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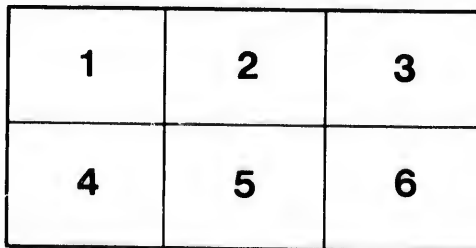
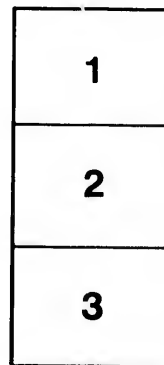
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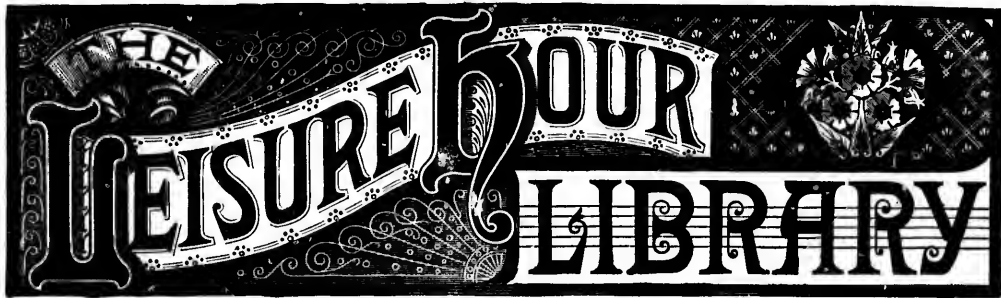
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SIR NOEL'S HEIR.

A Novel.

By Mrs. MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF "GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "A TERRIBLE SECRET," "A WONDERFUL WOMAN," "A MAD MARRIAGE,"
"NORINE'S REVENGE," "THE MYSTERY AT BLACKWOOD GRANGE," ETC., ETC.

From *Peterson's Magazine*, by special arrangement with Mr. Charles J. Peterson.

CHAPTER I.

SIR NOEL'S DEATH-BED.

The December night had closed in wet and wild around Thetford Towers. It stood down in the low ground, smothered in trees, a tall, gaunt, hoary pile of gray stone, all peaks and gables and stacks of chimneys, and rook-infested turrets. A queer, massive, old house, built in the days of James the First, by Sir Hugo Thetford, the first baronet of the name, and as staunch and strong now as then.

The December day had been overcast and gloomy, but the December night was stormy and wild. The wind worried and wailed through the tossing trees with whistling moans and shrieks that were desolately human, and made me think of the sobbing banshee of Irish legends. Far away the mighty voice of the stormy sea mingled its hoarse bass, and the rain lashed the windows in long, slanting lines. A desolate night and a desolate scene without; more desolate still within, for on his bed, this tempestuous winter night, the last of the Thetford baronets lay dying.

Through the driving wind and lashing rain a groom galloped along the high road to the village at break-neck speed. His errand was to Dr. Gale, the village surgeon, which gentleman he found just preparing to go to bed.

"For God's sake, doctor!" cried the man, white as a sheet, "come with me at once! Sir Noel's killed!"

Dr. Gale, albeit phlegmatic, staggered back, and stared at the speaker aghast.

"What? Sir Noel killed?"

"We're afraid so, doctor; none of us knows for certain sure, but he lies there like a dead man. Come quick, for the love of goodness, if you want to do any service!"

"I'll be with you in five minutes," said the doctor, leaving the room to order his horse and don his hat and great coat.

Dr. Gale was as good as his word. In less than ten minutes he and the groom were flying southwesterly along to Thetford Towers.

"How did it happen?" asked the doctor, hardly able to speak for the furious pace at which they were going. "I thought he was at Lady Stokesane's ball."

"He did go," replied the groom; "leastways he took my lady there; but he said he had a friend to meet from London at the Royal George to-night, and he rode back. We don't, none of us, know how it happened; for a better or surer rider than Sir Noel there ain't in Devonshire; but Diana must have slipped and threw him. She came galloping in by herself about half an hour ago all blown; and me and three more set off to look for Sir Noel. We found him about twenty yards from the gates, lying on his face in the mud, and as stiff and cold as if he was dead."

"And you brought him home and came for me?"

"Directly, sir. Some wanted to send word to my lady; but Mrs. Hilliard, she thought how you had best see him first, sir, so's we'd know what danger he was really in before alarming her ladyship."

"Quite right, William. Let us trust it may not be serious. Had Sir Noel been—I mean, I suppose he had been dining?"

"Well, doctor," said William, "Arneaud, that's his *valet de chambre*, you know, said he thought he had taken more wine than was prudent going to Lady Stokesane's ball, which her ladyship is very particular about such, you know, sir."

"Ah! that accoun'ts," said the doctor, thoughtfully; "and now, William, my man, don't let's talk any more, for I feel completely blown already."

Ten minutes' sharp riding brought them to the great entrance gates of Thetford Towers. An old woman came out of a little lodge, built in the huge masonry, to admit them, and they dashed up the long winding avenue under the surging oaks and chestnuts. Five minutes more and Dr. Gale was running up a polished staircase of black, slippery oak, down an equally wide and black and slippery passage, and into the chamber where Sir Noel lay.

A grand and stately chamber, lofty, dark and wainscoted, where the wax candles made lumi-

nous clouds in the darkness, and the wood-fire on the marble hearth failed to give heat. The oak floor was overlaid with Persian rugs; the windows were draped in green velvet and the chairs were upholstered in the same. Near the center of the apartment stood the bed, tall, broad, quaintly carved, curtained in green velvet, and on it, cold and lifeless, lay the wounded man. Mrs. Hilliard, the housekeeper, sat beside him, and Arneaud, the Swiss valet, with a frightened face, stood near the fire.

"Very shocking business this, Mrs. Hilliard," said the doctor, removing his hat and gloves—"very shocking. How is he? Any signs of consciousness yet?"

"None whatever, sir," replied the housekeeper, rising. "I am so thankful you have come. We, none of us, knew what to do for him, and it is dreadful to see him lying there like that."

She moved away, leaving the doctor to his examination. Ten minutes, fifteen, twenty passed; then Dr. Gale turned to her with a very pale, grave face.

"It is too late, Mrs. Hilliard. Sir Noel is a dead man!"

"Dead!" repeated Mrs. Hilliard, trembling and holding by a chair. "Oh, my lady! my lady!"

"I am going to bleed him," said the doctor, "to restore consciousness. He may last until morning! Send for Lady Thetford at once."

Arneaud started up. Mrs. Hilliard looked at him, wringing her hands.

"Break it gently, Arneaud. Oh, my lady! my dear lady! So young and so pretty—and only married five months!"

The Swiss valet left the room. Dr. Gale got out his lancet, and desired Mrs. Hilliard to hold the basin. At first the blood refused to flow—but presently it came in a little, feeble stream. The closed eyelids fluttered; there was a restless movement, and Sir Noel Thetford opened his eyes in this mortal life once more. He looked first at the doctor, grave and pale, then at the housekeeper, sobbing on her knees by the bed. He was a young man of seven-and-twenty, fair and handsome, as it was in the nature of the Thetfords to be.

"What is it?" he faintly asked. "What is the matter?"

"You are hurt, Sir Noel," the doctor answered, sadly; "you have been thrown from your horse. Don't attempt to move—you are not able."

"I remember—I remember," said the young man, a gleam of recollection lighting up his ghastly face. "Diana slipped, and I was thrown. How long ago is that?"

"About an hour."

"And I am hurt? Badly?"

He fixed his eyes with a powerful look on the doctor's face, and that good man shrunk away from the news he must tell.

"Badly?" reiterated the young baronet, in a peremptory tone, that told all of his nature. "Ah! you won't speak, I see! I am, and I feel—I feel. Doctor, am I going to die?"

He asked the question with a sudden wildness—a sudden horror of death, half starting up in bed. Still the doctor did not speak; still Mrs. Hilliard's suppressed sobs echoed in the stillness of the vast room.

Sir Noel Thetford fell back on his pillow, a shadow as ghastly and awful as death itself lying on his face. But he was a brave man and the descendant of a fearless race; and except for one convulsive throo that shook him from head to foot, nothing told his horror of his sudden fate. There was a weird pause. Sir Noel lay staring straight at the oaken wall, his bloodless face awful in its intensity of hidden feeling. Rain and wind outside rose higher and higher, and beat clamorously at the windows; and still above them, mighty and terrible, rose the far-off voice of the ceaseless sea.

The doctor was the first to speak, in hushed and awe-struck tones.

"My dear Sir Noel, the time is short, and I can do little or nothing. Shall I send for the Rev. Mr. Knight?"

The dying eyes turned upon him with a steady gaze.

"How long have I to live? I want the truth."

"Sir Noel, it is very hard, yet it must be Heaven's will. But a few hours, I fear."

"So soon?" said the dying man. "I did not think— Send for Lady Thetford," he cried, wildly, half raising himself again—"send for Lady Thetford at once!"

"We have sent for her," said the doctor; "she will be here very soon. But the clergyman, Sir Noel—the clergyman. Shall we not send for him?"

"No!" said Sir Noel, sharply. "What do I want of a clergyman? Leave me, both of you. Stay, you can give me something. Gale, to keep up my strength to the last? I shall need it. Now go. I want to see no one but Lady Thetford."

"My lady has come!" cried Mrs. Hilliard, starting to her feet; and at the same moment the door was opened by Anne and a lady in a sparkling ball-dress swept in. She stood for a moment on the threshold, looking from face to face with a bewildered air.

She was very young—scarcely twenty, and unmistakably beautiful. Taller than common, willowy and slight, with great, dark eyes, flowing dark curls, and a colorless olive skin. The darkly handsome face, with pride in every feature, was blanched now almost to the hue of the dying man; but that glittering, bride-like figure, with its misty point-lace and blazing diamonds, seemed in strange contradiction to the idea of death.

"My lady! my lady!" cried Mrs. Hilliard, with a suppressed sob, moving near her.

The deep, dark eyes turned upon her for an instant, then wandered back to the bed; but she never moved.

"Ada," said Sir Noel, faintly, "come here. The rest of you go. I want to see you, but you go. The graceful figure in its shining robes, and jewels, flitted over and dropped on its knees by his side. The other three quitted the room and closed the door. Husband and wife were alone with only death to overhear.

"Ada, my poor girl, only five months a wife—it is very hard on you; but it seems I must go. I have a great deal to say to you. Ada—that I can't do without saying. I have been a villain, Ada—the greatest villain on earth to you."

She had not spoken. She did not speak. She knelt beside him, white and still, looking and listening with strange calm. There was a sort of white horror on her face, but very little—the despairing grief one would naturally look for in the dying man's wife.

"I don't ask you to forgive me, Ada—I have wronged you too deeply for that; but I loved

you so dearly—so dearly! Oh, my God! what a lost and cruel wretch I have been."

He lay panting and gasping for breath. There was a draught which Dr. Gale had left standing near, and he made a motion for it. She held it to his lips, and he drank; her hand was unsteady and spilled it, but still she never spoke.

"I cannot speak loudly, Ada," he said, in a husky whisper, "my strength seems to grow less every moment; but I want you to promise me before I begin my story that you will do what I ask. Promise! promise!"

He grasped her wrist and glared at her almost fiercely.

"Promise!" he reiterated. "Promise! promise!"

"I promise," she said, with white lips.

"May Heaven deal with you, Ada Thetford, as you keep that promise. Listen now."

The wild night wore on. The cries of the wind in the trees grew louder and wilder and more desolate. The rain beat and beat against the curtained glass; the candles guttered and flickered, and the fire died.

And still, long after the midnight hour had tolled, Ada, Lady Thetford, in her lace and silk and jewels, knelt beside her young husband, and listened to the dark and shameful story he had to tell. She never once faltered, she never spoke or stirred; but her face was less than her dress, and her great dark eyes dilated with a horror too intense for words.

The voice of the dying man sank lower and lower—it fell to a dull, choking whisper at last.

"You have heard all," he said huskily.

"All?"

The word dropped from her lips like ice—the frozen look of blank dismay never left her face.

"And you will keep your promise?"

"Yes."

"God bless you! I can die now! Oh, Ada! I cannot ask you to forgive me; but I love you so much—so much! Kiss me once, Ada, before I go."

His voice faltered even with the words. Lady Thetford bent down and kissed him, but her lips were as cold and white as his own.

They were the last words Sir Noel Thetford ever spoke. The restless sea was suddenly ebbing, and the soul of the man was floating away with it. The gray, chill light of a new day was dawning over the Devonshire fields, rainy and raw, and with its first pale ray the soul of Noel Thetford, baronet, left the earth forever.

An hour later, Mrs. Hilliard and Dr. Gale ventured to enter. They had rapped again and again; but there had been no response, and alarmed they had come in. Stark and rigid already lay what was mortal of the Lord of Thetford Towers; and still on her knees, with that frozen look on her face, knelt his living wife.

"My lady! my lady!" cried Mrs. Hilliard, her tears falling like rain. "Oh! my dear lady, awake!"

She looked up; then again at the marble form on the bed, and without a word or cry, slipped back in the old housekeeper's arms in a dead faint.

CHAPTER II.

CAPT. EVERARD.

It was a very grand and stately ceremonial, that funeral procession from Thetford Towers. A week after that stormy December night they laid Sir Noel Thetford in the family vault, where generation after generation of his race slept at their last long sleep. The gentry for miles and miles around were there, and among them came the heir-at-law, the Rev. Horace Thetford, only an obscure country curate now, but falling male heirs to Sir Noel, successor to the Thetford estate and fifteen thousand a year baronet.

In a beech-amber, luxurious as wealth can make a room, lay Lady Thetford, dangerously ill. It was not a brain fever exactly, but something very like it into which she had fallen, coming out of that death-like swoon. It was all very sad and shocking—the sudden death of the gay and handsome young baronet, and the serious illness of his poor wife. The funeral oration of the Rev. Mr. Knight, rector of St. Gosport, from the text, "In the midst of life we are in death," was most eloquent and impressive, and women with tender hearts shed tears, and men listened with grave, sad faces. It was such a little while—only a few short months—since the wedding-bells had rung, and there had been bonfires and feasting throughout the village; and Sir Noel, looking so proud and so happy, had driven up to the illuminated hall

with his handsome bride. Only five months; and now—and now!

The funeral was over and everybody had gone back home—everybody but the Rev. Horace Thetford, who lingered to see the result of my lady's illness, and if she died, to take possession of his estate. It was unutterably dismal in the dark, hushed old house, with Sir Noel's ghost seeming to haunt every room—very dismal and ghastly this waiting to step into dead people's shoes. But then there was fifteen thousand a year, and the finest place in Devonshire; and the Rev. Horace would have faced a whole regiment of ghosts and lived in a vault for that.

But Lady Thetford did not die. Slowly but surely, the fever that had worn her to a shadow left her; and by-and-by, when the early morn-roses peeped through the first blackened earth, she was able to come down-stairs—to come down feeble and frail and weak, colorless as death and as silent and cold.

The Rev. Horace went back to Yorkshire, yet not entirely in despair. Female heirs could not inherit Thetford—as he stood in the way, and he did not, yet twenty, was left alone in the dreary old mansion. People were very sorry for her, and came to see her, and begged her to be resigned to her great loss; and Mr. Knight preached endless homilies on patience, and hope, and submission, and Lady Thetford listened to them just as if she had been talking Greek. She never spoke of her dead husband—she shivered at the mention of his name; but that night at his dying bed had changed her as never woman changed before. From a bright, ambitious, pleasure-loving girl, she had grown into a silent, haggard, hopeless woman. All the sunny spring days she sat by the window of her boudoir, gazing at the misty, boundless sea, pale and mute—dead in life.

The friends who came to see her, and Mr. Knight, the rector, were a little puzzled by this abnormal case, but very sorry for the pale young widow, and disposed to think better of her than ever before. It must surely have been the vilest slander that she had not cared for her husband, that she had married him only for his wealth and title; and that young soldier—that captain of dragoons—must have been a myth. She might have been engaged to him, of course, before Sir Noel came, that seemed to be an undisputed fact; and she might have jilted him for a wealthier lover, that was all a common case. But she must have loved her husband very dearly, or she never would have been broken-hearted like this at his loss.

Spring deepened into summer. The June roses in the flower-garden of Thetford were in rosy bloom, and my lady was ill again—very, very ill. There was an eminent physician down from London, and there was a frail little mite of babyhood lying among lace and flannel; and the eminent physician shook his head, and the portentously grave as he glanced from the crib to the bed. "Fitter than the pillows, whiter than snow, Ada, Lady Thetford, lay, hovering in the Valley of the Shadow of Death; that other feeble little life seer-ed flickering, too—it was so even a toss up between the great rival powers, Life and Death, that a straw might have turned the scale either way. So slight being that baby-hold of gasping breath, that Mr. Knight, in the absence of any higher authority, and in the unconsciousness of the mother, took it upon himself to baptize it. So a china bowl was brought, and Mrs. Hilliard held the bundle of flame and long white robes, and the child was named—the name which the mother had said weeks ago it was to be called, if a boy—Rupert Noel Vandeleur Thetford; for it was a male heir, and the Rev. Horace's cake was dough.

Days went by, weeks, months, and to the surprise of the eminent physician was another heir child. In summer, winter, and summer, turned; and the anniversary of Sir Noel's death came round, and my lady was able to walk down-stairs, shivering in the warm air under all her wraps. She had expressed no pleasure or thankfulness in her own safety, or that of her child. She had not said a word of her husband's name; and hearing his sex, had turned her face to the wall, and lay for hours and hours speechless and motionless. Yet it was very dear to her, too, by fits and starts, as it were. She would hold it in her arms half a day, sometimes covering it with kisses, with jealous, passionate looks, crying out to it, and half if it were a boy or a girl; and then, again, in a fit of sullen apathy, would resign it to its nurse, and not ask to see it for hours. It was very strange and inexplicable, her conduct, altogether; more es-

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pecially, as with her return to health came no return of cheerfulness or hope. The dark gloom that overshadowed her life seemed to settle into a chronic disease, rooted and incurable. She never went out; she returned no visits; she gave no invitations to those who came to repeat theirs. Gradually people fell off; they grew tired of that sullen coldness in which Lady Thetford wrapped herself as in a mantle, until Mr. Knight and Dr. Gale grew to be almost her only visitors. "Mariana, in the Moated Grange," never led a more solitary and dreary existence than the handsome young widow, who dwelt a recluse at Thetford Towers; for she was very handsome still, of a pale moonlight sort of beauty, the great, dark eyes, and abundant dark hair, making her fixed and changeless pallor all the more remarkable.

Months and seasons went by. Summers followed winters, and Lady Thetford still buried herself alive in the gray old manor—and the little heir was six years old. A delicate child still, puny and sickly, and petted and spoiled, and indulged in every childish whim and caprice. His mother's image and idol—no look of the fair-haired, sanguine, blue-eyed Thetford sturdiness in his little, pinched, pale face, large, dark eyes, and crisp, black ringlets. The years had gone by like a slow dream; life was stagnant enough in St. Gosport, doubly stagnant at Thetford Towers, whose mistress rarely went abroad beyond her own gates, save when she took her little son out for an airing in the pony phaeton.

She had taken him out for one of those airings on a July afternoon, when he had nearly accomplished his seventh year. They had driven seaward some miles from the manor-house, and Lady Thetford and her little boy had got out, and were strolling leisurely up and down the wet, white sands, while the groom waited with the pony-phaeton just within sight.

The long July afternoon wore on. The sun that had blazed all day like a wheel of fire, dropped lower and lower into the crimson west. The wide sea shone red with the reflections of the lurid glory in the heavens, and the numberless waves glittered and dashed as if sown with stars. A faint, far-off breeze swept over the sea, salt and cold; and the fishermen's boats danced along with the red sunset glinting on their sails.

Up and down, slowly and thoughtfully, the lady walked, her eyes fixed on the wide sea. As the rising breeze met her, she drew the scarlet shawl she wore over her black silk dress closer around her, and glanced at her boy. The little fellow was running over the sands, tossing pebbles into the surf, and hunting for shells; and her eyes aft him wandered once more to the lurid splendor of that sunset on the sea. It was very quiet here, with no living thing in sight but themselves; so the lady's start of astonishment was natural when, turning an abrupt angle in the path leading to the shore, she saw a man coming toward her over the sands. A tall, powerful-looking man of thirty, bronzed and handsome, and with an unmistakably military air, although in plain black clothes. The lady took a second look, then stood stock still, and gazed like one in a dream. The man approached, lifted his hat, and stood silent and grave before her.

"Captain Everard!"

"Yes, Lady Thetford—after eight years—Captain Everard again."

The deep, strong voice suited the bronzed, grave face, and both had a peculiar power of their own. Lady Thetford, very, very pale, held out one hand, and said:

"Captain Everard, I am very glad to see you again."

He bent over the little hand a moment, then dropped it, and stood looking at her silent.

"I thought you were in India," she said, trying to be at ease. "When did you return?"

"A month ago. My wife is dead. I, too, am widowed," Lady Thetford said.

"I am very sorry to hear it," she said, gravely.

"Did she die in India?"

"Yes; and I have come home with my little daughter."

"Your daughter! Then she left a child?"

"One. It is so, her name is Mariana. The climate killed her mother. I had mercy on her daughter, and have brought her home."

"I am sorry for your wife. Why did she remain in India?"

"Because she preferred death to leaving me. She loved me, Lady Thetford!"

"Her powerful eyes were on her face—that pale, beautiful face, into which the blood came for an

instant at his words. She looked at him, then away over the darkening sea.

"And you, my lady—you gained the desire of your heart, wealth, and a title? Let me hope they have made you a happy woman."

"I am not happy!"

"No? But you have been—you were while Sir Noel lived?"

"My husband was very good to me, Captain Everard. His death was the greatest misfortune that could have befallen me."

"But you are young, you are free, you are rich, you are beautiful. You may wear a coronet next time."

His face and glance were so darkly grave, that the covert sneer was almost hidden. But she felt it.

"I shall never marry again, Captain Everard."

"Never? You surprise me! Six years—many, seven, a widow, with innumerable attractions—Oh, you cannot mean it!"

She made a sudden, passionate gesture—looked at him, then away.

"It is useless—worse than useless, folly, madness, to lift the veil from the irrevocable past. But don't you think, don't you, Lady Thetford, that you might have been equally happy if you had married me?"

She made no reply. She stood gazing seaward, cold and still.

"I was madly, insanely, absurdly in love with pretty Ada Vandeleur in those days, and I think I would have made her a good husband; better, however—forgive me—than I ever made my poor dead wife. But you were wise and ambitious, my pretty Ada, and bartered your black eyes and raven ringlets to a higher bidder. You jilted me in cold blood, poor love-sick devil that I was, and resigned repentant as my Lady Thetford, that you might how to choose the better part, my pretty Ada!"

"Captain Everard, I am sorry for the past—I have atoned, if suffering can atone. Have a little pity, and let me alone!"

He stood and looked at her silently, gravely.

Then said, in a voice deep and calm:

"We are both free! Will you marry me now, Ada?"

"I cannot!"

"But I love you—I have always loved you. And you—I used to think you loved me!"

He was strangely calm and passionless, voice and glance, and face. But Lady Thetford had covered her face, and was sobbing.

"I did—I do—I always have! But I cannot marry you. I will love you all my life; but don't, don't ask me to your wife!"

"As you please!" he said, in the same passionless voice. "I think it is best myself for the George Everard of to-day is not the George Everard who loved you eight years ago. We would not be happy—I know that. Ada, is that your son?"

"Yes."

"I should like to look at him. Here, my little harpocrit! I want to see you."

The boy, who had been looking curiously at the stranger, ran up at a sign from his mother. The tall captain lifted him in his arms and gazed in his small, thin face, with which his bright tartan plaid contrasted harshly.

"He hasn't a look of the Thetfords. He is your own son, Ada. My little baronet, what is your name?"

"Sir Rupert Thetford," answered the child, struggling to get free. "Let me go—I don't know you."

The captain set him down with a grim smile; and the boy clung to his mother's skirts, and eyed the tall stranger as a snake.

"I want to go home, mamma! I'm tired and hungry."

"Presently, dearest. Run to William, he has cakes for you. Captain Everard, I shall be happy to have you at dinner."

"Thanks; but I must decline. I go back to London to-night. I sail for India again in a week."

"So soon! I thought you meant to remain."

"Nothing is further from my intentions. I merely brought my little girl over to provide her a home; that is why I have troubled you. Will you do me this kindness, Lady Thetford? Will you take my little girl? Oh, most gladly—most willingly!"

"Thanks! Her mother's people are French, and I know little about them; and, save yourself, I can claim friendship with few in England. She will be poor; I have settled on her all I am worth—some three hundred a year; and you, my Thetford, you can teach her, when she grows up, to catch a rich husband."

She took no notice of the taunt; she looked only too happy to render him this service.

"I am so pleased! She will be such a nice companion for Rupert. How old is she?"

"Nearly four."

"Is she here?"

"No; she is in London. I will fetch her down in a day or two."

"What do you call her?"

"Mabel—after her mother. Then it is settled, Lady Thetford, I am to fetch her?"

"I shall be delighted! But won't you dine with me?"

"No. I must catch the evening train. Farewell, Lady Thetford, and many thanks! In three days I will be here again."

He lifted his hat and walked away. Lady Thetford watched him out of sight, and then turned slowly, as she heard her little boy calling her with shrill impatience. The red sunset had faded out; the sea lay gray and cold under that twilight sky, and the evening breeze was chill. Changes in sky and sea and land told of coming night; and Lady Thetford, shivering slightly in the rising wind, hurried away to be driven home.

CHAPTER III.

"LITTLE MAY."

ON the evening of the third day after this interview, a fly from the railway drove up the long, winding avenue leading to the great front entrance of the Thetford mansion. A bronzed military gentleman, a nurse and a little girl, occupied the fly, and the gentleman's keen, dark eyes wandered searchingly around. Swelling meadows, velvet lawns, sloping terraces, waving trees, bright flower-gardens, quaint old fountains, sparkling fountains, and a wooded park, with sprightly deer—that was what he saw, all bathed in the golden halo of the summer sunset. Massive and grand, the old house reared its gray head, half overgrown with ivy and climbing roses. Gaudy peacocks strutted on the terraces; a graceful gazelle flitted out for an instant amongst the trees to look at them, and then fled in fright; and the barking of half a dozen mastiffs greeted their approach noisily.

"A fine old place," thought Captain Everard. "My pretty Ada might have done worse. A grand old place for that puny child to inherit. The staunch old warrior-blood of the Thetfords is sadly adulterated in his pale veins, I fancy. Well, my little May, and how are you going to like all this?"

The child, a bright-faced little creature, with great sparkling eyes and rose-bloom cheeks, was looking in delight at a distant terrace.

"See, papa! See all the pretty peacocks! Look, Ellen, to the nurse, 'three, four, five! Oh, how pretty!"

"Then little May will like to live here, where she can see the pretty peacocks every day?"

"And all the pretty flowers, and the water, and the little boy—where's the little boy, papa?"

"In the house—you'll see him presently; but you must be very good, little May, and not pull his hair, and scratch his face, and poke your fingers in his eyes, like you used to do with Willie Brandon. Little May must learn to be good."

Little May put one rosy finger in her mouth, and set her head on one side like a defiant canary. She was one of the prettiest little fairies imaginable, with her pale, flaxen curls, and sparkling light-gray eyes, and apple-blossom complexion; but she was evidently as much spoiled as little Sir Rupert Thetford himself.

Lady Thetford sat in the long drawing-room, after her solitary dinner, and little Sir Rupert played with his rocking-horse and a pile of picture-books in a remote corner. The young widow lay back in the violet-velvet depths of a carved and gilded *fauteuil*, very simply dressed in black and crimson, but looking very fair and stately within. She was watching her boy with a half smile on her face, when a footman entered with Captain Everard's card. Lady Thetford looked up eagerly.

"Show Captain Everard up at once."

The footman bowed and disappeared. Five minutes later, and the tall captain and his little daughter stood before Lady Thetford.

"At last!" said Lady Thetford, rising and holding out her hand to her old lover, with a smile that reminded him of other days—"at last, when I was growing tired waiting. And this is your little girl—my little girl from henceforth. Come here, my pet, and kiss your new mamma."

She bent over the little one, kissing the pink cheeks and rosy lips.

"She is fair and tiny—a very fairy; but she resembles you, nevertheless, Capt. Everard."

"In temper—yes," said the captain. "You will find her spoiled, and wilful, and cross, and capricious and no end of trouble. Won't she, May?"

"She will be the better match for Rupert on that account," Lady Thetford said, smiling, and unfasting little Miss Everard's wraps with her own fair fingers. "Come here, Rupert, and welcome your new sister."

The young baronet approached, and dutifully kissed little May, who put up her rosy-bud mouth right willingly. Sir Rupert Thetford wasn't tall, rather undersized, and delicate for his seven years; but he was head and shoulders over the flaxen-haired fairy, with the bright gray eyes.

"I want a ride on your rocking-horse," cried little May, fraternizing with him at once; "and oh! what nice picture books and what a lot!"

The children ran off together to their distant corner, and Captain Everard sat down for the first time.

"You have not dined?" said Lady Thetford. "Allow me to—" her hand was on the bell, but the captain interposed.

"Many thanks—noting. We dined at the village; and I leave again by the seven-fifty train. It is past seven now, so I have but little time to spare. I fear I am putting you to a great deal of trouble; but May's nurse insists on being taken back to London to-night."

"It will be of no consequence," replied Lady Thetford. "Rupert's nurse will take charge of her. I intend to advertise for a nursery governess in a few days. Rupert's health has always been so extremely delicate, that he has not even begun a process of learning yet, and it is quite time. He grows stronger, I fancy; but Dr. Gale tells me frankly his constitution is dangerously weak."

She sighed as she spoke, and looked over to where he stood beside little May, who had mounted the rocking-horse boy-fashion. Sir Rupert was expostulating.

"You oughtn't to sit that way—ask mamma. You ought to sit side-saddle. Only boys sit like that."

"I don't care!" retorted Miss Everard, rocking more violently than ever. "I'll sit whatever way I like! Let me alone!"

Lady Thetford looked at the captain with a smile.

"Her father's daughter, surely! bent on having her own way. What a fairy it is! and yet such a perfect picture of health."

"Mabel was never ill an hour in her life, I believe," said her father; "she is not at all too good for this world. I only hope she may not grow up the torment of your life—she is thoroughly spoiled."

"And I fear if she were not, I should do it. Ah! I expect she will be a great comfort to me, and a world of good to Rupert. He has never had a playmate of his own years, and children need children as much as they need sunshine."

They sat for ten minutes conversing gravely, chiefly on business matters connected with little May's annuity—not at all as they had conversed three days before by the sea-side. Then, as half-past seven drew near, the captain arose.

"I must go; I will hardly be in time as it is. Come here, little May, and bid papa good-bye."

"Let papa come to May," responded his daughter, still rocking. "I can't get off."

Captain Everard laughed, went over, bent down and kissed her.

"Good-bye, May; don't forget papa, and learn to be a good girl. Good-bye, baronet; try and grow strong and tall. Farewell, Lady Thetford, with my best thanks."

She held his hand, looking up in his sunburned face with tears in her dark eyes.

"We may never meet again, Captain Everard," she said hurriedly. "Tell me before we part that you forgive me the past."

"Truly, Ada, and for the first time. The service you have rendered me fully atones. You should have been my child's mother—be a mother to her now. Good-bye, and God bless you and your boy."

He stooped over, touched her cheek with his lips reverentially, and then was gone. Gone forever—never to meet those he left behind this side of eternity.

Little May bore the loss of papa and nurse with philosophical indifference—her new playmate sufficed for both. The children took to

one another with the readiness of childhood—Rupert all the more readily that he had never before had a playmate of his own years. He was naturally a quiet child, caring more for his picture-books and his nurse's stories than for tops, or balls, or marbles. But little May Everard seemed from the first to inspire him with some of her own superabundant vitality and life. The child was never, for a single instant, quiet; she was the most restless, the most impetuous, the most vigorous little creature that can be conceived. Feet and tongue and hands never were still from morning till night; and the life of Sir Rupert's nurse, hitherto one of idle ease, became all at once a misery to her. The little girl was everywhere—everywhere; especially where she had no business to be; and nurse never knew an easy moment for trotting after her, and rescuing her from all sorts of perils. She could climb like a cat, or a goat, and risked her neck about twenty times a day; she sailed her shoes in the soup when let in as a treat to dinner, and washed her hands in her milk-and-water. She became the intimate friend of the pretty peacocks and the big, good-tempered dogs, with whom, in utter fearlessness, she rolled and boomed in the grass all the day. She broke young Rupert's toys, and tore his picture-books and slapped his face, and pulled his hair, and made herself master of the situation before she had been twenty-four hours in the house. She was thoroughly and completely spoiled. What India nurses had left behind, and injudiciously brought over to the homeward passage had completed—and her temper was something appalling. Her shrieks of passion at the slightest contradiction of her imperial will rang through the house, and rent the tortured tympanum of all who heard. The little Antipops would fling herself flat on the carpet and utter a scream herself, and then her face, until, in dread of apoplexy and sudden death, her frightened hearers hastened to yield. Of course, one such victory insured all the rest. As for Sir Rupert, before she had been a week at Thetford Towers, he dared not call his own his own. She had partially scalped him on several occasions, and left the mark of her cat-like nails in his tender visage; but her venomous power of sneering for ours at will had more to do with the little baronet's dread of her than anything else. He fled ingloriously in every battle—running in tears to mamma, and leaving the field and the trophies of victory triumphantly to Miss Everard. With all this, when not thwarted—when allowed to smash toys, and dirty her clothes, and smear her infantile face, and tear pictures, and torment inoffensive lapdogs; when allowed, in short, to follow "her own sweet will," little May was as charming a fairy as ever set her shoes on. Her gleeful laugh made music in the dreary old rooms, such as had never been heard there for many a day, and her mischievous antics were the delight of all who did not suffer thereby. The servants petted and indulged her, and fed her on unwholesome cakes and sweetmeats, and made her worse and worse every day of her life.

Lady Thetford saw all this with inward apprehension. If her ward was completely beyond her power of control at four, what would she be a dozen years hence?

"Her father was right," thought the lady. "I am afraid she will give me a great deal of trouble. I never saw so headstrong, so utterly unmanageable a child."

But Lady Thetford was very fond of the fairy despite what. When her son came running to her for succor, drowned in tears, his mother took him in her arms and kissed him and soothed him—but she never punished the offender. As for Sir Rupert, he might fly ignominiously, but he never fought back. Little May had all the half-pulling and face-scratching to herself.

"I must get a governess," mused Lady Thetford. "I may find one who can control this little vixen; and it is really time Rupert began his studies. I shall speak to Mr. Knight about it."

It is Thetford sent that very day to the rectory her ladyship's compliments, the servant said, and would Mr. Knight call at his earliest convenience. Mr. Knight sent in answer to expect him that same evening; and on his way home he fell in with Dr. Gale, going to the manor-house on a professional visit.

"Little Sir Rupert keeps weakly," he said; "no constitution to speak of. Not at all like the Thetfords—splendid old stock, the Thetfords, but run out—run out. Sir Rupert is a Vandykeur, inherits his mother's constitution—delicate child, very."

"Have you seen Lady Thetford's ward?" inquired the clergyman, smiling; no hereditary weakness there, I fancy. I'll answer for the strength of her lungs, at any rate. The other day she wanted Lady Thetford's watch for a plying; she couldn't have it, and down she fell flat on the floor in what her nurse calls 'one of her tantrums.' You should have heard her, her shrieks were appalling."

"I have," said the doctor, with emphasis; "she has the temper of the old demon. If I had anything to do with that child, I should whip her within an inch of her life—that's all she wants, lots of whipping! The Lord only knows the future, but I'll play her prospective husband!"

"The taming of the shrew!" laughed Mr. Knight. "Katherine and Petruchio over again! For my part, I think Lady Thetford was unwise to undertake such a charge. With her delicate health it is altogether too much for her."

The two gentlemen were shown into the library, whilst the servant went to inform his lady of their arrival. The library had a French window opening on a sloping lawn, and here, chasing butterflies in high glee, were the two children—the pale, dark-eyed baronet, and the flaxen-tressed little East Indian.

"Look," said Dr. Gale. "Is Sir Rupert going to be your Petruchio? Who knows what the future may bring forth—who knows that we do not behold a future Lady Thetford?"

"She is very pretty," said the doctor thoughtfully, "and she matches with yours. Your prophecy may be fulfilled."

The present Lady Thetford entered as he spoke. She had heard the remarks of both, and there was an unusual pallor and gravity in her face as she advanced to receive them.

Little Sir Rupert was called in, and May followed, with a butterfly crushed to death in each fat little hand.

"She kills them as fast as she catches them," said Sir Rupert, ruefully. "It's cruel, isn't it, mamma?"

Little May, quite unabashed, displayed her dead prizes, and cut short the doctor's conference by impatiently pulling her play-fellow away. "Come, Rupert, come," she cried. "I want to catch the black one with the yellow wings. Stick your tongue out and come."

Sir Rupert displayed his tongue, and submitted his pulse to the doctor, and let himself be pulled away by May.

"The gray mare in that span is decidedly the better horse," laughed the doctor. "What a little dotspot in pinafores it is."

When her visitors had left, Lady Thetford walked to the window and stood watching the two children racing in the sunshine. It was a pretty sight, but the lady's face was contracted with pain.

"No, no," she thought. "I hope not—I pray not. Strangel but I never thought of the possibility before. She will be poor, and Rupert must marry a rich wife, so that if—"

She paused, with a sort of shudder, then added: "What will he think, my darling boy, of his father and mother if that day ever comes!"

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. WORMER.

LADY THETFORD had settled her business satisfactorily with the rector of St. Gosport.

"Nothing could be more opportune," he said. "I am going to London next week on business, which will detain me upward of a fortnight. I will immediately advertise for such a person as you want."

"You must understand," said her ladyship, "I do not require a young girl. I wish a middle-aged person—a widow, for instance, who has had children of her own. Both Rupert and May are spoiled—May particularly is perfectly unmanageable. A young girl as governess for her would never do."

Mr. Knight departed with these instructions, and the following week started for the great metropolis. An advertisement was at once inserted in the *Times* newspaper, stating all Lady Thetford's requirements, and desiring immediate application. Another week later, and Lady Thetford received the following communication:

"DEAR LADY THETFORD—I have been fairly besieged with applicants for the past week—all widows, and all professing to be thoroughly competent. Clergymen's widows, doctors' widows, officers' widows—all sorts of widows. I never before thought so many could apply for one situation. I have chosen one in sheer desperation—the widow of a country gentleman in distressed circum-

stances, who respectable manner, with governess from her la- tells me, at gether, I versant with arly next Lady Thigh of temper and with now. same day, and inform governess The sec and the railway baron took Tower taken at pared for Lady The Fetch room with Ten mil donk open announce Lady T pendent, someone was quite self, and tender Tully blac the blon air hair. little; as young w middle-a the noos Mrs. Th wished to out this perience tells me. "Yes, Th There low rol under li naughtily "Yet amazin "I a That she loo wo. "Are "No "An "Wba "The and pr of her. "Eli She chooked and a woman her bit "Eli coolly "O Aga went "I "W "A Well, of ch are d The Mrs. Rupe "T sumb subd "I ha has will adjo points trust "Yon "M "O

stances, who, I think, will suit. She is eminently respectable in appearance, quiet and lady-like in manner, with five years' experience in the nursery-governess line, and the highest recommendation from her late employers. She has lost a child, she tells me, and from her looks and manner altogether, I should judge she was a person conversant with misfortune. She will return with me early next week—her name is Mrs. Weymore."

Lady Thetford read this letter with a little sigh of relief—some one else would have the temper and outbreaks of little May to contend with now. She wrote to Captain Everard that same day, to announce his daughter's well-being, and inform him that she had found a suitable governess to take charge of her.

The second day of the ensuing week the rector and the new governess arrived. A fly from the railway brought her and her luggage to Thetford Towers late in the afternoon, and she was taken at once to the room that had been prepared for her, whilst the servant went to inform Lady Thetford of her arrival.

"Fetch her here at once," said her ladyship, who was alone in the usual long drawing-room with the children. "I wish to see her."

Ten minutes after the drawing-room door was flung open, and "Mrs. Weymore, my lady," announced the footman.

Lady Thetford arose to receive her new dependent, who bowed and stood before her with a somewhat fluttered and embarrassed air. She was quite young, not older than my lady herself, and eminently good-looking. The tall, slender figure, clad in widow's weeds, was as symmetrical as Lady Thetford's own, and the full black dress set off the pearly fairness of the blonde skin, and the rich abundance of her hair. Lady Thetford's brows contracted a little, her fair, subdued, gentle-looking, girlish young woman, was hardly the strong-minded, middle-aged matron she had expected to take the non-ense of obstreperous May Everard.

"Mrs. Weymore, I believe," said Lady Thetford, resuming her *faisade*, "I pray be seated. I wish to see you at once, because I am going out this evening. You have had five years' experience as a nursery-governess. Mr. Knight tells me."

"Yes, my lady."

There was a little tremor in Mrs. Weymore's low voice, and her blue eyes shifted and fell under Lady Thetford's steady and somewhat haughty gaze.

"Yet you look young—much younger than I imagined, or wished."

"I am twenty-seven years old, my lady."

That was my lady's own age precisely, but she looked half a dozen years the elder of the two.

"Are you a native of London?"

"No, my lady—of Berkshire."

"And you have been a widow, how long?"

"What called Mrs. Weymore? She was all white and trembling—even her hands, folded and pressed together in her lap, shook in spite of her."

"Eight years and more."

She said it with a sort of sob, hysterically choked. Lady Thetford looked on surprised, and a trifle displeased. She was a very proud woman, and certainly wished for no scene with her hired dependents.

"Eight years is a tolerable time," she said, coolly. "You have lost children?"

"One, my lady."

Again that choked, hysterical sob. My lady went on pitilessly.

"Is it long ago?"

"When—when I lost its father?"

"Ahl both together? That was rather hard. Well, I hope you understand the management of children—spoiled ones particularly. Here are the two you are to take charge of. Rupert—May, come here!"

The children came over from their corner. Mrs. Weymore drew May toward her, but Sir Rupert held aloof.

"This is my ward—this is my son. I presume Mr. Knight has told you. If you can subdue the temper of that child, you will prove yourself, indeed, a treasure. The best parlor has been fitted up for your use; the children will take their meals there with you; the room adjoining is to be the school-room. I have appointed one of the maids to wait on you. I trust you will find your chamber comfortable."

"Exceedingly so, my lady."

"And the terms proposed by Mr. Knight suit you?"

Mrs. Weymore bowed. Lady Thetford rose to close the interview.

"You must need refreshment and rest after your journey. I will not detain you longer. To-morrow your duties will commence."

She rang the bell—directed the servant who came to show the governess to the east parlor and see to her wants, and then to send nurse for the children. Fifteen minutes after she drove away in the pony-phaeton, whilst the new governess stood by the window of the east parlor and watched her vanish in the amber haze of the August sunset.

Lady Thetford's business in St. Gosport detained her a couple of hours. The big, white, August moon was rising as she drove slowly homeward, and the nightingale sang its vesper lull in the scented hedge-rows. As she passed the rectory she saw Mr. Knight leaning over his own gate enjoying the placid beauty of the summer evening, and Lady Thetford reined in her ponies to speak to him.

"So happy to see your ladyship! Won't you alight and come in? Mrs. Knight will be delighted."

"Not this evening, I think. Had you much trouble about my business?"

"I had applicants enough, certainly," laughed the rector. "I had reason to remember Mr. Weller's immortal advice, 'Beware of widlers.' How do you like your governess?"

"She has hardly had time to form an opinion. I live younger than I could desire."

"She looks much younger than the age she gives, I know; but that is a common case. I trust my choice will prove satisfactory—her references are excellent. Your ladyship has had an interview with her?"

"A very brief one. Her manner struck me unpleasantly—so odd, and shy, and nervous. I hardly know how to characterize it, but she may be a paragon of governesses, for all that. Good evening; best regards to Mrs. Knight. Call soon and see how your *protège* gets on."

Lady Thetford drove away. As she alighted from the pony-carriage and ascended the great front steps of the house, she saw the pale governess still seated at the window of the east parlor, gazing dejectedly out at the silvery moonlight.

"A most woful countenance," thought my lady. "There is some deeper grief than the loss of a husband and child eight years ago, that hardly know how to characterize it, but she may be a paragon of governesses, for all that. Good evening; best regards to Mrs. Knight. Call soon and see how your *protège* gets on."

No, Lady Thetford did not like the meek and submissive looking governess, but the children and the rest of the household did. Sir Rupert and little May took to her at once—her gentle voice, her tender smile seemed to win its way to their capricious favor; and before the end of the first week she had more influence over them than mother and nurse together. The subdued and gentle governess soon had the love of all at Thetford Towers, except its mistress, from Mrs. Hilliard, the stately housekeeper, down. She was courteous and considerate, so anxious to avoid giving trouble. Above all, that fixed expression of hopeless trouble on her sad, pale face, made its way to every heart. She had full charge of the children now; they took their meals with her, and she had them in her keeping the best part of the day—an office that was no sinecure. When they were with their nurse, or my lady, the governess sat alone in the east parlor, looking out dreamily at the summer landscape, with her own brooding thoughts.

One evening when she had been at Thetford Towers over a fortnight, Mrs. Hilliard, coming in, found her sitting dreamily by herself, neither reading nor working. The children were in the drawing-room, and her duties were over for the day.

"I am afraid you don't make yourself at home here," said the good-natured housekeeper; "you stay too much alone, and it isn't good for young people like you."

"I am used to solitude," replied the governess in a smile that ended in a sigh. "Let me see, I have grown to like it. Will you take a seat?"

"No," said Mrs. Hilliard. "I heard you say the other day you would like to go over the house; so, as I have a couple of hours' leisure, I will show it to you now."

The governess rose eagerly.

"The governess rose eagerly.

"I am very glad to see it so much," she said, "but I feared to give trouble by asking. It is very good of you to think of me, dear Mrs. Hilliard."

"She isn't much used to people thinking of her," reflected the housekeeper, "or she wouldn't be so grateful for trifles. Let me see," aloud, "you have seen the drawing-room and library, and that is all, except your own apartments. Well, come this way, I'll show you the old south wing."

Through the long corridors, up wide, black, slipperly stair-cases, into vast, unused rooms, where ghostly echoes and darkness had it all to themselves, Mrs. Hilliard led the governess.

"These apartments have been unused since before the late Sir Noel's time," said Mrs. Hilliard; "his father kept them full in the hunting season, and at Christmas time. Since Sir Noel's death, my lady has shut herself up and received no company, and gone nowhere. She is beginning to go out more of late than she has done ever since his death."

Mrs. Hilliard was not looking at the governess, or she might have been surprised at the nervous restlessness and agitation of her manner, as she listened to these very commonplace remarks.

"Lady Thetford was very much attached to her husband, then?" Mrs. Weymore said, her voice tremulous.

"Ahl that she was! She must have been, for his death nearly killed her. It was sudden enough, and shocking enough, goodness knows I shall never forget that dreadful night. This is the old banqueting-hall, Mrs. Weymore, the largest and dearest room in the house."

Mrs. Weymore, trembling very much, either with cold or that unaccountable nervousness of hers, hardly looked round at the vast wilderness of a room.

"You were with the late Sir Noel, then, when he died?"

"Yes, until my lady came. Ah! it was a dreadful thing! He had taken her to a ball, and riding home in his horse threw him. We sent for the doctor and my lady at once; and when she came, all white and scared like, he sent us out of the room. He was as calm and sensible as you or me, but he seemed to have something on his mind. My lady was shut up with him for about three hours, and then we went in—Dr. Gale and me. I shall never forget that sad sight. Poor Sir Noel was dead, and she was kneeling beside him in her ball-dress, like somebody turned to stone. I spoke to her, and she looked up at me, and then fell back in my arms in a fainting fit. Are you cold, Mrs. Weymore, that you shake so?"

"No—yes—it is this desolate room, I think," the governess answered, hardly able to speak.

"It is desolate. Come, I'll show you the billiard-room, and then we'll go up-stairs to the room Sir Noel died in. Everything remains just as it was—no one has ever slept there since. If you only knew, Mrs. Weymore, what a sad time it was; but you do know, poor dear! you have lost a husband yourself!"

The governess flung up her hands before her face with a suppressed cry so full of anguish that the housekeeper stared at her aghast. Almost as quickly she recovered herself again.

"Don't mind me," she said, in a choking voice. "I can't help it. You don't know what I suffered—what I still suffer. Oh, pray, don't mind me!"

"Certainly not, my dear," said Mrs. Hilliard, thinking inwardly the governess was a very odd person, indeed.

They looked at the billiard-room, where the tables stood, dusty and disused, and the balls lay tidy by.

"I don't know when it will be used again," said Mrs. Hilliard; "perhaps not until Sir Rupert grows up. There was a time," lowering her voice, "that I thought he would never live to be as old and strong as he is now. He was the puniest baby, Mrs. Weymore, you ever looked at—nobody thought he would live. And that would have been a pity, you know; for then the Thetford estate would have gone to a distant branch of the family, as it would, too, if Sir Rupert had been a little girl."

She went on up-stairs to the inhabited part of the building, followed by Mrs. Weymore, who seemed to grow more and more agitated with every word the housekeeper said.

"This is Sir Noel's room," said Mrs. Hilliard, in an awe-struck whisper, as if the dead man still lay there; "no one ever enters here but me."

She unlocked it as she spoke, and went in. Mrs. Weymore followed, with a face of frightened pallor that struck even the housekeeper.

"Good gracious me! Mrs. Weymore, what is the matter? You are as pale as a ghost. Are you afraid to enter a room where a person has died?"

Mrs. Weymore's reply was almost inaudible; she stood on the threshold, pallid, trembling, unaccountably moved. The housekeeper glanced at her suspiciously.

"Very odd," she thought, "very! The way

governess is either the most nervous person I ever met, or else—no, she can't have known Sir Noel in his lifetime. Of course not."

They left the chamber after a cursory glance around—Mrs. Weymore never advancing beyond the threshold. She had not spoken, and that white pallor on her face chafed still.

"I'll show you the picture-gallery," said Mrs. Hilliard; "and then, I believe, you will have seen all that is worth seeing at Theford Towers."

She led the way to a long, half-lighted room, wainscoted and antique, like all the rest, and down from the carved walls. There were knights in armor, countesses in ruffles and powder and lace, bishops in mitre c. head and crozier in hand, and judges in gown and wig. There were ladies in pointed stomachers and jeweled fans, with the waists of their dresses under their arms, but all fair and handsome, and unmistakably alike. Last of all the long array, there was Sir Noel, a fair-haired, handsome youth of twenty, with a smile on his face and a happy radiance in his blue eyes. And by his side, dark and haughty and beautiful, was my lady in her bridal robes.

"There is not a handsomer face amongst them all than my lady's," said Mrs. Hilliard, with pride. "You ought to have seen her when Sir Noel first brought her home; she was the most beautiful creature I ever looked at. Ah! it was such a pity he was killed. I suppose they'll be having Sir Rupert's taken next and hung beside her. He don't look much like the Thefords; ae's his mother over again—a Vandeuler, dark and still."

"Mrs. Weymore made any reply the housekeeper did not catch it; she was standing with her face averted, hardly looking at the portraits, and was the first to leave the picture-gallery."

There were a few more rooms to be seen—a drawing-room suite, now closed and dusted; an ancient library, with a wonderful stained window, and a vast echoing reception-room. But it was all over at last, and Mrs. Hilliard, with her keys, trotted cheerfully off; and Mrs. Weymore was left to solitude and her own thoughts once more.

A strange person, certainly. She locked the door and fell down on her knees by the bedside, sobbing until her whole form was convulsed.

"Oh! why did I come here? Why did I come here?" came passionately with the wild storm of sobb. "I might have known how it would be! Nearly nine years—nine long, long years, and not to have forgotten yet!"

CHAPTER V.

A JOURNEY TO LONDON.

VERY slowly, very monotonously went life at Theford Towers. There was only one change was that my lady went rather more into society, and a greater number of visitors came to the manor. There had been a children's party on the occasion of Sir Rupert's eighth birthday, and Mrs. Weymore had played for the little people to dance; and my lady had cast off her chronic gloom, and been handsome and happy as of old.

There had been a dinner-party later—an unprecedented event now at Theford Towers; and the weeds, worn so long, had been discarded, and in diamonds and black velvet Lady Ada Theford had been beautiful, and stately, and gracious as a young queen. No one knew the reason of the sudden change, but they accepted the fact just as they had found it, and set it down, perhaps, to woman's caprice.

So slowly the summer passed; autumn came and went, and it was December, and the ninth anniversary of Sir Noel's death.

A gloomy day—wet, and wild, and windy. The wind, sweeping over the angry sea, surged and roared through the skeleton trees; the rain lashed the windows in rattling gusts; and the leaden sky hung low and frowning over the fringed and dreary earth. A day like that, very like that, of nearly nine years ago, that had been Sir Noel's last.

In Lady Theford's boudoir a bright-red coal fire blazed. Pale-blue curtains of satin damask shut out the wintry prospect, and the softest and richest of foreign carpets bushed every footfall.

Before the fire, on a little table, my lady's breakfast temptingly stood; the silver, old and quaint; the rare antique porcelain sparkling in the ruddy firelight. An easy chair, carved and gilded, and cushioned in azure velvet, stood by the table; and near my lady's plate lay the letters and papers the morning's mail had brought.

A toy of a clock on the low marble mantle

chimed musically ten as my lady entered. In her dainty morning negligee, with her dark hair ripping and falling low on her neck, she looked very young, and fair, and graceful. Behind her came her maid, a blooming English girl, who took off the cover and poured out my lady's chocolate over a silver tray.

Lady Theford sank languidly into the azure velvet depths of her *fauteuil*, and took up her letters. There were three—one a note from her man of business; one an invitation to a dinner-party; and the third, a big official-looking document, with a huge seal and a long title.

The language eyes suddenly lighted, the pale cheeks flushed as she took it eagerly up. It was a letter from India from Capt. Eversard.

Lady Theford slipped her chocolate, and read her letter leisurely, with her slipped feet on the shining fender. It was a long letter, and she read it over slowly twice; three times before she laid it down. She finished her breakfast, motioned her maid to remove the service, and lying back in her chair, with her deep, dark eyes fixed dreamily on the fire, she fell into a reverie of other days far gone. The lover of her girlhood came back to her from over the sea. He was lying at her feet once in the long summer days, under the waving trees of her girlhood's home. Ah, how happy! how happy she had been in those by-gone days, before Sir Noel Theford had come, with his wealth and his title, to tempt her from her love and truth.

Eleven struck, twelve from the musical clock on the mantle, and still my lady sat living in the past. Outside the wintry storm raged on; the rain clamored against the curtained glass, and the wind worried the trees. With a long sigh my lady awoke from her dream, and mechanically took up the *Times* newspaper—the first of the little heap.

"Vain! vain!" she thought, dreamily; "worse than vain those dreams now. With my own hand I threw back the heart that loved me: of my own free will I resigned the man I loved. And now the old love, that I thought would die in the splendor of my new life, is stronger than ever—and it is nine years too late."

She tried to wrench her thoughts away and fix them on her newspaper. In vain! her eyes wandered aimlessly over the closely-printed columns—her mind was in India with Capt. Eversard. All at once she started, uttered a sudden, sharp cry, and grasped the paper with dilated eyes and whitening cheeks. At the top of a column of "personal" advertisements was one which her strained eyes advertently devoured.

"Mr. Vykings, who has been a male infant in charge of Mrs. Martha Brand, wishes to keep that child out of the work-house, he will call, within the next five days, at No 17 Waddington Street, Lambeth."

Again and again Lady Theford read this apparently uninteresting advertisement. Slowly the paper dropped from her lap, and she sat staring blankly into the fire.

"At last!" she thought, "at last it has come. I fancied all danger was over—that death, perhaps, had forestalled me; and now, after all these years, I am summoned to keep my broken promise!"

The hus of death had settled on her face; she sat cold and rigid, staring with that blank, fixed gaze into the fire. Ceaselessly beat the rain; wilder grew the December day; steadily the moments wore on, and still she sat in that fixed trance. The ornate clock struck two—the sound aroused her at last.

"Must!" she said, setting her teeth. "I will! My boy shall not lose his birthright, come what may!"

She rose and rang the bell—very pale, but jolly calm. Her maid answered the summons.

"Eliza," my lady asked, "at what hour does the afternoon train leave St. Gosport for London?"

Eliza stared—did not know, but would ascertain. In five minutes she was back.

"At half-past three, my lady; and another at seven."

Lady Theford glanced at the clock—it was a quarter past two.

"Tell William to have the carriage at the door at a quarter past three; and do you pack my dressing-case, and the few things I shall need for two or three days' absence. I am going to London."

Eliza stood for a moment quite petrified. In all the nine years of her service under my lady, no such order as this had ever been received. To go to London at a moment's notice—my lady, who rarely went beyond her own park gates! Turning away, not quite certain that her ears

had not deceived her, my lady's voice arrested her.

"Send Mrs. Weymore to me; and do you lose no time in packing up."

Eliza departed. Mrs. Weymore appeared. My lady had some instructions to give concerning the children during her absence. Then the governess was dismissed, and she was again alone.

Through the wind and rain of the wintry storm, Lady Theford was driven to the station, in time to catch the three-fifty train to the metropolis. She went unattended; with no message to any one, only saying she would be back in three days at the furthest.

In that dull household, where so few events ever disturbed the stagnant quiet, this sudden journey produced an indescribable sensation. What could have taken my lady to London at a moment's notice? Some urgent reason it must have been to force her out of the gloomy seclusion in which she had buried herself since her husband's death. But, discuss it as they might, they could come no nearer the heart of the mystery.

CHAPTER VI.
OCT.

THE rainy December day closed in a rainier night. Another day dawned on the world, sunless, and chilly, and overcast still.

It dawned on London in murky, yellow fog, on sloppy, muddy streets—in gloom and dreariness, and a raw, easterly wind. In the densely populated streets of the district of Lambeth, where poverty luddled in tall, gaunt buildings, rose the dismal light, so murky and slowly over the crowded, filthy streets and swarming publicans.

In a small upper room of a large dilapidated house, this bad December morning, a painter stood at his easel. The room was bare and cold, and comfortable in the extreme; the painter was middle-aged, small, brown and shrewish, and very much out at elbows. The dull, gray light fell full on his work—no inspiration of genius by any means—only the portrait, coarsely colored, of a fat, well-to-do butcher's daughter round the corner. The man was Joseph Legard, scene-painter to one of the minor city theatres, who eked out his slender income by painting portraits when he could get them to paint. He was as fond of his art as any of the great, old masters; but he had only one attribute in common with those immortals—extreme poverty; and his salary was so large, and Mr. Legard found it a tight fit, indeed, to "make both ends meet."

So he stood over his work this dull morning, however, in his fireless room, with a cheerful, brown face, whistling a tune. In the adjoining room he could hear his wife's voice raised shrilly, and the cries of half a dozen Legards. He was used to it, and it did not disturb him; and he painted and whistled cheerily, touching up the butcher's daughter's snub nose and fat cheeks and double chin, until light footsteps came running up-stairs, and the door was flung wide by an impetuous hand. A boy of ten, or thereabouts, came in—a bright-eyed, fair-haired lad, with a handsome, resolute face, and eyes of cloudless, Saxon blue.

"Ah, Guy!" said the scene-painter, turning round and nodding good-humoredly. "I've been expecting you! What do you think of Miss Jenkins?"

The boy looked at the picture with the glance of an embryo connoisseur.

"It's as like her as two peas, Joe; or would be, if her hair was a little redder, and her nose a little thicker, and the freckles were plainer. But it looks like her as it is."

"Well, you see, Guy," said the painter, going on with Miss Jenkins's left eyebrow, "it don't do to make 'em too true—people don't like it; they pay their money, and they expect to take it out in good looks. And now, ay news this morning, Guy!"

The boy leaned against the window and looked out into the dingy street, his bright, young face growing gloomy and overcast.

"No," he said, moodily; "there is no news, except that Phil Darking was drunk last night, and as savage as a mad dog this morning—and that's no news, I'm sure!"

"And nobody's come about the advertisement in the *Times*?"

"No, and never will. It's all humbug what granny says about my belonging to anybody rich; if I did, they'd have seen after me long ago. Phil says my mother was a housemaid,

and my father a valet—and they were only glad to get me off their hands. Vyking was a valet, grumpy says she knows; and if he's likely he'll turn up after all these years. I don't care, I'd rather go to the work-house; I'd rather starve in the streets, than live another week with Phil Darking."

The blue eyes filled with tears, and he dashed them passionately away. The painter looked up with a distressed face.

"Has he been beating you again, Guy?"

"It's no matter—he's a brute! Grumpy and Ellen are sorry, and do what they can; but it's nothing, I wish I had never been born!"

"It is hard," said the painter, compassionately, "but keep up heart, Guy; if the worst comes, why you can stop here and take pot-luck with the rest—not that that's much better than starvation. You can take to my business shortly, now; and you'll make a better scene-painter than ever I could see you get it in you."

"Do you really think so, Joe?" cried the boy, with sparkling eye. "Do you? I'd rather be an artist than a king—Hailoot!"

He stopped short in surprise, staring out of the window. Legard looked up the dirty street and caught a handsome cab at the step of their own door. The driver alighted, made some inquiry, then opened the cab-door, and a lady stepped lightly out on the curb-stone—a lady, tall and stately, dressed in black and closely veiled.

"Now, who can this visitor be for?" said Legard. "People in this neighborhood ain't in the habit of having morning calls made on them in cabs. She's coming up-stairs!"

He held the door open, listening. The lady ascended the first flight of stairs, stopped on the landing, and inquired of some one for "Mrs. Martha Brand."

"For granny!" exclaimed the boy. "Joe, I shouldn't wonder if it was some one about that advertisement, after all!"

"Neither should I," said Legard. "There's she's gone in. You'll be sent for directly, Guy!"

Yes, the lady had gone in. She had encountered on the landing a sickly young woman with a baby in her arms, who had stared at the name she inquired for.

"Mrs. Martha Brand? Oh, please, that's mother! Walk in this way, if you please, ma'am."

She opened the door, and ushered the veiled lady into a small, close room, poorly furnished. Over a smouldering fire, mending stockings, sat an old woman, who, notwithstanding the extreme shabbiness and poverty of her dress, lifted a pleasant, intelligent oval face.

"A lady to see you, mother," said the young woman, hushing her fretful baby and looking curiously at the veiled face.

But the lady made no attempt to raise the anxious screen, not even when Mrs. Martha Brand got up, dropping a respectful little servant's courtesy and planting a chair. It was a very thick veil—an impenetrable shield—and nothing could be discovered of the face behind it but that it was fixedly pale. She sank into the seat, her face turned to the old woman behind that sat on the screen.

"You are Mrs. Brand?"

The voice was refined and patrician. It would have told she was a lady, even if the rich garments she wore did not.

"Yes, ma'am—your ladyship, Martha Brand."

"And you inserted that advertisement in the Times regarding a child left in your care ten years ago?"

Mother and daughter started, and stared at the speaker.

"It was addressed to Mr. Vyking, who left the child in your charge, by which I infer you are now aware that he has left his mark."

"Left England, has he?" said Mrs. Brand. "More shame for him, then, never to let me know or leave a farthing to support the boy!"

"I am inclined to believe it was not his fault," said the clear, patrician voice. "The left England suddenly and against his will, and I have reason to think he will never return. But there are others interested—more interested than he could possibly be—in the child, who remains, and who are willing to take him off your hands."

But first, why is it you are so anxious, after keeping him all these years, to get rid of him?"

"Well, you see, your ladyship," replied Martha Brand, "it is not me, nor likewise Ellen there, who is my daughter. We'd keep the lad and welcome, and share the last crust we had with him, as we often have—for we're very poor people; but, you see, Ellen, she's married now, and her husband never could hear Guy—that's what we call him, your ladyship—Guy, which it was

Mr. Vyking's own orders. Phil Darking, her husband, never did like him somehow; and when he gets drunk, saving your ladyship's presence, he beats him most unmerciful. And now we're going to America—to New York, where Phil's got a brother and work is better, and he won't fetch Guy. So, your ladyship, I thought I'd try once more before we deserted him, and put that advertisement in the Times, which I'm very glad I did, if it will fetch the poor lad any friends."

There was a moment's pause; then the lady asked, thoughtfully: "And when do you leave for New York?"

"The day after to-morrow, ma'am—and a long journey it is for a poor old body like me."

"Did you live here when Mr. Vyking left the child with you—in this neighborhood?"

"Not in this neighborhood, nor in London at all, your ladyship. It was in Berkshire, in Berkshire, and my husband was alive at the time. I had just lost my baby, and the landlady of the hotel recommended me. So he brought it, and paid me thirty sovereigns, and promised me thirty more every twelvemonth, and told me to call it my Vyking—and that was the last I ever saw of him, your ladyship."

"And the infant's mother?" said the lady, her voice changing perceptibly—"do you know anything of her?"

"But very little," said Martha Brand, shaking her head. "I never set eyes on her, although she was sick at the inn for upward of three weeks. But Mrs. Vine, the landlady, she saw her twice; and she told me what a pretty young creature she was—and a lady, if there ever was a lady yet."

Then the child was born in Berkshire—how was it?

"Well, your ladyship, it was an accident, seeing as how the carriage broke down with Mr. Vyking and the lady, a driving furious to catch the last London train. The lady was so hurted that she had to be carried to the inn, and went quite out of her head, raving and dangerous like. Mr. Vyking had the landlady to wait upon her until he could telegraph to London for a nurse, which one came down next day and took charge of her. The baby wasn't two days old when he brought it to me, and the poor young mother was dreadful low and out of her head all the time. Mr. Vyking and the nurse were all that saw her, and the doctor, of course; but she didn't die, as the doctor thought she would, but got well, and before she came right to her senses Mr. Vyking paid the doctor and told him he never could back. And then, a little more than a fortnight after, they took her away, all shy and secret-like, and what they told her about her poor baby I don't know. I always thought there was something dreadful wrong about the whole thing."

"And this Mr. Vyking—was he the child's father, the woman's husband?"

Martha Brand looked sharply at the speaker, as if she suspected she could answer that question best herself.

"Nobody knew, but everybody thought who, I've always been of opinion myself that Guy's father and mother were gentefolks, and I always shall be."

"Does the boy know his own story?"

"Yes, your ladyship—all I've told you."

"Where is he? I should like to see him."

Mrs. Brand's daughter, all this time hushing her baby, started up.

"I'll fetch him. He's up-stairs in Legard's, I know."

She left the room and ran up-stairs. The painter, Legard, still was touching up Miss Jenkins, and the bright-haired boy stood watching the progress of that work of art.

"Come down-stairs at once. You're wanted."

"Who wants me, Ellen?"

"A lady, dressed in the most elegant and expensive mourning—a real lady, Guy; and she has come about that advertisement, and she wants to see you, mother."

"What is she like, Mrs. Darking?" inquired the painter—"young or old?"

"Young, I should think; but she hides her face behind a thick veil, as if she didn't want to be known. Come, Guy."

They hurried the lad down-stairs and into their little room. The veiled lady still sat talking to the old woman, her back to the dim daylight, and that disguising veil still down. She turned slightly at their entrance, and looked at the boy through it. Guy stood in the middle of the floor, his fearless blue eyes fixed on the hidden face. Could he have seen it he might have started at

the grayish pallor which overspread it at sight of him.

"So like! So like!" the lady was murmuring between her set teeth. "It is terrible—it is marvellous!"

"This is Guy, your ladyship," said Martha Brand. "I've done what I could for him for the last ten years, and I'm almost as sorry to part with him as if he were my own. Is your ladyship going to take him away with you now?"

"No," said her ladyship, sharply; "I have no such intention. Have you no neighbor or friend who would be willing to take and bring him up, if I will paid for the trouble? This time the money shall be paid without fail."

"There's Legard's," cried the boy, eagerly. "I'll go to Legard's, granny. I'd rather be with Joe than anywhere else."

"It's a neighbor that lives up-stairs," murmured Martha, in explanation. "He always took to Guy and Guy to him in a way that's quite wonderful. He's a very decent man, your ladyship—a painter for a theatre; and Guy takes kindly to the business, and would like to be one himself. If you don't want to take away the boy, you couldn't leave him in better hands."

"I am glad to hear it. Can I see the man?"

"I'll fetch him!" cried Guy, and ran out of the room. Two minutes later came Mr. Legard, paper cap and shirt-sleeves, bowing very low to the grand, black-robed lady, and only too delighted to strike a bargain. The lady offered liberally; Mr. Legard closed with the offer at once.

"You will clothe him better, and you will educate him and give him your name. I wish him to drop that of Vyking. The same amount I give you now will be sent you this time every year. If you change your residence in the meantime, or wish to communicate with me on any occurrence of consequence, you can address Madam Ada, post office, Plymouth."

She rose as she spoke, stately and tall, and motioned Mr. Legard to withdraw. The painter gathered up the money she laid on the table, and bowed himself, with a radiant face, out of the room.

"As for you," turning to old Martha, and taking out of her purse a roll of crisp, Bank of England notes, "I think this will pay you for the trouble you have had with the boy during the last ten years. No thanks—you have earned the money."

She moved to the door, made a slight, proud gesture with her gloved hand in farewell, took a last look at the golden haired, blue eyed, handsome boy, and was gone. A moment later and her cab rattled out of the murky street, and the trio were alone staring at one another, and at the bulky roll of notes.

"I should think it was a dream only for this," murmured old Martha, looking at the roll of his glistening eyes. "A great lady—a great lady, sure! Guy, I shouldn't wonder if that was your mother."

CHAPTER VII.

COLONEL JOCYLN.

FIVE miles away from Theford Towers, where the multitudinous waves leaped and glistened all day in the sunlight, as if a-gitter with diamonds, stood Jocelyn Hall. An imposing structure of red brick, not yet one hundred years old, with sloping meadows spreading away into the blue horizon, and densely wooded plantations gliding down to the wide sea.

Colonel Jocelyn, the lord of these boundless meadows and miles of woodland, where the red deer sported in the green arcades, was absent in India, and had been for the past nine years.

They were an old family, the Jockyls, as old as any in Devon, and with a pride that bore no proportion to their purse, until the present Jocelyn had, all at once, become a millionaire.

A penniless young lieutenant in a cavalry regiment quartered somewhere in Ireland, with a handsome face and dashing manners, he had captivated, at first sight, a wild, young Irish heiress of fabulous wealth and beauty. It was a love-match on her side—nobody knew exactly what it was on his; but they were a moonlight flitting of it, for the lady's friends were grievously wroth. Lieutenant Jocelyn liked his profession for its own sake, and took his Irish bride to India, and there an heiress and only child was born to him. The climate disagreed with the young wife—she sickened and died; but the young officer and his baby girl remained in India. In the fullness of time he became Colonel

"If I could but see her wife," Lady Thetford thought, "I think I should have nothing left on earth to desire."

She glanced across the wide room, across a vista of silks, and of fitting forms, and rich dresses, and sparkling jewels, to where a young lady stood, the center of an animated group—a tall and eminently handsome girl in a gown of white and blue, with a courtly grace of a young empress—Alleen Jocyn, herself of fabulous wealth, possessor of fabulous beauty, and descendant of a race as noble as the ancient and illustrious Medici.

"With her for his wife, come what might in the future, my Rupert would be safe," the mother thought; "and who knows what a day may bring for my Abi. She is dear only to me, but I dare not! It would ruin all. I know my son."

Yes, Lady Thetford knew her son, understood his character thoroughly, and was a great deal too wary a conspirator to let him see her cards. Fate, no, she had thrown the heiress and the baronet constantly together of late, and Alleen's own beauty and grace was surely sufficient for the rest. It was the one desire of Lady Thetford's heart; but she never said so to her son, who loved her dearly, and would have done a great deal to add to her happiness. She did not like to see him doing the wisest thing she could possibly do.

It seemed as if her hopes were likely to be realized. Sir Rupert, who had been so long in the love for all things beautiful, and could appreciate the grand statuesque style of Miss Jocyn's beauty, even as his mother could not appreciate it. She was like the French and Italian school of woman, fair and proud, uplifted and serene, smiling on all, from the heights of high-and-mightydom, but shining upon them, a brilliant far-off star, keeping her warmth and sweetness all to herself.

He was an indolent, dreamy Sybarite, this pale young baronet, who liked his rose-leaves unruined by any of the artistic tastes and inspirations, and a great deal too lazy ever to carry them into effect. He was an artist, and he had a studio where he began fifty gigantic deeds at once in the way of pictures and sculptures. So far as he had intended him for an artist, not a country squire; he cared little for riding, or hunting, or fishing, or farming, or any of the things which country squires delight in, he liked better to lie on the warm grass, with the summer wind stirring in the trees over his head, and smoke his Turkish pipe, and dream of artistic tastes and inspirations, and a great deal too lazy ever to carry them into effect.

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ness, and through the open French windows came the soft, misty moonlight and the saline wind. There they stopped, looking out at the pale glory of the night, and then Sir Rupert, about to ask the surprise of Alleen, and with his hand on his hip, beginning to plunge against his side, opened conversation with the usual brilliancy in such cases.

Miss Jocyn laughed frankly. She was of a nature far more impassioned than his, and she loved to see her father looking through every nerve of her body the pre-eminence of what he was going to say; but for all that, being a woman, she had the best of it now.

"Are you not all fatigued," she said; "and I like it. I don't think balls are bore—like this, I mean; but then, to be sure, my experience is very limited. How lovely the night! Look at the moonlight, yonder, on the sea! Look at the silvery glory. Does it not recall Sorrento and the exquisite Sorrentine landscape—that moonlight on the sea? Are you not all tired?"

She lifted a fitting, radiant glance, a luminous smile, and then the star-like face drooped again—and the white hands took to reckless breaking off sweet sprigs of myrtle.

"My inspiration is nearer," looking down at the drooping face. "Alleen—" and there he stopped, surprised, and amazed, and with his hand on his hip, for a shadow darkened the moonlight, and a figure flitted in like a spirit and stood before them—a fairy figure in a cloud of rose drapery, with shimmering golden curls and dancing eyes of turquoise blue.

Alleen Jocyn started back and away from her companion, with a faint, thrilling cry. Sir Rupert, who had been so long in the love for all things beautiful, and could appreciate the grand statuesque style of Miss Jocyn's beauty, even as his mother could not appreciate it. She was like the French and Italian school of woman, fair and proud, uplifted and serene, smiling on all, from the heights of high-and-mightydom, but shining upon them, a brilliant far-off star, keeping her warmth and sweetness all to herself.

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baronet for the remaining hours of the ball, she had known as well as he the words that were on his lips when May Everard interposed, and her eyes flashed and her dark cheek flushed dusky red to see how easily he had been won to his purpose. For him, he sought her once or twice in a delectatory sort of way, never noticing that he was purposely avoided, wandering contentedly back to devote himself to some one else, and in the pauses to watch May Everard floating—a sunbeam in a rosy cloud—here and there and everywhere.

CHAPTER IX.

PUT LEGARD.

"He meant to have spoken that night; he would have spoken but for May Everard. And yet that is two weeks ago, and we have been together since, and—"

Alleen Jocyn broke off abruptly, and looked out over the far-spreading, gray sea.

The morning was dull, the leaden sky threatening rain, the wind sighing fitfully, and the slow, gray sea creeping up the gray sands. Alleen Jocyn sat as she had sat since breakfast, aimless and dreary, by her dressing-table, and she was blankly over the pain landscape, her hair falling loose and damp over her shoulders, and a novel looking listlessly at the book that she had no interest in; her thoughts would stray, in spite of her, to Thetford Towers.

"She is very pretty," Miss Jocyn thought, "but that pink and white was so wonderful. Very nice, some people admire. I never thought she could, with her artistic nature; but I suppose I was mistaken. Her hair is fascinating; I believe that rather suddenly, and that 'laid' style of dress and doling, take some men by storm. I presume I was mistaken in Sir Rupert. The pretty, level-headed, peniless May will be Lady Thetford before long."

Miss Jocyn's short upper-lip curled forward scornfully, and she rose up with a little air of petulance and went to the window, and looked out at the window. It commanded a view of the lawn and a long wooded drive, and, entering airily up under the waving trees, she saw the young lady of whom she had been thinking. The pretty, level-headed, peniless May looked—all her tulleed curls floating in the breeze, like a golden banner; the blue eyes more starily radiant than ever, the dark hair, and dress, and jewelry, and the most becoming things in the world. She saw Miss Jocyn at the window, kissed her hand and resigned Arab to the groom in a minute, and she was saluting Alleen with effusion.

"You solemn Alleen! to sit and mope here in the house, instead of improving your health and temper by a breezy canter over the optics, what a contradiction; I know you were moping. I should be afraid to tell you how many miles Arab and I have got over this morning. And you never came to see me yesterday, either. Why wasn't I?"

"I didn't feel inclined," Miss Jocyn answered, truthfully.

"No, you never do feel inclined unless I come and drag you out to force; you sit in the house and grow yellow and jaundiced over high-church people. I declare I never met so many lady people as I do in my life, and I am sure they are all the same. One don't mind manner, poor thing! shutting herself up and the sunshine and fresh air of heaven out; but, for you and Rupert! And, speaking of Rupert," ran on Miss Everard in a breathless sort of way, "he wanted to commence his great picture of 'Fair Rosamond and Eleanor' yesterday—and how could he when Eleanor never came? Why didn't you—you promise!"

"I changed my mind, I suppose," Alleen broke up her word—more shame for you, then? Come now."

"No; thanks. It's going to rain." "Nothing of the sort; and Rupert is so anxious. He would have come himself, only my lady is ill to-day with one of her bad headaches, and asked him to read her to sleep; and, like the good boy that he is in the main, though shockingly lazy, he obeyed." Do come, Alleen; there's a dear! Don't be selfish."

Miss Jocyn rose rather abruptly.

"I have no desire to be selfish, Miss Everard. If you will wait ten minutes, I dress, I will accompany you to Thetford Towers."

She rang the bell and swept from the room, stately and uplifted. May looked after her, fidgeting a little.

"Dear me! I suppose she's offended now at that word 'selfish.' I never did get on very well with Alleen Jocyn, and I'm afraid I never shall. I shouldn't wonder if she were a little jealous. Miss Everard laughed a little slyly, and she slipped her hand over her forehead, and she looked like a girl who had just been told that she was not so certain about him. He's a great deal too indolent in the first place, to get up a grand passion for anybody, and I think he's inclined to look

ber, and Lady St. Gosport for and change of ce of Mrs. Wey. nfluence in her f I think I shall have delayed r. They were red October Devon hills, he said, softly. Lady Thetford, in surprise and be answered "So what?" Alleen Jocyn said never thought and "I never thought I still wish to that I am to-day be. Let us be her white Jew- can ever be to thirteen passed her countless in a deserted of course; Mrs. ard, the house- her mirror sat- tress, and her little May had large until with- to, had gone the Towers to thirteen years ough, rambling hills on the growing daily southern clime, to the name of Ox- them, and she had many reasons, to the old aver- she had taught her, though May it was not in their absence after that refus- left England, and made the tall within the son, spent her ed Col, and a queen. She return early once more in nced his in- more, her rice- rders for a year, and length pedes- and had a hazy idea that the handsome Alleen would not say to whom he spoke. "And I'll speak to-night, by Jove!" thought the young baronet, as he watched her, the brilliant center of a brilliant group. "How exquisite she is in her statuesque grace, my peerless Alleen, the ideal of my dreams. I'll ask her to be my wife to-night, that inconceivable idiot, Lord Gilbert Pearyn, will do it to-morrow."

prosciously on me—poor little me—in the second. You may spare yourself the trouble, my dear Sir Rupert; for a gentleman whose chief aim in existence is to smoke Turkish pipes and lie on the grass and write and read poetry is not at all the sort of man I mean to identify myself with.

The two girls descended to the court-yard, mounted and rode off. Both rode well, and both looked their best on horseback, and made a wonderfully pretty picture as they galloped through St. Gosport in dashing style, bringing the admiring population in a rush to doors and windows. Perhaps Sir Rupert Theford thought so, too, as he stood at the great front entrance to receive them, with a kindling light in his artist's eyes.

"May I say she would fetch you, and May always keeps her word," she said, as she walked slowly up the sweeping staircase "besides, Alleen, I am to have the first sitting for the 'Rosamond and Eleanor'—to-day, am I not? May calls me an idle dreamer, a useless drone in the busy human hive; so, to vindicate my character and cleave a niche in the temple of fame, I am going to immortalize myself on this painting."

"You'll never finish it," said May; "it will be like all the rest. You'll begin on a gigantic scale and with superhuman efforts, and you'll cool down and get sick in it. It will be finished, and it will go to swell the pile of daubed canvases in your studio now. Don't tell me I know you."

"And have the poorest possible opinion of me," Miss Everard.

"Yes, I have! I have no patience when I think what you might do, what you might become, and see what you are! If you were not Sir Rupert Theford, with your great income, you might be a great man. As it is—"

"As it is!" cried the young baronet, trying to laugh and reining violently. "I will still be a great man—a merchant, a millionaire, a statesman, a hero, Mrs. Everard? Alleen, I believe this is your first visit to my studio?"

"Yes," said Miss Everard, coldly and briefly. She did not like the conversation, and May Everard's familiar home-truths stung her. To her he was everything mortal man should be; she was proud, but she was not ambitious; what right had this penniless little free-speaker to come between them and talk like this!

May was flitting about like the fairy she was, her head a little to one side, in a critical canopy, her flowing skirt held up, inspecting the pictures.

"Jeanie D'Arro before her judges," half finished, as usual, and never to be completed, and weak—very, if it ever *was* completed. "Battle of Bosworth Field," in flaming colors, all confusion and smoke and red clover and rubbish; you did well not to take me to the museum. "The Swiss Peasant"—ah! that is pretty. "Storm at Sea," just tolerable. "Trial of Marie Antoinette." My dear Rupert, why will you persist in these huge paintings when you know your forte is landscape? "An Evening in the Eternal City." Now, that is what I call an exquisite little thing! Look at the moon, Alleen, rising over these hills—top and see those trees; you can almost feel the wind that blows! And that prostrate figure—why, that looks like yourself, Rupert!"

"It is myself," said Rupert.

"And the other, stooping—who is he?"

"The painter of that picture, Miss Everard; yes, the only thing in my poor studio you see fit to criticize is my own work. My worst picture is by a friend—an unknown Englishman, who saved my life in Rome three years ago. Come in, mother, mine, and defend your son from the two-edged sword of May Everard's tongue."

For Lady Theford, pale and languid, appeared on the threshold, wrapped in a shawl.

"It's all for his good, mamma. Come here and look at this 'Evening in the Eternal City.' Rupert has nothing like it in all his collection, though these are the beginning of many better things. He saved your life! How was it?"

"Oh! a little affair with brigands; nothing very thrilling, but I should have been killed or captured all the same, if this Legard had not come to the rescue. May is right about the picture; he painted well, had come to home to perfect himself in his art. Very fine fellow, Legard."

"It was Lady Theford who had spoken sharply and suddenly. She had put up her glass to look at the Italian picture, but dropped it, and faced abruptly round."

"Yes, Legard, a young Englishman, about my own age. By-the-bye, if you saw him, you would be surprised by his singular resemblance to some of the men in the picture-gallery—fair hair, blue eyes, and the same peculiar cast of features to a shade. I was rather taken aback, I confess, when I saw him first. My dear mother, you know it was not a very Lady Theford had uttered—it was a kind of wordless sob. He soon caught her in his arms and held her there, her face the color of death."

"Get a glass of water, May—she is subject to these attacks. Quick!"

Lady Theford drank the water, and sank back in the chair. Alleen wheeled up, her face looking awfully corpse-like in contrast to her dark garments and dead black hair.

"You should not have left your room," said Sir Rupert, "after your attack this morning. Perhaps you had better return and lie down. You look perfectly ghastly."

"No," the mother sat up as she spoke and pushed

away the glass, "there is no necessity for lying down. Don't wear that soiled face, May—it was nothing, I assure you. Go on with what you were saying, Rupert."

"What I was saying? What was it?"

"About this young gentleman's resemblance to the Thefords."

"Oh! well, there's no more to say; that is all. He saved my life and he painted that picture, and we were Damon and Pythias over again during my stay in Rome. I always do fraternize with those sort of fellows, you know; and I left him in Rome, and he promised, if he ever returned to England—which he wasn't so sure of—he would run down to Devonshire to see me and my painted ancestors, whom he resembles so strongly. That is all, and now, my dear mother, if you will give your places we will commence on the Rosamond and Eleanor. Mother, sit here by this window if you want to play properly, and don't talk."

But Lady Theford chose to go to her own room, and her son gave her his arm tiller and left her lying back amongst her cushions in front of the fire. It was always chilly in those great and somewhat gloomy rooms, and her ladyship was always cold of late. She lay there looking with gloomy eyes into the ruddy blaze, and holding her hands over her painfully aching feet.

"It is destiny, I suppose," she thought, bitterly; "let me banish him to the farthest end of the earth; let me keep him in poverty and obscurity all his life, and when I die, let me be buried in my own grave. Let me be here. Sooner or later the vow I have broken to Sir Noel Theford must be kept; sooner or later Sir Noel's heir will have his own."

CHAPTER X.

ASKING IN MARRIAGE.

A fire burned in Lady Theford's room, and among piles of chairs, languid and pale, lay, looking into the leaping flame. It was a hot July morning, the sun blazed like a wheel of fire in a sky without a cloud, but Lady Theford was alone, and when she closed her eyes, she saw how she were closer around her, and glanced impatiently now and then at the pretty toy clock on the decorated chimney-piece. The house was very still, and when she opened her eyes, she was absent with Sir Rupert for a morning carter over the sunny Devon hills.

"How long this stay, and these solitary rides are so dangerous! Oh! what will become of me if it is too late, after all! What shall I do if he says no?"

"There was a quick man's step without a moment and the door opened, and Sir Rupert, "booted and spurred" from his ride, was bending over his mother.

"Louise says you sent for me after I left. What is it, mother—you are not worse?"

"He knelt beside her. Lady Theford put back the fair brown hair with tender touch, and gazed in the handsome boy's face so like her own, with eyes full of unpeakeable love.

"My boy! my boy!" she murmured, "my darling Rupert! Oh! it is hard, it is bitter to have to leave you!"

"Mother!" with a quick look of alarm, "what is it? Are you worse?"

"My worst, Rupert; but no better. My boy, I shall never be better again in this world."

"Mother—"

"Hush, my Rupert—wait; you know it is true; and but for leaving you I should be glad to go. My life has not been so happy since your father died, that I should gently cling to it."

"But, mother, this stay; these morbid fancies are worst of all. Keeping up one's spirits is half the battle."

"I am not morbid; a mercy state a fact—a fact which must preface what is to come. Rupert, I know I am dying, and before we part I want to see my successor at Theford Towers."

"My dear mother!" amazedly.

"Rupert, I want to see Alleen Joeyin your wife. No, no; don't interrupt me, do believe me, I dislike match-making quite as cordially as you do; but my days on earth are numbered, and I must speak before it is too late. When we were broad I thought there never would be occasion; when we returned home I thought so, too. Rupert, I have consented to think so since May Everard's return."

"The young man's face flushed suddenly and hotly, but he made no reply."

"How many of your senses could possibly prefer May to Alleen, is a mystery I cannot solve; but then these things puzzle the wisest of us at times. Mind, my boy, I don't really say you do prefer May;—I should be very happy if I thought so, but I know—I am certain you love Alleen best; and I am equally certain she is a thousand times better suited to you. Then, as a man of honor, you owe it to her. You have paid Miss Joeyin such attentions as no honorable gentleman should pay any lady, save the one he means to make his wife."

Lady Theford's face grew emptier, and stood leaning against the man, her looking into the fire.

"Rupert, tell me truly, if May Everard had not come here, would you not ere this have asked Alleen to be your wife?"

"Yes—no—I don't know! Mother!" the young man cried, impatiently, "what has May Everard done that you should treat her like this?"

"Nothing; and I love her dearly, and you know

it. But she is not suited to you—she is not the woman you should marry."

Sir Rupert laughed—a hard sturdied laugh.

"I think Miss Everard is much of your opinion, my lady. You might have spared yourself all these fears and perplexities, for the simple reason that I should have been refused had I asked."

"Rupert!"

"Nay, mother mine, no need to wear that fright end face, I haven't asked Miss Everard to form any proposal to marry me, and she hasn't declined with thanks; but she would if I did. I saw enough to-day for that."

"Then you don't care for Alleen!" with a look of blank consternation.

"I care for her very much, mother; and I haven't owned to being absolutely in love with our pretty little May. Perhaps I care for one as much as the other; perhaps I know in my inmost heart she is the one I should marry. That is, if she will marry me."

"You owe it to her to ask her."

"Do! Very likely; and it would make you happy, my mother?"

"He came and bent over her again, smiling down in her own anxious face.

"More happy than anything else in this world, Rupert."

"Then consider it an accomplished fact. Before the sun sets to-day Alleen Joeyin shall say yes or no to your son."

"He bent and kissed her; then, without waiting for her to speak, wheeled round and strode out of the apartment.

"There is nothing like striking whilst the iron is hot," said a young man to himself, with a grim sort of smile, as he ran down stairs.

Loitering on the lawn, he encountered May Everard, still in her riding-habit, surrounded by three or four of her mischievous little smites.

"On the wing again, Rupert? Is it for mamma? She is not worse?"

"No; she is going to Joeyin Hall. Perhaps I shall fetch Alleen back."

May's turquoise blue eyes were lifted with a sudden luminous, intelligent flash to his face.

"Good speed you! You will certainly fetch Alleen back?"

She held out her hand with a smile that told him she knew all as plainly as he knew it himself.

"You will be very glad to hear that, and don't linger; I want to congratulate Alleen."

Sir Rupert's response to these good wishes was very brief and curt. Miss Everard watched him mount and ride off with a mischievous little smile rippling round her rosy lips.

My lady has been giving the idol of her existence a good talking to-day, matrimony. I amused Miss Everard, sauntering idly along in the midst of her little dogs; "and really it is high time, if she means to have Alleen for a daughter-in-law for the help of Theford Towers, and her doubtful that he is not falling in love with me; and Alleen is dreadfully jealous and disagreeable; and my lady anxious and fidgeted to death about it; and—oh! but good gracious!"

Miss Everard stopped with a shrill, feminine shriek. She had loitered down to the gates, where young man stood talking to the lodge-keeper with a big bow and a dog gamboiling round him seriously about him. The big Newfoundland made an instant dash into Miss Everard's gap of honor, and with one bound was back like a thunder, and which effectually drowned the rasp of the paddles. May flew to the rescue, seizing the Newfoundland's collar and pulling him back with all the might of two little white hands.

"You big, horrid brute!" cried May, with flashing eyes, "how dare you! Call off your dog, sir, this instant! Don't you see how he is frightening mine!"

She turned impetuously to the Newfoundland's master, the bright eyes flashing, the pink cheeks aflame—very pretty, indeed, in her wrath.

"Down, Hector!" called the young man, authoritatively, and Hector, like the well-trained animal he was, subsided instantly. I beg your pardon, young lady! Hector, your sir at your perils, sir! I am very sorry he has alarmed you."

He doffed his cap with careless grace, and made the angry little lady a courtly bow.

"He is a brute," replied May, testily; "he only alarmed my dogs. Why, dear me how very odd!"

Miss Everard, looking full at the young man, had started back with this exclamation and stared broadly. A tall, powerful-looking young fellow, rather dusty and travel-stained, but eminently gentlemanly, with dark blue eyes and profuse fair hair, and a handsome, candid face.

"Yes, Miss May," struck in the lodge-keeper, "it is odd! I see it, too. He looks enough like Sir Noel, dead and gone, to be his own son."

"I beg your pardon," said May, becoming conscious of her wide stare, "but is your name Legard, and are you a friend of Sir Rupert Theford's?"

"Yes, to both questions," with a smile that May liked. "You see the resemblance too, then. Sir Rupert says you are a good deal like him at home."

"Not just now, but he will be very good, and I know will be glad to see Mr. Legard. You had better come in and wait."

"And Hector?" said Legard. "I think had better leave him behind, as I see him eying your guard of honor with anything but a friendly eye. I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Everard? Oh!" laughing frankly at her surprised

face, "Sir Rupert says as you are a friend of his."

Miss Everard's conversation with the young man, who formed the letter of her own name, was not without interest. She had about her some of the old-fashioned archaic ideas, and the conversation hour followed watch at her feet found, to be

"What you might be a great man. As it is—"

"The baronet, my dear Mrs. Legard, will be glad to hear that, and don't linger; I want to congratulate Alleen."

"You will be very glad to hear that, and don't linger; I want to congratulate Alleen."

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face. "Sir Rupert showed me a photograph of yours as a child. I have a good memo'ry for faces, and knew you at once."
Miss Everard and Mr. Legard fell easily into conversation at once, as if they had been old friends. Lady Thetford's ward was one of those people who form their likes and dislikes at first sight, and Mr. Legard's face would have been a pretty strong letter of recommendation to him the wide world over. May liked his looks; and then he was Sir Rupert's friend, and she was never over particular about social forms and customs; and so they dawdled about the grounds and through the lonely arcades, in the genial morning sunshine, talking about Sir Rupert and Rome, and art and artists, and the thousand and one things that turn up in conversation; and the moments slipped by, half hour followed half hour, until May jerked out her watch at last, in a sudden fit of recollection, and found, to her consternation, it was past two.
"What will mamma say?" cried the young lady, agast. "And Rupert; I dare say he's home to luncheon before this. Let us go back to the house." Mr. Legard. I had no idea it was half so late.
Mr. Legard laughed frankly.
"The honesty of that speech is the highest proof of my conversational powers ever received. Miss Everard, I am very much obliged to you. Ah! by Jove! Sir Rupert himself!"
For riding slowly up under the sunlit trees came the young baronet. As Mr. Legard spoke, his eyes lit upon them, the young lady and gentleman advancing so confidentially with half a dozen curly poodles frisking about them. To say Sir Rupert's mind was not at the moment slipped by, his eyes opened in wide wonder.
"Guy Legard!"
"Thetford! My dear Sir Rupert!"
The baronet, with a gasp, his eyes lighting, and shook hands with the artist, in his bursts of wholeness very rare with him.
"Where in the world did you drop from, and how under the sun did you come to be *like this* with May?"
"I leave the explanation to Mr. Legard," said May, blushing a little under Sir Rupert's glance.
"What I go and see mamma, only promising that luncheon hour is past, and you had better not linger."
She slipped away, and the two young men followed more slowly into the house. Sir Rupert led his friend to his studio, and left him to inspect the pictures.
"I speak a word to my mother," he said; "it will detain me hardly an instant."
"All right!" said Mr. Legard, boyishly. "Don't hurry yourself on any account, your son had left here—say as if she had hardly stirred since. She looked up and half rose as he came in, her eyes painfully intensely anxious. But his face, grave and quiet, told nothing.
"Well," she panted, her eyes glittering.
"It is well, mother. Allen Jocelyn has promised to become my wife."
"Thank God!"
Lady Thetford sunk back, her hands clasped tightly over her heart, its loud beating plainly perceptible. Her face, which had been flushed and keeping its steady gravity—none of the rapture of an accepted love there.
"How are you and mother?"
"More than content, Rupert. And you?"
He smiled, and stooping, kissed the warm, pallid face. "I would do a great deal to make you happy, mother, but I would not ask a woman I did not love to be my wife. Be at rest; all is well with me. And now I must leave you, if you will not go down to luncheon."
"I think not; I am not strong to-day. Is May waiting?"
"More than May. A friend of mine has arrived, and will stay with us for a few weeks."
Lady Thetford's face had been flushed and eager, but at the last words it suddenly blanched.
"A friend, Rupert? Who?"
"You have heard me speak of him before," he said, carelessly; "his name is Guy Legard."
CHAPTER XL
ON THE WEDDING EVE.
THE family at Thetford Towers were a good deal surprised, a few hours later that day, by the unexpected appearance of Lady Thetford at dinner. Was as some spirit of the moonlight, she came softly in, just as they entered the dining-room, and her son presented his friend, Mr. Legard, at once.
"His resemblance to the family will be the surest passport to your favor, mother mine," Sir Rupert said easily. "My father met him just now, and recoiled with a shriek, as though she had seen a ghost. Extraordinary, isn't it—this chance resemblance."
"Extraordinary," Lady Thetford said, "but not at all unusual. Of course, Mr. Legard is not even remotely connected with the Thetford family?"
She asked the question without looking at him. Sir Rupert, however, had her plate for a moment, frank, fair face before her was terrible for her, almost as a ghost. It was the days of her youth again, and Sir Noel, her husband, once more by her side.
"Not that I am aware of," Mr. Legard said, running his fingers through his abundant brown hair. "But it may be for all I know the hero of a novel—a mysterious orphan—only, unfortunate-

ly, with no identifying strawberry mark on my arm. Who my parents were, or what my real name is, I know no more than I do of the biography of the man in the moon."
"There was a murmur of astonishment—May and Rupert were gazed, Lady Thetford white as a dead woman, her eyes averted, her hand trembling as if pilled.
"No," said Mr. Legard, gravely, and a little sadly, "I stand as totally alone in this world as a human being can stand—father, mother, brother, sister, I never have known; a nameless, penniless wretch, I was cast upon the world four-and-twenty years ago. Until the age of twelve I was called Guy Vyking; then the friends with whom I had lived left England for America, and a man—a painter, I think—came to me and gave me his name. And there the romance comes in: a lady, a tall, elegant lady, too closely veiled for us to see her face, came to the poor home that was mine, paid those who had kept me from my infancy, and paid Legard for his future care of me. I have never seen her since; and I sometimes think," his voice trembling, "that she may have been my mother."
There was a sudden clash, and a momentary confusion. My lady, lifting her glass with that grace, came to the poor home that was mine, paid those who had kept me from my infancy, and paid Legard for his future care of me. I have never seen her since; and I sometimes think," his voice trembling, "that she may have been my mother."
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"And you never saw the lady after?" May asked.
"Never. Legard received regular remittances, mailed, oddly enough, from your town here—Plymouth. The lady told him, if he ever had occasion to hope, that she never did leave, that I know of—to address Madam Ada, Plymouth! He brought me up, educated me, taught me his art and died. I was old enough then to comprehend my mother, and she used to make that knowledge edge was to return 'Madam Ada' her remittances, with a few sharp lines that effectually put an end to hope."
"Has you never tried to ferret out the mystery of your birth and this Madam Ada?" inquired Sir Rupert.
"I should shook his head.
"No; why should I? I dare say I should have no reason to be proud of my parents if I did find them, and they evidently were not very proud of me, for I have never heard of them since. My father has deserted it, I shall know, sooner or later; if destiny has not, then my many efforts will be of no avail. But if presentiments mean anything, I know, and I am sure, I shall find her. I have searched Devonshire, I should find Madam Ada."
"May Everard started up with a cry, for Lady Thetford, who had been sitting in a chair, suddenly spasms to which she had lately become subject. In the universal consternation Guy Legard and his story were forgotten.
"What you had had nothing to do with this," he cried, agast; and the one following so suddenly upon the other made the remark natural enough. But Sir Rupert turned upon him in a way that showed he was not to be trifled with.
"What you said! Lady Thetford, unfortunately, has been subject to these attacks for the past two years, Mr. Legard. That will do, May; let me assist her to her chair, and I have no doubt."
May drew back. Lady Thetford was able to rise, ghastly and trembling, and, supported by her son's arm, she went to her room, and lay down.
"Lady Thetford's health is very delicate, I fear," Mr. Legard murmured, sympathetically. "I really thought for a moment my story-telling had occasioned her sudden illness."
"Miss Everard fixed a pair of big, shining eyes in solemn scrutiny on his face—that face so like the pictured one of Sir Noel Thetford, and she said, "a very natural supposition," thought the young lady; "so did I."
"You never knew Sir Noel?" Guy Legard said, musingly; "but, of course, you did not. Sir Rupert has told me he died before he was born."
"I never saw him," said May; "but those who have seen him in this house—our housekeeper, for instance—stand perfectly petrified at your extraordinary likeness to him. Mrs. Lilliard says you have given her a 'turn' she never expects to get over."
"Legard smiled, but was grave again directly. "It is odd—old—very odd!"
"Yes," said May Everard, with a sneering nod; "but you had better be as sure as you can, and flush her comes Rupert. Well, how have you left mamma?"
"Better; Louise is with her. And now to finish dinner, and to be engaged for the evening."
Sir Rupert was strangely silent and *distract* all through dinner, a darkly thoughtful shadow glancing his ever pale face. A supposition had flashed across his mind that turned him hot and cold by turns—a supposition that was almost a certainty. This striking resemblance of the painter Legard to the dead artist was a freak of nature, but a retributive Providence revealing the truth of his birth. It came back to his memory with painfully acute clearness that his mother had sunk down dead before him in a room that he had seen at the mere sound of his name. Legard had spoken of a veiled lady—Madam Ada, Plymouth, her address. Could his mother—his—be that mysterious woman? The name—the picture—the thought of Sir Rupert Thetford wrenched his thoughts, by a violent effort, away, shook at himself.
"It cannot be—it cannot!" he said to himself pained and angry. "The name—the picture—the thought is a desecration of the memory of the dead, a

treason to the living. But I wish Guy Legard had never come here."
There was one other person at Thetford Towers strangely and strongly effected by Mr. Guy Legard, and that person, oddly enough, was Mrs. Weymore, the governess. She had never even seen the late Sir Noel that anyone knew of, and yet she had recoiled with a shrill, feminine cry of utter consternation at sight of the young man.
"I don't see why you should be so much affected by Mrs. Weymore," Miss Everard remarked, with her great, bright eyes suspiciously keen; "you never knew Sir Noel?"
"Mrs. Weymore sunk down on a lounge in a violent tremor and faintness.
"My dear, I beg your pardon. I—it seems strange. Oh, May! with a sudden, sharp, cry, losing self-control, "who is that young man?"
"Why, Mr. Guy Legard, artist," answered May, composedly, the bright eyes still on the alert; "formerly—in 'boyhood's sunny hours, you know—Master Guy. Let me see—see! Yes, Vyking."
"Vyking!" with a spasmodic cry; and then Mrs. Weymore dropped her white face in her hands, trembling from head to foot.
"Well, upon my word," Miss Everard said, addressing empty space, "this does cap the globe! The Mysteries of Edolphin, compared to this, are as a child's play. I don't know upon people. He's a very handsome young man, and a very agreeable young man; but I should never have suspected that, trusting the power of throwing all the elderly ladies he meets into gasp for its. There's Lady Thetford; he was too much for her, and she had to be helped out of the dining-room; and here's Mrs. Weymore, who has been terrified because he used to be called Guy Vyking. I thought my lady might be the veiled lady of his story; but not so. I think it is Mrs. Weymore."
Mrs. Weymore looked up, her very lips white.
"The veiled lady? What lady? May, tell me all you know of Mr. Vyking."
"Not Vyking now—Legard," answered May, and thereupon the young lady detailed the scanty *resumé* the artist had given them of his history.
"And I'm very sure it isn't chance at all," concluded May Everard, trusting the governess with an unwinking stare; "and Mr. Legard is as much a Thetford as Sir Rupert himself. I don't pretend to be a divination, of course, but I can fairly see how it is; but it is, and you know it. Mrs. Weymore, would you could enlighten the young man, and so could my lady, if either of you chose."
Mrs. Weymore turned suddenly and caught May's two hands in hers.
"May, if you care for me, if you have any pity, don't speak of this. I do know—but I must have time. My head is in a whirl. Wait, wait, and don't tell Mr. Legard."
"I won't," said May, "but it is all very strange and very mysterious, especially like a three-volume novel or a sensation play. I'm getting into my much interested in the hero of the performance, and I'm afraid I shall be deplorably in love with him shortly if it is not of my own accord."
Mr. Legard himself took the matter much more coolly than any one else; smoked cigars philosophically, criticised Sir Rupert's pictures, did a little sketching, and played himself, played chess with Miss Everard, rode with that young lady, walked with her, sang duets with her in a room, melodious bass, made himself fascinating, and took the world easy.
"It is no use getting into a gale about these things," he said to Miss Everard when she wended her way out at his constitutional plagues; "the crooked things will straighten of themselves if we give them time. What is written is written. I know I shall find out all about myself one day—like little Paul Donkey, 'I feel it in my bones.'"
Mr. Legard was thrown a good deal upon Miss Everard's resources for amusement; for, of course, Sir Rupert's time was chiefly spent at Jocelyn Hall, and Mr. Legard bore this with even greater serenity than the other. Miss Everard was a very charming little girl, with a laugh that was sweeter than the music of the spheres and hundreds of bewitching little ways; and Sir Legard undertook to paint her portrait, and found it the most absorbing work of art he had ever undertaken. As for the young baronet, spending his evenings at Jocelyn Hall, they never missed him. His wooing sped on smoothest wings—Col. Jocelyn almost as much pleased as my lady herself; and the course of true love in this case ran as smooth as heart could wish.
Miss Jocelyn, as a matter of course, was a great deal at Thetford Towers, and saw with evident attentiveness the growing intimacy of Mr. Legard and May. It would be an eminent success, and Miss Jocelyn thought, only it was a pity so much mystery shrouded the gentleman's birth. Still, he was a gentleman, and with his talents, he would become an eminent artist; and it would be highly satisfactory to see May fix her erratic affections on somebody, and thus be doubly cut of her—Miss Jocelyn's way.
The wedding preparations were going briskly forward. There was no need of delay; all were anxious for a marriage. Lady Thetford more than anxious, on account of her declining health. The hurry to have the ceremony irrevocably had grown to be something very like a monomania with her.
"I feel that my days are numbered," she said, with impatience, to her son, "and I cannot rest in my grave, Rupert, until I see Allen your wife."
"But to Sir Hugo, more than to me, thought his mother, hastened on the wedding. An eminent

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