"

"Yes," said Hope. "Well?"

She was standing on her own doorstep, and raising her crape veil she looked full up at the tall young man by her side.

"Yes, Cecil, what is your message?" she continued.

She was feeling cold and chilly now, and longing to get into the house.

"Good gracious, I can't tell it to you here," said Grey. "May I come in? I won't keep you long. It is not really intruding, for we are old friends."

"Of course we are, Cecil," said Hope, her face brightening. "I didn't know you wanted to come in. I'd have asked you, but it never occurred to me that you could want to, for the house is very gloomy now."

She rang the bell as she spoke, and Jane opened the door.

"Please, Jane, light the gas in the dining-room. We are not using the drawing-room just now, Cecil. Will you come in here?"

In the old times that had so quickly passed away, there ever was a brighter-looking house than Oakdene. Candles in profusion, colored lamps on every pedestal, crackling merry fires in every grate; and warm curtains and soft mats, and brightly dressed

girls with laughing voices, and the no less bright and fascinating mistress of the house—all combined to make the young men, and the girls too, who lived at Downton, regard Oakdene, even in winter-time, as a sort of fairy palace.

Cecil Grey had always looked upon it in this light. As he entered the dark hall now, he was conscious of a sort of chill. The colored lamps were nowhere to be seen; there was no reflection of cheerful firelight. One dull gas-lamp only made the gloom of the wide square hall more visible. The bright girlish figures no longer flitted about; there was no gay laughter. Only one grave young voice asked him to come into a cold half-warmed room, where the fire was nearly out, and the window curtains had not even been drawn. The young figure in its heavy black seemed like a ghost of the former brightness. Hope threw off her hat, when Grey came up to her.

"Thank you, Jane," she said, as the servant withdrew, having shut away the cold outside world. "Now, Cecil, your message. Cecil, you don't look well."

"I am awfully worried, Hope.' I said at last I'd come down and see you, and take my fate in my hand. The old people are put out, but they'll get over it. I told them what I was going to do. It isn't that they don't care, but there are always mortgages and things about a big place like ours, and fathers and mothers

have such fads about rich wives clearing them off. You understand, don't you, Hope. I always said you were such an understandable sort of a girl."

"Rich wives, and your father and mother—and your fate in your hand—and mortgages—and you looking as white as a sheet? No, I don't understand. Honestly, I don't understand a bit what you mean, Cecil."

'Answer me one question first," said Cecil. "Is it true that you—you and Jocelyn—are poor?"

"Yes, that is quite true."

"Then here is my message in a nutshell. I love Jocelyn with my whole heart—my father and mother are rich—I am the eldest son—I have plenty of money now—I shall have more some day—I want Jocelyn to be my wife. I can give her comforts—I can give her about everything she can want—and—and—you know it, Hope—you must have always known it—there never was anyone in all the wide world like Jocelyn to me."

CHAPTER V.

THE Greys were the rich people of Downton; they belonged to the country, and only a few of the humble inhabitants who lived in the straggling little village had the honor of their acquaintance. Mrs. Karron, however, had been the wife of a distinguished naval officer, and Jocelyn and Hope both possessed a certain air, and had a certain gracious prettiness about them, which made people like to ask them to their houses. Not only were they intimate with the doctor's wife and the lawyer's daughters, but they also knew the Greys and the Percivals, and even the Mainwarings, who lived ten miles away. Cecil Grey had been in and out of the house since he was quite a lad, and the girls were in the habit of regarding him as a convenient something between a cousin and a brother. They laughed at him a good deal; they chaffed him unmercifully; but they were fond of him, and undoubtedly they made considerable use of him. There never was a more affectionate, obliging, good-tempered fellow; and even Mrs. Karron sometimes expostulated with Jocelyn and Hope for the amount of messages they gave him to do for them. His visits to town were often solely taken to match Jocelyn's silks and

wools, or to get a very particular flower on which she had set her dainty mind, to accompany a certain costume to be worn at an evening festivity.

Girls of nineteen brought up like Jocelyn and Hope are very often thoughtless, and it never occurred to them to spare their obliging cavalier.

Cecil was one of the frankest, after a certain sense the most innocent, of mortals, and although he did feel a glow round his heart when he walked with Jocelyn, or looked at her, or listened to her words, and although even the delight of sport could not exceed in interest the absorption with which he obeyed her smallest behests, his eyes had never been opened to the true state of his own feelings until the evening of Mrs. Karron's sudden illness. When Hope flew upstairs that evening, and Dr. Marvel, with what tact he could compass, broke the news to Jocelyn, she gave one full, frightened, piteous look straight up into Cecil's eyes, put out her hands and let him clasp them; and with that look, and that hand-pressure, the young man knew his own secret.

He went home, feeling torn, aroused, pained, and yet full of ecstasy. Life was quite golden. Oh yes, even though there was gloom and misery at Oakdene; for he loved, and his love should be his.

On the day of the funeral, Sir Jasper Grey, Cecil's father, came suddenly into his wife's boudoir.

"My dear," he said, not noticing Cecil, who was

lounging by the window, "I have just heard of such a catastrophe; it is in connection with those poor Karrons. Marvel told me—he said it is the talk of the village, and no secret from anyone—the girls are left absolutely penniless, my dear; and their mother—one does not care to blame her, as she is dead, poor soul!—but she was little short of a spendthrift. She speculated, and lived on her capital—fact, I assure you."

"And with two girls to provide for!" exclaimed Lady Grey. "I blame her, even though she is in her grave. Poor girls—nice-looking, both of them; particularly Jocelyn. But there is nothing before them now but governess-ships, or secretaryships, unless, indeed, they would take lessons in cookery, and then teach what they know to inexperienced domestic servants."

"Not a bad idea at all, my dear," said Sir Jasper, who adored his wife. "This remark of yours seems to open up a new career for young women of the upper classes. But it is early days to speak of these things. The girls are terribly to be pitied; and the doctor tells me that their poor father left them fairly well off—that is, he left sufficient capital to secure to them a modest income."

"That wretched woman! I wonder she can rest in her grave," said Lady Grey.

"Well, my dear, she has gone to a higher tribunal to answer her shortcomings. The girls are the peo-

ple to think of now. I hear, poor Jocelyn is very ill; she is confined to her bed with a sort of feverish attack."

"Jocelyn!" said Cecil.

He had been standing perfectly motionless, drinking in his father's news. Now he came forward out of the gloom, and stood in the bright ring of light caused by the fire.

"I forgot you were there, Cecil," half yawned his mother. "You might ring for Hawkins, my dear. A cup of tea would be refreshing."

"In a minute," said Cecil.

He clenched his hands hard, and stood facing the fire; his boyish face was red all over. "You were talking about the Karrons—you have brought bad news of them, father; at least, at least, bad news for poor Hope—it doesn't matter so much about Jocelyn."

Cecil was delivering his sentences in so jerky a manner that Sir Jasper interrupted him with a laugh.

"Your mother and I are particularly struck with the clearness of your speech," he said. "Your remarks are most lucid. Is Jocelyn so ethereal that she can do without the necessities of life?—My dear, if Cecil won't wring the bell, I will. His ideas are so obscure just now as to be scarcely interesting."

"Hold, father.—Mother, you understand, don't

you! Jocelyn will come here—she will be my wife—that is, I mean to ask her."

As Cecil spoke he dropped on one knee beside his mother, and taking one of her slender hands half crushed it between his own.

"You'll welcome Jocelyn as my wife, won't you, mother?"

"Very heroic," said Sir Jasper. "Really, quite a slice of the old romances—the penniless damsel rescued by the young knight. Look here, Cecil; your mother and I are not going to listen to any such folly—you were only of age last summer—time enough if you bring us a wife in five years from now. The sooner you go back to Oxford the better, and put such folly out of your head."

Sir Jasper did not speak angrily. He regarded the whole matter as a huge jest. Cecil was nothing but a boy in his eyes; it was quixotic of the lad to stand up for a pretty, penniless girl—and—that was all.

"You'll go back to Oxford in a week, my boy, and there'll be an end to this folly," he said, patting the young man good-humoredly on the shoulder.

Cecil sprang to his feet as if he were stung. His mother had not articulated a word; not by the faintest movement did she return his hand-pressure, not once had her eyes met his. His mother's conduct hurt Cecil more than his father's. He went out of the room, feeling miserable enough to satisfy the most

exacting lover. He had appealed to his parents, asking them for bread, when the hardest stone of satire and indifference had been vouchsafed to him.

"He's nothing but a boy," said Sir Jasper to his wife, when he could find words to speak after Cecil had gone away. "We'll take no notice of him, my dear; and the silly affair will die of itself."

"She's a dangerous girl," said Lady Grey, "and the sooner she leaves the place the better. After all, we may perhaps regard it as a providence that she and her sister can no longer live at Oakdene."

"We must not allow ourselves to look at matters in that light, my love," said Sir Jasper, as he stirred his tea. "Poor Jocelyn! After all, she is a pretty creature. Young men will be young men; you must allow that, Susannah."

"Precisely, my dear. And mortgages *will* be mortgages, and money *will* remain just a little too short for our requirements; and Agnes Deane, who is the greatest heiress in the county, comes here in the spring—and—and—— But leave it to me, Jasper. I'll have a talk with Cecil this evening in my room."

When that talk took place, no one could be more eloquent than Lady Grey, and no dutiful son could have listened more attentively than Cecil. At the end of a conversation which lasted for over two hours, he made the following remark:—

"I don't want to do anything to hurt you or my father, and nothing would induce me to bring a wife here whom you could not respect, but Jocelyn is a lady. My thinking her beautiful and the best of all girls is perhaps nothing; but I suppose anyone, even you, mother, will admit that Jocelyn looks nice, that she makes a room all the brighter when she is in it, and—and—that she's the sort of girl no one need be ashamed of. She's just as well born as I am, and there is nothing in the world against her except that she hasn't got money. I have loved her for years. There is no one in all the world like her to me; and now, when she is in trouble and penniless, is just the time for me to come forward. I am going to come forward, mother—I'm going to propose for Jocelyn. My father speaks of me as a lad; but I'm of age, and my own master, and if you won't receive Jocelyn here, why, I've got that little place in Devon that Aunt Lucilla left me, and we can live there and be jolly enough until you and my father forgive us. I don't mean to be disrespectful, mother, and I love you as well as ever; but I won't give up my own girl for anyone, not even for my mother."

Cecil stooped down and kissed Lady Grey on her forehead as he spoke, and then he went out of the room without waiting for any last words from her. She had to acknowledge to herself, as she saw him go with a queer mixture of pain, and pride, and love, and

anger tugging at her heart, that he was not such a boy after all, and that Jocelyn was very much to be envied, and she, poor forsaken Lady Grey, very much to be pitied.

"It's Lucilla's doing," she said to her husband after she had related all that had passed between herself and Cecil. "She left the boy that wretched eight hundred a year; and he threatens to go and live at Leaside, away from us all, with a penniless girl."

"We can't permit that, whatever happens," said Sir Jasper.

CHAPTER VI.

"YOU understand all about it now, Hope?" said Cecil. "And you will speak to Jocelyn, and let me know. Perhaps if I could put off going away just for a day she could see me. Do you think so, Hope? Do you think there is any chance? It's awful not to have seen her for nearly a fortnight; it has half killed me—it has, really."

"I'll speak to Jocelyn," said Hope. "I don't think she'll be prepared—I don't, really, Cecil; for you have always been a sort of brother to us both, you know."

"Well, I'll be your brother still, and something nearer to Jocelyn. She couldn't make that objection now, could she, Hope?"

"No; I'll certainly speak to her. Only, Cecil, Jocelyn and I have never thought about lovers—never once."

"But you've got to begin. There has got to be a beginning to everything. You'll have lots of lovers yourself, Hope, presently. Oh! you needn't color up. You don't know what a jolly sort of a girl you are. Of course, heaps of fellows will be wanting you, and you'll have only to pick and choose. But now

about Jocelyn. You'll speak to her—you'll give her my message—you'll make the most of me you can: and I'll come down this evening to get my answer. It can only be the best kind of answer, can it, Hope?"

"I don't know," said Hope. "It seems to me that I don't understand. I'm very sorry for you, but I don't sympathize. I suppose it's because Jocelyn and I have never thought of lovers."

"You'll do your best for me at least," said Cecil.

Yes, Hope could promise that; and then it was arranged that he should call again that evening at nine, and if nothing had been accomplished—for Hope must find a fitting opportunity, and that might require longer time than between now and the evening—he would postpone his departure until noon of the following day.

Cecil went away, and Hope, pushing back her hair in a perplexed manner, went into Jocelyn's room.

It was true she did not understand, but it was also true that her heart was full of an undefined ache and pity for Cecil. His face had grown quite haggard in the last fortnight: there was no doubt at all of his earnestness, no doubt of the sincerity and depth of the feelings which caused him to speak.

Jocelyn was lying in a luxurious attitude on her sofa by the fire; her cheeks were slightly flushed, her red lips a very little parted. Her beautiful eyes had a contented smile and a light in them. Hope was

conscious of a feeling almost of repulsion as she glanced at Jocelyn's smiling beautiful face.

"She had no right almost to die of grief for mother, and now to look like that, particularly when Cecil is breaking his heart for her," was her reflection.

She came forward and stood moodily by the fire; Jocelyn looked up with a laugh.

"My Knight of the Doleful Countenance!" she said. Then a little petulance came into her voice. "Really, Hope, when I am doing my best to get better, and to cheer up after the terrible way I suffered, I think you might aid me instead of looking like Patience on a monument, and all the other dismal horrid things. Before you went out you tried to frighten me into my grave with visions of a bread-and-water diet. Then you stayed away for quite two hours, and now behold Minerva at least."

"Oh, don't liken me to anyone else," said Hope, suddenly laughing. "I am Don Quixote, Minerva, and Patience all in one breath. Listen, Jocelyn; I have got something really very interesting to say at last. It was quite true about the poverty; but you need not share it, darling. No, thank God, you can still have the pretty dresses and the nice things you ought to have; that you are suited for."

"I knew you were frightening me for nothing that time," interrupted Jocelyn. "The moment you mentioned Mr. Frost's name, I was sure of it. He's an

ogre, and, in my humble opinion, keeps our fortune for himself."

"Oh! *will* you listen?" cried Hope, clasping her hands in despair. "It is not that at all; we are poor. It is—it is——"

"We *are* poor?" said Jocelyn. "Your manners are quite enough to turn anyone's head to-day, Hope. Do let's drop the theme. I am to have pretty dresses still: that is one comfort. Do you know, Hope, I have been thinking—I'm afraid it's a little rude to say it, but still I fear deep mourning won't be as becoming to you as to me. I have been rather fretting about that, for I want you to look very nice when we go our round of visits presently. But when I was writing to Mme. de Pompadour I told her to put as many frills and soft trimmings as she could possibly devise on both our dresses; so I trust the effect won't be so bad, as far as you are concerned, Hope. Of course I shall be all right, with my fair complexion."

"I think it's only right and honest to tell you," said Hope, in a blunt voice, "that when I went out that time it was to despatch a telegram to Mme. de Pompadour, telling her not to execute your order. There, will that make you believe in our poverty?"

Jocelyn sat upright on her sofa. An angry spot glowed in one of her cheeks. Her eyes, sparkling and eloquent with reproaches, were fixed full on her sister.

"Is *this* your affection for mother?" she said at last. "Are we to wear no mourning for her?"

'Yes, the best we can make ourselves, with Jane's assistance."

'Hope, you haven't a bit of heart."

Down went Jocelyn's head on her pillows, and violent sobs shook her slight frame.

These tears filled Hope with compunction. She knelt down by the sofa, and putting her arm round Jocelyn's waist, kissed the back of her neck once or twice.

"Stop crying, Jo," she said, "I have not told you my news—the news which, after all, secures to you the pretty dresses."

Jocelyn half checked her tears, and Hope quietly, but not efficiently, pleaded Cecil's suit.

This was Jocelyn's first proposal. In her way she was as innocent as Hope. Her tears ceased altogether. Her smiles came slowly back.

"Ridiculous!" she said. And then she broke into a laugh. "Cecil—Cecil Grey! But I'm not going to marry for years and years. I've never even thought of marrying, nor of lovers. Poor Cecil! he must have looked very funny. Did he, Hope? I wish he had asked *me* for *you*—I'd have loved so to watch his face."

"It's all over, then, for him," said Hope, rising. "I wasn't sure, for you and he were always great

friends. But of course, if you can talk like that——"

"What other way could I possibly talk? Do tell me how he looked, Hope."

"Very earnest, and manly, and handsome. He's in love with you, Jocelyn, and you ought to be awfully sorry for him."

"I'm not—it's too funny. He looked manly? Nonsense, he's nothing but a boy."

"He didn't look like a boy when he talked about you. Well, I'm sorry for him. You are quite positively certain, Jo, that you don't care the least little bit in the world for him?"

"Care for him? Of course not. He's a great deal too young; he's not the style of man I'd have for a husband, and I'm not going to tie myself to anybody for years, and years, and years."

Hope seated herself on the hearthrug.

"I'm glad, for my part," she said. "We'll be very happy together. We won't mind being poor—not a bit, after we've got over the first rub."

"Oh! being poor. How you *do* harp on that string. I suppose Cecil is well off."

"I suppose so. He said you and he could begin on eight hundred a year."

Jocelyn pressed her hand to her chin in meditation.

"I don't know what eight hundred a year means," she said. "But it sounds a good lot of money. Then,

by-and-bye, I'd be Lady Grey, and we'd live at Grey's Park. I—— Hope!"

"What?" said Hope.

"Did he really look very manly when he spoke about me?"

"Yes" (a fierce light came into Hope's eyes), "a thousand times too manly to be married for his money or position."

"Oh, of course," said Joceyln, shrinking back. "Whoever thought of such a thing?"

CHAPTER VII.

CECIL took his dismissal quietly enough. He turned very white, but he did not say much, nor did he ask Hope to plead his cause any further.

"Thank you," he said, as he rose to go away. "You did your best for me, and I'll never forget this to you—never. I might have known I wasn't half good enough for her—I always feared it, but I'd just a sort of half idea that she might put up with me—I mean, that she would have allowed me to be a sort of comfort to her. However, it's all at an end now. God bless you, Hope; good-bye—God bless you."

"I'm ever so sorry for you, Cecil," said Hope; "even though I don't comprehend your feeling."

"It's awfully good of you—your turn will come some day—sure to. It won't be worse for you then that you were good to me now. Well, it's at an end, and I'm off to Oxford to-morrow. I might have known she wouldn't look at me. She's miles, miles above me!"

"Oh, don't, Cecil!" said Hope, relieving her strained feelings by a sudden laugh. "It does sound so ridiculous—poor little Jo!"

Cecil's face flushed hotly.

"You don't know what I feel," he said. "And even you don't know her, not as she looks to me. There's only one fellow in the world worthy of her, and I hope to goodness he'll never come across her."

"That's rather selfish of you, Cecil. What's the name of this wonder?"

"Oh, you needn't laugh; his name is Markham. He's a chum of mine at Oxford—he's awfully clever. He's ugly, too, but he can twist anyone, man, woman, or child, round his little finger. If he asks Jocelyn to marry him she won't say 'No.'"

"From your description, he must be unpleasant. We will trust that he won't spread his toils round Jocelyn. Good-bye, Cecil. I am deeply sorry for you."

"So am I for myself. Good-bye, Hope; you're a brick of a girl; he'll be a lucky fellow who has you for a sister. I only wish the luck were mine!"

Then Cecil went away, and Hope considered that episode in their lives quite at an end.

In a day or two Jocelyn came downstairs again. She was quite well, and no longer particularly sorrowful. Neither could she any longer shut her eyes to the fact of their poverty, and once or twice she was inclined to be sulky over the home-made mourning.

With all her faults—and she had plenty—Jocelyn, however, was a very good-tempered, sunny sort of

girl; and as all this time the shoe of poverty was only preparing to pinch, and had not yet given any very hard twinges, she and Hope lived happily enough at Oakdene, during their few remaining days there.

At last came the morning when Mr. Frost wrote to Hope, telling her that all debts were now paid, and that she and Jocelyn might walk forth free maidens into a cold world, with fifty pounds a year to sustain them. On the same day Jocelyn had a letter from Mrs. Seaton. It was long, and, to judge from her manner, was of absorbing interest to the young lady. So excited was she that she failed to notice Hope's disapproving tones. This was the first letter received from Mrs. Seaton since the day when Mrs. Karron had died, but this fact was also overlooked by Jocelyn.

"Lend me five pounds," she said to Hope. "I must go up to London to see Aunt Margaret. There is her letter; when you have read it you will understand."

Hope pushed the bulky envelope away.

"You forget, Jocelyn," she said, in a voice which she in vain tried to render unemotional. "I told you once what I thought of Aunt Margaret. I will not read her letter. I will not talk of her nor to her. It is a disrespect to our mother, Jocelyn."

Jocelyn colored.

"You don't understand," she said. "You are a very prejudiced person, Hope. If you don't take care, you will grow hard. I see hardness getting into your face every day. Aunt Margaret was not to blame. You made an impossible request to her. If you read the letter, you will see."

"I will not read the letter. My request may have been impossible, but it was refused in such a way that it killed mother. She might have come down—she might have written tender words—she was mother's only sister. She knew her life was in extreme danger, and she wrote such a letter that she died. I saw her die, and of the letter. Aunt Margaret is nothing to me now. I'll neither read what she writes, nor accept assistance from her. And Jocelyn, I *will* say it: if you are worthy of being mother's daughter, yes, and of being our father's daughter, who was a most honorable man, you will put that letter into the fire and give it no further thought. You owe it to our parents to accept nothing from Aunt Margaret Seaton."

Here Hope's voice changed. Her pliable, expressive face grew full of a great tenderness.

"Dear little Jo, poverty need not be hard if we stick together, and are of one mind," she said. "Let me burn the letter for the sake of all the happy old times, and because we both love our mother."

But Jocelyn was angry now. Hope came close to her. She pushed her away.

"You are all for heroics, Hope," she said. "I dare say they look very well in a book, but they aren't at all interesting in real life. Now I may as well tell you plainly that I am sick of this everlasting talk about poverty. I hate horrid dowdy home-made dresses. I hate pinching and contriving. I really don't know anything about the spending of money, but the income Mr. Frost is going to allow us every year would, I fancy, be spent by me in a single day. I see nothing for it, Hope, but that you must go your way, and I'll go mine. I have quite made up my mind. I have been making it up for the last week, since I saw you getting so horribly screwy. Aunt Margaret has written very kindly. She has given an explanation about what you choose to consider her unkind conduct to mother. She offers us both a home with herself, and for my part I am going to see her, and talk matters over with her, and that's what I want the five pounds for. I'm frank enough, Hope. You know every thing now."

"I have a great mind to refuse to give you the five pounds," said Hope. "I think you ought to be protected against yourself. This conduct is not honorable."

"You refuse!" said Jocelyn, her eyes flashing angrily.

"Oh, Jocelyn how changed you are! Yes, I have a great mind to refuse."

"Then I tell you what I'll do—what I've been making up my mind for the last week to do, until Aunt Margaret's letter saved me. I'll write to Cecil and bring him back; I'll marry him for his money."

"Oh, Jocelyn!" Hope gave a sharp cry. "Even Aunt Margaret is better than that," she said. She opened her purse, took out her solitary five-pound note, laid it on the table, and went out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE were no more luxurious flats in London than those to be found in Albemarle Mansions. They were well situated. They were in the centre of Mayfair, close to every body and everything, In themselves the flats were large and commodious: the reception-rooms were spacious, and there were plenty of them. In every way the flats were suited to the requirements of fashionable people, and in one of them Mrs. Seaton and her daughter Lottie lived a luxurious life.

Mrs. Seaton was about five-and-forty—a handsome woman, young-looking for her age, with a slightly full figure, and a slightly arrogant bearing. She was a widow and enormously rich. Her husband had been the well-known city merchant of the name. When talking about her, people had added to her wealth, making it fabulous; but although it was not that, she had a great deal more money than she knew how to spend, and Hope's mother had been right when she said that Margaret Seaton would not miss two thousand pounds. In one sense that was true, in another it was not. Mrs. Seaton was fond of balancing her banker's book, and of lying awake at

night counting over her stocks and shares and the various items which made up her great wealth. Two thousand pounds on the wrong side of the ledger would not have pleased her, and she decided to deny her dying sister's request. In this particular she showed great hardness, but she was not generally considered a hard woman, and in many ways could be kindness and generosity itself.

She had one child, a girl of eighteen, a fragile, white-faced creature, not the least like herself, for she was full of vitality and energy. Mrs. Seaton considered Charlotte a beauty, and perhaps the glamour of her wealth might have made some people agree with her. But to unprejudiced eyes she was simply a very fragile, uninteresting little mortal.

"How bitterly cold it is, mother," she said, on this particular January day. "How detestable England is at this time of year; why do we stay here?—why don't we go back to the Riviera at once?"

"Well, you know, darling, I have been rather upset. Your poor Aunt Amy's sudden death; then our mourning, and then my resolve—suggested by you, if you remember, Lottie—that we should invite the girls to come here, offering them a home as companions to you, darling."

Lottie's fretful blue eyes brightened.

"Yes, yes, of course," she said eagerly. "But not only as companions. That sounds like the kind of

person that writes your letters for you and reads aloud; that kind of person can be paid for. I want sisters, equals—girls who will put a little variety into my life, and be just the same to you that I am. Oh, I hope they'll come—I do earnestly hope they'll come."

Mrs. Seaton gazed full into her young daughter's face. A shadow quickly passed across her brow.

"You have been in the world ever since you were born, Charlotte," she said, "and yet you are the most absolutely unworldly person I ever came across. You talk of the possibility of your cousins refusing my offer. Do you think it likely that penniless girls will do that?"

"Are they penniless? How delightful! What fun it will be getting them all they can possibly want. Oh, mother, are you sure they will come?"

"Yes, I am sure."

"When did you write, mother?"

"Yesterday. Lottie, it does me good to see you roused and interested like this. When the girls come we will go to Cannes for a month or so, and travel about until it is time to come back here for the season. We might spend Easter at Rome."

"We might. It was rather dull there last year. What are my cousins' names, mother? It seems so funny we should never have met all these years."

Mrs. Seaton's face flashed.

"I will tell you the reason another time," she said. "Their names—I have no doubt you will admire their names, Lottie; for my part, I dislike fanciful titles. The girls are called Jocelyn and Hope. They are twins, and their mother, poor thing, used to write and tell me they were very pretty."

"What sweet names—Jocelyn and Hope—particularly Hope. Mother, I feel more excited about these girls coming than I have ever felt about anything in the whole course of my life. It is so uninteresting—so terribly uninteresting to be alone."

"And yet you have me, child. I am always alone in all the world but for you."

"Dear mother!"

Lottie went up, raised her lips lightly to the elder woman's face, bestowed a caress without much warmth in it, and sank down once more in a luxurious little chair opposite a glowing fire.

At this moment the room door was noiselessly opened, and a powdered footman brought in a telegram on a salver.

Lottie sprang to her feet, rubbing her hands, excitedly.

"Is it from the girls?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, child, yes.—There is no answer, Williams."

The footman withdrew.

Mrs. Seaton tossed the pink sheet of paper into her daughter's lap.

"You will make me jealous of those girls," she said, with the finest shade of bitterness in her voice. "But your wish is likely to be granted, Lottie. They are coming fast enough."

The telegram on which Lottie's eyes feasted was brief:—

"DOWNTON.

"Please expect me at three o'clock, to answer your letter in person.

"JOCELYN KARRON."

"It is half-past twelve now," said Lottie, looking at the clock. "What a long time we shall have to wait! Shall we go to meet Jocelyn at Paddington, mother? We can look up her train in Bradshaw."

"I should prefer to receive her here, Lottie. I will send Blake to Paddington in the brougham. I suppose this girl must remain for the night. She certainly *is* eager to come."

"I think that is so nice of her. I wonder if she is like me—very *petite*, and fair; I don't like being *petite* and fair. I wonder if she has got my tastes; I hate my own tastes. Heigh-ho, how weary life is! Mother, don't you think it's awfully uninteresting to be rich?"

"My dear Lottie, do you know that you are getting quite eccentric?"

"Am I? I suppose it's because I find everything so dull. It seems to me that riches hem one in and

stifle one. Riches are just another name for all sorts of odious proprieties. Now, I should so like to take an omnibus to Paddington this afternoon, and stand on the platform and look for Jocelyn, and then bring her home in a hansom. That's what I should like, instead of doing propriety in this dull, dull room."

"Lottie dear, you are really talking such wild nonsense that I shall have to send for Sir James Porter to see you. You cannot possibly be well."

"I am ill in mind, mother, that is all. How I wish my father had not made his huge fortune. He must have been much jollier when he blacked shoes at a penny the pair."

Mrs. Seaton colored all over her handsome face with intense annoyance.

"How dare you!" she began.

Then she paused. "If you weren't my child——" she continued—then again she stopped. The color faded from her cheeks and lips, leaving them chalky white.

Lottie surveyed her from the depths of her snug chair with a lazy, provoking smile.

"Poor papa!" she said; "he often talked to me about those days. Oh, what funny stories he had to tell! Do you remember the one about the slice of saveloy for supper? And that other story when he slept under an archway and found a threepenny-bit!"

But the drawing-room door was shut almost noisily; Mrs. Seaton had left her daughter to her recollections.

At about half-past three Jocelyn arrived. Her face was somewhat pale, her big eyes had a wide-open, appealing glance in them. She came up to Mrs. Seaton holding out both hands, her delicate color coming and going.

"You have a look of my mother," she said, and there was really a pathetic note in her voice.

"Only a very slight look, my dear," responded the good lady, touched and pleased in spite of herself by Jocelyn. "Your mother was much prettier than I ever was. I am glad you have come, Jocelyn. Let me introduce you to Charlotte.—Lottie, this is your Cousin Jocelyn."

Jocelyn was certainly neither *petite* nor fair, after Lottie's somewhat colorless pattern. Her hair was golden, it is true, but the gold was very bright; her complexion was creamy and rich; her blue eyes were shaded by curly black lashes, her brows were delicate and dark, and her figure, slightly full for her age, looked generous in its proportions beside her shadowy sprite-like little cousin. Nature had endowed Jocelyn with a most affectionate and taking manner. She clasped Lottie's hand now, gave it a squeeze, then turned again to her aunt.

"You wrote me such a kind letter, Aunt Margaret."

"Well, my dear, well—I meant to be kind to you and Hope. I am glad you came here to-day to discuss my proposal. There is no time like the present. Take off your hat, Jocelyn."

"And sit in *my* easy-chair, please, Jocelyn," eagerly interrupted Lottie. "It is very comfortable—I'll put this glass screen between you and the fire. Are your feet cold? Let me take your furs. What exquisite sable?—Look, mother, you haven't got sable like this."

"It is a set that belonged to my mother," said Jocelyn. "Thank you, Lottie; this snug chair is very resting."

She leant back in it with an air of possession. But neither Mrs. Seaton nor Lottie was just then in a mood to criticize. Charlotte felt excited and charmed; Mrs. Seaton compunctious. She had many failings, but her heart was not really dead, and Jocelyn had a radiancy about her which brought back a vision of her beautiful young sister of long ago. She had quarreled with this sister, and they had not met for years; her sister had made a dying request which she had refused. Now her penniless orphan daughter sat by her fireside. Mrs. Seaton said to herself—

"I will be very good to Jocelyn and Hope—I will make up to them for any little unkindness I may have shown to their mother."—"My dear," she said in a cordial voice, "after all, our consultation may be brief. I offer you and Hope a home—will you come to me and be my children, and Charlotte's sisters?"

"Say 'Yes,' Jocelyn," exclaimed Lottie, dropping on her knees beside her cousin's chair.

Jocelyn lowered her eyes. Now she raised them slowly.

"We have no money," she said.

"As if that mattered! Oh! mother and I are so tired of having too much money!"

Jocelyn felt herself coloring. She remembered the look on Hope's face, and the money which had been refused to her own dying mother.

"Aunt Margaret," she said, rising suddenly to her feet, and speaking with a visible effort, "there is nothing for it but for me to be frank. You wrote a letter which pained Hope very much—it also pained me. You explained your reasons for writing that letter when you wrote so kindly to me yesterday. Aunt Margaret, I accept your explanation—I—I—forgive you."

Lottie gave a little gasp. Mrs. Seaton drew herself up very erect, and half turned away. Jocelyn went a step nearer; she came right in front of her aunt.

"I forgive you," she said, "but that does not mean that I love you. Mother is dead, and Hope and I are very poor girls. I don't like being poor. You are rich. I like being rich. I like warmth, and nice food, and carriages, and beautiful dresses. I hate roughing it; I like to live in clover. I'll accept your offer, Aunt Margaret. I'll come to you, not because I love you, but because you are rich. I'll be a sister to Charlotte, and a daughter to you, outwardly; I'll do what I can. I can be bright, I can sing and play, and say witty, cheerful things, and keep a room alive, and I can always look pretty and be a credit to you. So perhaps, after all, I'll give as much as I get. You and Lottie look very dull. I don't think you'll be dull when you've got me. It's an equal bargain, I think. Is it to be one?"

Lottie gave another gasp: she looked at her cousin in a half-frightened way. Mrs. Seaton remained silent for nearly a full minute after Jocelyn had done speaking.

"Kiss me, my new daughter," she said then; and she pressed a very light kiss on Jocelyn's brow.

"What about Hope?" said Lottie, after another brief pause. "Is she coming, too, to make bargains, and to—to——"

Mrs. Seaton spoke abruptly.

"Hush, Lottie," she said. "Jocelyn has put things in a sensible light. I did not expect so much sense

from such a young girl; it took me by surprise. Of course, I respect it, No doubt, Jocelyn, love will come later. And now we must all try to *appear* affectionate."

"Yes," said Lottie, shivering. "All this is most exciting to me. I really never came across anything so refreshing and original. And I don't greatly care about the affection being left out. Still I want to know about Hope. I think Hope has a prettier name than you have, Jocelyn. I suppose she is not hard, like you—she's the soft and gushing sort?"

"She's harder than I am," said Jocelyn, shivering in her turn, and growing pale.—"Aunt Margaret, Hope has sent you a message."

"Yes, my dear, yes."

"She does not forgive you—she won't come here."

"But she has no money!" exclaimed Lottie.

"There is fifty pounds a year left; she says she will live on that—she won't come here."

Late the next afternoon Jocelyn returned to Downton. Hope was waiting at the station to meet her, and the sisters walked back to Oakdene arm in arm. Hope was looking very pale; her heavy black scarcely suited her.

"Oakdene is let," she said to her sister.

Jocelyn did not reply by a single word. She tugged her arm a little away from Hope's, who held it tightly.

"Is it all settled, Jo?" asked Hope, in a gentle voice.

"I feel stifling, Hope. Don't ask me any questions. Yes, though, why shouldn't you? I am to go there next week."

Hope did not speak for a full minute.

"Tell me about them, Jocelyn," she said then.

"There isn't much to tell. They have got what I want—riches and comforts. Aunt Margaret is a lady by birth; Charlotte isn't, but I like Lottie better than Aunt Margaret. It's all settled. I can have my own way. I shall want for nothing that money can buy. Hope, I did *not* know that Oakdene was to be let so soon."

"Mr. Frost found a tenant for it. He will take the furniture and all off our hands. It is a splendid chance."

"And you, Hope—you?"

"I am going to London, to the Frosts, for a week. We shall both be in London after all; I can sometimes see you."

"There will be a gulf between," said Jocelyn, in a choking voice. "I think I was mad to do it."

"It is not too late," said Hope eagerly.

"Yes, it is too late."

Jocelyn stamped her foot passionately on the snow-covered ground.

"I can't be poor, I won't be poor! And yet, Hope, how I hate myself, and respect you!"

CHAPTER IX.

"WHERE'S Hope Karron? Is she in? I want to see her at once."

The speaker was very eager; it was winter-time, and she was dressed in becoming furs.

"This isn't the visiting hour, Miss Douglas."

"What a nuisance! can't she come downstairs to see me? She's much better, isn't she?"

"Yes, miss, she's a great deal better. I'll inquire if she can see you in the dining-room, miss. Will you walk this way?"

"Thank you, nurse; you are very kind. Now make her come—carry her, if necessary. Nurse, are you proof against half a crown?"

"Oh, Miss Douglas, it's strictly against the rules. Well then, well then, if you must—I'll certainly do my best for you, miss; thank you, miss."

The nurse, a tall, comely-looking maiden, disappeared, and Miss Douglas, loosening her furs, and removing her hat, looked round the apartment in which she was waiting. It was a large room, wainscoted throughout. It was handsome but dull. It looked out on a very dull street.

Miss Douglas was an impatient mortal; she walked from one window to another, making a grimace as she glanced out of each.

"Worse and worse," she soliloquized. "How could Hope come here? Poor old girl! I expect she is half dead with *ennui*. No, though; she has entered the room; I behold her—she is brighter than ever; what a face—what a radiant light comes into it when she smiles!

"Hope darling—Hope darling, are you really better? Oh, you are a little lame still, but not much. —Thank you, kind nurse, I'll take great care of Miss Karron. I have a great deal to say to her: please leave us together, nurse."

"I am much better, Katie," said Hope. "I did quite right to come here; they have been so kind—it's a funny sort of place, but I have made friends with every body."

"And is your foot getting well, Hope?"

"It is gradually getting all right. The doctor says in about a month from now I shall have forgotten that horrid accident."

"You darling! But Roland won't forget, nor Roland's mother, nor his sister; why, you saved his life, you plucky girl!"

"We won't talk of it now," said Hope, turning a little pale. "Poor Roley! Is he a good boy? Give him my love, Katie!"

"He's not a particularly good boy. I don't think he deserves your love. He has a horrid trick of blowing out paper bags and making them go bang off at the back of my head. He has done it ever since he discovered that the doctor considered my nerves a little weak. He's back at school now, that's a comfort. Well, Hope, how much longer are you to stay here?"

"I don't know. I really need not stay more than another week. I am allowed to walk a little again, and the pain is nearly gone."

"How delighted you'll be to get away!"

"Pretty well."

"Where are you going?"

"I suppose back to my lodgings in Bayswater."

"H'm, h'm! that's a lively prospect, particularly in this foggy weather."

"Don't discourage me, Katie; the lodgings are very well, and I'm not often in them."

"No, you dear industrious mortal. There are always little boys to coach, and you are always coaching them. Why, Roley would never have read decently if you had not taken him in hand; and then to save his life! Has your medal come yet from that society?"

"I believe so, but I have not looked at it. I don't like to think of that scene, Kate. I wish you would not refer to it."

"You darling, I won't. Give me a kiss. Now, Hope, for what reason do you think I inflicted myself on you to-day?"

"Kindness, I suppose," said Hope. "And perhaps because you are fond of me, Katie."

"Of course I am; but I came with news. Don't you suppose that mother and I felt awful when you had to go into this Home, and we could do nothing? Our little house is so wee, and our poor purses are wee-er still. Mother and I thought of you day and night, and Roland absolutely cried when he heard you could not come to us to be nursed. But now what do you think? I have had an invitation, and you are included. It's from the Chattertons, my rich cousins in Shropshire; they want us to go down on Monday; they are wild to see you. They always do have the very jolliest houseful of people. By the way, you know one of the guests who is staying there at the present moment: Cecil Grey—he is so handsome, and such a catch. We have been asked for a fortnight; and won't a fortnight set you up, darling, and won't you see real life at last!"

Katie was in keen excitement. Her rosy cheeks were flushed, and her honest eyes sparkling.

"I'll be very glad to go," said Hope. "I should like a change, and to see the country again. I'm particularly fond of the country in winter. Downton used to be so exquisite when the snow was on the

ground. But one wants a lot of dress in a big country house, and I make it a rule to spend a very small amount in that quarter."

"I'll overhaul your wardrobe, and rig you up," said Katie. "I'm awfully skillful. Don't you see how I contrive for myself? This fur, which makes me look quite richly apparelled, has done duty for I can't tell how many years. Oh, I'll make you fit for any society. I promise I won't encroach on your modest income—you shall be charming without a heavy expenditure. No one with a face and figure like yours need spend much on outward adorning.—Is that you, nurse? Yes, I'm going.—Good-bye, Hope. I'll call for you here on Monday, and we can go down to Shropshire together."

It was two years now since Hope and Jocelyn had said farewell. They had come up to London together on a certain snowy afternoon in February, and then the two girls had gone their several ways—Jocelyn to her life of luxury and enjoyment, Hope to her poverty.

The Seatons and Jocelyn had gone abroad almost immediately; and Lottie, finding Continental life more than enjoyable, now that she had a vigorous young companion to share it with, had positively refused to come back to dull, smoky London.

"Not even for the season," she declared. "No, we

will go to Switzerland, for the so-called season, and to America in the autumn."

Thus Hope and Jocelyn had not met for two years. They corresponded regularly, each telling the other the outward circumstances of their lives, neither touching upon experiences, feelings, desires, disappointments. They had drifted asunder in more than one sense; a much wider barrier than separation parted them.

Hope had fifty pounds a year. She was strong and brave, she had no idea of sitting down to subsist on this meagre portion. No, she would add to it, she would earn money for a rainy day, and have enough in her purse to indulge now and then in the luxury of helping other people.

Women have many vocations in these days. Perhaps Hope's was a somewhat singular one. She was clever, and for a country girl fairly well educated, but she was not up to the High School mark, and she had passed no certificate examinations. Like most inexperienced people, she first of all turned her attention to teaching as a profession. Here she found the doors of success almost entirely closed against her. A girl who had not gone in for the Cambridge examinations could scarcely expect to find an engagement in these days of higher progress. She might become a nursery governess, a lady who conducted an agency told her,

but she was not even sure that so ignorant a young person would prove successful in this line.

It happened that on this very day the agent's little boy, a most refractory small personage, strayed, against his mother's permission, into the room where several candidates for employment were waiting to be interviewed. Hope called him to her side, talked to him, enchanted him, and before she went away taught him a short ballad.

The next day she went again to the agency office. The lady, a Mrs. Franklyn, greeted her with smiles.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said. "You have done me an inestimable service."

"How so?" said Hope.

"You have taught his father to believe in Freddy."

"I am sorry I don't quite understand."

"His father has always declared that Freddy could never learn; he has harped on this string, and made my life a misery with it. Last night Freddy repeated 'The Miller of the Dee,' and said you taught him."

"Yes, he learnt it quickly enough—I don't think he is a stupid boy."

"How sweet of you to say so! Will you come to my house for an hour daily, and teach Freddy until I can get you something permanent to do?"

Hope complied, and Master Frederick Franklyn made gigantic strides under her tuition. Mrs. Franklyn in ecstasies proclaimed Hope's fame, and in this

apparently trivial manner she obtained her vocation; she became coach to backward and stupid little boys. There are heaps of them in the world, and they are very often to be found in the houses of the wealthy.

Mrs. Franklyn counselled Hope to ask a fairly large figure for her services. It became rather the fashion in certain circles to get little boys coached up by Miss Karron for preparatory schools. She had an undoubted genius for making refractory boys good, for teaching stupid boys to read, and think, and inwardly digest. After a short time she found plenty of pupils, and the income she earned was more than sufficient for her modest wants.

She developed a good deal in person and character after the February day when she parted with Jocelyn. A great deal of purpose, of endurance, a strong look of courage, came into her face. These things brought to it gain, and in addition she never lost the expression of bright anticipation which she had worn from a child, and which made her name a sort of prophecy about her.

Most of her pupils were the sons of rich people, but one day when she was walking in Kensington Gardens, she was overtaken by a smart shower, and taking shelter under a large elm-tree, unwittingly heard a short conversation.

Two people, a small slender girl and a little boy, were also sheltering at the other side of the tree.

"You're a perfectly horrid little fellow," said the girl; "you're a disgrace to us."

"I'm not; I don't care."

"You'll break mother's heart; why won't you learn to read? There are nothing but complaints of you at school. Mother says her money is thrown away sending you there, and all your teachers have declared over and over that you can't make any real progress until you overcome your laziness about reading. Oh, I'm ashamed of you—eight years old, and to be such a dunce!"

"I like being a dunce. I don't ever mean to read—that is, I won't unless I'm coached properly, like Fernie Fitzmaurice. He had a coach and he can read first-rate. 'Twas a girl, and she taught him by splendid stories of adventure. There were lions and four tigers in one, and fifty-eight wolves in another, and—and——"

Hope came forward from her side of the elm-tree. She looked swiftly at the pair in eager conversation. The girl's face was red; she was half crying. The boy had very bright eyes which danced with mischief. The girl's anxious face appealed to Hope.

"I overheard what you were saying," she said. "I am the girl who taught Ferdinand Fitzmaurice to read. If you like, if you don't mind, I will take this little boy—Roland you call him—for a pupil."

"How jolly of you!" said Roland, running up to her, hooking his arms comfortably within hers, and looking up into her face.

The small slight girl turned half away; her cheeks grew redder and redder.

"May I?" questioned Hope, squeezing the little boy's arm with a sense of comradeship.

"Oh, Roland!" said his sister. "I'm so ashamed you should have heard us!" she continued. "Roland is a naughty boy—he won't take pains. I am so vexed you should have worried yourself about our small affairs."

"I can soon teach Roland to read."

"But you are—surely you must be Miss Karron? My mother has heard of you. Lady Fitzmaurice has told her how clever you were with Fernie."

"Yes, I am Miss Karron—Hope Karron is my name."

"Surely your terms are very high!"

Hope on the spot mentioned a sum so ridiculously small as the price she would expect for teaching Master Roland, that his sister almost gasped.

"You are not exorbitant," she remarked. "If you are not frightfully busy, will you come home with me to see mother! Oh, what a relief it would be to her to secure your services for Roland!"

In this way Hope did not secure a particularly lucrative pupil, but she made friends who were to

bring a great deal of sunshine into her life, and indirectly to influence her whole future. Roland proved as docile as other boys when instructed in Hope's charming manner. "Hill Difficulties" vanished, the toughest obstacles melted, and in an incredibly short space of time he mastered the technical trials of reading. Mrs. Douglas and Katie were never tired of thanking Hope, who in their opinion had worked miracles. The fact was, the young teacher's method was simple enough; she pursued a plan which aroused keen interest—she never permitted that interest to flag; this accomplished, all else was easy.

On a certain day in the autumn of the year in which she had first made the Douglases' acquaintance, Hope and Roland were walking together. Roland had a wild fit on—not even Hope could keep this exuberant child's spirits always in check. A man whose horse was not in full control was riding along the park. Roland ran in his path. The horse knocked the boy down, and might have killed him but for Hope, who rushed forward, caught hold of the bridle, and forced the horse back a step. He trod on her foot, trampling it badly, and Roland scrambled to his feet, his life saved by a hair's breadth. The rider, a sheepish, ill-tempered groom, muttered something, and was glad to hurry away. Hope limped to the nearest seat, and Roland flew off for assistance.

She spoke of the whole thing as a trifle, but the pain in her foot was so exquisite, that when Katie Douglas appeared panting on the scene, and tried to move her, she fainted.

A few days after, being still in great suffering, she was moved into a hospital for invalid gentlewomen in Harriet Street West. She was kindly treated there, and had the best surgical advice, for a small weekly sum.

Hope was not a girl to despond: she systematically looked on the bright side, and soon became a great favorite in the hospital. It was impossible to grumble in Hope's presence. She had a way of looking directly at you when you spoke in a murmuring or discontented spirit, and a quick wonder would fill her bright grey eyes which instantly gave the grumbler a certain sense of shame. On one occasion a lady said to her—

"Come and sit near me for a little, you happy-faced child; I cannot help feeling curious about you. Yours must be a peculiarly blessed lot."

"I always am so thankful to be alive," said Hope. "I do think there's a lot of sunshine just in living."

"Ah, my dear, may you long continue to feel so! You doubtless have a very bright home, dear—loving friends—a mother who adores you."

"I have lodgings in Bayswater; my mother is dead."

"And you live there alone?"

"Yes."

"Are you poor then, my love?"

"No, I am not very poor. I have fifty pounds a year of my own, and I earn the rest. Why do you ask me so many questions? Is it wrong of me to be happy?"

"No, my dear, no—God bless you, my dear!"

The lady sat for some time after this short interview thoughtful and puzzled. She was the greatest grumbler in the establishment, and she had a home, friends, and six times Hope's income.

In especial the young girls in the hospital—and there were several young girls—became attached to Hope, and they one and all broke into lamentation when they heard the day was fixed for her to leave them.

CHAPTER X.

"Now at last we are off?" said Katie Douglas. "Isn't it delicious? Aren't you glad to be out of prison, Hope? and have you no curious question to ask me?"

"Well, I don't know," said Hope. "I'm pleased to be going into the country, of course, and delighted to be with you, Katie, but I'm sorry for one or two of the girls in Harriet Street."

"Oh, then you're not going to enjoy yourself. You will be wrapped up in all kinds of charitable, good, unselfish thoughts while we are at Beeches. Oh, how horrid of you—I wish we were not going."

"I don't know what you mean, Katie. I intend to be as happy as the day is long. I feel bubbling over this minute. You don't know what the country means to me. Oh, is that snow on the distant hills? Lovely, delicious!"

Hope flung open the carriage window, and bent half out. The girls had a compartment to themselves.

"What am I to be curious about, Katie?" she said, suddenly returning to her seat, and looking into Miss Douglas' eyes with her own dancing.

"Only about your clothes, you wretched being. You have not been out of that horrid Harriet Street, and I assure you we are going to a house full of people."

"You said," began Hope, "I mean I gave you directions about packing my things, didn't I? Have you forgotten?"

"Oh, have I forgotten? You wait until you open your portmanteau, and that dress-basket which you never noticed, although I hoped you would, when it was being put into the luggage van. You don't suppose Katie Douglas ever for a single instant of her life forgets things of such paramount importance as a girl's dress? You wait and see."

"Katie, you know I told you very little money was to be spent."

"*Have* I troubled you about the bills, dear? Have I mentioned them! Do I look, too, as if I had run up enormous debts in your name?"

"You couldn't, Katie, that's one comfort. The shops wouldn't trust a girl who only occupied two small rooms in Bayswater. Oh, I say, the sun is shining on that field covered with snow. Look, Katie, here—here—isn't it rosy?—aren't you joyous even to look at it?"

"Very pretty. Don't keep that window open, Hope; I'm perished. Now if you had your choice,

your choice out of the wide world, what dress would you wear at dinner this evening?"

Hope looked thoughful.

"I'd wear black net, for choice," she said, "without any ornaments. I might have a flower, if it wasn't artificial, and if the color happened to suit me. Jocelyn and I always wore black net dresses when we went out at Downton—that is, in the winter; in the summer we dressed in white."

Katie's eyes grew rounder and brighter.

"You are not hard to please," she said. "I was so awfully afraid you were going to say that new shade of electric green, with white frosted flowers. Hope, you are the greatest comfort to me. I do so adore that new green, but I couldn't get it for you without running in debt. Now you shall just wait and see."

Hope laughed.

The train sped along swiftly; the girls talked at intervals, read at intervals, scrutinized their fellow travelers, when, bye-and-bye, their compartment filled up, and at last, in the dusk of a winter's evening, arrived at a small wayside station where a comfortable carriage awaited them.

A drive of two miles followed, and then they found themselves in a rambling country house, built very much like hundreds of others, with large reception-rooms, wide square halls, long corridors, innumerable conservatories, a billiard-room, a picture

gallery—in short, all those accessories which people who are rich, and who live in the country, are supposed not to be able to do without.

Katie and Hope were ushered into a hall where several people were already assembled, chatting round a great fire composed of logs of oak and firs, and drinking tea supplied to them by two or three pretty girls who knew Katie, and who ran up to her with eager words of welcome. They were introduced to Hope as Bee, Alice, and Maud Chatterton, and soon the party of three became a party of five, the elder ladies and one or two old gentlemen being very glad to be served by the gay young folk.

"You need not be alarmed," whispered Bee Chatterton to Hope. "We don't only represent the fairer sex at Beeches. You'll see some excellent specimens of mankind at dinner-time. They are all in the hunting field at present."

"And excellent sport they are having, no doubt," said Mr. Newbolt, one of the oldest of the old gentlemen, as he returned his empty cup into Hope's hands.

Then there was a little more chat, and Hope and Katie found themselves in their bedrooms. The rooms opened one into the other, and the girls flitted backwards and forwards as they dressed.

"Katie! why, this *is* my old black net, only it looks new, perfectly new! And how nice that satin slip is to wear under it. I don't know that I particularly

care about dress, but I certainly wish to look nice to-night. It is so long since I have been in a house of this kind; it reminds me of Grey's Park, and of the Ashfords, and of the other places where Jocelyn and I used to visit when we lived at dear old Downton."

"Don't reminisce, dear," said Katie, who was looking busy and important; "get into your dress, for I am not sure if the train is properly arranged at the back. Ah, yes, that will do; very nice, very nice indeed. Hope, what a beautiful figure you have, and what an upright carriage! I like, too, the way you arrange that hair of yours—but there, you know what I've always thought of you; others will agree with me here. You are quite certain—positive—to get a lover while you are here, Hope."

Hope laughed.

"You really do talk like a goose sometimes, Katie," she said. "Now what about your apparel—that blue? It looks wonderfully soft and cloudy."

"There's a pink like it in the basket trunk for you," answered Katie. "I knew pink would make you look sublime, so I had the thing tossed together. The color is perfect—like the lining of a sea-shell; the material fivepence a yard. You shall not wear that dress until the lover has begun to show his attentions. Now come, are you ready? I am, quite, at last. Oh no—my fan and gloves. Now then, now

then! Did I tell you, Hope, that you would probably meet Roland downstairs?"

"No. I am so glad! I thought he was settled at school."

"He has had a cough, and so secured two days' holiday. He came down here with Phil Chatterton. To tell the truth, I expect he'll be an awful bore. He's so *empressé*, and so destitute of shyness, and he's quite certain to say the sort of things one doesn't want him to say. I beseech you, Hope, fasten him to your train without delay, for he quite works on my nerves—he really does."

The drawing-room was nearly full when Hope and Katie entered. They seated themselves near the door, and Hope presently observed a pair of bright dancing eyes fixed on her. The glance of recognition was followed by a loud and decidedly unconventional "Hurrah! I say—it is—it is!" and then there was a raid across the room, during which one or two people were recklessly pushed aside, a small table was overturned, a vase filled with flowers broken, and then a pair of eager arms were flung round Hope's neck.

"I say, Miss Karron, I'm awfully glad to see you! Is your foot quite well again? The brute didn't quite trample it to pieces, did he? Let me see, do let me see!"

Katie beat a hasty retreat, and Hope held out the toe of a small satin shoe for inspection.

"My foot is quite well, Roley; we need not talk about it any more."

"I don't know about that at all; you're my champion deliverer. I *was* so excited when I heard you were coming. I told Chatterton all about you—Phil, you know, my friend; I'll introduce him presently. And do you know, there's a grown-up chap here, no end of a swell, who says he knows you! His name is Grey. I told Grey about you, too, Miss Karron, and he said what you did was heroic, and just what he expected. But what do you think? The fellow who owns the horse—Rossiter is the name of the horse—is here, too. The fellow's name is Markham; he's a great friend of Grey's, and Grey said he'd go straight off and tell him. Mr. Grey said he expected Markham would be awfully put out, and so he should be. I said I'd give him my opinion about that horse of his. Oh, I say! there's Grey—Mr. Grey, I mean. Don't tell him I call him Grey behind his back—I'll go and fetch him, Miss Karron! I say! your cheeks are quite red! Are you glad to see Mr. Grey? Is he a great friend of yours?"

"Yes, a great friend; and I'm very glad to see him," said Hope.

At that moment she almost wished Roland at the bottom of the sea. It agitated her to meet Cecil; his

face brought back such a rush of memories. And here was this dreadful boy misunderstanding everything.

"Here she is," said Roland. "Her foot's all right; you'll be glad to hear that. I say, have you told Markham yet? Is he awfully put out? His horse very near killed me, and a lady. I wonder if he could be tried for manslaughter if his horse killed two people. I think I'll ask Phil. Phil knows a lot of the law."

"Yes, go and ask him—he's in that distant window," said Cecil, giving the boy a little push. "Go and find him, and when you have found him stay with him. Do you hear?"

"I hear," said Roland.

He began to make a slow peregrination across the room, whispering softly under his breath—

"A lover and a loveress—won't I watch 'em!"

The moment he was out of sight, Cecil turned a beaming face to Hope.

"I *am* glad to see you," he said. "I've a thousand things to say to you. And Mrs. Chatterton is so good-natured, she says I may take you in to dinner."

CHAPTER XI.

"Do you see that queer-looking fellow just opposite to us?" whispered Cecil to his neighbor, as the soup was being removed. "Don't pretend to look at him, but just take a glance when you can, and give me your opinion."

"He has been looking at me," said Hope, "if it is the man you mean. He has a very quick way of looking, and you can scarcely find out that he has done so, but I have caught his eyes once or twice. He is dark and sallow—I don't much care for the shape of his moustache, and his eyes have nothing very special to distinguish them; still, he has a good head, and a good forehead—there, he has looked at me again. Do let us talk of something else, Cecil."

"I will by-and-bye. I have not done with the present subject yet. That's Markham—that's the man who I once told you was in all the world alone worthy of Jocelyn."

"I don't think much of your taste," said Hope. "And I am sure Jocelyn would not be particularly obliged to you."

"Tell me about her, Hope. You know I have not in the least forgotten her."

"But you are not broken-hearted, Cecil."

"Of course not. I should not let any girl spoil my life to that extent. But I think I care just as much as ever for Jocelyn; so do tell me all you have heard."

The conversation then drifted into long accounts of the wanderings of the Seatons, of Jocelyn's opinion on this or that place of foreign interest. Hope spoke with animation, and her companion listened with unabated interest. They made a striking-looking couple, and more than one pair of eyes turned in their direction with an appreciative smile.

"Quite old friends," whispered Mrs. Chatterton to a neighbor. "That girl has such a bright face that she is absolutely handsome. Of course, as to Cecil, there are no two opinions on the point."

While they talked, Hope again noticed the quick sharp glance of her opposite neighbor. There are many ways in which a man may look at a girl. There is the admiring, the indifferent, the affectionate, the adoring glance. Markham's might have been interpreted as the puzzled gaze. He looked at Hope as if she both irritated him and gave him a sense of fascination.

"I wish it was allowable to turn one's back on people at dinner," she said at last to Grey. "I don't

think your friend at all good-looking, Cecil; and he will go on favoring me with those queer flashes from his eyes."

"I can explain that," said Cecil; "it was Markham's horse Rossiter that trod on your foot. Markham is devoured with compunction terrible to witness."

"Oh dear! I hope he won't worry me on the subject. He was not in the least to blame. He cannot help his horse, and my foot is perfectly well."

He does not look upon the accident in that amiable light. He says it was his fault, for he should have had a more capable groom."

"Well, yes, the groom was awkward; but then, so was Roley. I do hope, Cecil, he won't worry me on the matter."

"Would you rather not be introduced to him?"

"Much rather. I need not know everybody at Beeches, need I?"

"Certainly not. Markham is sure to ask for an introduction, and I can tell him that you particularly wish to be excused. Then he'll be certain to stare more than ever. He's going to stay here all through your visit."

"Cecil, you quite tease me. Oh, introduce him, if you must, but give him a hint that I don't consider myself a heroine."

"Wisely spoken," said Cecil. "It won't be half so bad for you when he takes you in to dinner, and talks to you as he can talk. He won't have time to flash those glances then. Look here, Hope, I told you before what I thought of Markham. You say he is ugly now; but no woman can resist him. You hear him sing, for instance—I'm only glad Jocelyn is not in the house; that is, unless we were properly engaged and all that. Ah, there's the signal for your departure. What a pleasant chat we have had! I'll look you up again in the drawing-room."

Cecil had vastly improved in the two years which had intervened since Hope had last seen him. He was a handsome youth then—he was a striking-looking young man now. His features were good, his figure was very fine, and his expression most sweet and engaging. Such a youth, so endowed by nature, and so plentifully supplied by Dame Fortune with the good things of life, could not help being a universal favorite. Nobody guessed that Cecil had some time ago given his heart away, and wherever he went there were one or two anxious, if not designing, candidates for the lost treasure. Mothers were apt to be very polite to Cecil, and pretty girls smiled kindly upon him. His attentions, however, were so general, his affectionate speeches were so frank and above-board, so apt to be bestowed upon one pretty lass on a certain evening, and given to her sister to ponder

over on the next, that Cecil could only be spoken of as the most harmless sort of flirt, as hearts did not break on his account.

Perhaps this, however, is scarcely true. One heart did certainly ache a little, and one pair of soft pretty eyes could have grown very bright and tender had Cecil given them the chance. The owner of these eyes was Bee Chatterton, who could not help looking enviously at Hope during dinner, and rather avoiding her afterwards. How horrid it was of Cecil to have old, old friends, girl-friends, too, with faces like Hope Karron's!

Notwithstanding this little cloud, however, which nobody noticed, as it was really only shadowy, the girls in the drawing-room made very merry, and Hope and Katie being fresh from London found themselves the centre of attraction. In the midst of an eager stream of talk, during which Maud had advanced to such intimacy with Hope that her hand lay affectionately on the black net dress, Cecil and Markham came up. The dreaded introduction was made, Cecil turned aside to chat with Bee and Maud Chatterton. and Markham, looking gravely at Hope, said—

"I understand that a certain subject is not to be touched on between us."

"My foot is quite well," replied Hope, turning crimson, and glancing angrily at Cecil.

"I am immensely relieved to hear it. Also that we need not dwell on the matter. I have dismissed the groom, and if you dislike seeing the horse about he shall be sold."

"Is he here?—what a beautiful face he had! I see his eyes, a little wild and——" Hope turned pale.

"I thought we were not to discuss the matter. Will you come and sit in this window? It is not so hot here. Is that seat comfortable? No; we won't talk of Rossiter. He was a fine creature, handled by a brute. Now I want to apologize to you, Miss Karron."

"What for?" asked Hope.

"I stared at you unmercifully during dinner."

Hope colored again. She glanced fully up at Cecil's friend, and made up her mind to dislike him. Then the expression of his face softened her, perhaps rather it subdued. Like a quick flash Cecil's words rushed through Hope's mind—"Markham can fascinate any girl he pleases." She resolved that she should not be a victim. She sprang to her feet.

"Won't you sit down?"

"I like standing best," she said. Then she colored again, and was vexed with herself.

"Why can't we talk commonplaces?" she added. "I am not interested in the horse, nor in—in—what you did at dinner, Mr. Markham."

Markham's expression became intensely grave, even a little sad.

"I will fly to commonplaces as quickly as possible," he said. "I adore commonplaces. Still, I must just say a word in self-justification. I stared at you at dinner because—not because——"

"Oh, don't," said Hope.

"*Not* because I admired you."

"Of course not. What a lovely moonlight night this is."

"We'll go into the conservatory presently, and talk about the moon. I once made a sonnet about her. I'll repeat it to you. Nothing could be more commonplace. In the meantime I must tell you why I looked at you. You remind me of someone else. There is a face that haunts me, and you have a look of it. You are not very like, but you have a sufficient resemblance to give me a sense of unrest, of torment. I am sorry you came here."

"You are very polite," replied Hope angrily. "I won't at least trouble you with my presence. I knew from the first I should not like you."

"Thank you."

Markham made way a little, and Hope flew for refuge to an ottoman almost in the centre of the room. In this position she was under the full blaze of innumerable candles, her whole frame was quivering with indignation, her eyes sparkled. The faint

color which strong excitement gave her mantled her cheeks.

What a rude, ungentlemanly man! and Cecil's friend! What could Cecil mean by calling him fascinating? *She* knew better than to yield to his charm. Had anyone ever spoken to her so rudely before? He had absolutely said he was sorry she was there. Well—let him be sorry. For a whole fortnight Beeches was to be her home, and no Mr. Markham that ever breathed should turn her way, but she would take care not to speak to him again—oh, no!

"Miss Karron," whispered Roley's troublesome voice in her ear, "that's *him*, the man in the window—that's Markham."

"I'm not interested in the man in the window, Roley, and I think little boys like you ought to be in bed ages ago."

"Oh, I say, you *are* disagreeable! You might take a poor fellow's part. Phil and I have been dodging round for the last hour. We are so awfully afraid of Phil's father seeing us and ordering us off. May I sit at your feet on this footstool? I'll be quite safe here."

"Sit anywhere, but be quiet, Roley."

"How queer you look! Your cheeks are pink, as if they were painted. And your eyes—don't they sparkle! You look awfully pretty, though. If I

were a big fellow, wouldn't I just—wouldn't I——Oh, I say, Markham's going to sing. Let me hide low down at your feet, Miss Karron. I wouldn't miss his song for the world. I heard him last night, and I nearly choked."

"With laughter?" asked Hope.

"Laughter! You wait and hear. I tell you he makes you all teary in a minute, and as if you had a cold in your head. Laughter! I hope you've got a good big pocket-handkerchief in your pocket. Now then! I don't know how he does it—even Phil rushed out of the room to keep from blubbering last night. Now listen—won't you turn your head this way?"

"No, I can hear as I am. Hush!" she said then, in a moment, for the boy was rustling and fidgeting. "Hush!" she repeated, and she laid her hand on his shoulder, compelling him to be still.

The man was forgotten in the singer. Hope absolutely ceased to remember her recent encounter with Markham. Her short-lived anger melted away like the early dew. She forgot Roley, she forgot what she had said about her present position being the best. She stood up, she faced right round. As Markham sang, Hope looked full at him with two grey eyes into which tears were springing. His voice was a tenor, not too powerful, but sweet and infinitely pathetic. It was flexible, and so delicately swayed by the soul of the singer that the emotions felt by him were

instantly communicated to his listeners. The touching ballad of "Lochaber no more" was rendered in such a manner that Hope for the first time understood Burns' words when he said it was a tune for a broken heart:—

"Farewell to Lochaber, farewell to my Jean,
Where heartsome with her I have mony days been;
For Lochaber no more—Lochaber no more,
I'll maybe return to Lochaber no more."

The whole scene rose before the girl's eyes—the exile's farewell, the wild scene, the wail of the often repeated "no more." Markham sang right through the ballad, then with scarcely a pause he struck into another key. As he did so he gave Hope, across half the length of the long drawing-room, another lightning glance. She saw it, resented it, and would have sat down, but the voice arrested her like a spell:—

"My love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
My love is like a melody,
That's sweetly sung in tune.
Sae fair art thou, my bonny lass,
Sae deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the streams run dry;

Till all the streams run dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt with the sun;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the world is done."

"Didn't I tell you?" whispered Roley—"why, you're crying yourself. Won't I talk to Phil about this! I thought it was t'other one—Grey I call him behind his back—that could make you laugh or cry. Oh, I say, isn't Mr. Grey, though, going on with Bee Chatterton! And, mercy me, if that isn't Mr. Markham coming back! Good-night, Miss Karron—aren't your cheeks red, though!"

CHAPTER XII.

MARKHAM did saunter down the long drawing-room, he even paused near Hope's ottoman to exchange a few words with a pale-faced, limp-looking girl. In doing this he stood so close to Hope that her black net dress must have touched him, but he did not speak to her, nor turn in her direction. Presently he strolled into the conservatory with the pale girl "to recite that odious sonnet of his about the moon," whispered Hope to herself. She felt decidedly cross, and she went to bed in a bad temper.

Katie could not make out what had happened to her friend. Katie's evening had been one long delight. Roley had most mercifully kept out of her path, and the possible lover seemed already to loom in the distance, in the person of Gus Chatterton, who was good-looking, empty-headed, but fairly amiable and fairly well off.

Katie dreamt golden dreams while Hope tossed from side to side of her pillow. What *did* that man mean? Why did his face worry her? Why did his stupid rude words stick in her brain? Never in the whole course of her life before had any man made

even the most transient impression on her. She was accustomed to attentive ways and pretty speeches from the youths of Downton. Since she went to London she had been decidedly removed from the sphere of agreeable and chivalrous youth. Now she had returned to it. For a brief fortnight she was back in the old life, and she expected matters to go on as they had always done; the youths still to be chivalrous and agreeable, she receiving their attentions as a matter of course but always with well-bred indifference.

On the threshold, however, of her life at Beeches, a totally new experience came to her. An ugly man was specially commended to her notice. She was told that he was fascinating, that no woman could resist him. He began by being rude to her; he was rude in action, he was even ruder in speech. How could anybody tolerate him? And yet, how his voice thrilled, sending a sense of pain, while it angered her, as he spoke of the face that haunted him. She had not been nice about that face. A good deal of his talk was doubtless banter, but he was in earnest when he spoke of the face which hers resembled. He did not admire her, of course—who wanted him to admire her?—but she irritated him because of a resemblance.

Hope was not in the least vain. She was unaffected, unconscious of any personal charms; hers was a sweet, healthy, generous nature. Never before in her whole

life had she been oppressed with this sense of irritation, which now almost increased to a morbid curiosity. She rose softly from her midnight couch, closed the door which had been standing open between her room and Katie's, lit the wax candles on the dressing-table, and gazed anxiously at her own pale reflection in the glass.

She was very pale now, and her light hair was dishevelled. Her eyes had dark shadows under them, her lips at the moment were more fretful than arched with expectancy and delight. The small face did not please its owner. She got into bed feeling crosser than ever.

"I'll think no more of that intolerable personage with his whims and hauntings," she said to herself. "Why, I really don't know myself—to lie awake over such a trifle. Am I Hope Karron, or another?"

At last she did fall asleep, but Markham's song, "Lochaber no more," came into her dreams. She was present at that passionate farewell; she was crying to the singer to stop, to rend her heart no more; and as she spoke to him and cried to him, and entreated him, he turned and looked at her, and his ugly face grew beautiful, and his voice melted away into the tenderest love-song—

"And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the streams run dry;
Till all the streams run dry, my dear,

And the rocks melt with the sun;
I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the world is done."

She awoke with a headache; her dream discomposed her even more than the sore indignant thoughts which preceded it.

The next day it was arranged that the ladies of the party should ride to a certain glen about ten miles away to meet the sportsmen and take them lunch.

The Chattertons all rode well, and Hope in her Downton days had learnt to ride on a shaggy pony, and had many times had a mount from her richer friends.

She was scarcely a practised, but she was a very intrepid horsewoman. Katie declared that she would not even mount a donkey; one or two other girls of the party were equally timid; they were accordingly distributed among the matrons, who drove off to the rendezvous in a couple of landaus, and Hope, Maud and Bee Chatterton were quickly mounted and prepared to follow.

"You are sure you are not afraid, Miss Karron?" said Maud. "For if you are," she added, "I don't in the least mind exchanging horses with you. Stately is such a gentle darling, that even a girl who was not much accustomed to horses might feel quite comfortable on his back."

"I'm quite comfortable as I am," replied Hope, laughing. Then seeing that the two girls smiled and exchanged glances—"What's the matter?" she added. "Is this horse particularly vicious, or do I sit him in such a manner that you conclude beforehand that I'm an arrant coward?"

"Not a bit of it," said Maud. "Anyone can see that you know how to ride, Miss Karron. But the fact is you are on Rossiter's back. He half-killed you once already.—I did not know," she added, turning to Bee, "that Rossiter was to be brought out today. He is not quite certain, particularly for a lady."

"I am not afraid," said Hope, coloring. "Not that I wish to ride the animal."

"Then do change, dear—do. Stately is a delicious horse, and I can ride anything. I'm half my time on horseback."

Hope was half inclined to comply; not that she was afraid, but she did not want to put herself under any compliment to Markham.

"We can exchange in a minute," said Maud.

But Bee who since the night before had never felt thoroughly cordial with Hope, called out now in a somewhat spiteful voice—

"I think you are over-cautious, Maudie; Miss Karron looks perfectly comfortable on Rossiter, and I don't suppose, all things considered, she'd like to own she was afraid of him. Anyhow, we have no

time to change now. The carriages are out of sight as it is."

"I'm all right," said Hope. She whipped up her splendid bay, and immediately found herself in the position of leader of the little party.

It was true she was not afraid, but she knew enough about horsemanship quickly to perceive that Rossiter was her master—that he would not absolutely respond to her touch, nor obey her light, firm curb. This knowledge was not reassuring; she was not frightened, but she was annoyed. The horse was cantering along gaily; a little too fast, for Hope began to grow breathless. Her companions called out to her to wait for them, but she knew she could not. The longer she rode on Rossiter's back, the more certain horse and rider were that the key of the position remained in the horse's keeping.

There was no particular danger, however. Hope had a good seat, and unless Rossiter was frightened or startled in any way, a catastrophe was scarcely to be feared.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE carriages had gone by another road, and Hope and Rossiter were after all the first of the party from Beeches to arrive at the *rendezvous*. The sportsmen were all standing about when Rossiter galloped lightly into their midst, went straight up to Markham, and thrust his nose into his hand.

"Good gracious, Miss Karron!"

Hope was quite pale, and for a moment she felt too breathless to articulate.

"I did not know Rossiter was to be brought out to-day—he's much too fresh for a lady to ride. What a gallop you have had! May I help you to dismount?"

Scarcely touching the hand which he proffered to her, Hope sprang lightly to the ground. At another time she would have owned the truth. She was a perfectly frank girl, and not a particle of shame would have occurred to her in owning that Rossiter was beyond her control. Now, however, her tongue was tied. It was odious of the horse to walk up to Markham just as if she led him there! But no, the man could not be conceited enough to imagine that.

Rossiter was still rubbing his nose against his master's hand and shoulder.

"I trust you did not find him too much for you,' he said, looking anxiously at the still breathless girl."

"Not at all. Well, perhaps, he was a little fresh."

"But you weren't afraid?"

"Afraid! No, I don't fear horses. There's Mr. Grey; I'll go and speak to him."

She moved away, managing her habit gracefully. In such a dress she looked to the best advantage. The color in her cheeks, and a certain willful light in her eyes, added a new piquancy to her always piquant face.

The other girls came up, eager and laughing; the landaus with their loads arrived.

"Come and help me to get the lunch out of the hampers," said Cecil to Hope.

As they unpacked a savory pie together, Cecil said suddenly—

"I am surprised and amazed—Markham accuses you of want of sympathy."

Hope nearly flung her delicate pie on the grass.

"Oh, Cecil! I don't care what he thinks of me. Do you know, he doesn't suit me a bit."

"I'm surprised! A right good fellow doesn't suit you then, Hope! Why, he's the most honorable, the most generous—Oh! good gracious, what have I said?"

"Only, that if he's *the* model man, he's not agreeable to me," said Hope.

"Well, I repeat, I'm sorry. You are prejudiced. I praised him too much. He likes you; he told me so last night. He said you had the courage of your opinions—that you were no milk-and-water miss."

"I should think not, indeed. I'm awfully obliged to him! Cecil, I had a letter this morning from Jo."

Cecil raised his face eagerly. Hope had effectually and intentionally turned the subject.

"They all talk of coming back in May," she said. "Jocelyn is in the highest spirits. She says that Mrs. Seaton will get her presented. She evidently thinks a great deal of Jocelyn, and Jocelyn seems thoroughly happy with her."

"You will be a good deal with them when they come back?" said Grey,

"I? No, that I certainly won't. Of course I shall see Jo, darling pet, but I'm not going to Mrs. Seaton's house. She knows that."

"Why do you call her Mrs. Seaton, Hope? Is not she your aunt?"

"She is Jocelyn's aunt, but not mine. She is nothing to me. I can't enter into this story to-day, Cecil. It distresses me."

"You don't look well," said Cecil tenderly. "I am sure that ride was too much for you. Come and sit here, in this sheltered corner, on the rugs. What a wonderful day it is for the end of January! Quite

a spring air, quite warm. I'll bring you something to eat, and then you'll feel better. You know I never want to worry you, Hope."

"You never do worry me, Cecil. At least, scarcely ever," she added with a smile. "Perhaps I'm not quite well to-day. I had a bad night. It is very nice to see an old friend again like you, Cecil."

Grey supplied Hope with dainty morsels, stood by her while she ate, and chatted of his own desires, which had once more risen high at the prospect of Jocelyn's return.

"I certainly mean to try for her again," he said. "I am amazed she is not married before this. Perhaps she did care for me a little bit."

After lunch, as there was to be no more sport that day, the girls and young men started off for rambles together. They went in different directions, Cecil and Hope still keeping side by side. Presently Hope complained of fatigue, and asked to be allowed to rest on a sunny bank by the wayside.

"You must not wait with me, Cecil," she said. "There are the Chatterton girls up yonder without any gentleman. I won't have you stay—you shan't. I shall just rest for five minutes, and then go back to Mrs. Chatterton and the other ladies until we are ready to start home."

"Come on, you two," called out Maud Chatterton

from the top of a picturesque ascent a short distance away.

"Do go, Cecil—I really wish it," said Hope.

And seeing that she did so, and that she was in perfectly safe quarters within sight of the matrons of the party, he left her somewhat unwillingly.

A moment later a gay shrill voice sounded in her ear as Roley, very red in the face, and somewhat dirty in appearance owing to several falls, rushed to her side.

"This *is* luck! I've got you all to myself. Won't Phil be in a state! Phil thinks you are Queen of Beauty—he told me so last night."

"Roley," said Hope, "I don't think you are at all improved. I had not the most remote idea, when we were in London together, that you could talk such absolute nonsense."

"Oh, bosh," said Roley; "a fellow must be carried away now and then. Phil's in a great state about you, Hope. He's nearly as bad as Grey and Markham."

"Roley, if you say another word of that kind to me, I shall walk away and leave you."

"Well, I won't, then. Is it true that you were awfully frightened?"

"How? What?"

"Markham said so. Phil heard him. He said you were all shaking from head to foot, so that it

was the greatest wonder you were not killed, riding Rossiter. He said you were too much of a coward to ride such a horse, and he'd take care you didn't have him coming back. He means to have Rossiter himself, and you are to mount old Jenny. She's safe enough, anyhow. How white you look, Miss Karron!"

"I'm a little tired," said Hope, speaking in a still constrained kind of voice. "I'm a little tired, and I don't want to talk to anyone just now. Go away, Roley—go away, and join your friend Philip. Go at once, please."

"Oh, I say!"

"I mean it; I am tired. Go, please, Roley. We were always good friends."

The tender inflection in her last words melted Roley's very affectionate heart.

"If you put it in that way," he said, "I'll be off in a twinkling. I see Phil up the path; I'll join him. No one shall come near you."

He darted away, and was soon lost to view. The moment he was quite out of sight, Hope rose, looked quickly to right and left, saw that she was quite unobserved, and then walked off in the direction of the farm, where she knew the horses were stabled.

A groom came out to meet her, who, recognizing her as one of the young ladies from Beeches, respectfully touched his hat.

"I want the horse Rossiter," she said. "I am obliged to ride back to Beeches at once. Will you bring him to me here, and help me to mount him?"

The man stared and hesitated.

"Why don't you go?" said Hope, who felt inclined to stamp her foot. "It is necessary I should get back to Beeches directly. I rode Rossiter coming."

"Yes, Miss. But Mr. Markham, he said, as Rossiter was a bit fresh, and you was to ride one of the grooms' horses back."

"I understand. I will explain to Mr. Markham," said Hope haughtily. "I wish to ride Rossiter; bring him round at once."

Still hesitating, the man obeyed.

Rossiter, clean of limb, bright of eye, and curvetting playfully, was brought up. With the groom's assistance, Hope sprang lightly on his back.

"You'll let me come with you, Miss, they're bringing round Jenny. You'd better, Miss; the critter is a bit fresh."

"No, thank you, I prefer going alone. You can mention I was obliged to hurry on to Beeches."

Again she gave Rossiter a sharp little touch of her riding-whip, and, with a bound, the animal flew down the road and was out of sight.

"Now, I call that a gal with spirit," exclaimed the groom Harvey to his companion. "But if she hasn't

a firm seat, and a firm hand too, it's my belief as Rossiter will be too much for her."

Meanwhile, Hope, with tingling ears, flushed cheeks, and smarting eyes, was enjoying the delights of a swift passage through the air. She had naturally high courage. Roley's words repeated to her as Markham's had stung her beyond endurance. *She* a coward—she to submit to the indignity of riding home on a spiritless, broken-down animal! She quite concluded, in her anger, that Jenny was of this description. No, she would show this odious, this officious personage that she, Hope Karron, was made of different mettle. What fun it would be to walk coolly into the drawing-room before dinner, and expatiate on her pleasant ride on Rossiter's back—not that she wanted to ride him again. She would take care not to put herself under a compliment to that model—but oh, how intolerable!—Mr. Markham. But for the present she must uphold her dignity. Yes, it would be very nice to talk about her delightful ride.

But was it delightful? Had a horse ever before taken any girl so quickly over the ground? Now he had broken into a canter. It hurt her to ride like this. She gasped. Rossiter *must* obey her. He should; she would show him that she was his mistress. Not a bit of it; Rossiter took not the smallest notice of her silken touch. He was just as anxious as she

was to get back to Beeches, but he intended to get there his "ain gait." He knew a short cut which led down a steep uneven road, very different from the smooth, well-kept king's highway.

Hope felt really frightened when she found herself flying down this steep incline. She had to acknowledge that she could make nothing of Rossiter; that she must trust herself altogether to his tender mercies. She had to confess that her ride was not pleasant, that she had done a rash, a mad thing.

The uneven road was very steep, and Rossiter rushed quickly along. Still, up to the present he was not actually running away; he was simply enjoying himself in his own fashion, thinking nothing at all of the light weight on his back.

But just then, just at the most dangerous curve of the steep downward path, an ill-starred half-fed donkey put his head out of the hedge and brayed.

It was all up with Rossiter then. His gallop increased in velocity—it seemed to Hope he no longer ran, he flew. She shut her eyes; the end must come, she said to herself. "How silly, how ridiculous I have been! Poor Jo! will she miss me a little? There is no one else. After all, it is quite right I should be punished, for I was in a bad temper and conceited. Oh, to be off this horrid animal's back! I won't stay; I'll let go." She prepared to slip her leg off the crutch. A gate stood open into a ploughed

field; Rossiter dashed in. Now was Hope's time. The ground would be soft here. She shut her eyes again, uttered a prayer, and sprang. She came with a great bump to the ground; there was a flashing blue light before her eyes, a whirr of something whizzing through the air. It was the horse flying faster than ever now that he was delivered of his burden.

For a moment or two Hope felt stunned. She could neither move nor speak. Then she began gently feeling herself to ascertain if she was much hurt.

A sharp pain went through the foot which had been already injured. She had come down on it with great force. She could not attempt to stand on it, nor to move from her ignominious position in the middle of the ploughed field.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARKHAM was feeling ratner dull. He was a sociable fellow as a rule, always ready to forget himself and to make matters agreeable to others. Notwithstanding his ugliness, he was a very popular person, and Grey was quite right when he said that girls found him fascinating. He was a clever man, a don at Oxford, and when he chose to exert his powers he could exhibit very brilliant qualities.

He was a man without any home ties—he had no near relations. From his earliest days he had lived among strangers, and this fact perhaps gave him a kind of outward coldness, and a manner which could at times be sarcastic and almost disagreeable. In reality Markham had a great deal of passion and tenderness in his nature, and he had an ideal hope which was more to him than to most. Some day he should meet a girl who would bring to him the sacredness of home and the warmth of love. This hope he buried deep in his heart, for though he fascinated most girls, no one could accuse him of falling in love with any.

Girls there were in plenty who thought Dick Markham *the* most delightful of mortals, who adored his

ugly face, his divine voice, and his big, rather ungainly figure. But none of all these girls, in appearance at least, had touched even the surface of his heart.

"What's the matter, Markham?" said Grey, on this particular afternoon. "You look quite moped, old man. Why aren't you with the Hiltons? Those girls are perfectly wild to hear your explanation of the Hindoo puzzle."

"They must grow still wilder," said Markham. "I'm not in the humor to gratify them."

"Look here," said Grey, "we ought to be starting home soon; it will be dark directly. Mrs. Chatterton wants me to help her to collect a number of her party. Do you mind looking after Hope Karron? I left her sitting on a bank up that road. She said she would join the Chattertons after she was rested, but I don't see her with them. Look her up, Dick, will you?"

"She won't be obliged to you for sending *me* to her aid," said Markham smiling. "She has taken a prejudice against me. Oh, of course I'll go. Up that road, did you say?"

He sauntered away, not so unwillingly as his slow steps seemed to indicate. It was true that Hope both interested and irritated him. She reminded him of a certain face, a certain voice. No one could have accused Markham's rugged features of assuming a pathetic, even a sentimental expression, but as he

thought, not of Hope, but of another, his deeply set brown eyes wore an expression both of longing and tenderness, his whole face softened with a light which even his nearest and dearest friends had never seen on it.

As he walked up the road he meet the groom who had helped to mount Hope on Rossiter.

"Ef you please, sir," he said, "you have heard about the 'oss? The young lady said as she'd explain."

"What?" said Markham. "I don't understand. I gave you directions that Miss Karron should ride Jenny home, and I would take Rossiter myself."

"The young lady said as she'd explain, sir. She come up all in a hurry like, and said she must have Rossiter at once. She wouldn't look at the other 'oss, sir. She said she wanted to get back to Beeches all in a hurry, and she's off on Rossiter half an hour ago. I offered to ride behind her on Jenny, sir, but she wouldn't listen to me."

"Is it possible!" said Markham.

All the pleased look left his face. It grew hard and grim.

"Saddle the fleetest horse you have," he said. "Bring him to me this minute. I'll wait here. Don't waste time staring. Go, bring the horse."

"Black Bess, sir?"

"Black anything that has got four legs, and knows how to canter. Go."

The groom disappeared.

"Mr. Markham's real gone on that young lady," he said to himself. But a dim idea of the rashness of his own act in yielding to Hope entered his mind, and put wings to his feet. Black Bess was saddled, and a moment later Markham was tearing along the road. What possessed that headstrong girl? If Rossiter were dangerous coming out, he would be worse returning. Even then Hope could scarcely hold him in. What chance had she when his stable, his oats, his warm marsh, awaited him? Markham felt inclined to blame everybody and everything. What a fool he was not to have sold the horse when he parted with the groom!

"Just for a sentiment, too," he muttered to himself, as he let Black Bess feel a touch of his wip; "just because the creature's eyes overcame me, and he only showed his submissive and gentle side to me. Already the brute has nearly killed that girl. Now of course he has made an end of her. That girl, too, with eyes like—like—and a voice which reminds me—ah, what a wretch I feel!"

Black Bess was a fleet, good-tempered little horse, but she was a little small for Markham's weight, and she did not like the pressure which he brought to bear on her. Suddenly he pulled her up so short

that she reared in affright and almost fell backwards. His practised eye saw the freshly dug-up turf where Rossiter had turned aside to pursue the by-path home.

"God help the girl, if the brute took her down here," muttered Markham. "Yes, of course; down here they have gone. Come, Black Bess, down this path you too must follow."

He loosened the reins, bade the horse go forward, and then gave her her way. Now he ceased to have any consecutive thoughts, but with each step he was haunted by a direr and direr vision. Such a slim young thing, so graceful, so sprightly and upright in movement, with so spirited an eye, so arched and proud a lip. What was she like now? God help the girl, and God help him, for if any real harm had happened to her he could never be the same man again.

The spiteful donkey was still poking his head about and casting inquisitive glances up and down the narrow lane. Could he have spoken, he might have told a story which might not have been to his own credit. It was his present humor to be quiet; as Markham passed he uttered no agressive bray.

Two or three minutes later the man pulled up short, uttered a cry of thanksgiving, sprang from Black Bess' back, rushed across the ploughed field, and was kneeling by Hope's side.

Thank God! what a mercy!

"Are you very much hurt?"

"My foot hurts badly, and I cannot stir," answered Hope, turning her head away, for tears of weakness and nervousness were springing to her eyes.

"Don't try to speak; I know all about it. The brute threw you."

"He didn't. I jumped from his back. I am not a coward, Mr. Markham."

"I should think not—about the bravest girl I have ever known. Now I'm going to see to my horse—I won't be away a moment. I just want to tie her up until I can find someone to fetch her. I'll be back directly."

Hope had almost to press her lips together to keep back the wild desire which prompted her to say—

"O, don't leave me—I am a coward—I'm awfully frightened. Oh, don't leave me!"

She did keep back the words, but to save her life she could not have uttered any others.

"I'll be back in a moment," he repeated; and ran across the field to tie Black Bess by her bridle to the nearest post.

When he returned the tears were raining down Hope's cheeks.

Whatever Markham was destitute of, he had, when he chose to exercise it, abundance of tact. He looked at Hope now in as matter-of-fact a way as if it were

quite the ordinary thing, in fact the usual thing, for a girl to sit helpless in the middle of a ploughed field and look up with eyes drowned in tears to a man's face.

"I am glad you are so far recovered," he said. "As to your poor foot—it is your foot, isn't it?—we shall soon make that comfortable when we get to Beeches. Now, the thing is to get there. We are not more than a mile away. If I stoop down so, do you think you could manage to put your arm round my shoulder?

Hope felt herself shuddering all over.

"I really can't," she managed to mutter.

"That is silly."

Markham intentionally adopted a matter-of-fact, wooden tone. "You can't stay in this field all night, nor can you be left while I go to fetch some people to carry you. You are very light, and I am very strong. Try and think of me as your horse for the time being. I assure you I shall be a much safer one than Rossiter."

"The pain," muttered Hope; "I can't move an inch without screaming."

"You must try not to give way to that feeling. Each moment you sit in this damp field increases the chance of inflammation setting up in the injured joint. Now, one more flash of the courage which you so

really possess. Nonsense, I will have it—put your arm so—tighter, please. That is right."

In a moment Markham was walking across the field, managing his light burden skillfully. The injured foot suffered agony, but Hope did not utter a sound. Not once did she groan, nor even once try to alter her position. Markham felt his heart stirred to its depths with compassion; he could form some idea of the fortitude and pain and humiliation which were animating the breast of his light burden. Both he and Hope thought that walk would never come to an end. At last the avenue was reached, at last the lights from the cheerful and hospitable house streamed into view.

"The worst is over," said Markham, in a cheerful voice. "What? did you speak?"

He slackened his steps.

"It was only to say thank you," said Hope.

"You have nothing to thank me for. That brute of a horse was the cause. I shall part with him as soon as possible. Here we are—courage—the haven is won!—Yes, Mrs. Chatterton, I have brought you back this young lady in a sorry plight. Rossiter ran away with her, and she jumped off his back to save herself. She has been very plucky. I will lay her down here, if you will allow me. Give her some tea while I fetch a doctor."

CHAPTER XV.

THE dreaded inflammation did set in, and for some days Hope was a close prisoner to her room. She was sufficiently ill, and there was a sufficiently remote chance even of amputation of the injured member, to make her case of great interest in the house. It was the fashion of each gathering of the assembled guests to ask how Miss Karron was now; to discuss the chances of her recovery; the kindness of her host and hostess; the foolhardiness of her own deed. The kind people pitied Hope, the less good-natured showed sympathy for Mr. and Mrs. Chatterton. It was so unpleasant to have a confirmed invalid in the house—the very look of a trained nurse about the place was gloomy.

Then the kind and the unkind alike tried to put together what pieces they could of Hope's history. She was a penniless lass, rather low-born, with no expectations. No, not at all, her birth was excellent, her connections irreproachable; she had a little money of her own, and made more, and some day she would receive a large fortune through the medium of an enormously wealthy aunt, who had already adopted her sister.

These kind of remarks flew lightly all over the place, not affecting Hope, for they never reached her where she lay and suffered, in the pretty bedroom which joined Katie Douglas'.

After a week of great pain, the inflammation subsided—the fear and the interest alike abated downstairs and upstairs. Hope began to smile, to have long intervals of delicious peace and ease, and returning strength.

At last the doctor gave permission that she might leave her room, and be very carefully carried into Mrs. Chatterton's boudoir, which was on the same floor.

"You don't know how deliciously pretty we have made the room for you, darling," said Katie Douglas, kissing her friend's pale face with enthusiasm. "The gardener has been up and down all the morning, putting in fresh hot-house flowers; and Mr. Grey himself has arranged the sofa for you, so that you can see out over the lawns and the distant trees. It will be a change from your bed and this dull sofa, dear; for of course you will be able to see people. Not that there are many in the house who were here at the time of your accident. Poor Gus Chatterton went off yesterday"—here Katie blushed, and looked intensely melancholy—"and of course Roley and Phil have been back at school for days. That's the worst of country houses," concluded Katie; "when you do

meet a nice fellow who quite suits you, he's certain to have to run away on account of some horrid profession or business of some sort."

"Is," said Hope, coloring faintly, and bringing out her words with more effort than Katie had any idea of, "is Cecil—is Cecil still here?"

"Yes; he's here still, and so is Mr. Markham. I'm not fascinated by Mr. Markham. Maud Chatterton does rave so about his singing. I suppose it is very fine, and that I have no soul for music. Bee is just as bad about Mr. Grey. I never saw such girls; they certainly wear their hearts on their sleeves. What's the matter, Hope? You look quite white. Have some of your tonic, darling. Yes, your dear Cecil and his charming friend are still here, but that's all that can be said of them, for they go this afternoon. Rossiter is to be sold; did you know it? He was sent off yesterday, and they are both going to Tattersall's about him. He is a thoroughbred, you know, though he is so vicious."

"He's not a bit vicious," said Hope, coloring again, and sitting upright on her sofa. "Katie, I should like to see Cecil before he goes. Can't you manage it for me, Katie?"

"Of course I can. You shall be moved into the boudoir at once. It's quite ready. Do you know, Hope, although your face is whiter and thinner than it ought to be, you look wonderfully nice. I can't

make out what is so nice about you : I suppose it's the color of your eyes, and the way they are set, and the arch of your brows ; I can't make it out—is it your expression, I wonder ? For you have not got handsome features. No, critically, you have not."

"Oh, don't dissect me now, please, Katie ; here is nurse quite ready, and I want a change of room and scene so badly. Now, nurse, please help to wheel me out of gloom into sunshine."

Katie had gone to look for Cecil Grey. Hope lay back on her new sofa, and enjoyed the lovely surroundings of her fresh room. Flowers made it look like a bower ; a faint perfume, not too strong, pervaded it ; the view from the window, the distant view as well as the near, was of great beauty, and refreshed Hope's tired eyes and brain. A little color from excitement had come into her cheeks. Her heart was beating faster than was quite consistent with returning health.

"I hope Cecil will come to say good-bye," she said to herself. "I do trust Katie will be in time ; they may have gone off for a long walk, and then there will be lunch, and then only just the necessary half-hour to catch the train. I must see Cecil. He cannot be allowed to sell Rossiter—he must not sell him ; it would make me wretched to think of it. He would always then associate my name with a loss in his life. I don't think I could quite bear it. How weak of me to cry—I suppose I am weak : it's just

physical—but it's provoking all the same. Oh, I wish Cecil would come! Yes—there he is—that's his tap at the door. Come in, Cecil, come in."

"Cecil will see you afterwards," said Markham's quite cheerful, matter-of-fact tone. "I am so glad you have been moved here before we went away. I wanted to assure myself that you were really better by getting a good peep at you before I went. Now, tell me how you are. You don't mind my having a chat with you, do you?"

The tears were still wet on Hope's cheeks. She felt provoked. Was Markham always to see her in this condition?

"I'm a little weak," she said, somewhat lamely, for she was not feeling at all composed.

"I see—I am greatly concerned; but you will be better soon now, and Mrs. Chatterton takes so much interest in you. She says she is going to take you to Bournemouth next week; the sea-air will soon set you up."

"Mrs. Chatterton is more than kind. Of course I shall soon be all right again. Nobody need worry about me. Mr. Markham, I wanted to ask you something. I sent Katie to find Cecil, for I didn't think perhaps I'd see you."

"Yes? Did you really suppose me to be such a heartless being as not to make an effort to come to see you? You want to ask me something—what is

it? My dear Miss Karron, you won't get well at this rate. Your hands are quite shaking. Now, rest assured I shall accede to your modest request beforehand. Ask—command—I obey."

"But it isn't a modest request. I want you not to sell Rossiter."

Markham, who hitherto had preserved a very cool every-day expression, and whose words were carefully modulated to denote only common courtesy and friendliness, started now, the color rushed into his sallow face, and he gave Hope one of those lightning glances which had so displeased her on the first evening of their acquaintance.

"Why do you ask me not to sell my own horse? Why do you interfere?"

"I—because—" Hope hated to find herself stammering. Then she looked full up at Markham, and spoke bravely.

"You are selling Rossiter because of me. You love him, and he loves you. Don't sell him for my sake."

"My dear child!"—Markham's tone was tender enough now. "It is good of you to speak like this," he continued; "still, I have made up my mind to sell Rossiter. He gave me the ugliest half-hour of my life, and I can't forgive him."

"But he is not vicious; oh, not really—it was *my* fault. I was hurt, and I took hold of some words

the wrong way. It is very hard on Rossiter and on you, that he should be sold because I had a whim—just a freak—no more. Girls are always having freaks."

"In this instance the freak or whim nearly cost you your life."

"Nearly, but not quite. Please don't sell Rossiter."

"You remind me—" said Markham. He closed his lips before any more words came out; and moving a step or two, stared fixedly out of the window.

There was a rustle of drapery outside the door—it was opened wide, and Mrs. Chatterton, Bee, Katie Douglas, and Cecil Grey, all appeared on the scene.

"Here we are," said Katie's gay voice. "I found Cecil and Bee hunting for mosses. I brought them both up together to see you. How do you think she is looking, Mrs. Chatterton?"

"Very pale," said Mrs. Chatterton, stooping down and kissing Hope. "But you'll soon be better, dear, now. The doctor speaks so cheerfully of you; and I have heard from Bournemouth; my sister can take us both in next week."

"I'm going too," said Bee. "I don't intend to lose the fun; I want to smell the pines once more. Mr. Grey, did you ever try to catch a squirrel in the Bournemouth pine-woods?"

"I'll come next week and see how I can succeed in your company, Miss Chatterton," laughed back Grey. "What do you say, Markham, old man? Shall we both run down to Bournemouth for a day or two? The sea-breezes won't do us any harm. What do you say?"

There was a babel of eager voices, in wnich Markham's reply, if he made one, was quite inaudible. In the midst of the gay laughter and merry sounds, Mrs. Chatterton looked at Hope, and saw that the pink flush was too bright on her cheeks. At the same time she also remarked that Markham was looking at the girl with a rather peculiar gaze.

"You can arrange all future meetings downstairs," she said. "Now, gentlemen, please say good-bye to Miss Karron. She is very weak still, and must not be over-excited. Of course we shall meet at Bournemouth. No one need look lugubrious. Bee, my dear, please take your friends downstairs."

"Good-bye," said Markham to Hope.

He took her slim fingers in his, and gave them almost a crush.

"And he never told me what he had made up his mind to do about Rossiter," thought the girl. "He never told me. He did hurt my hand when he said good-bye."

No one was there to look, not even Mrs. Chatter-

ton, who was poking the fire and arranging curtains. Hope raised her slightly reddened fingers to her lips and kissed them.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARKHAM and Grey had a compartment to themselves when they traveled back that afternoon to London. It was a bitterly cold day towards the latter end of February. Markham, when not roused or excited or specially interested in things, was a very silent man. He was silent now, looking straight before him. The window was open; he was sitting by it, facing the engine.

"You'll catch a sore throat or something," said Grey, who, wrapped up in a thick ulster, was leaning back luxuriously in the opposite seat.

Markham continued to gaze out at the wintry landscape without replying. It began to snow afresh, and a few flakes came in and rested on his shoulder.

"Do you specially want rheumatic fever?" pursued Grey, raising his voice once more.

Markham stared at him, gave a slight shake to his big frame, seemed to wake up, and answered cheerily.

"Not at all. I'll sit at this side by you, Grey. I want to have a talk with you."

"By all means. But might we shut the window?"

"Of course."

Markham pulled it up with a bang.

"Grey," he said suddenly, "I wish you would tell me what you know about Miss Karron."

"About Hope, or her sister?"

"Don't be provoking. I have only the pleasure of Miss Hope Karron's acquaintance. Tell me what you know about her, Grey—I'm in earnest."

Cecil dropped his bantering tone.

"I see you are," he said. "I thought you were interested in her when you were so keen about selling Rossiter."

"I don't want to know your thoughts about me, but about Miss Karron, at the present moment," retorted Markham shortly.

"Oh, I have nothing but good to tell you. Good? The best. I have known Hope all my life. She is not as beautiful as Jocelyn. Jocelyn has a way about her—she quite comes over a fellow—you can't withstand her anyhow. Hope has not got that way, but I could imagine some people thinking her finer, nobler. You don't love a girl for being fine and noble, do you, Markham?"

"My dear Grey, I never asked you to compare Miss Hope with her sister. I can see pretty well for myself what sort of girl she is. I only wanted to know something of her history. You need not tell me that she is a lady—anyone can see that. I don't care really either about her birth; her father may have been anything, it makes no difference to me.

Only I should like to know why she is so poor and lonely; why she has absolutely to work for her living; the other sister appears to be wealthy—at least, she is able to use the wealth of others?"

Grey colored slightly.

"That's just it," he said. "That's why some people would say that Hope was nobler than Jocelyn. It isn't that, really. The two girls saw things from different standpoints. The aunt who adopted Jocelyn wanted to take Hope too, but Hope was offended about something or other. She thought this aunt had been unkind to her mother. Anyhow, she took a whim against her, and wouldn't live with her or have anything to say to her. So poor Jocelyn had to go off alone. It must have been a great trial to her, for she was so fond of Hope."

"And what did Miss Hope do?"

"They lived at Downton, then, close to our place; that's how I got to know them both so well. Hope came to town. There was forty or sixty pounds a year, or some such pittance, saved out of the wreck. Their mother had been extravagant, poor soul—a charming woman. Hope came to town and began to teach little dunces to read. She has a faculty in that direction, and she makes a living out of it. Little Douglas, whom you saw at Beeches, is one of the dunces."

"Thank you," said Markham.

He leant back again in his seat.

"Why do you ask me so many questions?" said Grey suddenly.

"It is fair you should have an answer, Cecil. I am going to ask Miss Karron to marry me."

"Dick, old fellow! Really! I am glad! What a splendid husband you will make for Hope!"

"I don't know that I shall, I am anything but sure on that point. It is very unlikely, too, that she will have me, for I have a story to tell her which would certainly make many a girl say no. Besides, I have not the least reason to suppose that she cares for me."

"She scarcely knows you, certainly," said Grey. "But I'm awfully delighted that you've fallen in love with her. I always said that Hope should get a splendid husband, for she's such a really jolly girl—so plucky, and with such a nice distinguished sort of off-hand air. I never did think, however, that she would be lucky enough to take your fancy. I am delighted! Oh, she's certain to say yes; you may be as spooney as you like down at Bournemouth. You'll soon win her round."

"I have thought over it a good deal lately," said Markham, whose manner was provokingly quiet, without a trace of Grey's enthusiasm. "I have thought over it, and made up my mind. If, after hearing my

story, Miss Karron is content to marry me, I shall be glad. We are both lonely people—we have neither of us near ties—I expect we shall pull together very well."

"Hope has got her sister."

"Oh, pooh! a sister she never sees. I shall be glad if she says yes. I think I can make her happy, and I know she will bring a great deal into my life. At first, for a certain reason, her face tortured and distressed me. Now it gives me a feeling of rest. I like to think of it, and look at it. What's the matter, Grey?"

"Only you always were a queer fellow, Dick; and —forgive me for saying it—I never thought you queerer than at this moment. You talk a great deal of a story you have to tell, and you have never once said you loved Hope. Certainly, if you do love her, you have not the ordinary way of expressing your feelings. Good gracious! a man who is in love—in *love*, mind you—does not talk of its being a "suitable arrangement," that 'lonely people should keep house together.' I know better than that," continued Grey, taking out his handkerchief, and mopping his forehead.

"You are very much excited," said Markham. Then he sighed, and that queer tender light came into his face, which, while it lasted, had the power of transforming it, and making it beautiful. "You're a

lucky fellow, Grey," he continued. "You love some girl with your whole heart, and she loves you."

"I'm abominably unlucky, Markham. I love Jocelyn Karron, and she won't look at me."

Markham sat grave and silent.

"This is no particular news to me," he said, after a pause. "I have guessed it, or something like it, with regard to you for some time. Very likely it will come right, Grey. You have my best wishes."

"Thanks. I mean to try my chance again when she comes back to England. But now, about Hope. You will understand, after what I have told you, that I look upon her as a sort of sister."

"I am glad to hear it, Grey. You are an excellent brother for any girl to have."

"Look here, Dick, I'm going to exercise a brother's privilege. Are you in love with Hope?"

"I am not."

"Then, by Jove!—why ever—I say, Dick, old fellow—do you call this right or fair?"

"I said I had a story to tell. When she has heard it, it is for her to decide."

"This is very mysterious—will you trust me with the story?"

"I intend to take you into my confidence this minute. The story is short. You may even ridicule it. But things that can be shortly told, and that may

even provoke a smile, will sometimes revolutionize a life."

"You certainly are mysterious," continued Cecil. "You know what a friend you have always been to me, Dick, old man. You may be certain I'll respect your confidence; and now for heaven's sake give it me. For those queer words of yours, and your whole manner since we got into this beastly railway carriage, have made me feel positively uncomfortable."

"It's a short story," said Markham. He changed his seat again, turned his face a little towards the window and began.

"Two years ago I was in Rome—I dare say you remember. I had just recovered from that touch of fever—I sometimes laid part of the blame of what followed on that—I mean on the fact that my brain was weaker, more impressionable. I may be wrong; of course it might have happened in any case."

"But what did happen, Dick? All this moralizing is positively tiresome."

"Well," said Markham, shooting a direct glance full into Grey's face, "after all, in one sense of the word, nothing happened. Briefly, what occurred was this. I saw a girl one day in St. Peter's—I fell in love with her. That is nearly two years ago. I have loved her madly ever since."

"And *you*—you dared to ask Hope to be your

wife? You shan't have her. Why don't you marry the girl you are in love with?"

"I should have married her long since if she would have had me and I could have found her. She is lost."

"Dick, are you quite right in the head? Really, now?"

"Perhaps not, Grey. I can only say I have had a miserable two years. I have resigned myself now to my fate. I shall never find the girl I love best. Hope Karron reminds me of her. She is like her—very different, but still like. If she will have me, knowing my story, I will consider myself a lucky man."

"The girl you were in love with was like Hope—like with a difference? What was her name? You saw her in Rome? When did you see her?"

The Easter of two years back. I never heard her name. What is the matter, Grey? You look quite white—are you faint?"

"No. This carriage is abominably stuffy. I'll open the window again, if you don't mind."

"My dear fellow! It was at your request it was shut. No," continued Markham, in a meditative fashion, "I never did hear the girl's name. I'll just tell you absolutely what occurred. You will judge for yourself how much and how little it meant. I was in St. Peter's wandering about; the priests were chanting in the distance; and there was that sickly smell of

incense. I was walking down one of the many aisles, when I saw a girl standing with her profile slightly turned towards me, gazing up at an exquisite bit of painted plass. It was a treacherous day—the sun hot, the wind cold. She held a fur wrap loosely on her arm. Her hat was pushed back. I was attracted by the delicacy of her profile, and the easy grace of her attitude. She started when she heard my step and turned towards me. 'I am so glad,' she said, in a low voice. 'You are an Englishman, are you not?'—'And you are an English lady,' I replied.—'Yes; I have lost my party, and this big place frightens me so dreadfully.'—'You will doubtless find your party again very quickly,' I answered. Then I made a commonplace remark—I think about the bit of painted glass she had been studying. 'I am too nervous to admire it,' she answered. 'Will you walk down with me as far as the nearest entrance? Perhaps I shall see my people coming up.' I bowed again. She was a very beautiful girl; it was a pleasure to walk with her even a few steps. She had a certain manner—I don't know how to describe it—which prevented my thinking it strange that she should ask me to do this trifling service for her. We meet her party at the entrance. I bowed—she thanked me with a smile. That's all, Grey. I fell in love with her. Thinking of it calmly, I am inclined

to attribute such a sudden fancy to the fever from which I had just recovered."

"What was she like, Dick? The girl, I mean."

"I can't quite describe her. She had a look of Hope Karron, but her face was more delicate, and alltogether more beautiful. Her voice, too, was like —I don't think I could take her features to pieces, even to oblige you, Grey."

"Oh, never mind, Dick. It's a queer story—I mean your falling in love like that. There, I believe I've caught cold. That window is chilling me again. I say, Markham, why didn't you follow her up, when you were so—so far gone?"

"That's just what I did do, and it was just in that particular that I absolutely failed. Remember, I had not the smallest clue—I could not identify one of her party—I could not even tell you now what dress the girl herself wore. I remembered the soft white fur she carried on her arm; I remembered the color of her hair, her face, her voice. I daresay I did not remember that face as it appeared to others. I have no doubt I idealized it. Perhaps the girl I have dreamt of does not exist at all. At any rate, I have not seen her since, although I have looked for her, and morning after morning waked up with the vague hope that I might find her. She flashed into my life and went away. She took something—the best of me, with her. I have not been the same man since."

The train was fast nearing its destination, the daylight had long departed. Markham's voice died into silence, and Grey did not articulate a single word. As they approached Paddington, the younger man roused himself with an effort.

"About Rossiter," he began: "shall I meet you to-morrow at Tattersall's?"

"I forgot; did I not tell you? I am not going to sell the horse."

"No? What do you mean?"

"What I say. I have changed my mind; or rather Miss Karron has for me."

CHAPTER XVII.

"YES," said Hope. "Yes"—she continued very slowly—"and that is all. You never saw the other girl again?"

"Never."

"And you think I should make you a good wife?"

"Honestly, I do. Honestly, I also believe that you will be happier with me than living alone in Bayswater."

"I was not unhappy there; I had a full and busy life—the boys interested me. I was independent."

"Practically you shall be so still. I will never coerce you."

"Oh, it isn't that," Hope frowned.

They were walking up and down in the shelter of one of the pine woods at Bournemouth. The aromatic sweet smell came pleasantly on the air. Hope walked slowly; she was still weak, and her face had only a faint color.

"Suppose," she said at length—"suppose I say yes, and you marry me, and then—then—afterwards you see the other girl."

"Is it likely?" said Markham. "What is one face? There are millions in the world. I have spent two years looking for it, and never caught a glimpse or got a clue. The face may have gone away into the infinite—the girl may be dead. In any case, the chances are a thousand to one that I may never see her again."

"You ask me to be your wife. And you love this other girl. You don't say anything at all about loving me. Don't you think you are very unkind to me?"

Markham looked full into Hope's eyes. She raised them frankly to meet his—they were full of pain. Then she lowered them as if something had struck her, and a crimson wave of color caused by some deep emotion swept over her face.

"Give me your hand," said Markham.

She gave it without a word.

"Listen," he said slowly. "Listen: I am a very earnest and a very honest man. I won't say a word that I don't fully mean. Even to help my own suit—even to bring sunshine into my shadowed life—I could not say one word that I do not mean with my own heart. I don't love you as I love the face that flashed across me and went away. I don't love you with the unreasoning passion which I feel when I think of it. But I do love you, Hope, in a way that I never thought to love a woman; I love you in the best way

because I honor and respect you, because to look into your eyes comforts me, and to take your hand in mine gives me a sense of peace. You are the best thing in all the world—a pure-hearted, noble-minded English girl. To think of you in my home makes me happy. Will you come, or will you say no because of a shadow?"

"I will come," said Hope. "Yes, I will come. You have spoken very good words to me, and I thank you; but remember—don't ever forget—that where you give little, I give all. Don't forget that. God help me, if the shadow grows into life."

"It shan't—it won't—it melts already," said Markham with enthusiasm. He folded his arms round Hope and kissed her.

"What a delightful arrangement!" said Katie Douglas, when she was told. "And you began by disliking him so much, you know, my dear. Anyone could see that. You could not bear even to have his name mentioned, and Bee and Maud Chatterton even now talk of how cross you looked when you found yourself on Rossiter's back."

"I am so delighted about it all, dear," said Mrs. Chatterton; "don't mind that silly girl and her ridiculous nonsense. It is sometimes true—is it not? that we conceal our real feelings by pretending to dislike."

Hope smiled and blushed.

"I don't think I ever did dislike him really," she said in a low voice. "At least, not since he sang '*Farewell to Lochaber.*'"

"And you are very happy now, darling," said Katie.

"Yes, Katie, I am certainly very happy."

"You have made an excellent and wise choice," said Mrs. Chatterton, drawing up her chair luxuriously to the fire, and gazing at the flames with a pleased smile. "I may as well say, Hope, now that all chance of such a thing is at an end, that you are not at all the sort of girl to run about London alone. It's all very well for some, but you are not the kind."

"I took very good care of myself, I assure you, Mrs. Chatterton."

"I daresay, my dear. But it was a pity, a thousand pities. Now, as Mr. Markham's wife—he holds an excellent position at Oxford, you know, dear, a distinguished man in himself, very—as his wife, the air which was so unsuitable in an omnibus will be really becoming."

"Mrs. Chatterton means that you have such a proud way of walking," explained Katie.

"And of looking, my love," added the good lady.

"It's no matter," said Hope, suddenly facing round upon them both. "I am not marrying for position.

I am marrying because I love Dick more than all the rest of the world. I am proud of that, if you like. But as to position, I think a girl may keep up her dignity even if she does ride in omnibuses. I was very happy in London, and very independent, and I had no idea of going about in a poor-spirited sort of a way."

"You couldn't, darling—it wouldn't be in you," explained the adoring Katie.

Mrs. Chatterton looked at the girl as if she would read her through.

"She's a fine young thing," she said to herself. "It would take a good deal to break her spirit. I cannot help admiring her. I wonder if she will be happy with that rather queer professor. He has a temper—I am sure he has a temper. How will Hope get on with a man who possesses a temper?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Cecil heard of Hope's engagement, he did not say a word. A friend broke the news to him at his club, a friend who knew Markham, and who was much interested in the fact that he was about to incur the risk of matrimony. This friend, Clavering by name, plied Grey with questions, to which he received such short and unsatisfactory replies that he left him, under the impression that he (Grey) was "soft" on the girl himself.

When Grey got home to his neat little flat in Curzon street, he found a letter from Markham, a very brief epistle, also announcing the fact :—

Wish me joy, Grey; it is all right. Forget our conversation coming up to town last week. Hope knows, and is satisfied. Forget it, and come down to Bournemouth; we all want you. Yours,

"DICK MARKHAM."

"Forget it!" muttered Grey; "I'm so likely to, of course! Wasn't it always the sort of thing I dreaded? Didn't I long ago say to Hope that if she—*she* met Markham it would be all up with me? Doesn't instinct tell me who the girl is that has bewitched

him?—the girl with a look of Hope, only more beautiful; with Hope's voice, only sweeter. And she was in Rome, then; and wouldn't it be just the sort of thing she'd do—to appeal to a stranger to help her? He wouldn't take a liberty—he wouldn't dare; and she—she would have her own way with any fellow. Forget it! Yes, that's so likely!"

Cecil did, however, come down to Bournemouth; and there he made himself exceedingly agreeable: congratulated Hope warmly, cut a number of stale but time-honored jokes, delighted Katie Douglas, to say nothing of Bee Chatterton, and was altogether the life of the party.

Markham wanted Hope to become his wife with as little delay as possible.

"You have nothing to wait for," he said; "you can rig yourself out afterwards. What do a lot of clothes signify? We want one another. Come to me at once, Hope?"

"It is not the clothes," said Hope. "You don't suppose I care about them? But I should like to hear from Jocelyn before I quite fix the day. No, I have not seen her for two years; but she is my only sister, and I love her dearly. I want to hear from her before I change my name. I have written; I may hear in a day or two. After that, I don't mind how soon you take me, Dick."

Hope was looking very radiant just now. If the shadow troubled her, she certainly never let it flit across her bright face. Markham found new charms in her day by day; and once or twice it even occurred to him to wonder how he ever could have preferred an unknown face and the echoes of a voice to this tangible, vigorous-minded, and fascinating girl.

"After all, I should not be afraid to see the other face," he said once to himself. He was standing by Hope, who was dressed in white, and whose slight hand rested on his arm as the thought came to him. He felt glad. "I can give my whole heart to the girl I am going to marry," he murmured, with inward rejoicing. "I love you, Hope, better every day," he said aloud, and he printed a kiss on the girl's broad white brow.

"Have you fixed the day?" asked Cecil of him that same evening.

"Well, not exactly," replied Markham. "Hope is waiting to hear from Miss Jocelyn. She's wonderfully attached to her sister. You sympathize with her in that, eh, Grey?"

"Stuff!" said Grey. I wouldn't wait, if I were Hope. I'll speak to her to-morrow."

"My dear fellow, forgive me; you and Hope have always been excellent friends, but as regards her marriage with me, I think *I* am the right person to

talk with her—I mean that she is not likely to yield a strongly expressed wish to any one else."

"It's all rubbish!" said Grey again, in a very ill-tempered tone. "Hope is a goose—you'll forgive my saying so, Markham, but what does it matter, in a case of this kind, whether she gets a letter from Jocelyn or not?"

"For my own part, I agree with you, Grey. I am most anxious to be married, for, independent of any sentiment in the matter, it is extremely inconvenient trotting backwards and forwards from Oxford. I am absolutely neglecting my necessary work. I do trust Hope won't mind our having a very short honeymoon."

Next day Jocelyn's eagerly looked-for letter arrived. It contained all the usual congratulations, and ended with an almost passionate request:—"Don't get married until I get back to you, my own dear, sweet, pet Virtue. I shall break my heart if you do; and Aunt Margaret, I am sure, will allow me to come back to England a little before herself and Lottie. Telegraph, when you get this, what is the very latest date to which you can defer your marriage, and I will be with you in time. I will, I must, I shall! Do grant me this one little petition, my own Hope, for the sake of old times, and because—because—well, because, in spite of everything, your Jo is not the happiest of mortals."

There were pages more in this voluminous letter, but the sum and substance of all was the same: Hope must not give herself away until Jocelyn stood by her side.

"And I won't," said the girl, tears filling her big bright eyes. "You won't ask me, Dick. Jo has set her heart on this, and it is not much to grant. I should like her to stand by my side when I give myself to you, Dick. She is the only one very, very near to me—and quite absolutely belonging to me. She is not only my sister, but we are twins. Do you know we never had a quarrel in our lives? Of course I differed from her, I differed from her awfully once, but we never said unkind things to each other as other girls do—never. She only asks us to give her time to come. We will give her time, won't we?"

"Certainly," said Markham. His face was grave; he did not know why he suddenly felt quite depressed. At that moment Cecil sauntered into the room.

"You have heard!" he exclaimed. "Foreign paper!—you have heard at last, Hope? How—how is Jocelyn?"

"All right," answered Hope. "She wants to come to the wedding, and Dick—Dick is kind. He says she may. You'll be glad, won't you, Cecil?"

Hope was still glancing over her letter. She looked up with an arch, gay smile now, full into Cecil's face.

"You'll be very glad!" she exclaimed, a note of sympathy in her voice.

Glad! No man ever yet looked less glad.

"You're not going to be such a fool?" said Cecil, turning white to his very lips, and glancing at Markham. "Jocelyn's at the other side of the world; and to put off the wedding—you'll repent this, Markham. I say, but you're not going to do it, you two, you are only joking!"

"I don't understand you, Cecil," said Hope in astonishment.

But Markham's tone showed real annoyance.

"I would do anything to please my future wife," he said sternly. "And in this matter I shall most certainly yield to her very natural wish. Hope, dear, did you not once tell me that Mrs. Seaton and your sister and cousin were coming to town in May? This is the first week in March. We will be married in May. Write and tell your sister so."

This arrangement was finally made. Cecil did not interfere by another word. The only thing he did do was to ask for Jocelyn's address, which Hope gave him, wondering why he looked so pale and care-worn.

"Are you going to try your luck again?" she asked. "Oh, I hope, I trust you will succeed!"

"I shall never succeed!" he answered almost brutally.

And he hurried out of the room, banging the door noisily after him.

Markham was obliged to go back to Oxford, and an arrangement was made that Hope should live with the Douglases during the short time that would elapse before her marriage. Mrs. Seaton, Lottie, and Jocelyn were spending the winter and spring in Algeria, and Jocelyn wrote enthusiastically about Hope's goodness and Mr. Markham's kindness in putting off the wedding-day. It was finally arranged that it was to take place on the first Saturday in May, and even for this Jocelyn must travel back a day or two before her companions.

Mrs. Seaton wrote a long letter to Hope, begging of her to overlook the past, and offering her house, and her own chaperonage for the wedding ceremony. But Hope's answer was a decided one.

"I don't want to think any unkind thoughts of you, Aunt Margaret. I am even grateful to you for being good to Jocelyn; but I cannot be married from your house, it would pain me. I cannot possibly do it. Besides, we have decided not to have any so-called wedding. We are going to church one morning early, and we shall be very glad to have Jocelyn with us—very glad for that, but there is not to be any wedding in the sense of requiring a grand house or having numbers of strange people, who don't care for one, looking on."

"Your sister must be a very odd young person," said Mrs. Seaton after she had read this letter aloud for the benefit of the two girls.

"Delightful and original, I should call her," exclaimed Lottie.

"Well, my dear, it always was your way to admire rudeness and unconventionality. Of course, I shall send Hope a wedding present; but beyond that I don't suppose anything further is expected of me."

"Not even that, if I understand Hope aright," replied Jocelyn, turning away her face and suppressing a very slight sigh. "Dear Hope! I should like to see her again."

"I wish you could manage to take me with you, Jocelyn," said Lottie. "Hope cannot possibly have any enmity against me. Might I go, mother? It would be refreshing to see a girl with a strongly marked antipathy for anyone. Besides, I suppose she is marrying a wonderful oddity. Did you ever see an Oxford don fit to look at, Jocelyn? There, mother has gone out of the room. She is quite huffed about Hope, I can see that. Jocelyn, have you made up your mind about the count? Forgive me, dearest, but I am dying of curiosity."

"Which I trust won't quite finish you, Lottie, as I mean to tell you nothing until I please myself."

CHAPTER XIX.

DAYS pass quickly when one is busy, slowly when one is anxious. Cecil Grey thought the two months which intervened between Hope's engagement and her wedding the longest he had ever gone through. Hope, on the contrary, full of energy and work, her heart dancing with joy, her whole nature basking in the sunshine of a great love, found these same days marvelously fleet-footed.

Hope was not a girl to do anything by halves. When she fell in love, she did not do so in a half-and-half way; there was no one like Dick Markham; there was no girl so altogether blessed as Hope Karron. For a time the queer story Markham had told her produced a certain effect—a certain uneasiness when her joy seemed most near to perfection; but every day, as she thought more of the man himself, the less did she trouble herself about an unknown, indistinct shadowy rival.

Hope's wedding-day was arranged for the sixth of the month, and, for various reasons, Jocelyn's arrival could not take place until the day before. On the morning of that day Cecil called rather early at the

Douglases' house. His face looked careworn, his eyes had an excited gleam in them, the boyish expression had almost totally left his somewhat thin but handsome face. The little house was in that state of confusion which will precede even the quietest wedding. Cecil was shown into the drawing-room, which was littered all over with wedding presents and odds and ends of half-finished finery. In a moment Hope opened the folding door which divided the tiny room from the dining apartment behind. She came in hastily, holding out both her hands to Cecil, and looking so radiant, so expectant, so like her name, that the young fellow recoiled with a half-smothered exclamation.

"Good gracious, Hope, don't look so happy!" he said.

"Cecil!"

Hope's expression changed to one of concern and pity.

"Dear Cecil, you are not well. Why do you speak to me like that? Why should I not look happy? Jocelyn is coming to-day, and to-morrow I am to be Dick's wife. Dick! Fancy Dick falling in love with me, Cecil. You used to say he was so good, even good enough for Jocelyn. Do you remember? Fancy my getting him! How can I help being happy, dear Cecil?"

"Yes, but you looked so—so—like the thing itself—like hope itself in the room. Don't, it isn't lucky."

"Cecil, you really can't be well. Do you know you are talking the greatest nonsense?"

"Perhaps so. I have had a sensation of being rather hipped lately. Don't bother about me. I called to-day to know if I could be of any help to you, Hope?'

"In what way?"

"Well you see, Markham won't be up from Oxford in time. I thought perhaps I could go to Victoria with you to meet Jocelyn. There'll be sure to be a fuss, getting her things through the customs, and all that. I thought perhaps I could be a help."

"Dear Cecil, of course you can be a help—it will be just the very thing. One always wants a man on these sort of occasions, and Jocelyn won't be my dear old Jo if she has not heaps of luggage. But you're sure you don't mind, Cecil?"

"Why should I?"

This was said a little roughly. Hope colored.

"I mean—you see, Cecil, I don't forget you even though I am so happy—I thought it might hurt you to meet Jocelyn like that."

"Not a bit of it—I'm long past that stage."

Again he spoke roughly, and a warm color flooded his face.

"Then I'm delighted to have you," said Hope, not noticing, or not appearing to notice, his queer manner. "Do you know I rather strategized about Dick. Of course he wanted to come with me to meet Jo, but I did not want him to see her looking tossed from traveling, and tired, and altogether not like her beautiful self. So I managed to get him to choose a train from Oxford which would come in too late to bring him in time to Victoria. He is to dine here to-night, and then Jocelyn will be quite rested, and he'll see her at her very best. It is nice, therefore, to have you, Cecil. And, dear Cecil, I should like to take this opportunity to thank you."

"What for, Hope? For goodness' sake, don't begin loading me with thanks."

"But I must. You have always been a sort of brother to me. Perhaps, Cecil, perhaps what you most wish for will come right after all. Then you and I will be the two happiest people in the world."

"I'm past wishing or hoping," muttered Cecil. "All the same, I'll do what I can for you, Hope—I mean, up to the end. I'll bring a hansom here at three to take you to Victoria."

Hope could not help wondering a little when Cecil at last took himself off. Was he ill? How changed he looked—not at all as if he was glad to see Jocelyn once more. Then she recalled with a vague, half un-

easy wonder that the change in Cecil had really begun about the date of her own engagement to Markham.

"It is odd, and I can't account for it, poor dear fellow," she murmured.

But she was too busy and too happy to dwell long on any disturbing thoughts that day.

The Continental train was due at Victoria between three and four. It was half an hour late, but that is a common occurrence, and would not have greatly mattered to anybody on this particular occasion had not a certain train from Oxford been very sharp to time, and had not a certain individual who intended to come by a later one traveled by it.

"Good!" said Markham, as he sprang on to the platform at Paddington. "They are sure to be delayed a little at the Customs. I'll risk it—I'll go to Victoria. It will be a surprise to Hope, and I can but miss her and that sister of hers at the worst. I've a chance, however, of being in time if I get a fleet horse and a good hansom. Yes, I'll certainly risk it."

The cab bowled off merrily, and Markham, leaning forward a trifle in his seat, gazed before him with an abstracted but pleased expression. He was pleasant to look at, at that moment—an ugly man, doubtless, but with a face marked not only by many indications of power, but of kindliness, of steadfastness, of truth and honor.

As the hansom carried him swiftly to Victoria, he was looking at a picture—a very happy picture to gaze at for a man who had hitherto all his life felt himself more or less of a waif and stray. He was looking at a peaceful English home, at a bright English girl its presiding genius, at himself as the centre of her affections, the owner both of the girl and the house. It was all bright, and the picture was about to become a reality. He quite forgot the shadowy face, and the voice which had haunted him for two years became almost indistinct. Had he remembered the face and the voice at that moment he would have laughed.

"Thank God, I am cleared of that folly!" would have been his exclamation.

The cabman drew up at Victoria. Markham paid him his fare and walked into the station. A porter told him that the Continental train was just coming in. He was in time, therefore. He walked leisurely towards the platform indicated. He would not hurry himself. Hope should kiss her sister with no one there to look on. When her first great joy had subsided, he would touch her arm and get her to introduce him.

He reached the platform; it was full of people, bustling, rushing about, gesticulating, embracing. The scene was noise and confusion. Markham stood a little in the background. He was so big that he

could look over the heads of most present. There was no hurry. He smiled to himself at the people who made so much fuss and got so excited. Suddenly his gaze lit upon Cecil's slight figure. He was glad to see him there; it was good-natured of Grey to go and help Hope at this crisis. Then he remembered what Grey had told him about his own feelings for Jocelyn, and he stepped a little further out of sight, and almost reconsidered his project of surprising Hope at this juncture.

Hope was standing close to Cecil's side. She wore a grey dress, and a black lace hat partly shaded her face. She, too, was tall and slim. Her very upright carriage gave her always a distinguished appearance, and Markham owned to a sense of pride as he reflected that she belonged to him.

Both Cecil and Hope were standing close to a first-class carriage. Cecil was loading a porter with all sorts of rugs and wraps, and the next moment a girl stepped out, put her hand on Hope's shoulder, looked up into her face and kissed her. She was not so tall as Hope, but the moment she came up to her and touched her, she gave to Hope a peculiar appearance. The whole scene set itself at once in a sort of picture in Markham's brain, and Hope, to borrow an old simile, looked like the moon beside the sun. The strange girl's face was set in a frame of the softest golden hair, her eyes looked big and dark, her

coloring was brilliant, her smile radiant. She said something to Hope, and Markham fancied that he could hear her voice, lower, richer than Hope's. Hope was graceful, lovely in her way—but beside this girl! Markham felt himself turning faint, cold and sick. He had not forgotten, then! The shadow had come to life. He stumbled rather than walked away. Neither Jocelyn nor Hope had seen him, but as he reached the end of the platform a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned. Cecil Grey linked his arm within his.

"It's all up, old man, isn't it?" said Grey. "Oh, yes, I always guessed this—always—since you told me you met her in Rome. Come away; don't let the girls see you at present. Bear up, if you can, Markham; I'll come home with you, and we can talk the matter out."

CHAPTER XX.

"AND so you are really and absolutely over head and ears in love, Hope?—Hope the wise, Hope the cautious! Who'd have thought it? Who ever would have thought it? But tell me about him, my own pet Virtue. How did he catch and imprison that grave, steadfast heart of yours? How was it done, Hope?"

Jocelyn and Hope were together in the little bedroom which they were to share that night. Jocelyn was lying back in the one easy chair; Hope was standing by the window. Both girls were in white; but Hope's dress was plain, made simply, and high to her throat. Jocelyn's was a mass of ruffles and laces, and revealed the exquisite shape of rounded throat and rounded arms.

"How did you do it, Hope?" repeated her sister; and now her big eyes looked up wistfully at where the younger girl stood erect, clasping and unclasping her long fingers.

"Jocelyn, I am so happy to see you again!" said Hope, and she bent and kissed Jocelyn on her forehead. "Jocelyn, try not to joke for once in your

life. I am a very happy girl—a very, very happy girl."

"Dearest, that goes without saying. But describe your hero. Is he beautiful? Is he artistic? Is he rich? Is he clever?"

Hope put her hands to her ears.

"You shall see him for yourself," she said. "I won't answer any questions about his appearance. You will see him for yourself in a minute. He is coming to dinner, and he ought to be here directly. Had we not better go into the drawing-room?"

"Yes, love, certainly. Is Cecil Grey coming to dinner too, Hope?"

"Yes, Jocelyn." Hope looked full into her sister's eyes. "Are you going to be kind to poor Cecil?"

"I can't tell you, Hope. Is my dress all right?—and my hair? Do you like this new way I have of arranging it? Hope, I must tell you something. Cecil wrote to me when I was in Algiers—such a letter—poor boy! I did not think he could have cared for me for so long. He did write such rubbish too. It isn't *me* he cares for; it's an ideal he looks at through my eyes. I am wonderfully commonplace. Poor Cecil! he is something of a boy still, but he has grown wonderfully handsome."

"What did you say in answer to his letter, Jo?"

"What did I say? I am not going to tell you all my secrets, miss, even though you are to be a bride

to-morrow! So you won't describe your wonderful Dick to me? Well, as you say, I can soon judge for myself; but answer me one thing at least—is he well off?"

"I really don't know, Jocelyn."

"Oh, what an unworldly Virtue! No wonder she retains her bright face! But seriously, Hope dearest, did not two years of poverty make you sick of it?"

"No," said Hope; "I have had a very happy two years."

Jocelyn looked full into her face. The strained expression was once more apparent in her eyes; she looked older than Hope at this moment.

"Riches *can* become monotonous," she said, in a dreary, low tone.

Then she linked her arm in Hope's, and they went into the drawing-room.

"The gentlemen are late," said Mrs. Douglas. "Hope, dear, how well you look!—not a bit tired or overdone. Jocelyn—I really must call you Jocelyn for your sister's sake—will you sit by me? Here, on this sofa, my dear."

"I will, if you will tell me all you know about Hope's wonderful Dick," replied the elder Miss Karron, lightly.

Hope moved away to the other end of the tiny drawing-room; a very slight sensation of restlessness

came over her. It was five minutes past the hour appointed for dinner.

"How late these tiresome men are!" pouted Katie. "We have such oceans to do to-night. Yes—what is it, Jane?—what do you want?"

Jane was the housemaid, a neat-handed girl, who had taken a fancy to Hope, and Hope to her. To-morrow she was to change mistresses, and go away with Hope on her honeymoon.

"What is it, Jane?" repeated Katie.

"Can I speak to Miss Karron please, Miss Douglas? Will you step out for a moment on the landing, please, Miss Karron?"

The girl's face was grave, important, but not in the least alarmed.

"It's a message from that tiresome dressmaker!" said Katie to herself. She was dying to follow, but did not like to.

"What is it, Jane?" said Hope, as the two stood on the landing; "is anything the matter?"

"Mr. Grey is in the library, miss. He wants to know if he can speak to you in private for a minute."

"Mr. Grey? But he is coming to dinner with Mr. Markham? What can be the matter, Jane?"

"I don't know, miss. What he said was, 'Ask Miss Hope Karron if I can see her for a moment by herself, and don't let the others know.' Mr. Grey is not in his evening dress, miss."

Hope felt as if a cold hand were laid on her warm beating heart. She did not change color, however, nor allow the maid to see a trace of uneasiness in her face.

"It's a message from Mr. Markham, of course," she said. "Don't say anything until I know, though, Jane. I'm sure it's only to say that Mr. Markham can't come to dinner. But don't say anything until I give you leave."

She ran downstairs, opened the library door quickly, went in, and shut it behind her.

"Now, Cecil, if there is bad news, tell it to me quickly!" she panted.

"My dear Hope—my—dear Hope—" said Cecil. He came up to her, took her hands, wrung them in his own, then put a letter between them.

"There," he said; "I couldn't say it, nor could he. It's in the letter—what's of it, that is—it's bad enough but not hopeless—no, not quite hopeless."

Hope did not utter a word. She clasped the letter tightly; her lips parted as if she wanted to say something very badly, but Cecil did not wait; he took up his hat and rushed out of the house.

When he was gone Hope went to the door and called Jane.

"Tell them to go to dinner, Jane," she said. "Make them go, invent any excuse you like; I am busy, I can't be disturbed for a little. Come back to

me at the end of ten minutes, Jane, I may want you."

Hope shut the door and turned the key. The cold weight still rested against her heart, but it was slightly numb now, and although her intellect never felt keener or brighter, her capacity for extreme suffering was slightly blunted. She opened the letter and was amazed to find that it was in Cecil's writing.

"DEAR HOPE,—Markham can't manage it, so I am doing it for him. He has had a sudden blow, he is ill—yes, that is it, Markham is ill—he can't be married to-morrow, and I've been to the church and put the thing off. I am also writing to Mrs. Douglas, she will get her letter through the post. Don't you bother to tell her. God bless you, Hope.

"CECIL GREY.

"P.S. Markham says he may be all right soon. It's a sudden attack—he says he may get quite over it."

Hope clenched her fingers as she read. She read the letter twice, then she slipped it into its envelope and put it back into her pocket. Jane's tap came softly at the other side of the door. Hope sprang to it and opened it.

"Good gracious, Miss Hope, has anything gone wrong? You look—you look—oh, Miss Karron, forgive me, you look dreadful bad."

"I'm tired, Jane," said Hope, forcing a faint smile. "Don't worry about my looks just now. Are the others at dinner?"

"Yes, miss—so surprised and questioning-like—but I didn't let out a thing. Susan's waiting on them, and they're at the fish now—spring salmon—and it was an elegant dinner, Miss Hope, fit, so to speak, for a bridal. You couldn't fancy a small bit of fish if I brought it here, miss?"

"No, I shall be sick if you mention food. Jane, I want you to come out with me. I want you to come at once before they leave the dining-room. Run upstairs and bring down my hat and cloak. We can walk down the street a little way and get into the first hansom we meet. I want you to be very quick, Jane, and, Jane, I'm in great trouble. Will you be brave and faithful and willing to do just what I tell you to-night?"

"Yes, miss, oh, indeed, with all my heart, miss."

Jane's honest eyes began to overflow.

"You'll have plenty of time to cry afterwards," said Hope in her quiet tone. "Fetch me my hat and cloak, and let us come at once."

A moment afterwards the two girls were walking quickly down the street. Ten minutes later Hope was standing on the steps of a large mansion occupied by the Chattertons, who were spending the season in

town. She knew that both Markham and Cecil were their guests for the time being.

"No, I don't want to see Mrs. Chatterton," she said to the footman, who knew her and asked her to enter. "Will you please tell Mr. Markham that I am here and must see him at once?"

"Mr. Markham is in his room, miss. I don't think he is well. The others are at dinner, and—oh, here is Mr. Grey."

Cecil came hastily forward; he had not changed his morning dress; his whole appearance was untidy; his face looked thinner, and more worn than ever.

"The doctor has just left," he said. "Markham has had a shock. Did you not read my letter, Hope?"

"Yes, I read it, and I have come here. I must see Dick at once."

"Come into this room."

Cecil took her hand and almost pulled her in, slamming the door behind him.

"Don't you know it is very imprudent for you to come here?" he said with irritation. "We are trying our best to hush up the thing and not have a talk, and of course how can it be prevented if you come here looking as you do? How can you see Dick when he is in bed? He's ill. I told you he was ill in my letter."

"By this time to-morrow," replied Hope, "but for the shock which you talk about, I should have been Dick's wife. Then you could not have kept me away from him. I will see him now—I won't leave the house until I see him. He is not so ill but that he can see me. Go up and tell him that I am here. Ask him to get up and come down and see me. He can be as ill as he likes afterwards. I won't leave the house until I see him."

"You are very unwise, Hope—this may be most injurious. Am not I doing my best for you? It is madness your seeing Dick to-night. Besides, he is ill—ill enough to see a doctor; it is hard of you to want to disturb a man who is very ill."

"Call me any names you like, Cecil. I am not going to leave the house until I see Dick. I am almost his wife, and he is almost my husband. I am not asking too much."

"It's on your own head, then," said Cecil. "I would have saved you."

And he left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

HE was not gone three minutes: in less than that time he and Markham returned together. Hope saw at a glance that the latter had never been in bed. He, too, looked dishevelled, his face was pale, and its expression considerably disturbed. His eyes rather avoided Hope's; she came up at once and took his hand.

"I'll leave you," said Grey; "only I told you, Hope—I told you that it was wrong to disturb a man who is ill. If Markham gets worse, the sin will be on your head."

"Don't be bitter," said Hope. Her voice was almost bright. She herself opened the door for Cecil, and saw him out. Then she again returned to Markham, took one of his big hands in both her own, and looked full up into his face. She was a tall girl, but he towered above her. His face, massive and rather heavy in outline, made no response to the quick, sweet glance, and the hand she clasped lay passive between hers.

"Dick, are you really ill?" she said tenderly, but with some of the alarm, which his presence had for a moment dispersed, coming back into her voice.

"In mind, Hope; I have had a blow, and am ill in mind."

"But Cecil said you sent for the doctor."

"*He* did—he is a good fellow, and he and the doctor between them made up a sort of story about me."

"Then it wasn't true?"

"No, it wasn't true. Physically, I am in health—that is, I move, I breathe, I see, and hear without pain."

"Yes—come and sit on the sofa, Dick. Here, close to me. Dick, you have had a blow?"

"God knows, child—yes."

Hope felt the cold round her heart getting greater. All the momentary reaction of pleasure had left her. Even her hands felt chilly; she would have trembled but for the violent restraint she put upon herself. Markham sat by her side as she bade him, and when she nestled close, his big frame bent forward a little; still he avoided her eyes.

"Look at me," said Hope suddenly. "Dick, look at me—you must, you shall! I know what has happened. You have seen the other girl; the shadow has come to life."

"Yes, it has come to life with a vengeance."

"You saw the other girl to-day, Dick?"

"I saw her to-day."

"You will marry her, I suppose?"

"Marry her! No, that I shall never do. She is not for me."

Hope sat absolutely silent. She did not move even an inch away from Markham's side; the only difference in her attitude was that now her cold hands lay perfectly still on her white dress.

Markham still kept his face averted. His expression was dogged, changed, almost cowed. There was no tenderness in his manner, no compunction. His mouth was set hard, and its expression was cruel. The fact is he was absolutely taken up with himself. He was an unselfish man, as a rule. Now all his thoughts were self-control; at this moment the slim girl by his side was absolutely nothing to him. It seemed as if hours had passed away, although in reality not many minutes had gone by, before Hope raised her voice and spoke quietly.

"You were quite honest with me, Dick; you told me about the other girl before we were engaged. You did not think you would meet her again, but you admitted the possibility. You never for a moment gave me to understand that you loved me, or could love me, better than her."

"It would have been a lie if I had said it," answered Markham, suddenly rising, and beginning to pace the floor. "I am not myself when I think of her—that I should have seen her to-day, of all days! I am not myself; I have had an awful blow. You

had better leave me, Hope. I cannot talk to you now."

"You were quite fair about it," continued Hope; "you told me at the time. It is an awful thing for me all the same. You gave me so little, and I gave you so much—all. I have nothing left, Dick; I am going away empty. Good-bye, Dick! You are not sorry for me now, but you will be presently. Good-bye, Dick!"

She went up to him, took his hand, raised it to her lips, and kissed it. Then she went out of the room. He scarcely saw her go, and scarcely felt her kiss; but when she was gone, really gone away; when he heard the house-door being shut quietly, he staggered up and leant against the mantlepiece, and burying his head in his hands, gave one or two great tearless sobs.

"Does she know?" said Cecil, who came into the room. "Did you tell her? Did you really break her heart?"

"Yes, old man," replied Markham, "she knows. She spoke of it herself—she guessed. Yes, she knows."

"Then you have broken her heart. Hope's heart broken!—think of it—the brightest, the bravest heart any girl ever possessed! But, Dick, one question more. Does she know who has robbed her?"

"I did not tell her," replied Markham, rubbing his hand wearily across his forehead. "She may guess, of course, but I don't see why she should; I did not tell her. I am going upstairs, Grey. I feel dazed and queer; I ought to be in an awful state, but I'm not. Don't worry me any more to-night, like a good fellow. The best news I can now hear is that you are engaged and married. Do it quickly, and tell me nothing until you send me a paper announcing the fact."

"About Hope—what about Hope, Dick?"

"I don't know. I can't think of her, somehow."

CHAPTER XXII.

A FORTNIGHT after the events mentioned in the last chapter, a girl might have been seen standing in an expectant attitude on the steps of Mrs. Douglas' small but daintily-kept house. It was a very bright day, and the girl, who was exquisitely dressed, had a face so radiant that in itself it seemed part of the May sunshine. She stood on the steps, drawing on her gloves, and looking half-expectantly, half-absently up and down the street.

At that moment a hansom cab was seen to dash round the corner, a rather restive horse was pulled up short, and Cecil Grey, springing out, ran up the steps.

"Have I kept you, Jocelyn? I didn't mean to. What a day it is! Will you come now? My mother came to town last night. We shall meet them in the Park: I told them you would be there."

"You were imprudent, Cecil, and I never gave you leave to be that. If your mother sees us together, she will think—oh you know naturally what she will think."

"But it is true, dearest. We are engaged."

"Yes, yes. Did I deny it? I will drive with you, Cecil, not to the Park, but to Regent Street. I want to make a change in a rather important order. Now let us be off; all the housemaids in the street will soon have their heads out of the windows, wondering what we are talking about. Yes," continued Jocelyn, as the hansom whirled the pair away, "I admit that I am engaged to you, but I also admit, and you must admit, that all this is under the seal of secrecy—secrecy inviolate."

"You said so, Jocelyn; not that I could see the smallest necessity for it. My mother is most anxious that we should both be happy; my father has withdrawn any opposition he ever felt, and—and—but don't let us talk of it. Your wishes are mine, darling. I am the happiest fellow in the world—too happy, under the circumstances."

"Yes, the circumstances are grave," responded Jocelyn. "What an eccentric person—to use the mildest term—your friend Dick must be. I should like to see him, really, out of curiosity."

"The powers forbid!" ejaculated Grey.

Then he forced a laugh, looked into the radiant face of his betrothed, and said again, almost apologetically—

"I'm the happiest fellow, and I'm ashamed of myself when Hope is so ill."

"I cannot understand Hope," answered Jocelyn. "She certainly is very ill; the doctors say it is a sort of low fever. Oh, I don't think they are really alarmed, Cecil. They say she has had a shock of some sort, and will come round if she gets time, and isn't worried. What puzzles me about her is her fretting at all for a man who would behave so abominably. Fancy his breaking off the engagement at the eleventh hour. Hope will never give any reason for it, and she won't blame the wretched fellow. Shouldn't I blame him, though, if it were me!"

"No, you wouldn't, Jocelyn, you, least of all."

"Why should I blame him least of all? Oh, how mysterious you all are, and I hate mysteries!"

"Forget what I said, Jocelyn. Don't think of it again. Dick has gone out of our lives—poor Dick. Hope is right not to blame him. Hope was always right, and some day he'll remember it. Some day her face will come back to him as the sweetest memory."

"It's all most melancholy," said Jocelyn—"melancholy and mysterious; I came back, as I thought, to a wedding, but it's much more like a funeral."

"You came back to me, darling," said Cecil. His eyes glowed, and he tried to take her hand.

"Don't, Cecil, I hate demonstrations, particularly in hansom cabs. Here we are, will you come in? You'll find it awfully slow."

"Yes, I will. No, I won't, if you'd rather not. I'll walk up and down outside until you come out."

"Much the best plan," laughed Jocelyn.

She went into the shop; it was nearly an hour before she reappeared. When she did, she was accompanied by a slight, plain, eager-looking girl.

"I must have an answer for him, Jocelyn," the girl was saying. "Are you coming back to-night, or are you not? I can't have him coming to the house as if he wanted to see me. Mother would be so wild."

"Hush! I'll come if I can; how can I make promises when Hope is so ill? You are unreasonable, Lottie."

"Well, shall I give him Mr. Douglas' address? It really is hard on me. He is certain to come again to-night."

"I'll come over. I'll promise. If you give my address, Ill never speak to you again. Now, no more, I entreat. This is Mr. Grey coming up the street; you have heard me speak of him—Cecil Grey, an old Downton friend. Cecil, let me introduce my cousin, Miss Seaton."

"I have often heard of you," said Lottie.

The three walked away together; presently Jocelyn made an excuse.

"I must go into this shop with Lottie," she said. "Yes, I am going to sleep at the Douglases' to-night,

but I shall go home to lunch with Aunt Margaret and Lottie, and it is very probable I shall spend the evening with them. I can see you to-morrow with the Douglases, Cecil; you might come about eleven if you like."

Cecil's face fell.

"And my mother!" he began, "you know she expected to meet you in the Park."

"Please give her the prettiest message you can invent, from me. Tell her I was unexpectedly detained. I trust you will say something nice, dear old man."

The last words were almost whispered; the lovely eyes grew soft and tender. Cecil felt a glow round his heart.

"I'll manage it, my dear," he said, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

Jocelyn nodded again lightly to him, and went into the shop with Lottie.

"No wonder poor Dick is as bad as he is," thought the young fellow, as he walked down Regent street. "I loved her before—I loved her always, since the first day I saw her, when she was a little imperious child, and made me do what she wanted, but oh, how deeply I care for her now. She bewilders me, she teases me. She'll always do just whatever she fancies with me—she knows that; but how lucky I am, I can't believe in my own good fortune. Well, poor

Dick, yes of course I'm sorry for Dick, he must go to Australia, or Ceylon, or somewhere; he'll have to give up Oxford, of course, that goes without saying. I don't suppose he'll be selfish about it, for *I* couldn't take Jocelyn into exile, she wouldn't go. I shouldn't like to test her love too much. Oh, of course it's there, but she mustn't be ruffled. The first thing I ask her shall not be a sacrifice. No, Dick must go away. Poor Hope, I hate to think about Hope. Well, it is all really settled. I am absolutely engaged to Jocelyn Karron; now I shall write to Dick and tell him."

Grey turned into his club, and soon dashed off a hasty line. He was happy, but he felt very restless and disturbed. Jocelyn was his, but he certainly could not mention any possible wedding day.

"Dick said not to let him know until we were absolutely married," he murmured to himself. "I may have to wait awhile for that, but this will put him out of his pain—poor Dick, poor old fellow!"

Then Grey wrote his letter, glanced over its contents, put it into its envelope, and with his own hands dropped it into the nearest pillar-box.

The next morning Markham, who had returned to Oxford, received it. He had taken a house there—a house where he and Hope were to have lived happily together. He had not gone near the house, but had returned to his old lodgings. There he

silenced his astonished landlady by telling her that he had no news whatever to give her; that he was not married, nor likely to be, and by a request, made with most unusual sternness, that she would cease to question him on the subject.

Then he took up his usual avocations, lecturing better than ever, but shunning his fellow-men. It was quite true that he was not the least ill in body; he ate, and when he went to bed he slept. His brain felt more acute than ever: his reasoning powers were excellent; but the kindly light had quite gone out of his face—the light which used to make Dick Markham's plain, rough, rugged features almost beautiful when he looked at suffering, or spoke to a child, was gone. He often said to himself, "I don't suffer at all, but really I have not a scrap of heart. It is as if it had been killed with a blow. If this state of things goes on, I may turn into a very cruel man. I am a hard man now—hard as iron—I must be on my guard against myself."

On the morning Markham received Grey's letter, he ascertained with almost a sense of satisfaction that the heart he thought dead was only frozen or stunned. It awoke with a great throb to fresh life. A wretched sense of bitterness came over him.

"The worst of it is, I know I am an utter fool," he said to himself. "What man who was not an idiot would throw away all that makes life worth living for

the sake of a face and a voice that can never be his. Never, now absolutely, for at this very moment she belongs to another."

For the first time that day Markham's thoughts turned to Hope. Not that he was even yet sorry for her. It seemed impossible to him at that moment that any girl was to be pitied who was well rid of a fellow like himself. For perhaps the most acute part of the suffering which fell to his share during the few weeks that followed was his sense of self-abasement. He hated himself even more thoroughly than he still loved and clung to the voice and the shadow which darkened his life.

His heart was no longer paralyzed, however; which, although he could scarcely be got to consider this a special blessing, was at least a move in the right direction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IT was rather a merciful thing for Hope that the dreadful and mysterious calamity which fell upon her was immediately followed by illness of an acute form. She was not absolutely in danger, but she suffered from a recurrent sort of low fever, which when at last it left her took away a good deal with it.

For instance, the great charm which there had always been about Hope had been the singular likeness which her face bore to her name. It was an expectant face, with a glad outlook about it, an anticipation of something brighter and better than the present could give, always filling the eyes and sparkling on the lips.

Now this look had gone. The face which rose from that sick bed was sweet, but the thing that had given it its beauty had left it. It was a still face, rather wanting in animation, quite unexpectant, with no forward inquiring glance. No one could now speak of Hope Karron as beautiful, although the trouble that had come to her had in no sense embittered her.

There are girls and girls. There are many who under a blow like this would become shattered, poor, and

useless; not a great many really die of broken nearts, but most would be embittered.

Hope was not embittered. A great deal had been taken away, but she was not going to lead a useless life.

After three weeks of illness, she went one day to Mrs. Douglas, and had a long talk with her.

"I am not cured," she said. "Something has been taken away from me which can never be replaced. Dick was not to blame; he told me that a possible contingency might occur when first he asked me to be his wife. I became engaged to him, knowing all about this. Dick was not to blame, although it is very sad for me. Yes, it is very sad and hard, but I am not going to be crushed. To-morrow, Mrs. Douglas, I want to go away. I have fixed on the place I am going to, but I don't want anyone to know my secret but you. Neither Katie nor Jocelyn are to know. I will give *you* the address. See, it is here, in this closed envelope. Open it if you really want me, and in any case open it at the end of six months if you don't hear from me before. I am going away to get cured, or at any rate so far cured that I can be a useful sort of girl again."

"But what about money, dear?" said Mrs. Douglas, who was a soft-hearted woman, and could not help crying while the young girl sat by her side so quiet, and still, and patient. "You can't go on with

your profession while you are away, Hope. You must have money to carry out your scheme."

"So I have," answered Hope. "I have a little money saved, and Mr. Frost had just sent me my half-yearly income. Now you will keep my secret, won't you? I am not going to tell anyone I am going. I am not going to say good-bye to anyone."

"Not even to Jocelyn?"

"No, not even to Jocelyn. Jocelyn seems very far from me now. Oh, yes, I am glad she is engaged to Cecil, but she is changed. I think she is more Aunt Margaret's child now than my sister."

The next morning early Hope carried out her plan. She vanished from the Douglases' quiet little dwelling, leaving no apparent trace behind her, for Mrs. Douglas faithfully kept her secret. There was a small excitement at her departure. The little circle of her acquaintance were interested for a day or two, but time goes fast in the busy London season, and in a day or two Hope Karron and her sad little story were forgotten.

It was the end of June and a very sultry evening when Markham once again, owing to some circumstances connected with his profession, found himself traveling to London. Once again he was in the bustle of arrival at Paddington. After his late experience he cordially hated railway stations, and now

pushed his way rapidly through the crowd. All his necessary luggage had been shoved into one small handbag. This he carried himself, and was about to hail a hansom to convey him to his destination when once again he was pulled up short, and once again his heart beat heavily and strangely.

As he stood on the pavement waiting to summon his hansom, a neat brougham drawn by a pair of bays came rapidly up, occupied the space just before which he was standing, interrupted his view of the line of hansoms, and forced him for the moment, chafing with impatience as he was, to turn his attention to the occupants of the brougham.

They got out—a girl and a man. The girl looked full into Markham's face; he staggered back and turned white. His change of color and evident confusion perhaps helped her to recognize him. She stepped forward with a radiant smile.

"My unknown friend of St. Peter's, at Rome, is it not so?" she said. And she held out her little hand.

Markham did not take it. He stammered something unintelligible; a crimson wave of deep color had rushed all over his face.

"I think myself lucky to have met you," continued the girl. "I don't know your name, but I have always somehow associated you with luck. I will tell you

my name now, that is, my new name—the Contessa Longobardi. Yes, I am a bride—this is my wedding-day."

"Let me congratulate you," began Markham. "My name is—is—" but before he could utter a word the count, a fussy little dark-eyed Italian, hurried up.

"Not a moment to lose—we shall miss our train, carissima," he said, and he darted a fiery glance at Markham. Some people rushed up in a hurry, the bustle increased, and in a moment Markham found himself whirling away in a hansom through the sultry evening air. There was a cold dew on his forehead; he had a queer sensation as if he had suddenly passed through death. "Anywhere—drive anywhere," he said to the cabman.

The evening was very still; not a breath of air seemed to move. Markham took his hat off and began mechanically to wipe the drops of dew from his cold forehead. The driver of the hansom, not knowing where else to go, took him into Hyde Park. He drove through from one gate to another not too fast, for surely there was no use in wearing his horse out over a person who did not know his own mind. Markham, with his hat still off, leant forward in his seat. The balmy warm air was reviving to him, and something in his present situation recalled dimly at

first, then vividly, an old memory. About two months ago he had left Paddington and driven, a gay and light-hearted man, to Victoria. He was going to meet a girl who on the next day was to take his hand in hers and promise to be his true, loving and faithful wife. All through the years that followed this girl and he were to walk in loving fellowship — they were to be so united that no man could sever them. The picture of the home which he and Hope were to have together once more rose up before his mental vision. He saw Hope's face, tender, strong, very faithful, very bright and steadfast. The whole picture came vividly before him, and he there and then discovered that for the last two months his whole moral nature, all that made him manly, worthy, honorable, had been under an eclipse. Something had come between him and the sun. A dark cloud, from which he never thought to escape, had enveloped him. But this evening at Paddington he had looked once into a beautiful but shallow face, the voice that had haunted him sounded once more in his ears—it was insincere, it was untrue.

"Thank God, I'm cured!" suddenly shouted Markham. He said it aloud, and the cabman, who heard him, thought his eccentric fare had gone quite off his head.

"Look here," said Markham, putting on his hat, springing to his feet, and addressing the cabby, "drive to — in Pall Mall;" he gave the address of Cecil's club. In ten minutes he found himself there. He inquired of the hall-porter if Grey were in.

"No," said the man; "Mr. Grey has been in the country for the last day or two."

"I will write to him," said Markham; and he was about to proceed to the reading-room when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and the very man he sought stood by his side.

"Good gracious, Markham! what has brought you to town? And you look—you look quite well?"

"So I am," said Markham, "quite—that is, *I* am well," he continued, with a sudden pause of shocked recollection. Until this moment he had absolutely forgotten that what had worked his own recovery might wreck the life of the bright young fellow who stood by his side.

"Come into the coffee-room," said Grey, his face glowing. "Your presence puzzles, astonishes; but it also delights me. *You* here, the old Dick—I know by your face that you are the old Dick."

"A sadder and a wiser man," said Markham, with a grim smile. "Still, absolutely cured—yes, absolutely; but at a cost, Grey. Grey, old fellow, must each man have his turn? I am cured, at a cost."

"Come into the coffee-room," said Cecil. "Let us have some dinner together. Afterwards I am going to the Seatons. They are having their last reception for the season. You—you couldn't come. I don't suppose you are cured enough for that?"

"I am absolutely cured, Cecil. No, I won't go into the coffee-room. If you are hungry, go and eat. Afterwards, shall we take a stroll together? The evening is lovely."

"As you please. I don't believe you are cured, Markham; you look queer. I'll just go and have something, for I'm starving. Then I'll join you."

Markham went into the reading-room. He took up an evening paper, held it so that no one should see his face, and fell instantly into a dream. Once again he saw the home and the girl who presided there. He was cured, he had been delivered from a delusion; but perhaps even yet his mind had not recovered its normal balance. He was a just man, unselfish, a man with generous instincts—such was the normal Markham. He was about to inflict a terrible blow on his best friend, and yet the moment that friend left him he forgot him.

He sat on in a snug chair, enjoying his dream. The room was full of men when he entered. After a time he noticed that he was almost alone. Then

it occurred to him to speculate on the length of time Cecil took to dine. Then he looked at his watch and started—he had been in the reading-room for over an hour; it was now nine o'clock.

He rose with an effort; his pain had been so acute, and his absolute deliverance so sudden, that he felt a certain sense of pleasant inertia. All was right where all had been wrong—the love, the home, were before him. He was not troubled as yet with even the faintest shadow of a doubt with regard to the reception Hope would give him.

Still, Cecil was a long time away. He went out of the reading-room, and found himself again in the entrance-hall. Seeing that he was looking about in an inquiring manner, a page came up to him.

"Are you Mr. Markham, sir? Are you looking for Mr. Grey?"

"Yes. Mr. Grey was dining here. Will you ascertain if he has finished?"

"He went out a long time ago, sir. He said when you asked for him I was to give you this."

A rather bulky envelope was put into Markham's hand. He thrust it into his pocket, put on his hat, and went out. He felt no curiosity to read what Grey had said.

"He knows, poor fellow!" he murmured. "Probably she wrote to him at his club. She was all froth

and vapor. One day he will be as glad as I am to have been saved from her."

Then Markham turned his attention once again with a certain selfish recklessness to his own affairs.

There was a quiet little hotel in the neighborhood of Piccadilly where he was in the habit of going when he spent a few days in town. Should he drive there now, order some dinner, read poor Cecil's letter, and ponder over what he could do for him? No, he could do nothing for Cecil; he could not even comfort him. His own affairs were paramount. Something was drawing him, a longing which was almost pain was impelling him in a certain direction. He yielded to the impulse, jumped into the cab, gave Mrs. Douglas' address, and soon reached the house. It was now half-past nine—rather a late hour for an ordinary caller; but he could not possibly class himself under such a head. A neatly-dressed servant—not Jane—answered his ring.

"Is Miss Karron at home?"

"Miss Karron? No, sir. Miss Karron doesn't live here, sir."

This answer made Markham stagger back a trifle. He gazed at the servant with a perturbed expression coming over his face.

"Can I see Mrs. Douglas?" he asked, then.

"Mrs. Douglas is away until to-morrow, sir."

"Oh, is any one at home?"

"There's Miss Katie, but——"

"That'll do," said Markham, in a tone of relief, "I'll see Miss Katie Douglas. Take her this, ask her if I can see her on important business at once."

He gave his card to the maid, who presently returned with a grave face, and conducted him to the drawing-room. The gas was lit; the little room which Markham had always associated with Hope, for they had often spent hours alone there, looked dreary and not too tidy. The windows were open, and Katie, as usual surrounded by trophies of needle-work, rose with a startled nervous glance from the recesses of one, and came to meet him. Her manner was as cold and stiff as such a very *empressé*, undignified person could make it. She did not offer her hand, but looked at Markham in no friendly spirit. He afterwards said that the look on Katie's face showed him more of what he himself had done than any reproach he had ever received. The words he had meant to utter so easily were arrested half way. When he did speak it was with an effort.

"I am told by the servant that Hope is not with you, can you give me her address?"

"No, I cannot. I don't know it."

Katie stood about six feet away from Markham. He did not advance any nearer. Again his words came with an effort.

"You must be able to tell me something about Hope," he said presently. "When last I saw her, she lived with you. It is most important I should find her at once."

"It is not at all important to us that you should find her; I don't know where she is—I cannot help you in the matter."

Katie sat down once more in her window. She was altering a ball dress, and she took the flimsy material now between little fingers that trembled.

"You are rather cruel to me, Miss Douglas," said Markham, "you can at least tell me something, something about Miss Karron."

"Yes, it is much more suitable for you to call her Miss Karron. She is nothing whatever to you."

"That's as she and I will, in future. Miss Douglas, I know my conduct must appear black to you. I begin to see something of its true colors myself, now. My excuse is that I was insane. Now I am sane, my right mind has returned to me."

"What a blessing that you didn't make Hope your wife—how awful if she had married a lunatic! No, I don't know anything about her, and if I did I shouldn't tell you."

"But I wasn't insane in that sense! Good gracious, I can't explain it to you. Miss Douglas, you don't know what awful mischief you may be doing by keeping back what little information you can give me,

Now look here, I desire you to tell me what you know about Hope."

"'You desire,'" said Katie, flinging down her work, and confronting him with flashing eyes. "Do you know that you nearly killed Hope? Do you know that she went away because you broke her heart? *You!* I love Hope, and I hate you. Do you think I would do anything to help you?"

"I bitterly repent," began Markham, whose face had grown white.

"Yes, and what good does your repentance do anyone? You did not take Hope's life, but you took away that which made her a delight to all who knew her. You took the sun from her, and the joy from her; you made her name, her dear name, a lie every time she is called it. Oh, how miserable the world is when men like you can be so cruel!"

Here Katie's fortitude forsook her. She laid her head on her hands and sobbed bitterly.

It is impossible for a girl to keep up her anger long when she gives way to violent weeping. Presently her voice became softer and more heartbroken.

"This has been such an awful, wretched day," she began. "You must forgive me if I say bitter things. You know, or do you know that Jocelyn was privately married this afternoon to Count Longobardi; that wretched, mean-spirited little Lottie Seaton helped her, and poor Cecil knew nothing about it till an hour

ago. Cecil came here for a minute this evening. He was almost wild. Jocelyn wrote him a letter which he got at his club. I could tell him nothing, and he went straight away to the Seatons. Oh, no wonder I am miserable and perturbed. Fond as I am of Hope, I almost wish I had never known the Karrons. Now, what is the matter, Mr. Markham?"

"Nothing. I am going to the Seatons to try and find Grey. Good-night. I may call to-morrow"

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNTIL Markham got to the Seatons' house he quite forgot what Cecil had told him; they were having a reception, a great reception, the farewell to their many friends of the season. In his present attire Markham could scarcely enter, besides he did not know the Seatons. He inquired of more than one liveried footman standing about if he could tell him anything of Grey. Was Grey upstairs? Had he left? No one seemed able to give accurate information. One said one thing, one another. Markham resolved to see the reception out on the steps. He was slightly in the shadow himself, but he could see the face of each man and woman as they came out to go away. An attendant looked askance at him. He slipped a sovereign into the man's hand and held on to his position. By-and-bye the very last guest departed. No, Grey was not present. Markham hailed a hansom and drove back to Grey's club. The hall-porter assured him that Mr. Grey had never come in. Then he drove to the young man's private address in Curzon street; the house was shut up, no light anywhere; finally, Markham went to his own hotel. He was spent, weary, almost faint now, it was hours since

he had eaten. He ordered some supper, quickly despatched it, and going up to his room at last took out Cecil's letter. All this time remorse like a vulture was tearing him. How could he in the moment of his own deliverance have so forgotten his friend as to let him receive this blow unsupported. The sense of Jocelyn's unworthiness had been a relief to him. Why did he forget that what was his release might be another man's death?

He opened Cecil's letter. Some straggly lines were written across a thick page of the club notepaper.

"Each man must have his turn; enclosed will explain."

There was no signature. Markham saw then that Grey had absolutely sent him Jocelyn's own letter. He took it in his hand for a moment, tried to open it carelessly, then flung it from him on the floor as if it were a living thing and could sting him. Presently he buried his head in his hands, and strong man, in many respects iron man that he was, he began to weep. A man's tears are terrible things. Markham was weeping for the sorry part he had played, for the desolation which he had caused, and also because a new dull fear had taken possession of him. Was it at all likely that Hope would look at him or think of him again? Between fear about Hope, and remorse at having let Cecil meet his trouble unaided, Mark-

ham had a bad night of it. It was not until morning had long broken that he took courage to read Jocelyn's letter. This was what she said :—

"DEAR CECIL,—When you hold this in your hands I shall be another man's wife. I know how angry you will be. I know that I shall have hurt you awfully. I am very sorry. I would not if I could help it, Cecil, give you a moment's pain. I'll tell you how it is, and how I can't help myself. I am marrying the Count Longobardi because I am a coward. I am afraid of him—you don't know how fierce he can look. He is an Italian, and has an awful passionate nature. He does not know anything about my ever being engaged to you—he must never know, it would be too dreadful. I'll tell you the story about him, Cecil.

"Last winter at Algiers, Aunt Margaret used to have receptions, and he always came to them. He is enormously rich, and Aunt Margaret thought for a time he was coming after Lottie. She did not want Lottie to marry a foreigner, and she often said she would only give her to an Englishman. But the count did not want Lottie, it was me. He said that he worshiped me, and I think he did and does. He asked me to marry him, and I was frightened, and I said I would. I was sorry the moment I said it, I didn't a bit want to marry him. I begged of him to keep our engagement secret, and I always hoped and hoped that I might get out of it. Then *you* wrote, asking me to marry you, again, and I thought how much nicer you were than the count, and I felt more

sorry than ever that I had promised to be his. He was very fierce just then, and he was always threatening to tell Aunt Margaret, but I used all my powers to get him to keep it a secret. I tried to make him think Aunt Margaret wouldn't let me have him, that she meant me for some grand titled man in England. That frightened him, and he gave in. I told him I would marry him privately whenever he wished, but that we must not tell Aunt Margaret until after we were man and wife. Just then he had to go to Italy, I think his father died or something—anyhow he had to go away in a hurry. It was then I was coming to England for Hope's wedding, and I managed to get away without his knowing, and I hoped oh so earnestly that I had escaped the count. Then *you* proposed to me, Cecil, once again, the third time, dear Cecil. I thought perhaps that the count could never find me in England. No such luck, he discovered me all too soon. I have gone through six weeks of misery, trying to keep you two apart. I don't think he knows of your existence—he must never know. Lottie helped me, and I married him this morning. I am writing this now while he thinks I am changing my dress. Oh, how my hands shake! Good-bye, Cecil. I don't suppose I'd have been a good wife for you. What a pity it wasn't Hope you fell in love with! Forget the worthless, the unhappy,

JOCELYN LONGOBARDI."

Markham read every word of this letter.

"Poor girl!" he said softly. "Yes, it was somebody quite different who filled my heart. I am bitterly sorry for her and for Cecil."

Then he saw some pencilled lines faintly scratched at the end of the letter. They were in Cecil's handwriting.

"Burn this, Markham, when you have read it."

So Markham tore up the letter, and committed it to the flames. The contessa's miserable story was safe as far as he and Grey were concerned.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOPE settled herself comfortably in a tiny village on the Devonshire coast. She had gone there once many years ago with her mother. She sought out the same landlady, who kept just the same neat little white-washed, spotlessly clean dwelling. She took in Hope with acclamations of delight; told her she had grown into a most beautiful young lady, fed her up and petted her.

Hope now set herself seriously to the task of getting well; quite well, not only in body, but in mind, she intended to become; but even Hope did not realize how sore and deep her pain was. She determined to lead a busy life in the little village. She made friends with the fisher people, and often went out in their boats. She hired a rough pony, and took long rides by herself. She studied French and German diligently, made a collection of sea anemones and seaweeds. She even sketched a little, and during every moment of spare time she read.

No one could have led a busier or more healthful life. The color bloomed once more in her cheeks, and the light of health came back to her eyes. Still,

the dull ache in her heart did not go away. It lay down with her at night, and pursued her through the long and busy day. She knew its name—it was a starved pain—starved because Dick had turned away from her, and she might never see his face again.

She had been about a month at Highbeach, and all that time had congratulated herself at not having met a single human being of her own world, when one day, returning from a longer ride than usual, she was startled by hearing a clear voice call out her name.

She turned round, and saw, rather to her dismay, Roley Douglas, accompanied by two other boys, coming tumbling and leaping over the short rough grass to meet her.

"Hullo! I knew it was you, Hope—Miss Karron, I suppose I ought say—I always do call you Hope behind your back. We have come down to lodge next door to you, Jones and Spicer and I."

Here he waved his hand in a patronizing style to the other boys, who were nearly double his size, and looke red and awkward.

Hope nodded to them, took Roley's hand in hers, but could not help a shade of disappointment coming into her voice.

"How did you find me out, Roley? I did not think anyone—anyone knew where I was."

"I like that! What a muff you must take me for! Wasn't your easel outside the door, and a bit of blotting-paper of yours floating out of the open window with great D's scribbled all over it? D stands for—D stands for—I say, Hope, you need not go off in a rage that. I'm not going to split. The fact is, we all had whooping-cough at school, and Jones and Spicer and I were the worst. And my mother wrote to our master, and told him what a nice place High-beach was. She didn't say anything about your being here. We found that out for ourselves; didn't we, Spicer?"

"I say, you might let Miss Karron go on—go on with her ride," drawled Spicer.

"Oh, I'm very glad to see you, boys," said Hope, after a moment. "I've had my ride, and am coming home now. And will you—will you all," she added, "come and have tea with me to-night. If you say Yes, we may as well go round by the shrimp-man's—I know Roley of old was devoted to shrimps."

Roley uttered a loud hurrah of joy; Spicer might have been observed to pronounce distinctly the one word "Galopshious!" while Jones, who had not hitherto articulated, said solemnly, "It's scrumptious!"

During the days that followed the boys and Hope spent most of their time together. After the first little pang of dismay, she had to own that she was

glad of their society. She was just the sort of girl herself to delight boys, and they took long expeditions together, had a few almost perilous adventures, not a few long delightful days, and were in every respect the best of friends.

"I think you might," said Roley one day to her.

"Might what, Roley?"

"Might let me call you Hope now, to your face, as well as behind your back."

"Well," said Hope, after a pause, "it doesn't sound very respectful, does it? I used to be your teacher, you know."

"Yes, the only jolly one I ever had."

"But I'm not your teacher now. Yes, I think, on the whole, you may call me Hope."

"Thanks awfully. And I suppose Spicer and Jones may too. They don't like Miss Karron; they think it so stiff."

"No, Roley; I really must draw the line there."

"Must you? I think it's rather hard of you. Spicer and Jones like you tremendously. Spicer said the other night that he'd almost as soon have a walk with you as eat shrimps. He did really; and Jones nodded. Jones always nods to everything Spicer says."

"I'm greatly obliged," said Hope, "and—flattered. Are they coming now? It's time we were off."

It was on the evening of that same day that Roley edged up close to Hope, looked into her face, and said :—

"I've a bit of news for you. You won't guess what my eyes rested on to-day."

"No ; what is it ? I wish you wouldn't be mysterious, Roley."

"I mysterious ? That's not my way. Why, you have all colored up ! Well, I'll tell you—I expect you'll be surprised. Rossiter's here."

"Nonsense, Roley ! I don't believe it."

"It isn't nonsense. I saw him—a groom had him —he's in the stable at the White Hart—I saw him going in. He looked very wicked, and the groom seemed afraid of him. As if *I* wouldn't know Rossiter ! He *is* here—he's in the stable of the White Hart this minute. I'll go and ask if you won't believe me."

"No, Roley, you'll do nothing of the kind. You have mistaken the horse, that's all. Little boys are always making mistakes of the kind."

"Thank you—'little boys,' indeed ! 'Little boys' are sometimes right. How obstinate you are, Hope, and your face is as white as it was rosy a minute ago. Are you tired, Hope ?"

"I believe I am ; I'll go indoors," said Hope.

All the freshness had left her voice. She went in feeling flat and quiet. After all, life with the flavor out of it must at the best be a tasteless thing.

Presently she went to bed, but a headache kept her awake. Roley was probably quite wrong, but if Rossiter were there, it was only because he was sold to a new master.

Towards morning she fell into a troubled sleep. She had a dream in her sleep; she was still Dick Markham's betrothed wife. She was standing close to him, and he was singing to her—

"Sae fair art thou, my bonny lass,
Sae deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the streams run dry."

"But he was never deep in love with me," said poor Hope to herself, as she dressed languidly, pressing her hand now and then to her hot forehead. "I gave him all—he knew that. Yes, it has been hard on me."

She went downstairs; the words of the old song kept ringing in her ears—

"Sae fair art thou, my bonny lass,
Sae deep in love am I."

She hated herself for humming them—she almost hated the words. In the middle of breakfast Roley rushed in.

"It's a lovely morning, Hope," he said. "Are you going for a ride?"

"I think I will," said Hope. "I have a headache,

and the exercise will drive it away. You might ask them to bring Robin round in half an hour, like a dear boy, Roley."

Roley nodded and vanished, and Hope, having finished her breakfast, went leisurely upstairs to put on her rough grey habit.

The half hour passed; no Roley appeared, but she heard horses' footsteps, and running down opened the cottage door.

"I'm ready, Jim," she said, addressing the man who generally helped her to mount. "I hope Robin is nice and fresh this morning. I mean to take it well out of him, I can tell you."

Nobody answered; she had been drawing on her gloves, and had not for the moment raised her head. The color was fresh in her cheeks; she never looked more animated, nor sweeter. Now, startled at the silence, she raised her eyes fully.

"Jim—" she began. Then she turned very white, stepped back a pace or two, and leant against the cottage porch.

Neither Jim nor the rough pony were waiting for her, but Rossiter, pawing the ground and arching his neck, stood close to the cottage step; he had on a lady's saddle. By his side was a powerful black horse, and holding the bridles of both stood Dick Markham.

"Will you come for a ride?" he said.

His voice was gruff, and not very steady.

"You need not be afraid of Rossiter. He conquered you once. Having done that, he'll forgive you all the rest of his days. You need not fear Rossiter, nor—not me—Hope."

"I never feared either man or horse," said Hope, when she could find her voice. "But—I don't understand."

"No, you don't. Something marvelous has happened—marvelous, miraculous! Take one ride on Rossiter by my side, and let me tell you. Hope, *let* me tell you; I shall be a broken-hearted man all my days if you say no."

Perhaps Hope Karron had no spirit, after all. No one can quite count beforehand on how a girl will act under given circumstances. This girl stood quite still for another full minute, then she held out her hand to Markham, and lightly sprang on Rossiter's back.

They took a long ride away, away through the lovely country. For hours they were absent, and when at last they returned, no one who had known Hope of old could now miss anything out of her face.

"There is one thing," said Markham, as they rode quietly up to the cottage door. "That I never even knew the meaning of being properly in love before."

"And you are certain, Dick—certain," said Hope,

in a shy, tremulous voice, "that the shadow won't come back again?"

"It cannot, Hope; it has melted into air. You fill my heart. When all is said and done, I cannot give you more than all."

But Hope never knew—never during the whole of her happy married life—whose face and voice Markham had once passionately worshiped. She never knew this, for neither Markham nor Grey would tell her. Jocelyn did not return to England, and from one cause or another the sisters are scarcely likely to meet.

By-and-bye Grey recovered from the blow which had nearly shattered him. He married Bee Chatterton, and makes her an excellent husband.

Markham says no man is as happy as he is, and he also adds, what perhaps in some ways is true, that he doesn't deserve it.

"But then there was never any one quite like Hope," he adds; "which just accounts for my being absolutely forgiven and loved beyond my deserts."

THE END.

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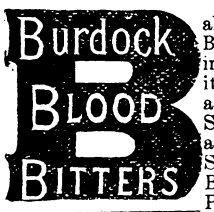

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