LIKE AND UNLIKE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"MOHAWKS," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS TO VOL. I.

LIKE AND UNLIKE

CHAPTER I.

CONTRASTS

"Has Mr. Belfield come in yet?"

"No, Sir Adrian."

"He rode the new horse, did he not?"

"Yes, Sir Adrian."

Sir Adrian Belfield moved uneasily in his chair, then walked to the fireplace, and stood there, looking down at the smouldering logs upon the hearth, with an anxious air. The footman waited to be questioned further.

"What sort of character do they give the new horse in the stables, Andrew?" asked Sir Adrian, presently.

Andrew hesitated before replying, and then

answered, with a somewhat exaggerated cheerfulness, "Well, Sir Adrian, they say he's a good 'un, like all the horses Mr. Belfield buys."

"Yes, yes, he's a good judge of a horse—we know that. But he would buy the maddest devil that was ever foaled if he fancied the shape and paces of the beast. I didn't like the look of that new chestnut."

"You see, Sir Adrian, it's Mr. Belfield's colour. You know, sir, as how he'll go any distance and give any money for a handsome chestnut when he won't look at another coloured 'oss."

"Yes, yes; that will do, Andrew. Is her ladyship in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, Sir Adrian," said the footman, who was middle-aged and waxing grey, and ought long ago to have developed into a butler, only Belfield Abbey was so good a place that few servants cared to leave it in the hope of bettering themselves. The butler at Belfield was sixty, the under-butler over fifty, and the younger of the two footmen had seen the sun go down upon his thirty-second birthday. That good old grey stone mansion amidst the wooded

hills of North Devon was a paradise for serving men and women; a paradise not altogether free from the presence of Satan; but the inhabitants were able to bear with one Satanic element where so much was celestial.

Sir Adrian went to the window—a mullioned window with richly painted glass in the upper mullions, glass emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the Belfields, and rich in the heraldic history of aristocratic alliances. Like most Elizabethan windows, there was but a small portion of this one which opened. Adrian unfastened the practicable lattice and put his head out to survey the avenue along which his brother would ride home.

There was no horseman visible in the long vista —only the autumnal colouring of elms and oaks which alternated along the broad avenue with its green ride at each side of the road, only the infinite variety of fading foliage, and the glancing lights of an October afternoon. How often had Adrian watched his twin brother schooling an unmanageable horse upon yonder turf, galloping like an

infuriated centaur, and seeming almost as much a part of his horse as if he had been made after the fashion of that fabulous monster.

"They must have had a good day," thought Adrian. "He ought to have been home before now, unless they killed further off than usual."

He looked round at the clock over the fireplace. Half-past five! Not so late after all. It was only his knowledge that his brother was riding a hot-tempered brute that worried him.

"What a morbid fool I am," he said to himself impatiently. "What an idiot I must be to give way to this feeling of anxiety and foreboding every time he is out of my sight for a few hours. I know he is one of the finest horsemen in Devonshire, but if he rides a restive horse I am miserable. And yet I can sympathize with his delight in conquering an ill-tempered brute, in proving that the nerve and muscle of the smaller animal, backed with brains, can prevail over size and weight and sheer brute power. I love to watch him break a horse, and can feel almost as keen a delight as if I myself were in the saddle, and my hands were doing

the work. And then in another moment, while I am exulting in his victory, the womanish mood comes over me, and I turn cold with fear. I'm afraid my mother is right, and that nature intended me for a woman."

He was pacing slowly up and down the room as he mused upon himself thus, and, coming face to face with a Venetian glass which hung between two blocks of book-shelves at the end of the library, he paused to contemplate his own image reflected there.

The face he saw in the looking-glass was handsome enough to satisfy the most exacting self-consciousness; but the classical regularity of the features and the delicacy of the colouring were allied with a refinement which verged upon effeminacy, and suggested a feeble constitution and a hypersensitive temperament. It was not the face of one who could have battled against adverse circumstances or cut his way upward from the lowest rung of the ladder to the top. But it was a very good face for Sir Adrian Belfield, born in the purple, with fortune and distinction

laid up for him by a long line of stalwart ancestors. Such a one could afford to be delicately fashioned and slenderly built. In such a one that air of fragility, tending even towards sickliness, was but an added grace. "So interesting," said all the young ladies in Sir Adrian's neighbourhood, when they descanted on the young baronet's personality.

For Belfield's own eye those delicately-chiselled features and that ivory pallor had no charm. He compared the face in the glass with another face which was like it and yet unlike—the face of his twin brother, in which youth, health and physical power were the leading characteristics. Sir Adrian thought of that other face, and turned from his own image with an impatient sigh.

"Of all the evils that can befall a man I think a sickly youth must be the worst," he said to himself as he left the room and went across the hall to his mother's favourite sitting-room, the smallest in a suite of three drawing-rooms opening out of each other.

Lady Belfield was sitting in a low chair near

the fire, but she started up as her son opened the door.

"Has he come home?" she asked eagerly.

"Valentine? No, mother," answered Adrian quietly. "Surely, you are not anxious about him?"

"But I am anxious. How white and tired you look! I am always anxious when he rides a new horse," Lady Belfield exclaimed, with an agitated air. "It is so cruel of him to buy such wretched creatures, as if it were on purpose to torture me. And then he laughs, and makes light of my fears. The stud-groom told me that this chestnut has an abominable character. He has been the death of one man already. No one but Valentine would have bought him. Parker begged me to prevent the purchase, if I could. He ought to have known very well that I could not," she added bitterly, walking to and fro in the space before the bay window.

"Dearest mother, it is foolish to worry yourself like this every time Valentine rides an untried horse. You know what a horseman he is."

"I know that he is utterly reckless, that he would throw away his life to gratify the whim of the moment, that he has not the slightest consideration for me."

"Mother, you know he loves you better than any one else in the world."

"Indeed I do not, Adrian. But if he does, his highest degree of loving falls very far below my idea of affection. Oh, why did he insist upon buying that brute, in spite of every warning?"

"My dear mother, while you are making yourself a martyr, I daresay Valentine is walking that obnoxious chestnut quietly home after a distant kill, and he will be here presently in tremendous spirits after a grand day's sport."

"Do you really think so? Are you sure you are not uneasy?"

"Do I look it?" asked Adrian, smiling at her.

He had had to conceal his own feelings many a time in order to spare hers when some recklessness of the dare-devil younger-born had tortured them both with unspeakable apprehensions. Ever since he had been old enough to be let out of leading-

strings Valentine had been perpetually endangering his limbs and his life to the torment of other people. His boats, his horses, his guns, his dogs, had been sources of inexhaustible anxiety to Lady Belfield and her elder son. It suited his temperament to be always in movement and strife of some kind; riding an unbroken horse, sailing his yacht in a storm, making his companions and playthings of ferocious dogs, climbing perilous mountain peaks; crossing the Channel or the Bay of Biscay, just when any reasonable being, master of his own time, would have avoided the passage—doing everything in a reckless, hot-headed way, which was agony to his mother's tender heart.

And yet, though both mother and brother suffered infinitely from Valentine Belfield's folly, they both went on loving him and forgiving him with an affection that knew no diminution, and which he accepted with a carelessness that was akin to contempt.

"You look pale, and fagged, and ill," said Lady Belfield, scrutinizing her son with anxious eyes. "I know you are just as frightened as I am,

though you hide your uneasiness for my sake. You are always so good to me, Adrian:" this with a tone that seemed half apologetic, as if she would have said, "I lavish the greater half of my affection on your brother, and yet you give me so much."

"Dear mother, what should I be but good to the best and kindest of parents?"

"Oh, but I am more indulgent to him than to you. You have never tried me as he has done, and yet——"

"And yet I love him better than I love you." That was the unspoken ending of her speech.

She went to the window, brushing away her tears—tears of remorseful feeling, tears of sorrowing love, tears which she half knew were wasted upon an unworthy object.

"Cheer up, mother," said Adrian lightly. "It will never do for Valentine to surprise us in this tragical mood. He will indulge his wit at our expense all the evening. If you want him to get rid of the chestnut say not one word about danger. You might remark in a careless way that the

animal has an ugly head, and does not look so well bred as his usual stamp of horse—that is a safe thing to say to any man—and if he tells us a long story of a battle royal with the beast, be sure you put on your most indifferent air, as if the thing were a matter of course, and nobody's business but his own; and before the week is out he will have sold the horse or swopped him for another, and, as he could hardly find one with a worse character, your feelings will gain by the change. He is a dear fellow, but there is a vein of opposition in him."

"Yes, he loves to oppose me; but after all he is not a bad son, is he, Adrian?"

"A bad son! Of course not; whoever said he was?"

"No one: only I am afraid I spoke bitterly about him just now. He is always keeping my nerves on the rack by his recklessness in one way or the other. He is so like his poor father—so terribly like."

Her voice grew hushed and grave almost to solemnity as she spoke of her dead husband. She

had been a widow for nearly twenty years, ever since her twin boys were four years old. It was the long minority which had made Sir Adrian Belfield a rich man.

"And yet, mother, he must be more like you than my father," said Adrian, "for he and I are alike, and every one says that I am like you."

"In person, yes, he is more like me, I suppose," she answered thoughtfully; "but it is his character which is so like his father's: the same daring spirit—the same restless activity—the same strong will. He reminds me of poor Montagu every day of his life."

Sir Montagu Belfield had met his fate suddenly amidst the darkness of a snowstorm on the ice-bound slopes of Monte Rosa, while his young wife and two boys were waiting and watching for his return in a villa on Lago Maggiore. The horror of that sudden death, the awfulness of that parting, had left a lasting shadow upon Constance Belfield's existence, and had given a morbid tinge to a temperament that had always been hypersensitive. That first sudden sorrow had so impressed her

mind that there was an ever-present apprehension of a second blow. She quailed before the iron hand of inexorable destiny, which seemed always raised to strike her. She had lived much alone, devoting her time and thoughts to the rearing and education of her sons; and her mind had fed upon itself in those long, quiet years, unbroken by stirring events of any kind. She had read and thought much in those years; she had cultivated her taste for music and art, and was now a highly accomplished woman; but her studies and accomplishments had always occupied the second place in her life and in her mind. Her sons were paramount. When they were with her she thought of nothing but them. It was only in their absence that she consoled herself with the books or the music that she loved so well.

Her elder son, Adrian, resembled her closely in person and disposition. His tastes were her tastes, and it was hardly possible for sympathy and companionship between mother and son to be closer than theirs had been. Yet, dearly as she loved the son who had never in his life thwarted or

offended her, there lurked in the secret depths of her heart a stronger and more intense affection for that other son, whose wayward spirit had been ever a source of trouble or terror. The perpetual flutter of anxiety, the alternations of hope and fear, joy and sorrow, in which his restless soul had kept her, had made the rebel only so much the dearer. She loved him better for every anxious hour, for every moment of rapture in his escape from some needless peril, some hazardous folly. Valentine was the perpetually straying sheep, over whose recovery there was endless rejoicing. It was in vain that his mother told herself that she had reason to be angry, and tried to harden her heart against the sinner. He had but to hold out his arms to her, laughing at her foolish love, and she was ready to sob out her joy upon his breast.

She went back to her chair by the fire, and sat there pale and still, picturing to herself all the horrors that can be brought about by an ungovernable horse. Adrian took up a newspaper and tried to read, listening all the time for the sound of hoofs in the avenue.

At last that sound was heard, faint in the distance, the rhythmical sound of a trotting horse. The mother started up and ran to the window, while Adrian went out to the broad, gravelled space in front of the porch to meet the prodigal.

He came up to the house quietly enough, dropped lightly from his horse, and greeted his brother with that all-conquering smile which made up for so many offences in the popular mind.

"Look at that brute, Adrian," he said, pointing his hunting-crop at the horse, which stood meekly, with head depressed and eye dull, reeking from crest to flank, and with blood stains about his mouth. "I don't think he'll give me quite so much trouble another time, but I can assure you he was a handful even for me. I never crossed such an inveterate puller, or such a pig-headed beast; but I believe he and I understand each other pretty well now. Yah, you brute," with a sharp tug at the bridle.

"You might let him off without any more

punishment to-night, I think, Val," said Adrian quietly; "he looks pretty well done."

"He is pretty well done; I can assure you I haven't spared him!"

"And you've bitted him severely enough for the most incorrigible Tartar."

"A bit of my own invention, my dear boy; a high port and a gag. I don't think he has had too easy a time of it."

"I cannot understand your pleasure in riding an ill-conditioned brute in order to school him into good manners by sheer cruelty," said Adrian, with undisguised disapproval. "I like to be on friendly terms with my horse."

"My dear Adrian, your doctors and nurses have conspired to molly-coddle you," answered Valentine contemptuously. "They have made you think like a girl, and they have made you ride like a girl. My chief delight in a horse is to get the better of the original sin that's in him. You may give him a warm drink, Stokes. He has earned it," he added, flinging the bridle to the groom, who had come

from the stables at the sound of Mr. Belfield's return.

"Had you a good run?" asked Adrian, as they went into the house.

"Capital; and that beggar went in first-rate style when once he and I got to understand each other. We killed on Hagley Heath after a ripping half-hour over the grass."

"Come and tell mother all about it, Val."

"Has she been worrying herself about the chestnut? She was almost in tears this morning when she found I was going to ride him."

"She was getting a little uneasy just before you came home," answered Adrian lightly.

That scornful glance of his brother's eye wounded him to the quick. It implied a contemptuous acceptance of a too loving solicitude. It showed the temper of a spoiled child who takes all a mother's care as a matter of course, and has not one touch of gratitude or genuine responsive affection.

The two brothers went to the drawing-room side by side. Like and unlike. Yes, that was

the description which best indicated the close resemblance and the marked difference between them. In the form of the head and face, in the outline of the features, they resembled each other as closely as ever twin brothers have done since Nature produced these human doublets; but in colouring and in expression the brothers were curiously unlike. The elder one had the pallid tints of ill-health, an almost waxen brow, hair of a pale auburn, features refined to attenuation, eyes of a dark violet, eyebrows delicately pencilled, lashes long and drooping like those of a girl, lips of faintest carmine. It was only his intellectual power and innate manliness of feeling which redeemed Adrian's face from effeminacy; but mind was stronger than matter, and here the brave, calm spirit dominated the weakly frame.

Valentine was altogether differently constituted. His head, though shaped like Adrian's, was larger, broader at the base, and lower at the temples—a head in which animal propensities predominated. His complexion was of a dark olive, browned by exposure to all kinds of weather;

his eyes were of deepest brown—splendid eyes considered from a purely physical standpoint, large, and full, and brilliant, with a wondrous capacity for expressing all the passions of which self-willed manhood is capable. Nose, mouth, and chin were formed in the same lines as in that other face, but each feature was larger and more boldly cut. The dark hair was thicker than Adrian's, coarser in texture. Hercules might have had just such a head of hair, bristling in short crisp curves about the low forehead. That likeness and yet unlikeness between the twins was a psychological wonder to contemplative observers and theorists of all kinds.

Lady Belfield came to meet her sons as they entered the room. It was only by the most strenuous effort at self-control that she suppressed all signs of emotion and laid her hand calmly on the sportsman's shoulder, looking at him with a happy smile.

"Well, Valentine, had you a good day on the chestnut?" she asked lightly.

"Splendid. That horse will make a first-rate

hunter, in spite of you and Parker. Did you see him from the window as I brought him home?"

"Yes, I was watching you. I don't think he is quite up to your usual standard, Val. Hasn't he rather an ugly head?"

"That's just like a woman," exclaimed Valentine, with a disgusted air. "Her eye is always keen on prettiness, as if it were the Alpha and Omega. He hasn't a racer's head, if that's what you mean. He has a good serviceable head, that will bear a good deal of pulling about—rather a plain head, if you will have it. But a horse doesn't jump with his head, or gallop on his head, does he?"

"My dear Val, if you are satisfied with him——"

"Satisfied," cried Valentine, looking as black as thunder, "I tell you I am delighted with him. He is out and away the best hunter in the stables—beats that gingerbread piebald mare you gave me on my last birthday hollow."

"And yet I have heard people say the piebald is the prettiest horse in the county."

"There you go again—prettiness, all prettiness. The piebald was never well up to my weight—oh, she carries me fairly enough, I know that—but she's over-weighted. You should have given her to Adrian"—with a sneer.

"Adrian can afford to buy his own horses," answered the mother, with an affectionate look at the elder born. "The only birthday gift he will take from me is a bunch of early violets."

"All your life is full of gifts to me, mother," said Adrian. "Whenever you're tired of Cinderella I'll take her off your hands, Val."

"The deuce you will," cried Valentine. "You'll find her a trifle too much for you. It's like the old saying about the goose, dear boy. She's too much for you and not enough for me. She wants work, Adrian, not gentle exercise. She was never meant for a lady's palfrey."

Adrian sighed as he turned away from his brother, and seated himself at lady Belfield's tea-table, which had been furnished with due regard to a hungry hunting man, too impatient to wait for the eight o'clock dinner. That taunt of

Valentine's stung him as such taunts—and they were frequent—always did sting. He keenly felt his shortcomings as a horseman and as an athlete. In all those manly accomplishments in which his brother excelled, fragile health had made Adrian a failure. The doctors had warned him that to ride hard would be to endanger his life. He might amble along the country lanes, nay, even enjoy a slow canter over down or common; might see a little hunting sometimes in an elderly gentleman's fashion, waiting about upon the crest of a hill to watch the hounds working in the hollow below, or jogging up and down beside the cover while they were drawing; but those dashing flights across country which so intoxicate the souls of men were not for him.

"You have a heart that will work for you very fairly to a good old age, Sir Adrian, if you will but use it kindly," said the physician, after careful auscultation, "but you must take no liberties with it. There are plenty of ways in which a man may enjoy the country without tearing across it at a mad gallop. There is fly-fishing, for instance. I

am sure with that noble trout stream in your own park you must be fond of fly-fishing."

"I cannot imagine anything tamer than fly-fishing in one's own park," replied Adrian, with a touch of impatience. "Salmon-fishing in Scotland or in Norway——"

"Too fatiguing—too strenuous a form of pleasure for a man of your delicate constitution. A little trout-fishing in mild spring weather——"

"Merci. I must live without sport, Dr. Jason. After all, I have my library, and I have the good fortune to be fond of books, which my brother detests."

"I should have guessed as much," said Jason blandly; "Mr. Belfield has not the outlook of a reading man. He has that hardy penetrating gaze which denotes the sportsman—straight, keen, business-like, rapid, yet steady. What a wonderful specimen of manhood. I think I never saw a finer young man—and so like you, Sir Adrian."

"Is it not something of a mockery to tell me that after you have sounded this narrow chest of mine?"

"Oh, there are constitutional divergencies. Nature has been kinder to your brother in the matter of thew and sinew; but the likeness between you is really remarkable, all the more remarkable perhaps on account of that constitutional difference. And I have no doubt there is a very close affection between you—that sympathetic bond which so often unites twin children."

"Yes, I am very fond of him," answered Adrian dreamily. "Fond of him, do I say—it is more than mere fondness. I am a part of himself, feel with him in almost all things, am angry with him, sorry with him, glad with him; and yet there is antagonism. There is the misery of it. There are times when I could quarrel with him more desperately than with any other man upon earth; and yet I declare to you, doctor, he is as it were my second self."

"I can readily believe it, Sir Adrian. Who is there with whom we are so often inclined to quarrel as with ourselves? I know there is a damned bad fellow in me whom I should often like to kick."

Dr. Jason wound up with a boisterous laugh, and felt that he had earned the twenty-pound note which Sir Adrian slipped modestly into his comfortable palm. Joviality was the fashionable physician's particular line; and a case must be bad indeed in which he would not venture to be jovial. Were there but three weeks of life in a patient, Dr. Jason would take leave of him with a jocosity which was cheering enough to help the patient on a fourth week. And this case of Sir Adrian's offered no reason for dolefulness. A fragile body and a sensitive temperament, a life that might be prolonged to three score and ten, or might expire in a moment, in the very morning of youth, like the flame of a candle.

"Are you ever going to give me my tea, mother?" asked Valentine impatiently; "I am absolutely famishing."

"My dearest boy, everything is ready for you."

Valentine surveyed the low tea-table with a sweeping glance before he sat down, and then strolled across to the bell and rang violently. "Those stupid fellows always forget the cognac,"

he said, as he dropped into a chair. "I dare say if one of them came home after seven hours in the saddle, he'd want something stronger than tea."

"My dear Valentine, I am sure it is a very bad habit to poison your tea with brandy," said Lady Belfield, with a distressed look.

"Spare me the customary sermon, mother. It is a much worse habit to lecture me every time I take a spoonful of brandy. It will end by my going straight to my dressing-room after hunting, where I can enjoy a stiff glass of grog with my feet on the hobs, and with nobody to preach temperance."

"You know I love to have you here, Val," said the mother, laying her delicate hand upon her son's roughened wrist, and looking at him with ineffable tenderness.

"So be it, and in that case don't let's have any teetotal sermons because of a homœopathic dose of cognac."

The footman brought a small decanter, and Mr. Belfield half filled his cup with cognac before his mother poured out the tea. The table

was liberally furnished with varieties of cakes and muffins, anchovy sandwiches, and dainty little arrangements of *foie gras* in golden tinted rolls, which Mr. Belfield snapped up as if he had been a Newfoundland dog eating biscuits. His mother was delighted to see him in such good appetite, and sipped her tea with the serenest air, although the smell of the brandy in Valentine's reeking cup almost sickened her. These tea-drinkings after the hunt were her delight. To sit at her low table, with a son on each side of her, to linger long over the social meal, was the most delicious relaxation of her days. She asked no higher pleasure. Her evenings were often lonely, for Valentine hated sedentary occupation and intellectual dawdling of all kinds, and generally dragged his brother off to the billiard-room directly after dinner. If there were men visitors in the house for Valentine to play with, Adrian would sometimes stay in the drawing-room with his mother; but he was always at his brother's beck and call. The influence of the younger over the elder was supreme.

"I think we are like Jacob and Esau, and that my father must have willed upon his death-bed that the elder should serve the younger," said Adrian. "I can but fulfil my destiny."

The mother sighed and submitted, as she had always submitted, to Fate in the person of her sons. She had lived for them and in them so long that she had almost ceased to have individual desires or personal likings. Everything in house and stables and gardens and park and home-farm was regulated and governed by the inclinations of the brothers, albeit Lady Belfield was tenant for life in the mansion and its immediate surroundings. It happened somehow, almost imperceptibly, that in all things whereof she was mistress the inclinations of the younger son dominated those of the elder. Adrian was at once too weak and too proud to struggle against that overpowering influence.

"My dear mother, the place is yours. It is for you to decide," he would say, when Valentine had hotly maintained his own opinion with scornful depreciation of everybody else's ideas, treating

architects, landscape-gardeners, and nurserymen as if Nature had stamped them so obviously as fools that it would be mere hypocrisy to treat them with the respect due to reason and good sense. "It is for you to decide, my dear mother," said Adrian, deserting in the heat of the battle; and the upshot was inevitable. Valentine had everything his own way.

How could two gentle, yielding natures stand firm against the force of an indomitable will and a boundless self-esteem? It was natural to Adrian to doubt his own judgment, to depreciate his own capacity; but Valentine had believed in himself from his cradle, had asserted himself to his wet nurse, and had reigned supreme ever since.

Happily for the household, from an æsthetic point of view, Mr. Belfield's taste was better than his temper; his judgment was sounder than his morality. If he erred, it was on the side of strength rather than weakness; he inclined to the brilliant and striking in all things, was in favour of large effects, bold lines, vivid colouring. There

were those who shuddered at the first aspect of Mr. Belfield's billiard-room, with its scarlet draperies against black oak, its Japanese black and gold, its Rouen pottery and Neapolitan brass—there were those who declared that Mr. Belfield was the worst-dressed young man in London—but Royal Academicians had admired the arrangement of his den, and women liked his style of dress because it was picturesque.

"A picturesque man must be a cad," said Mr. Simper, who would have expired sooner than wear a hat with a brim the infinitesimal part of an inch wider or narrower than the Prince of Wales's, or a check that had not the stamp of equal authority. "A man who makes himself different from other men is not a gentleman. No gentleman ever courted observation."

It may be that Valentine Belfield rather defied than courted observation. He dressed to please himself, wore his hair long or short as his fancy prompted, would wear a low hat in Bond Street in the height of the season, and scowl upon observers with supreme contempt for their opinion. He

had his clothes cut and fashioned as it pleased him, and had never been known to accept an opinion from his tailor—not even the West-end tailor's final argument, "I wear this pattern myself, sir."

A man with a taste and a temper of his own is generally admired and looked up to by other men. Mr. Belfield had been the centre of an aristocratic little circle at Trinity, his rooms the favourite resort of some of the best-born and wildest young men at the University. Needless to say that he had not worked, that he had missed chapel, and otherwise offended against the laws of the college; that he had worn out the patience of college tutors and college coaches; and that, with a reputation for first-rate talents, he had contrived to place himself in the very lowest rank of students. Uninfluenced by the shades of the mighty dead—heedless of Bacon or Newton, Byron or Macaulay, Whewell or Thackeray—he had gone his idle way, drinking, rioting, gambling, carousing at unholy hours, insulting the authorities, flirting with barmaids, violating every rule

and regulation of that venerable pile. He had disappointed his mother's ambition, and drawn heavily upon her purse. His return to Belfield Abbey was a signal for the commencement of a rain of Cambridge tradesmen's bills and lawyers' letters, which for the next twelve months steadily descended upon the house.

There were expostulations and explanations, tears from gentle Lady Belfield, sullen defiance from Valentine, generous interposition on the part of Adrian, and finally the Cambridge traders, with but a few egregious exceptions, were paid their demands in full, which was more than any of them deserved. Lady Belfield found half the money out of her private fortune, and Adrian insisted upon providing the other half.

His own career at Trinity had been curiously different from that of his brother. His weaker health had shut him out from all the pleasures of athleticism. He had been known neither as a hunting man nor a rowing man. He had never been heard of at Newmarket. He had read assiduously, and had taken honours. He had

cultivated a few friends, but those were young men of studious habits like his own. He had lived so secluded a life that his presence in the college had only been known to the men of his own quadrangle and to the librarian, who saw him sitting in his own particular nook near Byron's statue on many a morning when other men were on the river or in the hunting-field.

For Adrian, Trinity had meant seclusion and earnest work; for Valentine, college life had been a long holiday, a riotous, reckless indulgence of youthful pleasure and youthful passions, a bad beginning for any life; and yet he had contrived amidst all his self-indulgence to leave Cambridge with the reputation of having been one of the most popular undergraduates in that great college of Trinity. He had flung away his money with a royal munificence, knowing that it was not his to fling. He had been good-natured after his fashion; he talked well, had a handsome face and commanding appearance, kept his rooms open to all the fast young men of his time, lent his horses freely till they went lame, and had a box of irre-

proachable cigars always open on his table. For one man who knew and liked Adrian there were twenty who affected to be warmly attached to Valentine. What their friendship was worth, only the after-time could show. At present he was tolerably independent of all friendship outside Belfield Abbey.

He was six-and-twenty, and had been in love, or had fancied himself in love, twenty times. Indeed he had professed to have outgrown the capacity for loving.

"Women are so monotonous," he said in one of those gushes of confidence with which he sometimes honoured his brother. He loved talking about himself, and Adrian was his most sympathetic listener. "Women are all alike. Upon my soul, Adrian, if you knew how little difference there is between the idiosyncracies of a peeress and a barmaid, you would not wonder that a man who has had a few adventures soon begins to feel that love is played out."

"My dear Val, I don't think you know much about peeresses, and I hope you know next

to nothing about barmaids," replied Adrian quietly.

It was on the evening after Valentine's first day on the chestnut. The brothers had retired to the billiard-room after dinner, and were sitting on each side of the wide old fireplace, too lazy to play, and luxuriating in the glow of the beech-logs and that kind of careless, easy-going conversation which has neither beginning, middle, nor end.

"My dear fellow, that shows how little you know about the other half of yourself. I have not reached my present age without an occasional flirtation with a peeress, and I have been passionately in love with a barmaid. The loveliest woman I ever met was a girl at an inn near Trumpington. What hogsheads of beer I have consumed as a sacrifice to her charms. Once I thought she loved me, and that I might have been wild enough to marry her. And now I am told she is singing patriotic songs, dressed as Britannia, at an East-end music hall."

"You know, Val, that a disreputable marriage would break your mother's heart."

"Don't I tell you the thing is off. I am not going to break anybody's heart—for the sake of that lovely deceiver on the Trumpington Road."

"But you are so reckless, so heedless of consequences."

"Because I live for myself, and for the enjoyment of the present hour," answered Valentine, in his deep strong voice, lying back in his low chair, and slowly puffing at a cigar.

How handsome he looked in that easy graceful attitude, the very embodiment of unblemished youth and physical power. It was but the highest type of sensual beauty—soul and mind went for but little in the well-cut face, the bold flashing glance; but yet there was some kind of charm that was not wholly physical—some touch of brightness, mirth, and courage which attracted the regard of men, and won the love of women. The creature was not wholly clay, albeit flesh predominated over spirit.

"For what else should a man live but the present?" said Valentine, continuing the argument. "Who can count upon the future—who cares for the past?"

"Conscience and memory both care for the past."

"Conscience is a bugbear which the parsons have invented for us; and memory is a morbid habit of the mind which a healthy man should discourage. I have no memory."

"Oh, Valentine!"

"Well, I suppose if I were to sit down and try back I could remember most things that have happened to me since my cradle," answered his brother lightly; "but I never cultivate my memory. I make it a rule to ignore the past. Sally Withers, the Trumpington barmaid, jilted me. I blot her out of my existence. Lady Pimlico flirted with me—courted me, made a fool of me—and then deliberately dropped me. She is gone. Do you suppose I sit and brood over the summer days we spent together on his Lordship's house-boat at Henley—when we sat in a corner under a Japanese umbrella, hiding ourselves—as much as ostriches are hidden—between two great Majolica tubs of palms, and made ourselves conspicuously idiotic? Or that I ever dream of the nights at the opera,

when we were alone together in her ladyship's box? No, Adrian. I make it my business to forget all such twaddle. Life is too short for memory of the past or forecast of the future. *Carpe diem,* dear boy. Gather your roses while you may. Be sure I mean to gather mine."

"Valentine, I verily believe you were created without a conscience."

"I was. You have the conscience, I the capacity for enjoyment. We are but two sides of one character."

CHAPTER II.

A WILD IRISH GIRL

A WEEK after that first day with the chestnut, Valentine Belfield had gone off to Paris at an hour's warning to accompany a college friend who was going on to winter at Monte Carlo, with an infallible system which he and a mathematical friend had invented two or three years before in their midnight reveries at Trinity. Valentine told his mother nothing about the system or the intended trip to Monte Carlo. He only told her that he felt hipped and wanted a change, and that as Touchwood was going to Paris he had decided on going with him and making a round of the theatres.

"The drainage is so dreadful in Paris; I am always afraid of fever," said Lady Belfield, looking intensely anxious.

"My dear mother, we shall go to the Bristol."

"And the hotels are so horribly high. They will be putting you on a fourth storey perhaps, and if there were a fire——"

"There never has been a fire at a good Continental hotel within my recollection," answered Valentine lightly. "Can't you suggest any other calamity, or any other peril—a cyclone, an earthquake, an insurrection, the fall of the Vendôme Column. I don't suppose they fastened it very securely when they put it up after the Commune."

"Dear Val, you always laugh at me."

"How can I help it, mother, when you give me such opportunities? There, kiss me, dearest, and good-bye. Lucas will have packed my portmanteau by this time. There's the dog-cart. *Je me sauve!*" And, with a hurried embrace, he ran off to the hall, his mother following to get the last look at him as he sprang into the cart, took the reins from the smart young groom, drove round the circular sweep, and spun into the avenue at a pace that threatened a catastrophe before he could reach the lodge.

He was gone, and Sir Adrian and his mother settled down into that placid and studious existence

which suited them both so well. Lady Belfield divided her time between the newest books and the most classical music. She played Scarlatti and Bach. She read Browning and Herbert Spencer. She dawdled away an occasional hour in her flower gardens, which were lovely; she went the round of greenhouses and hothouses, and talked to her gardeners, who were numerous, and who all adored her. She moved among them as a queen whose approving smile is like a ray of winter sunshine. She went every day to the stables and petted Valentine's hunters, with whom she was on the most familiar terms. Even the new chestnut, although he set his ears back when she opened the door of his box, suffered her to go in and pat him, and accepted a lump of sugar from her palm, after sniffing at it suspiciously for a minute or so.

Life was full of interest for her without going beyond her own park gates; and then there were duty drives to be taken almost every day, and calls to be returned. There was a regular exchange and barter in the way of visiting to be maintained, though Lady Belfield rarely accepted a dinner in-

vitation, or adorned a ball by her graceful presence and her fine family diamonds. She went to friendly tea-drinkings and tennis parties, and so maintained local friendships. She liked a free-and-easy visiting, which did not oblige her to take off her bonnet or put on her diamonds. Genoa velvets and Mechlin flounces hung idle in her wardrobe. She liked to dine alone with her boys, in a tea-gown, and to read or play in the peaceful solitude of her drawing-room. Life taken at this gentle pace seemed never too long or too monotonous. She sighed for no change in an existence which realized all her wishes.

People wondered much that so pretty and attractive a woman should have escaped a second marriage. But to Lady Belfield a second marriage would have seemed a crime.

"I loved my husband, and I adore my sons," she said. "What room is there left for any other affection?"

"But you ought to marry, my dear," said her friend, Mrs. Freemantle, who was distinctly practical. "A husband would be immensely useful to you

and those boys. He would look after your timber and your tenants, and would launch your sons—get them elected at the proper clubs, and all that kind of thing. He would be a steward without a salary."

Constance Belfield did not contemplate the matter from this common-sense point of view. Second marriage in the mother of a family she considered domestic treason. And when Valentine was troublesome, when the outside world deemed that a second husband, a man of strong will and clear brain, would have been invaluable to the lad's mother, Constance rejoiced that there was no one but herself to whom the sinner need be accountable, that she had the indisputable right of pardoning all his follies and paying all his debts.

The intervention of a hard-headed man of business at such times would have tortured her.

"My poor foolish boy," she said to herself, weeping in secret over the young man's delinquencies. "Thank God, there is no one to lecture him, no one to complain of him, no one to make him worse by hard measures."

She was not altogether foolish, although she erred on the side of soft-heartedness; and she knew that Valentine's career had up to this point been unsatisfactory, but she went on hoping that all would come right by-and-by; that these evil ways meant no more than the sowing of those wild oats which she had been told most young men were doomed to scatter before they sobered and settled into propriety.

Adrian was exceptionally steady. For him there were no wild oats to be sown. He had been his mother's comfort and mainstay from his very childhood; thoughtful, attentive, devoted, her companion and counsellor when he was in Eton jackets. His nature seemed almost passionless. She never remembered to have seen him violently angry. She had never suspected him of being in love. He loved her, and he had an intense sympathy with his brother; but she doubted if his heart had ever gone forth beyond that narrow home circle. His tastes and inclinations in all respects resembled her own. He loved music, of which she was passionately fond, and he was no mean per-

former upon the organ and piano. He had his mother's subdued taste in colours, her scrupulous refinement and orderly habits.

And now they two, mother and son, were alone together by the hearth, in the long November evenings, while Valentine and his friend Touchwood went the round of the theatres in Paris, and danced at strange dancing places, and matured their scheme for breaking the bank at Monte Carlo.

"Mother, did you know that Morcomb was let?" asked Sir Adrian, as he scanned the county paper at breakfast one morning, a few days after Valentine's departure.

"What, at last? No, indeed, I have heard nothing about it."

"Then you have not been with any of your gossips for some time, I suppose. Here is the paragraph. 'Morcomb, Lord Lupton's fine old family mansion, has been recently let furnished to Colonel Deverill, of The Rock, near Kilrush, county Clare. Colonel Deverill is a keen sportsman, has been master of foxhounds in his own county, and will doubtless prove an acquisition to the neigh-

bourhood.' Why, mother, how wonderstruck you look. Do you know anything about this Deverill?"

"A good deal, Adrian."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope."

"No, dear; but it was just a little startling to hear that he had settled so near us. His father and my father were bosom friends, and Gerald Deverill and I used to see a good deal of each other when he was a young man about town, in one of the household regiments. I don't mind telling you that he wanted to marry me in those days, and as he was a wild, self-willed young fellow, he made himself extremely troublesome. I was very young, you see, Adrian, and I was almost afraid of him. And then your father came, and I knew I was safe. I think it was that sweet feeling of being protected by his love that first made me fond of him—and then—and then—ah, Adrian, how fond I was of him, and how good he was—only—only a little self-willed like your brother. But he was always good to me."

The tears came into her eyes as she thought of

that brief wedded life, which had been all love, though it had not been all sunshine.

"This Deverill must be a disagreeable fellow," said Adrian. "I am sure I shall dislike him."

"Oh, no, you won't, Adrian. He is not a bad man, by any means. He was very wild in those days, drank a good deal, I'm afraid, and was altogether in a bad way; but he married a year or two after my marriage and sobered down, I was told. He has lived a good deal on the Continent of late years, and he and I have never met since your father's death."

"Whom did he marry?"

"Oh, a nobody, I believe—a girl with a little money, which he spent in a year or two. Her father was something in the City, a merchant or a broker, I think they said; and they lived in one of the new districts on the far-away side of Kensington Gardens. I have heard of them from time to time; but I have never seen him since his marriage, and I never saw his wife."

"She was not in your set, then."

"My dear Adrian, her people were in trade,"

answered Lady Belfield naïvely. "I suppose you ought to call on Colonel Deverill."

"I can hardly avoid it without being uncivil; but if you dislike the notion of seeing him here I won't call. He will understand, no doubt, why I don't."

"And he might think that I was afraid of meeting him. I would not have him suppose that for the world. No, Adrian, I should like you to call on him, just in the ordinary way. You can refer *en passant* to his early acquaintance with my family, not affecting to know that he was ever any more to me than a friend. And you will find out about his surroundings. His wife died some years ago; but I believe there are daughters. If they seem nice girls I might call on them. If not——"

"I may limit the matter to asking Colonel Deverill to a bachelor dinner—eh, mother?"

"I shouldn't like to be obliged to take up girls with Continental ideas and fast manners; and I fear these poor girls must have been sadly neglected."

"I'm afraid I'm not much of a judge of the

species girl, but I'll give you as exact a report as I can, mother," answered Adrian gaily.

He was not in any hurry to set out upon his adventure. He still retained a good deal of his boyish shyness, and a visit to strangers was of all his social obligations the most obnoxious; so he let some pleasant, studiously idle days slip by before he found the weather good enough for a drive to Morcomb, and then he girded up his loins, looked out his least damaged hat from the array of well-brushed felt and beaver in the hall, ordered his phaeton, and turned his face resolutely towards Lord Lupton's Park, which was a good five miles from Belfield Abbey.

The stable clock chimed the half-hour after two as he drove down the avenue. He would be at Morcomb at about three, which was the prescribed hour for ceremonial calls in that part of the world. Intimates might drop in at five and join in a friendly tea-drinking round a cosy little table; but for your visit of ceremony, patronage, or respect, three o'clock was the hour. Unsustained by luncheon, unrefreshed by tea, the visitor must face

his host or hostess in the awfulness of an empty drawing-room, prepared to converse vivaciously about nothing particular for at least twenty minutes.

Morcomb Park was not particularly well kept. Park and home farm had been let to the local butcher for some years, and his cattle grazed within twenty yards of the drawing-room windows. There was an old-fashioned garden on one side of the house, and there was a spacious and lofty conservatory, which in Lord Lupton's prosperous days had been one of the glories of the neighbourhood; and all the rest was pasture, upon which Mr. Pollack's oxen and sheep fed and fattened. Gardens and conservatory had both been neglected since his lordship's chronic asthma had obliged him to winter at Nice, and the house had been either empty or in the occupation of strangers. Those village wiseacres who pretend to know a great deal more than their neighbours, declared that chronic asthma was only another name for impecuniosity, and that Lord Lupton turned his back upon Morcomb because he could not afford to live in his own country.

Every one knew that poor Lady Lupton adored the place, and was never really happy anywhere else.

A succession of tenants had occupied Morcomb within the last ten years, and had been looked upon more or less coldly by the surrounding families. There is always a shade of suspicion in the rustic mind attaching to the people who occupy furnished mansions; an idea that if they were all that they ought to be they would have houses of their own. If they are rich the neighbourhood wonders where their money comes from. If they are foreigners the neighbourhood is sure they are not all they ought to be. Madame is a *ci-devant* opera-singer; Monsieur has a talent for card-sharping. If they are Americans, and scatter their money in the lavish Transatlantic style, opinion is against them from the outset. The only people who are kindly looked upon in this connection are those whose names and belongings are plainly set forth in Debrett, and who have houses of their own in other counties. To these are the arms of friendship opened.

Colonel Deverill was such a one. The Rock,

Kilrush, was his ostensible dwelling-place; and, though his reputation was by no means untarnished, he was known to be a gentleman by birth, and to have begun life in a crack regiment. The two facts, that he was an Irishman and had lived a good deal on the Continent, counted naturally in his disfavour, and the county looked upon him with a qualified approval.

The house was half a mile from the lodge, and a fairly kept drive wound along the base of a low hill, athwart undulating pasture land, dotted here and there with oaks and elms, and clusters of ancient hawthorns, and offered Sir Adrian a view of Mr Pollack's beeves cropping the scanty sward of late autumn. On the crest of the hill stood the mansion, a classic villa about a hundred years old, much after the manner of the Club House at Hurlingham, with portico and pediment of white stone, and uniform rows of long French windows. A large bay window, broken out forty years before by an unæsthetic Lord Lupton, at the end of the south wing, was the only relief to that faultless uniformity.

There were no servants about. Sir Adrian's groom pulled a bell, which rang with startling loudness a long way off, pealing with a determined clamour as if it would never have done ringing. Sir Adrian alighted, ashamed of the noise he had caused to be made, flung the reins to his groom, and went up the steps. The hall doors were open, and a girl's voice cried, "Your shot, Leo," as he approached the threshold.

This was embarrassing, but the situation became even more involved when another voice exclaimed, "That bell means another county family come to stare and catechize. *Je m'esquive.*"

But before the speaker could escape, Adrian had crossed the threshold, and was standing, hat in hand, face to face with two young ladies, dressed as he had never seen girls dressed before, and both of them a great deal prettier than any girls his memory suggested to him by way of comparison.

"Miss Deverill, I think," he said to one of the damsels. "My name is Belfield, and I must apologize most humbly for bursting in upon you in this manner."

"Oh, but you could not possibly help it. If architects will plan houses with billiard-rooms on the doorsteps, the occupants must pay the penalty," answered the elder sister gaily. "We are very glad to see you, Sir Adrian. This is my sister, Miss Deverill, and I am Mrs. Baddeley. I am sorry my father is out this afternoon. He would have been charmed to make your acquaintance. He has talked tremendously about Lady Belfield, whom he had the pleasure of knowing quite intimately when they were both young. Will you come to the drawing-room, or shall we sit and talk here? Helen and I make this our den for the most part. You see we have no brothers to dispute the ground with us."

"I would much rather stay here," said Adrian.

Mrs. Baddeley had flung aside her cue while she was talking, and Miss Deverill, who had been sitting on the table when he first beheld her, was now standing beside it, flicking the chalkmarks off the cloth with her handkerchief. She was a tall slim girl, in a sage-coloured velveteen gown, with a short waist and a broad yellow sash, and with her

reddish auburn hair, which was superb in hue and texture and quantity, falling down her back in a rippling mass of light and shadow. Her gown was short enough to show a perfect instep and a slender ankle, set off by Cromwell shoes and yellow silk stockings. The married sister wore an olive plush tea gown over an Indian red petticoat, red shoes and stockings, and her hair, which was darker than Helen's, rolled up in a great untidy mass, and fastened with a red ribbon. The style and costume were altogether different from the regulation afternoon attire in this part of the world, which was generally severe—a tailor gown and a neat linen collar being the rule.

Had Sir Adrian seen this kind of picturesque toilette in Bedford Park, on the person of a plain girl, he would have regarded it with infinite disgust, for he had all the masculine love of neatness and subdued colouring: but both these women were so pretty, both were so graceful, with the easy grace of perfect self-assurance, that gracious air of women who are accustomed to be admired, approved, and made much of on all occasions, that,

had they been clad in such calicoes as Manchester manufactures to meet the crude desires of the untutored African, he must have not the less admired them.

There was a large fire blazing in the wide grate, and there were three or four delightful armchairs (of draped and cushioned bamboo) about the hearth, and a scarlet Japanese table, suggestive of afternoon tea. Those chairs, with their vivid reds and yellows, and tassels and fringes, and Liberty silk handkerchiefs tied about them, had never belonged to Lord Lupton, whose furniture had all been bought in the reign of William the Fourth. Chairs and table were an importation of the Deverills, Adrian saw at a glance.

They all three sat down in front of the fireplace, while the outer doors were shut by the butler, who had come in a leisurely way to see if that loud pealing of the hall bell were a matter requiring his personal attention. He closed the double doors, put a fresh log on the fire, and discreetly retired.

"And now tell us all about Lady Belfield," said

the married sister, perching her feet upon the old brass fender, and affording Adrian a full view of arched insteps and Louis heels. "Is she quite well, and is she as lovely as she was when she was young?"

"That might be saying too much—I mean about the loveliness," answered Adrian, smiling; "but to my mind my mother is the prettiest woman of her age that I have ever seen. Of course, a son is partial. As for health, well, yes, I think I may say she is quite well. Would you like her to drive over and see you?"

"Of course we should. We are dying to see her," said Helen, who was not at all shy. "If English etiquette were not written in blood, like the laws of Draco, we should have made father take us to Lady Belfield the day after we arrived here."

"You don't appreciate British conventionalities?"

"I detest everything British, present company of course excepted. We have always had such good times in France and Italy; and as for Switzer-

land, I feel as if I had been born there. I am longing to be at Vevey, or at one of those dear little villages on Lake Lucerne, now, when your horrid English winter is beginning. I can't think why father persisted in bringing us here. It is almost as bad as The Rock."

"You don't care for Ireland?"

"Does any one, do you think? If you knew Kilrush, you wouldn't ask such a question; but you don't, of course."

"I have not that privilege."

"Well, perhaps it is a privilege to have lived in the dullest, most out-of-the-way hole on the surface of this earth," retorted Miss Deverill lightly, flinging herself back in the Liberty chair, and showing rather more ankle and instep than the rival establishment on the other side of the hearth. "There is something exceptional in the fact, of course. But why, being obliged to live at The Rock occasionally for duty, my father should bring us to a remote Devonshire village for pleasure, is more than this feeble intellect of mine can grasp."

"I don't think there's much mystery about it,"

said Mrs. Baddeley. "In the first place, father is tired of wandering about the Continent; and in the second, my husband will be home on leave in December, and I must be in England to receive him. So my father very good-naturedly suggested a country place where Frank could stay with us and get a little huntin' and shootin'. If Frank had been obliged to find his own quarters the choice would have been between London lodgings or staying with his own people, both equally odious for *me*."

"Mr. Baddeley is in the army, I conclude."

"Yes, he is a Major in the 17th Lancers, and has been in India for the last two years, and I'm afraid may have to go back there again after a winter in England."

"You return with him?"

"Unhappily, no," sighed the lady, "I cannot stand the climate. I tried India for a year, and it was something too dreadful. I was reduced to a shadow, and I looked forty. Now, Helen, on your honour, didn't I look forty when I landed from Bombay?"

"You certainly looked very bad, dear," said Helen. "Do you think it would be too dreadful to offer Sir Adrian tea at a quarter to four," with a glance at a fine old eight-day clock. "Do you *ever* take tea, Sir Adrian?"

"A teapot is the favourite companion of my studious hours," answered Adrian. "May I ring the bell for you?"

"Yes, please, and you won't laugh at us and call us washerwomen for wanting tea so early."

"I promise to do neither; but were my brother here I would not answer for him. He is very severe on my womanish passion for the teapot."

"Is he very different from you?"

"Altogether different."

"And yet you are twins. I thought twins were always alike."

"I believe we are alike in person, except that Valentine is handsomer, stronger, and bigger than I. But it is in tastes and character we are unlike. Yet perhaps, after all, it is mostly a question of health and physical energy. His robust constitution has made him incline to all athletic exercises

and manly sports, while my poor health has made me rather womanish. I am obliged to obey the doctors, were it only to satisfy my mother."

"If Mr. Belfield is as nice as you are, I am sure we shall all like him," said Mrs. Baddeley frankly. "I hear he is abroad just now."

"Yes, he is in Paris, *en route* for the South; but I don't think he will be long away. He is very fond of hunting, and won't care to miss too much of it."

The leisurely butler brought in the tea-tray, and arranged it comfortably in front of Miss Deverill, who was allowed to enjoy all those privileges which involved the slightest exertion. Mrs. Baddeley was the very genius of idleness, and never picked up a pocket handkerchief, shut a door, or buttoned a boot for herself. She required to be waited upon and looked after like a baby. She attributed this lymphatic condition entirely to the twelve months she had spent in Bombay, which was supposed to have shattered her nerves and undermined her constitution. Helen, who had never been in India, was expected to write her sister's letters, pick up her

handkerchief, and to find screens to protect her complexion from the fire, by which she sat at all times and seasons. Helen's maid was expected to wait upon her from morning to night, to the neglect of Helen's wardrobe.

So Helen poured out the tea, and they all nestled cosily round the fire, with as intimate an air as if they had been friends from childhood. The two women chattered about their continental life, their summers at Biarritz or Arcachon, their winters at Nice or at Vevey, and of those dreadful penitential periods of residence in Ireland. "Father is afraid of our being boycotted if he once gets the reputation of being an absentee," explained Helen, "so we make a point of spending three months of every year at Kilrush, and we pretend to be very fond of the peasantry on the estate. They really are nice, warm-hearted creatures; though I dare say they would shoot us on the slightest provocation. And father has a yacht on the Shannon, and altogether it is not half a bad life."

"Speak for yourself, Helen," said her sister peevishly; "you can bear solitude. I can't. I

hope the people about here give decent parties," she added, turning to Adrian.

"They are not very energetic party-givers. A couple of balls within a radius of twenty miles and half-a-dozen dinners constitute a rather gay season."

"Good heavens, am I to exist all the winter upon two balls!" cried Mrs. Baddeley. "I shall forget how to waltz. My diamonds will go off colour from being shut up so long in their cases."

Sir Adrian wondered a little to hear an officer's wife talk of diamonds as if she had been a duchess, but he opined that Major Baddeley must be a man of substance. Certainly Colonel Deverill's daughter could hardly have been jewelled from the paternal resources, which every one knew to be meagre.

What a lovely woman she was, lolling back in her chair with the firelight shining on her hair and eyes—large hazel eyes. Every feature was charming, if not altogether faultless: the nose small and slightly *retroussé*, the mouth rather large, with full carmine lips and a bewitching smile; the chin beautifully rounded, the complexion of creamy whiteness. The younger sister was like her, only

prettier, fresher, more girlish, eyes larger and more brilliant, hair brighter and more luxurant, mouth smaller and of a more exquisite mould, nose less coquettish and more dignified, a face to dream about, a face to sing in Society verses, and glorify in fashionable photographs.

The clock struck five and startled Sir Adrian from his forgetfulness of all things but the two faces and the two voices and the little glimpses of two hitherto unknown lives, revealed to him by that careless prattle. He rose at once.

"I must really apologize for the length of my first visit," he said.

"You wouldn't if you knew how dull we are, and how anxious we were to see you and Lady Belfield. I hope she will come soon," said the elder sister.

"She shall come to-morrow," answered Adrian.

"Oh, that is too good of you. Please bring her to lunch. My father will be charmed."

"I'm afraid to engage her for lunch. I know that in a general way she dislikes going out so early. Afternoon tea is her passion."

"Then bring her to afternoon tea. She shall not discover us in the hall as you did. She shall find us in the drawing-room, behaving properly."

Adrian was glad to hear this. He had an idea that the vision of two girls playing billiards with open doors, and that exclamation, "your shot," would have disparaged the young ladies in his mother's estimation. He also hoped that Helen would have her hair less carelessly displayed to-morrow afternoon.

"She shall certainly come to-morrow, unless there is something extraordinary to prevent her," he said, "and in that case I'll send you a note, Mrs. Baddeley."

"You will not put us to the trouble of being proper for nothing. That is very kind of you. Good-bye."

She rang for Donovan, the butler, who appeared five minutes afterwards, just as Sir Adrian was disappearing. The sisters went with their visitor to the door, which he opened for himself. They went out into the windy afternoon with him, and patted and admired his horses, which had waited

in the cold much longer than they were accustomed to wait. The two girls stood in the portico and watched him drive away, and waved white hands to him as to an old friend.

Scarcely had he driven out of sight of them when his heart began to fail him as to that promise which he had made about his mother. He had been eager to pledge her to friendship with these strangers; and now he began to ask himself whether these two young women, lovely as they were, would not appear intolerable in her eyes. His mother was the essence of refinement; and these girls, though assuredly charming, were not refined. They had a free and easy air which would jar upon a woman whose secluded life had kept her unacquainted with the newest developments in Society and manners. Young women who wore their hair *au naturel,* and showed their ankles freely, were an unknown race to Lady Belfield; nor was she familiar with the type of young woman who is thoroughly at home with strangers of the opposite sex the minute after introduction. Lady Belfield's manners had been formed in the quiet

and reserved school. She had never played billiards, or been interested in racing, or gambled in a Kursaal, or enjoyed any one of those amusements which society smiles upon now-a-days. She had been an only daughter and an heiress, brought up very strictly, permitted few amusements, and only a chosen circle of friends; knowing not Hurlingham or Ascot, Goodwood or Baden; oscillating between a dull house in London and a duller house in the country; working at her piano conscientiously under a fashionable German master, cultivating her mind by the perusal of all the best books of the day, attending all the best operas and concerts, dancing at half-a-score of aristocratic balls in the season, and knowing as little of the world as an intelligent child of ten.

"I'm afraid she'll hardly like them as much as I do," thought Adrian innocently. "They are so frank, so friendly, so full of life, and so different from all the girls we have met round about here. I wonder what the father is like?"

And then he recalled his feelings as he drove along this road two hours ago, and remembered

with what a suspicious mind he had thought of Colonel Deverill, inclined to suspect that gentleman of the most Macchiavellian motives for planting himself within easy reach of Belfield Abbey. Had he not come to Morcomb with the secret intention of renewing his old suit to Lady Belfield, of trying to win her for his spoil now that she was a wealthy widow, her own mistress, not too old to marry again, free to marry whom she chose? Yes, he had been inclined to suspect the Colonel of hidden views in this direction; and yet had he any such scheme it was strange that he should not have set about the business ten years ago, since he had been quite eleven years a widower. That such a scheme should be an after-thought would be strange.

And now, in his homeward drive, Adrian was assured that Colonel Deverill had come to the neighbourhood in all innocence of mind, in his happy-go-lucky Irish way, glad to get a cheap house in a picturesque country.

CHAPTER III.

DANGER

LADY BELFIELD consented to fulfil the engagement which her son had made for her, but she owned that her dear Adrian had been somewhat precipitate.

"To call two days running seems rather too eager," she said, "and if we find by-and-by that Colonel Deverill has degenerated, and that the girls are *not* nice, it will be difficult to draw back. To go to them twice in a week implies such an ardour of friendship."

Adrian blushed.

"I think you will like them," he said, with a troubled air.

"You have told me so little about them after being with them so long. What did they talk about all the time?"

"The places where they had lived, mostly. You

see we had no common friends to pull to pieces. Mrs. Baddeley seemed horrified when I told her what a limited amount of gaiety she is likely to get in this part of the country."

"Then she is evidently fond of pleasure."

"I'm afraid she is. However, her husband is expected home next month, and no doubt he will keep her in the right path."

"And the unmarried sister; what is she like?"

"Very like Mrs. Baddeley, only prettier."

"My dear Adrian, you talk of nothing but their beauty. I'm afraid they must be empty-headed girls."

"They are not blue-stockings. They did not quote Huxley or Sir John Lubbock, did not make a single inquiry about the geology of the neighbourhood or our antiquarian remains. I believe they are the kind of women who think that ruined abbeys were invented for pic-nics, and who only consider a geological stratum in its adaptability to the growth of roses or strawberries. They are very handsome, and I think they are very nice.

But you will be able to judge for yourself in ten minutes."

This dialogue took place in Lady Belfield's barouche, on the way to Morcomb.

They were approaching Mr. Pollack's demesne, and a little flock of Mr. Pollack's sheep had just passed them in a cloud of dust on their way to the slaughter-house, a sight that always afflicted Lady Belfield, so tender was her love of all four-footed beasts, from the petted fox-terrier in her drawing-room to the half-starved horse on the common.

The carriage drove up to the Corinthian portico, and before the horses stopped Colonel Deverill was out upon the steps to welcome his old love. He handed her out of her carriage, and escorted her into the house. He was a handsome-looking man, with grey hair and black moustache and eyebrows, a man whom strangers generally spoke of as "striking."

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am for this early visit, Lady Belfield," he said. "I was so anxious for my girls to know you. They have had

such a wandering life, poor children. I have so few friends, except in that miserable country of mine, where, of course, everybody knows them. And this is your son?" shaking hands with him as he spoke; "my girls told me how well they got on with you yesterday, Sir Adrian. Brazen-faced hussies, I'm afraid you found them."

Again Adrian blushed, so strangely did the paternal phrase jar upon his ear.

"They are not at all like the ordinary run of young ladies," said Deverill. "I have brought them up in the true spirit of *camaraderie*, and I always think of them as jolly good fellows."

Lady Belfield looked horrified. She accompanied her host through an ante-room to the long drawing-room, speechless with wonder that any father should so speak of his daughters.

Two fair and graceful forms rose from before the hearth, and Adrian breathed more freely. No flowing tresses to-day, and a far less liberal display of ankles. Mrs. Baddeley wore a fashionable tailor gown and a high collar, and her hair was dressed to perfection.

Helen was in soft, grey cashmere, with a falling collar of old lace, and long tight sleeves, which set off the beautiful arms and slender white hands. She was still æsthetic, but she was tidy, and her little bronze slippers only played at bo-peep under the long limp skirt, as she came forward to welcome Lady Belfield.

Her beauty was indisputable; her smile would have fascinated an anchorite. She received Lady Belfield with caressing sweetness, almost ignoring Adrian, to whom she only gave the tips of her taper fingers. She seated herself on a low sofa by her guest, and asked leave to loosen her mantle.

"You will take it off, won't you? You are not going to pay us a flying visit. Father, take Lady Belfield's mantle directly, or she will be suffocated in this warm room."

Between them they removed her ladyship's cloak, and made her comfortable upon the sofa, with a hassock for her feet, and a little table for her teacup.

"Now, you look homelike and friendly," said

Helen, seating herself on a low ottoman, so as to be in a manner at the visitor's feet.

Colonel Deverill looked on with a pleased air.

"I hope you won't object to our being very fond of you," pleaded Helen. "You are not the least like a stranger to us, Lady Belfield. Father has talked so much of your girlish days and his young mannish days, when all the world was so much better than it is now, and when even an Irish estate was worth something. How hard it is for us young people to be born into such a bad used-up world, isn't it? To be created at the fag-end of everything!"

The girl almost took Constance Belfield's breath away. She was so easy, so spontaneous, and her caressing manner had such an air of reality. Adrian's mother had come in fear and doubt, rather inclined to dislike Colonel Deverill's daughters, who were only beautiful; and this one was wheedling herself into the warm motherly heart already.

"And so you have not forgotten the old days in Eaton Square, when your father and my father were

such friends," she said to the Colonel at last, feeling that she must say something. "It is very pleasant to find you have made your daughter like me in advance."

"I have not forgotten a single detail of that time," replied Deverill. "It was just the one golden period of my life, before I had found out what care means. So long as I was a pensioner on my father everything went well with me; if I got into difficulties the dear old boy always got me out of them. There was a growl, perhaps, and then I was forgiven. But when he died, and I was my own master, with a rich wife, too, as people told me, the floodgates of extravagance were opened, and the stream was too strong for me. I thought there must be a lot of spending in our two fortunes, and I took things easily. When I pulled up at last, there was deuced little left, only just enough for us to get along with in a very humble way. We have had to cut and contrive, I can tell you, Lady Belfield. This girl of mine doesn't know what it is to have a gown from a fashionable milliner; and I have left off cigars for the last six

years. I only keep a box or two on the premises for my friends."

"A case of real distress," sighed Mrs. Baddeley, with a tragi-comical air; "we contrive to be very happy in spite of the wolf at the door, don't we father? It is an Irish gentleman's normal state to be ruined. Now, Helen, go and pour out the tea, and let me sit by Lady Belfield."

Helen went to the table, which Donovan had just set out. There was no other servant in attendance. This slow and faithful Hibernian seemed to comprise the indoor staff.

"And are these all your family?" asked Constance, looking at the sisters.

"These are all I have in the world, and one of these will be deserting me, I suppose, if her husband can contrive to stay in England," answered Colonel Deverill.

"Which I hope he may be able to do, poor fellow," said Mrs. Baddeley, with a more careless air than Lady Belfield quite approved in a wife's mention of an absent husband.

Adrian handed the tea-cups and muffins, and

when those duties were performed slipped into a seat beside Helen, and they two talked confidentially, while Mrs. Baddeley and her father and Lady Belfield carried on an animated conversation, chiefly about the neighbourhood and its little ways.

Sir Adrian was questioning the young lady for the most part, trying to find out what manner of girl she was, so that he might be the better able to meet a second attack from his mother.

Did she hunt? Yes, and she adored hunting; it was just the one thing in life worth living for.

"But I think you are fond of yachting, too," suggested Adrian. "You talked of yachting yesterday."

"I revel in a yacht. Yes, when there's no hunting, yachting is just the one thing I live for. When father had a two-hundred-ton yacht cruising about the Mediterranean my life was ecstasy."

"Then you are a good sailor?"

"If that means never being ill I am a very good sailor. But I go a little further than that,

for I know something about navigating a yacht. I should not be in the least afraid of finding myself at sea without a skipper."

"These are out-of-door accomplishments," said Adrian; "no doubt you have equal gifts for winter and wet weather. You are musical, of course."

"*Comme ci comme ça.* I can play a valse or accompany a song."

"Your own songs, for instance."

"My own, or yours, if you sing."

"Alas, no; I am not vocal, though I do a little in the way of instrumental music. But you—I like to know all your talents. You paint, perhaps—flowers."

"Heaven forbid! Do I look the kind of girl to devote a week to the study of a carnation in a glass of water, not a bit like when it's done? or to a hedge-sparrow's nest and a bunch of primroses? No, I never have used a brush; but I sometimes indulge in a little caricaturing with a quill pen and an inkpot. But how very egotistically I am prosing. Tell me about yourself, please, Sir Adrian, since we are to be friends as well as neighbours.

What are your particular vanities—tennis, shooting, fishing? I hear you don't hunt."

"No, I don't hunt; I do a little fly-fishing in the season, and I shoot a few pheasants every October, just to keep pace with the neighbourhood. I am not a sportsman, Miss Deverill. Books and music are my only vanities."

"I adore books," said Helen, smiling at him "they furnish a room so sweetly. If I were rich enough I would have mine all in vellum, with different coloured labels."

"You are a connoisseur of bindings, I see."

"Oh, I like everything to look pretty. It is the torment of my life that I am not surrounded with beautiful things. In our nomadic existence it is impossible to have one's own atmosphere. Two or three Liberty chairs and a little Venetian glass won't make home in a wilderness. I hope some day I shall have a perfect house of my own and heaps of money."

Lady Belfield rose. The visit had lasted nearly three-quarters of an hour, not so long as Adrian's yesterday.

"You will come and see me soon, I hope," she said to Mrs. Baddeley.

"I am dying to see the Abbey. I am told it is too lovely."

"It is a dear, good old place, and we are all fond of it. I heard you talking of books, Miss Deverill. I know Adrian will be pleased to show you his library."

"I shall be delighted to see it—and the stables," answered Helen. "I have heard so much of the stables. And I want to see Mr. Belfield's hunters."

"I am sorry he is not at home to show them to you. He is very proud of them."

"Oh, but it will be fun to get acquainted with them in his absence; and when he comes back it will seem as if I had gone half-way towards knowing him," said Helen laughingly.

She and her sister went with Lady Belfield to the portico, and hung about her as she got into her carriage. These caressing Irish ways were new to Constance Belfield, but she yielded to the fascination of two fair faces and two fresh young voices, full of music.

"I don't know that they are altogether good style, Adrian," she said, as they drove home, "but they are very sweet."

Adrian agreed as to their sweetness, but not as to their deficiency in style.

"I don't believe in any hard and fast rules for a woman's manners," he said, rather irritably. "I don't recognize that conventional standard by which every woman must speak and look and move in exactly the same fashion. I think Mrs. Baddeley and her sister are simply charming in their unstudied frankness and warm-hearted enthusiasm. How really pleased they were to see you."

"They seemed very cordial; yet, as I was quite a stranger to them——"

"Oh, but you were not a stranger. They had talked of you and thought of you, and elevated you into a kind of ideal friend. Their hearts went out to you at once."

"They are very charming, but when I meet with girls of that kind I am always reminded of Tot, the fox-terrier."

"As how, mother?"

"She is such a darling thing, and if she sees me in the garden or the stableyard, she rushes to me and leaps up at me in an ecstasy of affection; but I have seen her behave just the same five minutes afterwards to the butcher. It seems an exuberance of love that runs over anyhow."

"Rather hard upon Helen Deverill to compare her with a fox terrier!" said Adrian.

Helen Deverill! How familiar seemed the sound of her name to him already. Helen Deverill! and he had known her only four-and-twenty hours.

"You'll ask them over soon, I suppose, mother?"

"If you like, dear."

"To dinner?"

"That means a party."

"Oh, no, pray don't have a party. The Vicar, perhaps, and the Freemantles—just three or four friendly people. One sees so little of one's friends at a set dinner. They would like to meet Freemantle and his wife, I dare say."

"And we could ask Jack Freemantle, as there are girls."

"Yes, I suppose we must ask Jack. He is an oaf, but the kind of oaf who always gets on with girls."

"He sings, Adrian."

"Did I not say that he was an oaf, mother. In my estimation, a man who sings ranks almost as low as a man who plays the flute."

"And yet I thought you were fond of music."

"Music, yes; but not amateur singing and playing. It is because I love music that I hate the young man who carries a roll of songs when he goes out to dinner, and the young woman who can sit down in cold blood to murder Beethoven."

The mother smiled and then sighed. Her son was all that was dear to her, but she had the feeling that a good many mothers and fathers must needs experience now-a-days, that the young men and women of this present generation are trained too fine.

The invitation to a friendly dinner, at three days' notice, was sent next morning. Adrian reminded his mother of the letter at least three

times before it was written, and despatched by a mounted messenger. Posts in the country are so slow, and there was always a hunter to be exercised.

Sir Adrian walked across the fields to Chirwell Grange, and invited Mr. and Mrs. Freemantle, whose house was just three-quarters of a mile from the Abbey, as the crow flies. Mrs. Freemantle was his mother's most intimate friend in the parish, a sturdy, practical woman, who affected nothing better than common sense, but excelled in the exercise of that admirable quality. Her well-to-do neighbours, for the most part, disliked her. She was too keen and outspoken for them; but the poor and the sick adored her. She had known the brothers from their cradles, and treated them as cavalierly as she treated her own Jack, future Squire of Chirwell, or her daughter Lucy, a tall slip of a girl who scarcely seemed to have a mind of her own, so overshadowed was she by her strong-minded mother.

"You must all come," said Adrian to this kindly matron, who stood bareheaded in the cold,

clipping the dead leaves off a favourite shrub in a thicket that bounded her lawn. "I am sure you will like them."

"Them," echoed Mrs. Freemantle. "Then there are more than Colonel Deverill? You only spoke of him just now."

"There are his daughters—two daughters."

"Oh, there are daughters, are there? Is that the reason you are so eager to launch this new man? I thought you generally held yourself aloof from girls, Adrian. I know you have been very tiresome whenever I have wanted you here to play tennis."

"I am not particularly inclined to girlish society in a general way, perhaps. But these ladies are—well, a little out of the common."

Mrs. Freemantle gave a *sotto voce* whistle.

"I see," she said, "They are the new style of girls, fast and furious; just the kind of girls I should not like my Lucy to know. They would corrupt her in a week. She would begin to think of nothing but her frocks, and consider herself a martyr because she lives in the country eleven

months in every twelve. God forbid that she should ever get intimate with such girls. Irish too! I believe that after five-and-twenty they generally drink."

"Don't you think it would be as well to see them before you condemn them?" said Adrian, who was used to Mrs. Freemantle's little ways, and not prone to take offence at her speech.

"I am not condemning them. I am only preparing myself for the worse. Yes, of course we will dine with you, if Lady Belfield wants us. We are free for Saturday, I know."

"You'll all come."

Mrs. Freemantle pursed up her lips in another suppressed whistle.

"Four would be too many. Jack and the father and I will come. That will be more than enough of us."

"You are afraid to trust Lucy among my Hibernians. I don't think the ladies have taken to whisky yet. One of them is married, by-the-by, her husband expected home from Bombay shortly."

"A grass widow," exclaimed Mrs. Freemantle; "worse and worse. I feel sure they are a disreputable set, and your eagerness to insinuate them into society is a mistaken benevolence. And you would make me your catspaw. I am to be the thin end of the wedge."

"I don't believe Colonel Deverill or his daughters care a straw about your stuck-up rural society; only they are bright, clever people, and I want to see something of them myself."

"Take care, Adrian. What if this Irish Colonel wants to be your step-father?"

"He will never realize his wish. I can trust my mother's discretion, and her love for her sons."

"My dear Adrian, nine people out of ten would say your mother acted wisely in marrying again, if she were to make a suitable match. Your brother Valentine is not the easiest young man to manage ——"

"Do you think a step-father would make him more manageable, Mrs. Freemantle? I wonder you can talk such nonsense," exclaimed Adrian, getting angry.

"My dear boy, I don't know what to think about step-fathers and second marriages; but I think your mother has a troublesome handful with her younger son."

"He is a very good fellow, and he is very fond of his mother."

"Fond of her, after his own fashion, yes—a dutiful son, no. Well, Adrian, every back has to carry its burden; may your mother's rest lightly. You are the person who can best lighten it for her. She has at least one devoted son. There, there, you look angry and you look distressed. My foolish tongue has been running on too fast. I promise to be in my most agreeable mode on Saturday evening, and I'll try to admire Colonel Deverill's daughters. What is the married lady's name?"

"Baddeley."

"What? We have some Baddeleys among our family connections. I dare say we shall find out that Mrs. Baddeley's husband is a kind of cousin. The world is so absurdly small."

From Chirwell Adrian walked to the Vicarage,

and in the dusty old library, where the worthy Vicar had taught him his rudiments twelve years ago, discovered that luminary nodding over his Jeremy Taylor, exactly in the same attitude and, as it seemed to his old pupil, in the same suit of clothes which had marked him in those earlier years. It was a tradition in Chadford that the Vicar never read any other book than those mottled-calf-bound volumes of the great divine, and that he had never been known in his sermons to quote any other authority, yet produced his name ever with an air of novelty, as one who introduced a new light to his congregation.

He looked up smilingly as Adrian entered unannounced, having been always free to go in as one of the family since his days of pupilage.

"My dear boy, I haven't seen you for an age," said the Vicar, holding out his thin right hand, while his left still clasped his book. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Making some new acquaintances, Vicar; and I want you to come and meet them next Saturday evening."

And then Adrian entered once again upon a graphic description of Colonel Deverill and his daughters, finding a more sympathetic listener in the Vicar than he had found in Mrs. Freemantle.

Reginald Rockstone was a man of peculiar delicacy of feeling, not deeply learned but exquisitely critical, knowing a few authors well, worshipping a few poets with all his mind and all his heart, and seeing all things from their most spiritual standpoint.

"It must be sad for these young women to be motherless, and with a wild Irish father," he said gently; "and the married girl—she is little more than a girl, I take it—sad for her to be separated from her husband."

"She is just now expecting him home," said Adrian, "and she seems in excellent spirits."

The Vicar was a bachelor, and his own master in all things. The living was not one of the plums of the Church, but the income was ample for a man whose tastes were of the simplest and who had some means of his own. He was a man of excellent family, a gentleman to the core of his heart.

His poor parishioners adored him; his friends among the country people tolerated him as a harmless eccentric. The small professional people, village doctor, market-town solicitors, considered him reserved and supercilious. He refused all invitations to dinner from this class, though he would take a cup of afternoon tea with their wives now and then, to show them he bore no malice.

"Why should I dine out unless it be to dine more pleasantly than I can at home?" he argued, when he talked over his parish and his idiosyncracies with his intimate friend Lady Belfield. "My evening by the fireside or in my garden is always precious to me. I have the books I love for my companions, and their company never palls. At my age a man's leisure evenings are numbered. He cannot garner them too carefully. Why should I go out to sit an hour and a half at a gaudily arranged dinner table, surrounded by petty formalities, in an atmosphere of roast mutton, and among people who look as if their evening dress was a kind of armour, to hear the smallest of small talk, to struggle with irrepressible yawns, to endure

all the agonies of casual attendance from a sham butler. When I come here—or to houses like this—my body basks in a luxury that I am sybarite enough to appreciate; while my mind expands and soars in unison with minds that think only noble thoughts. Here we talk of books and of spiritual things; in the village or the town the talk is of politics or persons—hovers between Gladstone's last speech and the latest scandal about the Board of Guardians."

To Belfield Abbey, therefore, the Vicar went whenever he was bidden. Lady Belfield's low voice and sympathetic manner had a peculiar charm for him. So far as that great tender heart of his had ever gone out to a woman, it had gone out to her years ago, in the early days of her widowhood, when she came home to the Abbey with her two boys—a stricken mourner, deeming her sorrow above all sorrows. He—a grave man of seven and thirty, old for his years—had comforted and advised her, had helped her in the bringing up of her sons, and had prepared them for Eton and coached them for Oxford. He, who had never on any other

occasion sacrificed that golden leisure which he prized so highly—the leisure to read old books and muse and dream over them—had for Lady Belfield's sake toiled at the very elements of classical education, at declensions and conjugations, at Cornelius Nepos and Livy. In Adrian he had found a pupil after his own heart, and at five-and-twenty Adrian was still his pupil, still delighting to read a Greek play with him, proud to discuss a tough passage in Plato or Aristotle; or to talk about Horace and his little ways, as if they both had known him intimately.

With Valentine education had been a tougher job. Clever, idle, arrogant, self-opinionated; from a very early stage always convinced that he knew more, or understood better, than his master: to teach him had been like hewing shapely stones out of the hardest rock. The material was there, could one but quarry it; but the labour was ungrateful, and often seemed hopeless. The pupil never wanted to learn what the master wished to teach him. When the good Vicar opened the Æneid, the boy cried, "A fig for classics," and was hot upon read-

ing "Don Quixote" in the original, angry with his master because he would not turn from the beaten path of duty to teach him Spanish.

"You are a good Spanish scholar; my mother told me so when she was sounding your praises," said Valentine; "why won't you teach me Spanish?"

"Because you are very backward with your Latin. Stick to that, Val, and it will help you with Spanish by-and-by."

"I sha'n't care about Spanish by-and-by. I want to learn it now."

This was a sample of many such arguments. The lad was obstinate and wrong-headed, but the Vicar never gave way to his whims; and this may have been the reason that Valentine liked Mr. Rockstone better than any one else at Chadford.

But with advancing manhood Valentine exhibited characteristics which filled his mother's loyal friend with apprehension. He was uneasy when the young man was at the Abbey. He was more uneasy when he was away; dreading lest every day should bring some evil tidings to the mother. He, who had studied

Lady Belfield's thoughts and inclinations as closely as only one who fondly loves can study a character, knew that to the mother's heart the wayward son was the more precious.

"She loves them both," he told himself; "she loves Adrian exactly as a good mother should love a good son; but she loves the other one foolishly, blindly, sinfully—if, indeed, it be a sin to make an idol of poor humanity."

Ten minutes to eight on Saturday evening, and the Vicar was luxuriating in the glow of a splendid fire, in a drawing-room full of light and colour, the perfume of hothouse flowers, and the litter of new books and periodicals. Lady Belfield sat in her favourite chair by the hearth, with her eye on the door. A kind of instinct told her that the Morcomb party would be late. Adrian hovered about near the door, with a slightly nervous air.

"That dear young man looks as if he expected to be arrested," said Mr. Rockstone; and then went on questioning Lady Belfield about the last book she had been reading. He used to say that

he had no occasion to read new books on his own account: Lady Belfield always kept him *au courant.*

"An intelligent woman's synopsis of a shallow book is always better than the book itself," said the Vicar.

Mr. and Mrs. Freemantle and their son Jack were announced as the clock struck eight. With the Freemantle family there was always a military exactitude. They were all well drilled. Even Lucy had never been late for a lesson or a church service in her life.

Mrs. Freemantle shook hands with Lady Belfield and looked round for the strangers. Mr. Freemantle was an excellent man, with plenty of common sense but no cultivation, and very little memory. He never opened a book, and he rarely listened to conversation, unless it had some direct bearing upon field sports, politics, in which he was faintly interested, or his own affairs. He had utterly forgotten that he had been asked to meet anybody in particular, and when it came to a quarter-past eight and there was no announce-

ment of dinner, he began to wonder whether Lady Belfield had changed her cook.

Lady Belfield and her friend talked of the parish, the sick and poor, whom they saw almost daily, the Vicar joining in now and then. Adrian still lingered near the door, and made believe to be entertained by Jack Freemantle's account of a football match which had come off with *éclat* to Jack's side that afternoon.

"We gave those fellows a tremendous licking; I had only just time to get home and dress," said Jack, who had the newly-washed look of a man who had dressed in a desperate hurry.

"Your friends are very late, Adrian," said his mother presently. "Do you think we ought to wait any longer?"

"My dear mother, their first visit! Of course we must wait. I know you'll forgive us, Mrs. Freemantle."

"I forgive you with all my heart, Adrian; but the Vicar and my husband have both been looking at the clock every five minutes, and I am afraid

they are beginning to feel rather vindictive towards these friends of yours."

"Are you really expecting any one?" asked Freemantle innocently. "I thought it was your cook that was behind time."

"Lady Belfield's servants are never unpunctual, John. Didn't I tell you we were to meet Colonel Deverill?"

"Deverill! Ah, to be sure, the man who has taken Morcomb. I used to see him in London five-and-twenty years ago. He was in the Guards —a South of Ireland man."

The timepiece chimed the half-hour, and the door was flung open.

"Colonel Deverill and Miss Deverill, Mrs. Baddeley."

The matron led the way, lovely, smiling, deliciously unconscious of blame, svelte, graceful, in a tight-fitting ruby velvet gown, and with only one ornament—a large diamond pendant, which a duchess might not have disdained to wear. Helen followed, clad in some limp, creamy fabric, with neither jewels nor gold, only a cluster of white

lilies on her shoulder. If this was an æsthetic toilet, æstheticism was very becoming to Miss Deverill.

No one apologized for being late. The Morcomb party slipped into their places in the easiest manner. Mr. Freemantle was told off to the younger sister, the Vicar was assigned to Mrs. Freemantle, and Sir Adrian took Mrs. Baddeley. His mother had told him that it must be so; and Jack followed his hostess and the Colonel as if he had been an aide-de-camp.

The dinner was much livelier than rural dinners are wont to be. Helen sat between the Vicar and Mr. Freemantle, and prattled delightfully to both. The sisters were full of talk and laughter, gayer and more spontaneous than any girls Adrian had ever met. They played into each other's hands, held each other up to ridicule, bandied jokes with the airiest touch—flew from subject to subject with inexhaustible vivacity; and yet their voices never grew loud or harsh, their conversation never degenerated into noise and clatter. To Adrian the evening passed as if by enchantment. It was

nearly midnight when the Deverill carriage drove away. He and the sisters had pledged themselves to all manner of engagements. He was to go over to tea next day, and to inspect their stud. He, who never hunted, was to be at the meet on Monday, and was to potter about a little, and show them the country.

"Adrian," remonstrated his mother, whose quick ear caught that mention of hunting, "you know Dr. Jason said you must not hunt."

"He said I mustn't ride across country, mother. He never forbade my jogging about the lanes on a steady cob."

"He has had delicate health from his childhood," said Lady Belfield to Mrs. Baddeley, with an apologetic air. "I may be forgiven if I am over-careful of him."

Adrian escorted the ladies to their carriage.

"What do you think of them, Sophy?" asked Constance Belfield of her friend, while her son was out of the room. Mr. Freemantle and the Vicar were talking politics, Jack was yawning in a corner, exhausted after having shouted all his best songs—

"If doughty deeds my lady please," and "The Stirrup Cup," and "Old London Bridge."

"What I think of them may be summed up in one word—DANGEROUS."

"Oh, Sophy!"

"For Adrian most decidedly dangerous. Indeed I believe the mischief is as good as done already. But perhaps you would not object to his marrying Miss Deverill."

"My dear Sophy, she is a perfect stranger to me. How could I approve?"

"Well, you will have to approve—or to disapprove very strongly."

"I can see that Adrian admires Miss Deverill; but there is no reason to conclude he must needs be in love with her."

"Reason! Fiddlesticks! I tell you he *is* in love with her. When did reason and love ever go together! When a young man has been bottled up for the best part of his life in a village, his heart is as inflammable as a haystack after a dry summer."

And with this unpoetical comparison, Mrs. Free-

mantle drew her Canton crape shawl round her shoulders, ordered her husband and son off with a nod, bade her friend "Good-night," and sailed out of the room.

CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS COUNTRY

MRS. FREEMANTLE was right in her diagnosis.

Adrian was in love. He was not altogether unconscious of his own condition; but like most intellectual young men he fancied himself much wiser than he really was. He thought that he only admired Helen Deverill; and he told himself that he would go no further than admiration until he knew a great deal more of the lady. He was his own master, free to marry whomsoever he chose. A penniless girl of good family seemed to him the most proper person for him to marry: but he told himself that he must have the highest qualities in a wife. She must not be beautiful alone; mentally and morally she must be perfect. He was not to be scared by a little unconventionality; he admired a girl who dared to think and act for herself, and whose manners were not modelled upon the

manners of all other girls; but he meant to study the lady's character before he suffered his heart to go out to her—never suspecting, poor fool, that his heart was already hers, and that he who aspired to be her judge was in reality her slave.

He had never ridden to hounds since he was a boy; for from the hour he found hard riding was perilous, or even impossible for him, he had turned his back upon the sport, and had tried to persuade himself that he did not care for it. Yet now he was out every hunting day, dawdling at the meet, jogging up and down the lanes, watching and waiting about, as much in the day's sport as it was possible for him to be without going fast over pasture or common and taking his fences with the rest of the field. Whenever there was a bit of slow-going he was at Helen's side. When the hounds were in full cry she was off after them, while he waited patiently in a sheltered corner, hoping fate and the fox might bring her back that way.

She seemed to like his society, but she was full of caprices and uncertainties, wayward, wilful, a

coquette to the marrow of her bones, only Adrian did not so judge her. He thought her a versatile creature, a being of whim and fancy, disinterested, uncalculating, innocent as a wood or water nymph, but full of tricks and changes like the nymphs. That she was a clever, keen-witted young woman, who meant to make a good match, knew the value of her own beauty to an iota, and intended to enjoy all that is best and pleasantest in this brief, swift race across the earth's surface, which we call life—this he suapected not. He saw only graces and charms and frank unconscious loveliness of person and of mind in every look and word and action. To him she appeared faultless; and yet he thought that he was over-critical, thot he erred on the side of deliberation and severe juddment.

Some days, when the fox was what Helen called "a ringing brute," and the run scarce worth serious consideration, she would spend the whole day in Sir Adrian's company, utterly indifferent to the scandal such companionship might occasion. She had been accustomed to be talked about ever since she was fifteen, and would have fancied her

attractiveness on the wane if people—womenkind especially—had ceased to say hard things of her. She had her sister for chaperon, but then Mrs. Baddeley always had her own affairs to look after. She was a splendid horsewoman, and rode in a business-like way which admitted of no favour to that little court of admirers which she always had in her wake. Her admirers must be in the first flight if they wanted to see anything of her. For those who rode as boldly and as fast as she did, she had ever the sweetest smiles and the kindest words; and the long ride home with two or three of these, after the kill, was like a procession of lovers.

"Launcelot and Guinevere!" exclaimed Miss Toffstaff, one of the county Dianas; "the way those two young women go on is too astounding. I never saw anything worse in the Row: and *that*," added Miss Toffstaff significantly, "is saying a great deal."

There were three Miss Toffstaffs, who rode to hounds, and who rode well, and were always well mounted. They prided themselves in turning out in perfect style, and had their habits, hats, and

boots from the best maker, be he who he might. Fashion is very capricious in its treatment of habit-makers. There is always a new man coming to the front, with advanced theories upon the cutting of the knee; so the Miss Toffstaffs changed their habit-maker about once a year.

Mr. Toffstaff was a new man in that part of Devonshire, who had lately acquired the estate of a deceased native. Needless to say that he was more "county" than the county people whose ancestors had been owners of the soil ever since the Heptarchy, subscribed much more liberally to the hunt, and gave himself more airs than the men of the *vielle roche.*

In opposition to, and yet in friendly relations with, the three Miss Toffstaffs, were the two Miss Treduceys, whose father, Sir Nathaniel Treducey, of The Moat, was of an older family, and owned more aristocratic connections than any other man in the neighbourhood. His mother came of a ducal race in Scotland, and his wife was the daughter of a French marquis, who had fallen in love with the handsome young diplomatist at one of the

Empress's balls in the golden days of the Second Empire.

The Miss Treduceys had been, as it were, born on horseback, and looked down from a prodigious altitude upon the Miss Toffstaffs, whom they suspected of having been taught by a riding-master. They were fair, rather pretty girls, with large liquid blue eyes, and they were as thin as their mother was fat. Their aquiline noses and slender figures were an inheritance from Sir Nathaniel, who belonged to an eagle-nosed race, and had the air of a gentlemanlike bird of prey.

The Miss Toffstaffs and the Miss Treduceys rarely agreed about any one subject, albeit they were such very good friends; but they were unanimous in their condemnation of Colonel Deverill's daughters.

"It makes one feel ashamed of being a girl, don't it?" asked Matilda Treducey of Marjorie Toffstaff.

The Miss Treduceys had been christened Matilda and Isabel, in honour of their Norman descent; the Miss Toffstaffs were Dorothy, Marjorie, and

Jessie, having been christened at a period when quaint rustic names were in fashion. Mrs. Toffstaff was a woman who followed fashion assiduously, and as she never thought of anything else, sometimes overtook it. Everything at Wilmington—the dinner-table, the drawing-room, the stables, and the gardens—was in the newest style. A fashion could hardly be heard of in Devonshire before it was to be seen at Wilmington. At The Moat, on the contrary, everything was of the old school, a curious and rather pleasant mingling of old French and old English fashions. Lady Treducey protested her abhorrence of all innovations, and boasted of her husband's poverty as if it were a distinction in an age when parvenus are egregiously rich.

"Since France has been a Republic everything new has been detestable," she said, "and England is very little better than a Republic. All our fashions have an American taint. I look forward with horror to a day when London and Paris will be only suburbs of New York."

The five young ladies were all agreed as to one

fact—that Colonel Deverill's daughters were a disgrace to the neighbourhood; but as Lady Belfield knew them, and in a manner vouched for their abstract respectability, every one called at Morcomb, and the objectionable ladies had been bidden to luncheons and afternoon teas.

Matrons and maids owned that the new-comers were pretty, but were unanimous in denouncing them as bad style. The word had been passed round, as it were. They were to be called upon and tolerated; but they were not to be admitted to the inner sanctuary of friendship.

They were received, however, that was the main point. Sir Adrian met them everywhere. His life was a new life, full of new interests. He wrote long letters to his brother, filled with descriptions of Helen, her looks, her sweet little ways, her sparkling conversation, which lost a good deal of its sparkle when reduced to pen and ink.

"I did not think it was in you to be such a fool," wrote Valentine, with brotherly candour; "the girl is evidently setting her cap at you. She

has not a sixpence, and you are one of the best matches in Devonshire. However, of course you will please yourself. There is no reason why you should try to please anybody else. I, who have only my mother's fortune to depend upon, must marry money, if I ever marry at all. To my own mind at present my state is the more gracious as a bachelor."

CHAPTER V.

AS THE SPARKS FLY UPWARD

THOUGH he was much of a student and more of a dreamer, Mr. Rockstone was a true friend, helper, and counsellor to the poor of his parish. It was a sadly ignorant parish, such as one might expect to light upon could some magician's wand reverse the glass of time and take us back a century to the days of Farmer George and Snuffy Charlotte. Reading and writing were rarest accomplishments among those of mature years, and, in spite of schools and schoolmasters, the youthful mind was in a state of darkness which made a simple game of dominoes in the Vicar's reading-room seem as mysterious and perplexing as an inscription on a Babylonian brick.

Often in the long winter evenings would Mr. Rockstone tear himself away from his own comfortable fireside to go down to the little reading-room, where he would labour with sublime patience

at the mystery of dominoes, or the perplexity of "Muggins" or "Slap Jack," two games at cards, by which he tried to enliven the dulness of a purely literary evening. Here, too, he would read aloud, and enlighten the rustic mind by a leader in the *Standard* or the *Post*, and would listen good-naturedly to the rustic ideas as to the last political crisis. Nor did the Vicar confine his ministrations to the vicinity of vicarage, church, and schools. His sympathies extended to the furthest limits of an extensive parish.

The Deverills had been settled at Morcomb for nearly a month, and it was the first week in December when Mr. Rockstone set out one mild, sunny morning for a leisurely ride to Wymperley Marsh, which was at the extreme edge of Chadford parish. The soft west wind and blue sky suggested April rather than mid-winter, and the Vicar felt it a privilege to exist as he trotted along a Devonshire lane on his steady-going old horse, Don—so called because he was as stupid and as lazy as some of the college dons Mr. Rockstone had known in his youth.

The Vicar loved Don, and Don loved the Vicar, would recognize his master's voice afar off in the garden, and appeal to him from his stable with loud neighings. Don had carried the Vicar over every acre of his capacious parish, and knew every cottage at which he was accustomed to stop and every turn in the lanes which led to his own stable. Horse and rider had a gentle tussle now and then when Don wanted to go home—which was the normal condition of his mind—and when the Vicar wanted to go further afield. But this morning Don was as fresh and as ready for his work as it was in his nature to be at any time, and he got over the ground rather quicker than usual.

The River Chad is one of the most picturesque streams in England, but even the Chad has its bits of commonplace; and it is never less romantic than in that broad reach which is bounded on one side by Wymperley Marsh, and on the other by low level meadows, where the cattle wade breast deep in the rank sedgy grass.

The marsh sustains nothing but wild-fowl, and

can only be crossed at one point by horse or foot passenger, who has to pick his way along a rough stone causeway, which was constructed in the dim remoteness of an unrecorded past, and which it is nobody's business to improve or repair in the present.

Few but sportsmen intent on water-fowl would have tempted the dangers of this dilapidated causeway; but Mr. Rockstone knew every stone of it. A solitary hut, which stood close to the river, with water on one side and marsh on the other, was the *ultima thule* of his parish; and here he came about a dozen times in the year to see two of his parishioners, who had awakened in him a keener interest than their merits might be said to deserve.

Yonder hovel, with low cob walls and a gable roof of blackened reeds, had been tenanted for the last forty years by a basket-maker, whose gipsy wife had died soon after his establishment in that solitary abode, and had left him with a daughter of three years old. The child had grown up with him somehow, as the birds grow in their nests, in

that lonely place, without womanly help of any kind, and she had grown into a creature of a strange wild beauty, in which her gipsy blood was manifest. She had grown almost to womanhood when Mr. Rockstone came to the parish, and he had been interested in her as a curious growth of savage ignorance in the very midst of civilization. She had grown up knowing hardly anything which civilized young women know; but she had on the other hand the innocence of ignorance, had no more knowledge of the outer world, its pleasures, temptations, and sins than she had of the great shining worlds in that unfathomable universe above her head. She could neither read nor write; she could not count her own ten fingers without breaking down two or three times in the attempt; and she had never been inside a church since she was christened. Her father's excuse when charged with his sins of omission was, that he was a very poor man, and that he lived four miles and a half away from everything.

"How could I send her to school?" he asked.

"You might have moved to a more civilized home," said the Vicar.

"Moved! Why, this cottage is my own freehold, Parson. I'd as soon part with my right arm as sell the house that shelters me. I should never get another if once I sold this. The money would all go in drink."

"You might at least go to church once a week," pursued the Vicar. "You wander many a mile in the week to sell your baskets. Could you not walk a few miles on a Sunday to save your soul?"

John Dawley shook his head.

"When a man has been on the tramp all the week he wants his rest on Sunday," he said.

The Vicar talked to Madge Dawley—tried to teach her the elements of Christianity; but the task was difficult. He could not ask her to walk nine miles a day in quest of enlightenment. He rode over to the cottage by the marsh as often as he could, and he took more pains with this beautiful young ignoramus than with anybody in his parish. After he had been engaged thus for about

a year, he began to think he had shed some rays of light upon the dimness of the girl's mind. Intelligence seemed to be awakening. Madge was less childish in her remarks upon the Gospel, and more inquisitive about the world in which she lived. Mr. Rockstone was full of hope about her, when she disappeared suddenly from the cottage, the marsh, and parish of Chadford, without leaving the slightest clue to the mode and motive of her departure. All that her father could tell the parson was that he had left the hovel at daybreak to carry his baskets to a remote market town, where there was a fair; and on coming back at midnight he had found the house empty.

Had he ever seen a strange man lurking about the cottage? Did he suspect his daughter of any acquaintance with a person who might lure her away?

No, to both questions.

Mr. Rockstone took infinite pains to trace the fugitive, but in vain; she had not been seen in the village, nor at the nearest railway station. The local police could do nothing, the metropolitan

police were equally at fault. John Dawley's daughter was but another vanished drop in the great ocean of humanity.

Five years afterwards, the basket-maker, returning towards midnight from the same market town and the same annual fair, upon the anniversary of his daughter's flight, found a child, apparently between two and three years old, sitting on his hearth staring at the fire, which had been lighted not long before by unknown hands.

He had no occasion to puzzle his brains about the child's identity, for she was the exact reproduction of his daughter's infancy, and she wore round her neck the yellow glass necklace which Madge had worn from infancy to womanhood, her mother's favourite ornament, without which she had never considered herself dressed for the day.

He searched the hovel, thinking to find his daughter in hiding somewhere, but the place was empty save for that young thing squatting before the fire. He questioned the child, but she was backward in her speech, and could only express her own wants in a very infantine fashion:

Maggie tired, Maggie hungry, Maggie want milk. She did not cry for her mother, or make any objection to her changed surroundings. She ate her supper of dry bread contentedly; but she refused to sit upon the basket-maker's knee. She curled herself up like a kitten upon the bed where he put her, and slept as peacefully as a kitten sleeps.

The basket-maker took to his new burden with a stolidity which might be either resignation or indifference. He would have brought up the granddaughter exactly as he had brought up the daughter; but here the Vicar interfered. He arranged that the child should be boarded for two weeks out of every four in the house of a respectable cottager at Chadford. During that fortnight the girl was to attend the school, and be taught and cared for as a Christian child in a Christian country. The second fortnight in each month she lived with her grandfather; and as soon as her baby fingers were capable of work she began to help him in his basket-making. Her friend the cottager taught her domestic work of all kinds,

and trained her to usefulness in the earliest age. She was able to keep the hovel in order from the time she was eight years old. Her board was paid for by the Vicar, who asked no one's help in this good work. When she was eleven years old the cottager's wife died, and Madge, who was able to read and write and cipher, now took up her abode permanently in the cottage on the marsh, and was only expected to appear at Sunday-school and church on fine Sundays.

Sometimes she tramped about the countryside with her grandfather, selling baskets. At other times she spent her solitary days in the cottage, or in the little cottage garden, a quarter of an acre redeemed laboriously from the marsh, a paradise of flaunting wallflowers, stocks, and nasturtiums, hollyhocks and sunflowers, with patches of potatoes and cabbage, and a tall screen of scarlet-runners, bright against blue river and blue sky in the hot summer afternoons, when Madge sat on a little mound at the edge of the stream, basket-weaving, and watching the lazy tide flow by, her fingers moving with a monotonous regular motion

as if she had been weaving a net to catch the souls of men.

She was beautiful enough for an enchantress, with those great dark eyes and raven hair, a skin like old ivory, and features of Roman mould. The Vicar was mortal, and he could not help feeling a deeper interest in the soul that dwelt within this splendid form than in his snub-nosed, apple-cheeked villagers. And then the girl was shy, or proud, and held herself aloof from all sympathy, which made the Vicar only the more sympathetic.

Mr. Rockstone had deferred his visit to old Dawley's cottage longer than usual, and he approached the marsh to-day with a certain anxiety of mind, inasmuch as Madge had not appeared in her usual place in the gallery of his church for more than a month. The weather had been either bad or doubtful on all those Sundays, and he had taken that to be the cause of her absence; yet when a fifth Sunday came and she was still absent, the Vicar began to think there must be some more serious reason than rain or wind.

The smoke rose in a thin, white column from the low chimney of the hut, and a gleam of fire-light showed in the window that looked across the marsh. There was some life in the hovel at any rate.

Old Dawley was sitting by the hearth, which occupied one side of the low, dark living-room, making a basket; his granddaughter knelt by the window with her arms folded upon the sill, looking out across the broad, level marsh to the road on the edge of the low hill which shut out all the world beyond. The marsh was about a quarter of a mile in width, broken up here and there into pools, where the wild fowl congregated; a long stretch of waste land and dark water very dear to the sportsman.

The girl turned her head with a listless air as the Vicar entered; but she did not rise from her knees or offer him any greeting.

"How d'ye do, Dawley? how's the rheumatism? No better, eh," as the old basket-maker shook his head. "That's bad. The weather has been against us old fellows for the last three months.

But I didn't think the weather was bad enough to keep a healthy young woman like you from church, Madge," added the Vicar, with good-humoured remonstrance, smiling at the girl, whose great dark eyes were looking at him dreamily, as if she were but half-conscious of external things, in the absorption of her own thoughts.

"She ain't over-healthy now," said her grandfather discontentedly. "I don't know what be come over her. She's just as if she was half-asleep all day, yet she's awake almost all night, for I hear her toss about t'other side the lath and plaster, and sigh as if she'd a mort o' trouble, half the night through. She spiles my rest, she do, as well as her own. She's the most discontentedest young female as ever I met with."

"Come, come, friend, you musn't be hard upon her. It may be that the life is too lonely for her, and that she's not well. Young women most of them seem subject to neuralgia now-a-days. They all seem to want tonics, quinine and iron, sea air, and change of scene. What's the matter, Madge?"

asked the Vicar gently, laying his broad fatherly hand upon the raven hair.

"Nothing's the matter," the girl answered, with a sullen air; "I am sick of my life, that's all."

"You are tired of this lonely place. You want to leave your poor old grandfather?"

"No, I should be no better anywhere else. It isn't the place I'm tired of, it's my life."

"This is a case for quinine; I'll send you a box of pills," said the Vicar cheerily.

Madge turned her back upon him and looked out at the marsh, just as she had been looking when her patron entered. The old man got up from his three-legged stool, and jerked his head significantly towards the door.

"Come out and have a talk, Dawley," said the Vicar; "your cottage is too warm for me, and I've got Don outside to look after."

Don was browsing contentedly upon some rank grass on the edge of the causeway, and had no more intention of going away than if he had been the original antediluvian horse in a museum.

The two men went out together, and strolled along the causeway side by side.

"Of course you can see what it is, can't you, Parson?" began Dawley abruptly. "No mistaking the signs in a gal."

"You think she's in love," hazarded the Vicar.

"O' course she is, Parson. That's the way it allus begins—sighin' and sulkin', and sleepless nights a-thinking of *him*. Curse him, whoever he is! He'll lure this one away like the other one was lured away, of a sudden, without a word of warning to the poor old father. I dursen't leave the cottage, lest I should find it empty when I comes back. I hain't sold a basket for a fortnight. I'm here to guard her from the sarpent."

"Who can it be?" asked the Vicar, with a puzzled air. "Is there any one in the village that she cares for?"

"Lord! no, Parson. It ain't no one in the village—it ain't a working man, or a gentleman's servant, or any one of her own station—else it would be all fair and above-board, and she wouldn't be afraid to tell her old grandfather. It's some-

body whose love means ruin. Some lying, fine gentleman, who'll speak her fair, and tempt her to go away with him, and leave her to rot when his fancy's over. I knows the breed."

"Have you any reason to suspect mischief?"

"Too many reasons; but I'll tell you one or two, and you can judge. It's just about six weeks ago that I noticed when I came home late at night that there was a smell of 'baccy in the room yonder. Well, I'm a smoker myself, but this wasn't my 'baccy that I smelt, and it wasn't twelve hours old, neither. It was a gentleman's 'baccy; as different from what I smoke as the champagne you gentry drink is from the cider they sell up street. I know'd there'd been a stranger here when I smelt that 'baccy. I asked my gal if there'd been any one come to the cottage all day. She said 'No,' but I could see she was lying. I noticed the same smell three nights running; and on the morning after the third night I found another sign o' mischief. There'd been rain the day before, but the wind shifted towards evening, and there was a sharp frost in the night; and

when I went out into the causeway there was my gentleman's footprints, as if they'd been cut in a rock—the prints of a gentleman's strong-soled shooting boots. There's no mistakin' the cut of a fine gentleman's boot: it's as different from a poor man's clodhopper as a gentleman's 'baccy is from mine. Somebody had been hanging about the cottage and making up to my gal."

"Was that all? Did you never see the man himself?"

"Never. He was too artful. I've scarcely been three days away from home since I saw the footprints in the causeway; but my gentleman has never shown up hereabouts, and my gal has moped all the time."

"Have you never questioned her since then?"

"Now and again, careless like. Had there been any one shooting the wild fowl, anybody going past in a boat? and such like. But I might as well expect to get answers out of a stone. Not a word would she say to me, except she didn't know, she hadn't noticed—what reason was there for her to watch for people in boats?"

"Well, Dawley, we must be on our guard for her, poor child. She is too handsome to be exempt from dangers and temptations. I don't think she ought to be left to live this solitary life any longer. Solitude encourages brooding. She wants change and occupation—the sight of strange faces."

"How is she to get them?" asked Dawley despondingly.

"She might go into service."

"And be ruined and broken-hearted before she had left me six months. I know what servant gals are, and how little care there is taken of 'em. She's not old enough or wise enough to be left to take care of herself. Send her out to service anywhere hereabouts, and the fine gentleman who left his footmarks on this causeway would soon find out where she was, and be after her. She'd have her evenings out, belike; and he'd be waiting for her somewheres in the dusk. I knows the world, Parson. She don't, poor child; and knowledge of the world ain't to be learnt second-hand. I might preach her sermons as long as my arm, but she'd never be warned by them."

"There is service and service, Dawley. I know of houses in which the maids are as well looked after as nuns in a convent. I'll talk to a lady I know about your granddaughter, and if I can interest her——"

"It will be hard to part with her," said the old man, "but I can't keep watch over her always and sell my baskets; and if I don't sell 'em we must starve. And she's gettin' to hate me for being so watchful of her, I can see that. It's a wicked world, Parson."

"It's a troublesome world, my friend, and we must make the best of it for ourselves and each other. Man was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Have you heard anything of Madge's mother lately?"

"Not a word, Parson. Ah, she was a bad lot, an out-and-out bad lot, with a heart as hard as the nethermost millstone."

"You must not judge her, Dawley. She was brought up in darkness and ignorance. No one ever taught her her duty."

"There's duties that don't need to be taught—

the duty of loving your father and mother. That ought to come natural even to a savage."

"Your daughter may have died years ago."

"I don't think so, Parson. I heard of her six or seven years ago—not a word from her, mark you—but I heard from a man who had seen her in London, riding in her carriage, or in somebody's carriage, as bold as brass—as fine a lady as any in London, Joe Tronnion said. He's a gipsy hawker, sells brooms and baskets and such like, and travels all over the country. He saw my gal, he did, not seven year agone, all among the gentle folks on Hepsom Downs, dressed in silk and satin, as brazen as you like, she that never came to look after her child since the little one was three year old."

"Well, we had best forget all about her, Dawley, till God puts better thoughts into her mind and brings her back to us. I'll see what can be done about Madge. She wouldn't suit everybody, never having been in service—but I think I know a lady who will help me."

"In this or in any other emergency," he said to himself, by way of postscript.

He mounted Don, and rode slowly homeward across the open waste to the lane with its tall tangled hedges, bare now for the most part, save where the foliage lingered on the pollard oaks, and the beechwood showed copper-coloured leaves that were to last till late into the coming year, when the young growth came to drive them away. Very slow was that homeward ride, for Don had exhausted all his freshness in the outward journey, and only quickened his pace when he saw the old church tower and smelt the clover in the Vicarage stable. But to his astonishment the Vicar took him past that familiar gate, and trotted him, snorting with indignant protest, to the gates of Belfield Park and along the avenue to the Abbey, where there was some consolation, as a groom came out at the sound of hoofs, and conducted the clerical steed to a loose box, while his master went into the house to see Lady Belfield.

She was in her usual place in the innermost drawing-room, a woman always ready to see her friends, and give them cordial welcome; not one of those women who have to be hunted for on the

arrival of a visitor, and who are never fit to be seen except when they are *en grande tenue.*

She gave her hand to the Vicar with a smile, and he sat down in the luxurious chair at her side, and felt that life was worth living for.

He told her the state of things at old Dawley's cottage: the young life wasting, the young, undisciplined heart pining, for want of womanly care and sympathy, and he had enlisted her feelings before his story was half finished.

"You want change of scene for her, a brighter, busier life, a home where she will be taught and cared for," she said, when she had heard all. "Let her come here by all means. My housekeeper is an excellent creature—but you know my good Mrs. Marrable as well as I do."

"I have reason to know her. Yes, she has a heart of gold."

"Well, I will place this *protégée* of yours under Mrs. Marrable's especial care, and I will do all I can for her myself."

"You are always good, Lady Belfield. You have taught me to rely upon your goodness. But

I must warn you that this girl may be of very little use in your establishment. She is untaught and inexperienced."

"I don't expect her to be of use to me; I want to be of use to her. Bring her to me as soon as you like, Vicar."

"God bless you. I will bring her to you tomorrow, if I can."

CHAPTER VI.

EASY TO LOVE HER

THE Vicar rode Don across the marsh early next morning, a liberty which that sage animal felt inclined to resent, so rarely was he taken far afield two days running. But the Vicar was too intent upon humanity just now to spare horse-flesh.

Old Dawley had gone to the market-town with a load of baskets, his exchequer having sunk to the lowest point, dire necessity forcing him to abandon his post as guardian of a girl's heart and honour.

Madge was alone, in the same moody attitude, with the same moody countenance which the Vicar had observed yesterday. She took but the slightest notice of his entrance—scarcely stirred from her place by the window, scarcely ceased from her contemplation of the marsh, only looked

at him with a bored expression and muttered a sullen good morning.

"Madge, I have got you a place," he said, without circumlocution.

"What place?"

"A place in a lady's house, where you will be kindly treated and taught to be useful. I am going to take you to a new and cheerful life, to a good home, clean rooms, wholesome food, and companions of your own age."

"You mean that I'm to go into service," she said, with the same sullen air.

"Yes, my dear girl; the life you are leading here is altogether an unnatural life. It is high time you went out to service, and learnt to get your own living."

The girl was silent for some moments, looking across the marsh with that dreamy air of hers; then she turned slowly and looked at the Vicar, half in wonder, half in scorn, with large dark eyes that were capable of looking unfathomable things.

"Did my grandfather put that in your head!" she asked.

"No. Your grandfather told me only that you were unhappy. It was I thought of the cure."

"A pretty cure!" she cried, contemptuously. "You think it will make me happy to scrub floors and pots and pans, or perhaps you would send me out as a nursemaid to mind squalling babies. I would rather starve and have my freedom than be a well-fed slave."

"There is no such thing as slavery in the house where I am going to take you. Lady Belfield is one of the kindest women I know. She will take you into her service as a favour to me, and she will have you treated kindly and taught to be useful."

"Lady Belfield!" cried Madge, jumping up and flushing to the roots of her hair; "Lady Belfield will take *me* into her service!"

"Yes, Madge, and will interest herself in your welfare. She has heard of your dismal life here, and has promised to do all in her power to make you happy. You won't refuse such a service as that, will you?"

"No," answered the girl, after a long pause. "I won't refuse. I ought to be very grateful, I

suppose. It's a fine thing for dirt like me to be let into such a house as that."

"It will be the making of you, Madge," answered the Vicar gravely, "and I hope you accept the situation in a right spirit, and will try to do your duty to that excellent lady."

The girl vouchsafed him no assurance as to her intention upon this point.

"When am I to go?" she asked.

"At once—to-day."

"I have hardly any clothes but those on my back."

"My housekeeper shall get you some more clothes. You can come to the Vicarage as fast as you can, and Deborah shall buy you what you want in the village."

The girl took up his hand and kissed it in a burst of gratitude.

"You are a good man," she said; "yes, I'll come. Poor old grandfather! He'll miss me of an evening, when he comes home; but anything will be better than it has been lately. We've both been miserable—and perhaps some day——"

She smiled, her face flushed again as it had flushed at the first mention of Lady Belfield's name.

"Will they let me come and see my grandfather sometimes?" she asked.

"Of course; and if you learn to be a valuable servant, by-and-by you will get good wages, and then you can be a help to him in his old age."

Madge appeared at the Vicarage before three o'clock, with all her worldly goods tied up in a cotton handkerchief. She was not overcome by the grandeur of the Vicarage, for that grave old house, with its sombre rooms, cool in summer and warm in winter, had been familiar to her in her childhood, when the Vicar catechised her on Sunday evenings in his library with a class of Sunday-school children. She remembered the look of the panelled hall and the old Oriental jars, the Vicar's fishing tackle and the perfume of rose leaves and lavender. Deborah, the housekeeper, who was a very homely personage as compared with Mrs. Marrable at the Abbey, received her instructions

from the Vicar and sallied out with Madge to the village shop where all the indispensables of this life were kept in stock, and here the two women sat for nearly an hour, choosing and buying: Deborah keenly interested, Madge indifferent, looking with incurious scorn upon the snowy calico and the neat pink and white prints which were being bought for her.

"I suppose you can make your own gowns," said Deborah, rather snappishly, provoked at an indifference which implied ingratitude to the good Vicar.

"I have never had anybody else to make them for me," answered Madge.

"That one you have got on fits pretty fair, though I don't like the style of it," said Deborah, eyeing the supple form from top to toe. "I wouldn't let one of our maids wear such a gown as that, and you'll have to dress different at the Abbey. And you won't be allowed to wear them beads round your neck."

"And yet they say service isn't slavery," retorted Madge, with a scornful laugh.

Deborah spent a couple of sovereigns grudgingly, knowing how many claims her master had upon his benevolence, and having very little sympathy with this ungracious young woman.

"You're to come back to the Vicarage and have tea with us," she said curtly, "and then John is to walk to the Abbey with you."

John was the Vicar's valet, butler, confidant, and factotum. He was known only as John, and seemed to have no occasion for any surname. The Vicar's John was known and respected all over the parish. He was a tall, lean, sharp-nosed man, very chary of speech, and never talking except to the purpose. He was a great reader of newspapers, and a profound politician. Of books he knew none but the Bible, and that he knew better than five curates out of six. He had a way of talking about the patriarchs and the kings and heroes of Israel as if they had been Peel and Brougham, or Bright and Gladstone, which was curious, and quite unconsciously irreverent.

"I don't want any tea," Madge answered, ungraciously.

"Oh, but you must want your tea; you must be almost sinking. What a queer girl you are! Come along now; let's get home as fast as we can. Martha will have got the kettle boiling, and John will be wanting *his* tea."

John was a person whose wants must always be studied. He waited upon the Vicar with exemplary devotion, but he expected that the women folk should wait upon him. In the kitchen and servants' premises he was first in importance, and all gave way before him.

The Vicarage kitchen looked very cheery in the winter afternoon, with a bright red fire burning in an old-fashioned open grate, and the hearth spotless, and the fender shining like silver. The Vicar dined at eight, so this afternoon hour was a period of leisure and repose. The large oak table at which Deborah did her cooking was pushed on one side, and a snug round table covered with a snow-white cloth stood in front of the fire-place. Martha, the housemaid, a rosy-cheeked buxom lass, had prepared everything except the actual making of the tea, a sacred office reserved for Deborah. The tea-

tray was spread, and there was a dish of hot buttered cakes frizzling on the hearth, by which sat the Vicar's John in a dignified attitude, reading the *Standard.*

Mr. Rockstone's indoor establishment consisted of these three, and they formed as happy and united a household as could be found in all the county. That catholic spirit of benevolence and peace which breathed in the Vicar's theology pervaded all the acts and thoughts of daily life at the Vicarage.

Madge sat amongst them as an alien. She took her cup of tea in silence, ate very little, had no idea of "making a good tea," as Deborah urged her. It might be that she was fretting at leaving her old grandfather. This supposition softened Deborah's heart a little.

"Now then, miss," said John, rising suddenly, with a military squareness of action, after a tremendous meal, "if you are ready, I am. It will be dark before we get to the Abbey."

It was nearly dark when they passed in front of the porch on their way to the servants' quarters.

There were a couple of grooms and three horses waiting before the porch, two with side saddles. Lights were shining in the windows of the lower rooms, but the hall was lighted only by the fire-glow. It looked a picture of luxury and bright colour as Madge saw it through the open door: armour flashing in the firelight — old tapestry — vivid colouring of Oriental curtains draping chimney-piece and doorways; such an interior as Madge's eyes had never looked upon before.

She caught but a glimpse of that strange splendour, and then John hurried her on by a shrubbery path which skirted one side of the house, to a low door which opened into a stone lobby and thence to the servants' hall. Beyond the servants' hall there was another door, and at this John tapped respectfully.

It was the door of Mrs. Marrable's private sitting-room, only one degree less sacred than Lady Belfield's own apartments. Indeed, the Abbey servants were more afraid of Mrs. Marrable than of Lady Belfield.

The room looked delightfully cosy in the light

of a bright wood fire. It was covered from floor to ceiling with a heterogeneous collection of pictures, prints, oil paintings, and water-colours. All the pictures rejected from the state apartments by three generations of Belfields had been banished to this limbo. There were doubtless some very vile specimens among this collection, but the general effect, seen in a half-light, was excellent. There was a goodly array of old china also on shelves and in cabinets, for here was brought all the damaged porcelain.

Mrs. Marrable had been enjoying a nap by the fire, preliminary to candles and tea, but she was wide awake in an instant.

"How do you do, John? Very glad to see you. So this is the young person recommended by the Vicar," she said. "Her ladyship told me all about you, my dear, and she wished to see you directly you arrived. I'm to take you to the drawing-room myself as you're a stranger. You may just lay aside your hat and shawl—you'll have to wear a bonnet in future—and come with me. Perhaps you'd like to step into the

servants' hall, John, and join them at their tea."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am, I tea'd before I came," John answered gravely. "I must be getting back to see after the Vicar's dinner. Good-night, mum; good-night, miss;" and John marched off by the way he had come, while Madge, trembling slightly, in spite of her native audacity, followed Mrs. Marrable to that enchanted chamber with the curtains of wrought gold and vivid colour, the flashing arms and great stags' heads, which she had seen from outside.

They crossed the firelit hall, and Mrs. Marrable opened the drawing-room door and entered with Madge at her heels, expecting to find this room empty and Lady Belfield alone in her usual place in the inner drawing-room. She was drawing back at the sight of a group round a low tea-table near the fire, two ladies in riding habits, and Sir Adrian in his hunting clothes, lolling luxuriously in their low easy chairs.

"Don't go away, Mrs. Marrable," said Lady

Belfield. "You have brought me the young person, I see."

She rose and left the tea-table and came over to the other end of the spacious room, where Mrs. Marrable stood with Madge beside her, doubtful whether to withdraw or to remain, while the girl's dark eyes gazed across empty space to the bright glow of lamp and firelight in which those three figures were seated.

She gazed at Sir Adrian with a look half of surprise, half of admiration. She had caught chance glimpses of those pale, refined features, across the width of the parish church as Sir Adrian stood in the old-fashioned curtained pew in the chancel. But those glimpses had not familiarized her with his face. It was new to her to-night in the glow of lamp and fire, radiant with happiness, as he talked to Helen Deverill, who sat nursing her hat upon her knees, and smiling up at him, with a charming unconsciousness of her very liberal display of patent-leather Wellingtons.

The girl hardly saw Lady Belfield's calm, kind face, so absorbed was all her power of vision by

that face in the firelight; but she courtesied when her new mistress spoke to her, as she had been taught to courtesy to her betters in the Sunday-school.

"I am glad you have come so soon," said Constance; "I hope you will be happy with your fellow-servants, and that you will try to please Mrs. Marrable, who will be very kind to you, I know."

There was no patronizing admonition, no word about duty or desert, only a kind and friendly welcome for the stranger.

"I should like to have had a little talk with you," added Lady Belfield, "but I am engaged just now. Mr. Rockstone has told me how much he is interested in you."

"He has been the only friend I ever had except grandfather," answered Madge.

"Say, my lady," whispered the housekeeper.

"Then I hope you will try to be happy here, if it is only to please that kind friend," said Lady Belfield.

"Yes, my lady, I will try."

She courtesied again, and followed the housekeeper out of the room, and went back to the servants' offices to begin her new life. Helen and her sister began to criticize her directly she was out of the room.

"What a handsome girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Baddeley: "worlds too pretty for a servant. How inconvenient when girls in that station of life are born with such good looks. What made you engage her, Lady Belfield? For my part I detest pretty servants. They always set all the indoor men by the ears, and make the other maids ill-tempered. There ought to be a dead level of commonplace features and muddy complexions among young women of that class."

"Surely you would not like to be waited upon by gorgons," remonstrated Adrian, laughing.

"I did not say anything about gorgons. There is a middle distance between beauty and ugliness. I like my servants to occupy that neutral ground of inoffensive mediocrity. You haven't told me why you engaged this girl, dear Lady Belfield."

"You haven't given me time," said Constance

smiling at the animated face, and then she told just enough of the girl's story to awaken interest in sympathetic minds, and both sisters appeared full of kindly feeling, frivolous as Lady Belfield was sometimes disposed to consider them.

Adrian was in high spirits this afternoon as he sat by Helen's side, feeding her with sweet things as if she had been a bird, thinking her absolutely bewitching as she nibbled pound-cake, and acknowledged to a passionate love for buns. These two had been pottering about with the hounds side by side all day—a wretched day for sport, but a very good day for Adrian, who could only enjoy his divinity's society fully when there was a bad scent and a great deal of waiting about outside the coverts. The Miss Toffstaffs had been eloquent in their animadversions upon Miss Deverill. They even wondered that Sir Adrian's better judgment did not prevent such immorality.

"I call it disgraceful conduct even in him," said Dorothy.

"And what *can* one call it in *her?*" responded Isabel Treducey.

There were a knot of Dianas clustered on the opposite side of the road, keenly observant of Helen and Adrian, in the midst of their own light prattle.

"I believe she has hooked him," said Matilda Treducey, who was horsy and outspoken.

"What, you can't imagine he'll marry such a brazen-faced flirt," exclaimed Dorothy.

"My dear, I can imagine anything. Men are such fools."

But if it were folly, it was a pleasant folly while it lasted. Never had Adrian been so happy as in this dreary December—never before had there been for him this glory and brightness over earth and sky, this glamour of passionate love which filled the world with light and life and gladness and ever-hurrying emotion. He felt like a man borne down the tide of a rushing river, or carried by a swift horse, with the freshness of the air in his nostrils, the sunlight shining upon him. He had a delicious sense of being hurried onward without knowing or caring whither. The journey was in itself so rapturous, he scarce asked himself where was the goal.

His mother startled him one morning soon after Madge's advent at the Abbey, by asking him abruptly:

"Adrian, are you going to marry Helen Deverill?"

He flushed crimson at the suddenness of the attack. They were alone together before breakfast, standing in the window of the breakfast-room, and had both been silent and thoughtful until that moment, watching the falling snow.

"To marry," he faltered; "what a startling attack, mother!"

"My dear boy, you must know your own mind by this time. Everybody tells me you are in love with Miss Deverill; and if you don't mean to marry her, and if you are not compromised by any declaration, you had better go away and let people see that they are wrong. I am tired of being questioned and congratulated about a potential daughter-in-law."

"Mother, how strangely you say that! You like her, don't you?"

"I hardly know my own mind about her,

Adrian. There are times when she bewitches me, almost as she has bewitched you; and then I am afraid of her, Adrian; I am full of fear for your happiness."

"It is too late to talk about fear, mother. I gave her my heart long ago. I think it must have been the first time I saw her. But indeed you have no cause for fear. She is the most innocent, childlike creature the sun ever shone upon. She is as open as a summer sky. Yes, I have studied her character, and I am not afraid to trust my life into her keeping. You are right, mother: it is time I should declare myself. I have been living in a fool's paradise—too happy to take thought of the morrow."

"Then you mean to marry her?"

"Mean! How can I be sure that she will have me?"

"There is no fear of a refusal."

"Then you think she loves me?" he asked eagerly, his face brightening as he spoke.

"I think you are Sir Adrian Belfield, and the best match in the county."

"Mother, that is a detestable speech, and not a bit like you."

"My dearest, to my mind you are the most loveable young man in England. But I am afraid of Colonel Deverill's daughter. She has been brought up in a bad school. She has graduated at fashionable watering-places and in gambling saloons. I would ever so much rather you had fallen in love with Lucy Freemantle."

"I should be as likely to fall in love with that yew obelisk yonder," said Adrian impatiently. "But don't let us argue the point, mother. If I can but be so fortunate as to win her, I know she will make you love her. She will creep into your heart, and be to you as a daughter before you have quite decided whether you can trust her."

"And that is the worst of it, Adrian. I may learn to love her without being able to trust her."

Mother and son breakfasted together, for the most part in silence. Both were preoccupied. Lady Belfield felt that she had precipitated the inevitable by her questions; and yet when evil is inevitable it may as well be faced. She thought

of those other girls whom she would have preferred for her son's choice. Of the Treduceys, who were only just tolerable as individuals, but who were excellent in the way of race and antecedents; of Lucy Freemantle, who was a really estimable girl, a pretty-looking, fresh-complexioned, uninteresting young Englishwoman, much too shy to make the most of her advantages. Could she wonder that her son preferred this outspoken, fascinating girl, with her light-hearted gaiety, her child-like delight in life, her tender, caressing ways, and low musical voice?

"No hunting," said Adrian, after breakfast, going off to the stables.

He ordered a pair of horses to be roughed, and an hour afterwards he was driving his four-wheel dogcart along the road that led to Morcomb.

Helen was alone in the billiard-room, practising the spot stroke, in a neat little blue frock, with a scarlet waistcoat. "The Guards' colours," she told Adrian, when he admired it.

"Leo was ordering one from her tailor, so she

ordered one for me at the same time," said Helen. "Kind, wasn't it?"

"Very kind."

Adrian wondered a little at Mrs. Baddeley's somewhat lavish expenditure, since he had been told that her husband had very small means—a mere pittance beyond his pay.

"I am quite alone," said Helen, when they had seated themselves on each side of the hearth. "There was a telegram from Brindisi this morning, and father and Leonora rushed off by the express on their way to Paris. They are not to stop travelling till they get to Paris, and they may be just in time to meet Major Baddeley, who will travel as fast as ever he can from Brindisi; and then they will stop in Paris two or three days to see the sights, and then they will come back to poor disconsolate me."

"You do not look very disconsolate," said Adrian, contemplating her admiringly, as she sat in a lazy attitude, with her hands clasped above her head, with its loose mass of dark auburn hair.

"To tell you the truth, I don't at all mind being alone for a change. If it were hunting weather I should rather rejoice in their absence, for I could have a second horse—Leo's. Of course she told me not to ride him; but of course I shouldn't mind that, if this beastly snow would only give way. But what can one do in such weather as this?"

"Well, there *are* resources—one's books and one's piano."

"Oh, I have too much quicksilver in my veins for that kind of life. I want movement, air, variety—people to talk to me."

"People to admire and adore you, you mean," said Adrian.

"Yes, it is nice to be adored. One gets spoiled at a place like Monte Carlo, where there are so many idle young men, who can't afford to be always shooting pigeons or playing trente-et-quarante, and who are obliged to fall in love with somebody, *pour passer le temps*. But don't let us talk nonsense. I am growing a very serious personage in this rural atmosphere, I can assure

you. If I were to stay here another winter I should ask the Vicar to give me a district, and go about among the cottagers. I find I am very much looked down upon by other young ladies because I don't do that."

"Pray, don't; it is not in your line. There are bees and butterflies. You belong to the butterflies—beautiful insects, but useless except for the delight their grace and beauty give to man. We might exist without bees, but life would be unendurable without butterflies."

"How sweet of you to say that," exclaimed Helen. "Then I will not be false to my vocation. I shall try to fulfil my mission as a butterfly."

And then, after a pause, she said carelessly:

"Isn't it funny that you and I should be sitting on each side of the fire, like Darby and Joan?"

"Funny, Helen? No, it is intensely serious. It is the finger of Fate that has motioned us to these two chairs." Then, suddenly crossing the hearth and seating himself close beside her: "Shall

we not be Darby and Joan for life, Helen—always, always together, with the right to sit by our own fireside? Say yes, my darling; say yes. You know how dearly I love you. There need be no passionate speeches, no romantic wooing. I have loved you from the hour we first sat beside this hearth. Tell me on this spot, dear love, where first we met, that you give me love for love, that you will be my wife."

He drew her to his breast, and she let her head sink upon his shoulder. She was his own now; that lovely hair, with its delicate perfume, was his to caress; and the lovely lips did not refuse themselves to the kiss of betrothal.

"I don't know if I ought to pledge myself like this in my father's absence," she said, withdrawing herself suddenly from her lover's arm, with a touch of prudishness. "He ought to be consulted, ought he not—Adrian?"

How deliciously she murmured his name for the first time.

"He shall be consulted," said Adrian. "But I have no fear of his withholding his consent."

"Oh, you know you are a good match," cried Helen, tossing up her head. "You are King Cophetua and I am the beggar maid; and what can the beggar maid's father say to the King, except to thank him for his condescension?"

"My darling, you know that you are the queen and I am the beggar; a suppliant for the infinite boon of your love."

"Pray, does Lady Belfield know that you mean to give her *me* for a daughter-in-law?" asked Helen abruptly.

"She does know that it is the desire of my heart to do so."

"Poor dear Lady Belfield, I am sure she would rather have had anybody else. That strictly proper and rather pretty Miss Freemantle, for instance. Will you swear that you were never in love with Miss Freemantle?"

"I won't, because you know as well as possible that I never knew what love meant till I loved you."

"Ah, that is a kind of sophistical asseveration that all lovers make. 'Were you never in love

before?' says the lady. We are such jealous creatures—jealous of the past, the present, and the future, but most of all of the past. 'I never knew true love till I saw you,' replies the gentleman. But that commits him to nothing. He may have been in love a hundred times before. And you are five-and-twenty, Adrian. You *must* have been in love."

"I may have had a spasm or two of calf-love. I once rather admired Matilda Treducey."

"No, don't tell me *that*—anything but that. I should like to think you had good taste even before you knew me. And now, will you come for a walk? I want to see the horses and dogs. Don't be frightened. I am not going to present you to the stablemen as my future husband."

"I wish you would. It would be a kind of security that you will marry me. Put on your warmest wraps, love. It is very cold out of doors."

"I am not going to be called 'love,' or 'darling,' or any of those sickly sweet appellations. You are to call me Helen, and I shall call you Adrian. There

is a world more meaning in our own two names, which belong to us individually, than in any barley-sugar epithets that all the world uses."

"Then you shall be Helen, my Helen, I ask for no sweeter name. Helen, the destroyer of ships and of men:

> 'Is this the face that launched a thousand ships,
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?'"

"Is that some of Tennyson's nonsense?"

"No, it is Marlowe's nonsense."

"Marlowe? A new poet, I suppose. Please ring that bell for me, Adrian. I want a handful of sugar for the horses."

"Happy horses to be fed with sweets from such sweet hands."

"Now, have we not agreed that you are to indulge in none of that nonsense? I will have no sentimentality. You must treat me as your comrade and friend, or I will have nothing to say to you."

Her prettily authoritative air took the sting out of her speech. He submitted, and accompanied

her meekly on her round to the stables, which was a long business. It was not that there were many horses, bnt each was a personal acquaintance and had the strongest claims upon Helen's attention; and there was a good deal of time lost in running in and out of boxes in the endeavour to re-adjust the balance of favour, when one had had more than his due share of sugar, and another snorted indignant demands across the top of a door. And then there were the fox-terriers that lived in the stables, and the yard dogs outside, all equally exacting.

"I hope they will be able to live without you for a week or two," said Adrian.

"They cannot live without me. Where I go they must go."

"What, on your father's yacht, for instance?"

"No, I have only a beggarly allowance of one small dog on the yacht."

"And when you pay visits?"

"I never do pay visits. Don't you know that we are nomads—almost friendless nomads. Leo has friends—her husband's brother officers and

their people. It is a crack regiment, you know, and Frank is quite the smallest person in it. Leo goes into society. Leo visits at country houses. I don't. I am a Bohemian, a savage, a wild girl of the woods. You will change your mind perhaps when you come to consider the kind of person you have chosen."

"I have chosen her; to me she is perfect. My dearest, I love you ever so much better for not being a woman of the world. But I am not going to let you mope alone here while your people are away. You must come to the Abbey. My mother shall fetch you this afternoon."

"It would be very nice; but do you think Lady Belfield would like it?"

"I am sure she would. You cannot grow too near and dear to her. I want you to be to her as a daughter, in advance of the tie that is to make you one."

"She is very sweet," said Helen gravely. "It is easy for me to love her; but I'm afraid it may be difficult for her to love me."

"Indeed it will not. Come, and try your power.

I believe she loves you already. And now I will leave you to make your preparations for coming to the Abbey."

"But shall I not look rather foolish if I pack my trunks upon your invitation, and if Lady Belfield should not care about having me?"

"She will care. She shall be here at four o'clock to fetch you. Show her how punctual and business-like you can be. You can send your heavy luggage in the stable cart—or shall I send for it?"

"Oh no, our own men can take my luggage. If you insist upon it, I will get ready, even at the risk of looking foolish."

CHAPTER VII.

NOT QUITE CONTENT

Helen Deverill had been staying at the Abbey for nearly three weeks; she had become domesticated there, and seemed a part of the family life. Lady Belfield found herself wondering how she had ever managed her existence without the girlish figure always at her side, prompt and swift to anticipate her wants and wishes, to cut the leaves of her books, and to arrange her crewels, to listen with an enraptured air to her music. She was more than reconciled to the idea that this girl was to be her daughter in the future. She was grateful to Providence for having given her such a daughter.

"If she is only as devoted to Adrian as she seems to be!" thought the mother. "If she is only true!"

There is always that doubt, until love and

lovers have been tried in the furnace of hard experiences.

Colonel Deverill and his elder daughter were still in Paris. That lively city was at its best just after the turn of the year. Major Baddeley and his wife had numerous friends there, French and English. They were staying at the Grand Hotel, and they were seeing everything. The Colonel had been less eager to go back to Devonshire, seeing that Helen was so happily placed with her future mother-in-law. He had replied to Adrian's letter, asking his consent to the engagement, with characteristic candour.

"I confess that I saw which way you and Helen were drifting, and that I was heartily glad," he wrote. "She is a sweet girl, and will make you a sweet wife. Of course you know that, from a worldly point of view, you could hardly do worse. I have not a shilling to give my daughters. They will have my ate between them when I am dead and gone, an f there should be a radical change in the condi ı of Ireland, the property may be worth some ng. At present it is worth little

more than nothing. My best tenant is two years and a half in arrear with his rent; my worst has threatened to shoot me for taking out his doors and windows in a futile attempt to eject him. But I won't plague you with these dismal details. Happily, you are rich and generous, and you can afford to marry a girl whose beauty and innocence are her only dower."

Thus assured of the Colonel's approval, and seeing his mother growing daily better pleased with his choice, Adrian Belfield was completely happy. The die being cast, his friends and neighbours accepted the inevitable, and congratulated him with seeming heartiness on his engagement. Even the Miss Treduceys and the Miss Toffstaffs were gracious, taking an early occasion to call upon Lady Belfield and to ask if this startling news was really, really true.

"It is quite true, and I have my future daughter-in-law staying with me," answered Constance. "She and Adrian are out riding; but they will be home to tea, if you can stay and see them."

"We shall be charmed," said Dorothy Toffstaff

who had driven her smart little cart over from the heights above Chadford, and had picked up Matilda Treducey on her way. It was a long drive from Chadford to Wilmington, but the Toffstaffs, with their inexhaustible stud, made light of distances. They liked to be everywhere, and were to be met with at all possible points within twenty miles of their house.

The Treducey stables were altogether on a different footing, and there were daily quarrels and heart-burnings as to who should have cattle to ride or drive. Thus it had happened of late that the Treduceys were always being driven in Toffstaff carriages and riding Toffstaff horses. They broke in difficult animals for the Miss Toffstaffs, who, notwithstanding this fact, could never be induced to own the Treducey superiority in riding.

"They have very good hands," said Dorothy, speaking of her dearest friends, "but they have no style. They would be dreadful in the Row."

Style, as imparted by a fashionable riding-master, at a guinea a lesson, was Dorothy's strong

point. She balanced herself airily upon her saddle, stuck out her elbows, tossed up her head, or straightened her spine in the last approved manner, and she was an admirable horsewoman as long as her horse behaved himself; but it was the Treduceys' strong point to master vice and inexperience in their horses, and to make all the hunters they ever rode.

And now Dorothy Toffstaff and Matilda Treducey sat on each side of the hearth and complimented Lady Belfield on her son's choice.

"She is so pretty," said Dorothy, "one can hardly wonder that he fell in love with her. But I hope *you* like her, dear Lady Belfield?"

Dorothy was prepared to receive a reluctant negative.

"Yes, I like her very much; but liking is a cold word. I love her?" Lady Belfield answered frankly.

"Lucky girl, to have such a charming mother-in-law," said Miss Treducey, looking round the noble old drawing-room, which had been a drawing-room in Queen Elizabeth's time, and had echoed

the silvery tones of that great sovereign's speech, and the graver accents of Burleigh. The Abbey was rich in traditions about dead and gone monarchs and senators. More than one sovereign had rested there on a royal progress through the West Countree.

Matilda Treducey had always admired the Abbey. If there was one house in which she would rather have ruled than in another, it was this Elizabethan mansion; and to know that it was to be the home of an Irish scapegrace's unsophisticated daughter, a girl who had been brought up anyhow—this was exceeding bitter. Miss Toffstaff also felt that she had been cheated. Sir Adrian was the only good match in that part of the country—and with *his* family and position and *her* wealth, they might have done anything. And he was throwing himself away upon a pauper.

Helen came in with her lover while the gentle Dorothy thus mused. She was flushed with her ride in the cold clear air, and looked lovely in her neat little felt hat and girlish habit, a little blue cloth habit made by an Irish tailor. Mrs. Baddeley

had her hunting gear from the most fashionable habit-maker in London; but then Mrs. Baddeley had her own bills and her own resources, great or small.

Adrian and his *fiancée* were perfectly frank and gracious in their talk with the two young ladies; had no idea of any leaven of malice lurking under the outward semblance of goodwill; accepted congratulations and good wishes as a matter of course.

"Yes, we are both very happy," said Adrian, smiling at his betrothed; "I did not think it was the common lot of man to know such bliss."

"You don't hunt now, do you?" asked Miss Toffstaff of Helen. "I haven't seen you out for ever so long."

"No, I have not been out. Adrian is advised not to hunt, and I don't care about it without him."

"That must be a dreadful deprivation though, to anybody who is fond of sport."

The two girls were talking together on one side of the room, while Adrian was engaged with his mother and Miss Treducey on the other side, out of hearing.

"I am very fond of sport," Helen confessed, with a sigh. "I can't help being sorry that Adrian can never be a hunting man. I should so like him to have had the hounds. They say there will be some difficulty about a master when Sir George Rollestone gives them up, as he means to do; and Adrian would be the most natural person to take them. But as he is not allowed to hunt it would be a mockery for him to have anything to do with them."

"What a pity he is not his brother."

"Ah, Mr. Belfield is a capital sportsman, I believe," said Helen, with a slightly regretful air.

"Mr. Belfield is everything that Sir Adrian is not," said Miss Toffstaff sententiously.

"Nature has been kinder to him. Poor Adrian?"

"But then, Sir Adrian is so clever. Mr. Rockstone told me that he has read more than most men of fifty."

"Yes, he has surfeited himself with books. He is very clever."

This was spoken with a sigh. Helen was apt to

be oppressed by her lover's intellectual superiority. It was a kind of barrier that kept them apart. He knew so much of books and the men who had written them, and she so little. She was ashamed of her ignorance, and thus dared not talk freely with him upon any intellectual subject, lest he should discover her deficiencies.

"Dorothy Toffstaff was talking about your brother," she said to Adrian later, as they sat over the drawing-room fire in the dusk before going off to dress for dinner.

Helen had kept on her habit. She had a way of sitting about for an hour or two just as she came off her horse, with rumpled hair and bespattered skirts. She was sitting on the hearthrug almost at her lover's feet, staring at the fire in an idle reverie. Lady Belfield had left them half-an-hour ago seated just in the same attitudes. It was not that they had very much to talk about. It was happiness to Adrian even to be in the presence of the woman he loved, to have her near him, a beautiful enchanting creature, whose every tone was music, whose every movement was grace.

"She said that you and Valentine are utterly unlike," pursued Helen, "and yet I have heard your mother say that you are the image of each other."

"I believe we are alike in face and figure—alike with a difference," answered Adrian dreamily. "Our features were cast from the same sketch, but not in the same mould. You will see him very soon, I hope, and judge for yourself. He and I have never lived so long apart, and if I had not had you to give a new colour to my life, I should have felt miserable without him. Even with your sweet companionship I begin to weary for his return."

"Take care! I shall be jealous of any one who steals your thoughts from me—even of a brother. You must be very fond of each other?"

"Fondness can hardly express our feeling. It is something more than affection. It is a sympathy so close that his vexations and his pleasures move me almost as strongly as my own. I have never seen him out of temper without being agitated myself; and in all his great triumphs—on

the river, in the cricket field, at a steeplechase—I have been as elated as if I myself were the victor Yes, I have felt a thrill of pride and delight far keener than common sympathy."

"I don't think sympathy is by any means common," said Helen lightly. "I believe that the great majority of people are supremely indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others. The world could hardly go on if it were otherwise. We have such a little time to live that we must live fast if we want to get anything out of life."

"Is not that rather a selfish theory?"

"I suppose it is; but I frankly own to being selfish. Selfishness is one of my numerous failings."

"I will not hear you say so. I know you better than you know yourself," he said tenderly, leaning down till his lips touched the golden-brown hair.

"That is a delusion on your part. You only know an ideal Helen, a Helen of your own invention, faultless, a bundle of virtues, a concatenation of noble qualities and lofty feelings. I am not

even a blood relation of your Helen. I am full of faults."

"Then I will love you with all your faults. I have plenty of my own to balance them."

"No. You have only three—three great faults."

"Name them. Let me know the worst."

"First, you are too good for me. Secondly, you are far too clever for me. Thirdly, you are not a sportsman."

"The goodness and the cleverness might be easily got over, since they belong rather to your ideal Adrian than to the actual man. But I fear I can never be a sportsman."

"I should have liked my husband to keep a pack of hounds, and to hunt four times a week," sighed Helen, with the air of a child that has been baulked in some eager fancy.

"My dearest, I can never be the typical English squire; nor can I allow the wife I love to spend half her days and nearly all her thoughts in the hunting-field. I want to share your life, Helen; I want your company all day long—your mind, your heart, and all your thoughts and fancies. I would

not have one of your thoughts wasted upon horses and hounds."

"I have been brought up to care more for four-footed friends than any others."

"Perhaps you never had a friend who loved you as I do. Such friendship is exacting, Helen. There must be sacrifices."

"Must there? Well, it is not a very great sacrifice for a penniless Irish girl to be your wife, and to live in this lovely old house. It will not be my house, though! I shall only be a secondary person. Your mother must always be the first."

"You do not mind that?" asked Adrian.

"Mind? No, I adore her. She is as much above me as if she were an angelic being. But I shall be Lady Belfield too. Will not that seem strange? Two Lady Belfields in one house. We must live half the year in London and Paris, Adrian. We must not rust away our lives here."

"Do you call this rusting?" he asked tenderly.

Her head rested against his knee, her eyes were looking up at him, starlike in the dim light of the low wood fire.

"No, this is fairyland, dreamland, what you will. But it cannot last much longer—not a moment longer"—as the timepiece chimed the half-hour. "There is half-past seven, and I shall be late for dinner again."

"Don't if you can help it, darling. It is one of the few things that vexes my mother."

Helen made a *moue* as she ran out of the room. It seemed to her that there were a good many things which vexed Lady Belfield. Disorder of all kinds set that gentle lady's teeth on edge, and Helen was the very spirit of disorder.

Half-way to her room she met one of the housemaids in a corridor.

"Is that you, Margaret?" she cried. "Come and help me to dress. "I'm awfully late again."

Margaret, *alias* Madge, was Lady Belfield's last *protégée*, the new girl who had been taken into the household out of charity. Mrs. Marrable had pronounced her very amenable, and had taken pains to instruct her in certain domestic duties. Her province was on the upper floor. Helen, who had brought no maid to the Abbey, was struck

by the girl's good looks, and had in a manner appropriated her services. She was much quicker of intellect and handier altogether than the average housemaid.

With Margaret's help, Helen contrived to appear in the drawing-room just two minutes before the butler announced dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

"NO GENTLEMAN WOULD HAVE ACTED SO"

THERE had been but the briefest letters from Valentine either to Lady Belfield or to Adrian. He was at Monte Carlo, shooting pigeons, riding other peoples' horses in steeplechases, drinking the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and he intended to return to the Abbey in time for the last of the hunting. This was all that was known about him, and now the season was nearly over, and he might be expected at any time. His rooms were ready, his horses fit, his own particular groom was on the look-out for his return.

It was a dull afternoon in February, and Helen was alone in the library, her lover's favourite room, the very sanctuary of his life, as it were—the place where he read, and thought, and played, and lived his own sacred inner life, with which the rest of the household had little in common.

It was not a conventional library—not a place of massive bookcases and regulation sets of books. It was half a music-room, with an organ at one end, and a grand piano in the angle near the old-fashioned fireplace. Adrian had inherited his mother's love of music, and played both organ and piano. The books were chiefly of his own collecting, a library of modern *belles lettres,* in several languages.

"You are so awfully learned," exclaimed Helen, after glancing at a shelf of German metaphysics. "Do you really, really read those dreadful books?"

"I have spent some thoughtful hours that way, love. I won't go so far as to say that I understand them."

"Does anybody?"

And then she would take out a volume of Keats or Wordsworth, and twirl its pages for a little while, and declare that the poetry was quite too lovely.

"Which do you like best, Keats or Wordsworth?" he asked.

"I don't quite know," looking up at him with interrogative eyes, to see which of the two she

ought to prefer. "They are both so sweet. Keats is delicious—but Wordsworth is—Wordsworth. No, I cannot find the right words to express my appreciation; but I can feel his poetry."

And Adrian was content to accept this kind of thing as the expression of a spiritual essence that had not been concentrated into speech.

This afternoon Helen had the library all to herself. Adrian had gone a long journey to Exeter, to look at a pair of horses which he had been advised to buy for his mother's barouche. The horses she was using were beginning to show signs of wear. He was not expected back till dinner-time. Lady Belfield had complained of a headache after lunch, and had gone to her room to lie down. She had been having bad nights of late, and sorely wanted sleep. The cause of these wakeful nights was as far off as Monte Carlo. The mother had been full of anxiety about that wayward younger son, whose prolonged absence might mean mischief of some kind.

This afternoon was dull and cold, with occasional showers. Helen made up her mind to spend

it indoors. She would amuse herself in that dear old room, free to peer and pry about like an inquisitive child.

The delight of looking at things all by herself—opening private drawers—turning over books and papers — lasted about half-an-hour. Then she played the piano a little, trying first one piece and then another, never getting beyond a page of any composition before she was tripped up by a difficulty, and turned the leaf in disgust. Wearying of this, she went to the organ, and pulled out the stops and touched the dumb, senseless keys; and then, in a fit of temper, she flew to the bell and rang it sharply.

"It is miserably dull indoors," she said to herself; "I must get a good gallop."

The footman appeared in the usual leisurely manner of a servant who reproves any ill-bred impetuosity in the ringing of a bell by being a little slower than usual in answering it.

"Will you ask Dodman to saddle a horse for me," she said; "I should like Mr. Belfield's last new chestnut."

"Yes, ma'am. Will you require Dodman?"

"I sha'n't require him, but I suppose I shall be obliged to have him," said Helen.

It was one of her grievances that Adrian would not allow her to ride without her groom. She liked the sense of freedom, being accountable to no one for where she rode or what she did with her horse.

She had heard a good deal about the chestnut hunter's evil propensities, and it was naturally on that account she wanted to ride him.

But Dodman was not the kind of man to be caught napping; and he knew that Sir Adrian would not put his future wife on an ill-disposed brute like the chestnut. So when Helen ran down to the hall in her habit and hat, eager for the fray, she found the pretty skewbald Cinderella standing in front of the porch.

"Am I to ride that brute?" she asked.

It was the brute she generally rode with Adrian.

"You don't find no fault with her, do you, ma'am?" asked Dodman, immovable as a rock.

"No, except that she is a sheep. I sent you a

message by Bellows. I wanted to ride the chestnut."

"You couldn't manage that 'oss, ma'am. He's too much for any lady."

"He wouldn't be too much for me."

"I should be very sorry to see you on him, ma'am."

"Oh, you are much too careful. You have spoiled Sir Adrian's riding, and now I suppose you want to spoil mine."

Dodman was too superior a person to notice this unworthy petulance. He flung the young lady into her saddle, and gave her the bridle without a word, and then he mounted behind her and followed her along the avenue.

She punished him for her disappointment by taking the skewbald over some of the worst ground in the neighbourhood, and at a breakneck pace. She did everything that she ought not to have done in the course of an hour and a half of hard riding. It was six o'clock when she went back to the Abbey.

There was a good fire in the library. She saw

the red light shining through the lattices and the emblazoned glass of the upper mullions. She was cold after her ride in the wind and rain, and she went to the library with the idea of enjoying herself for half-an-hour in front of the burning logs.

She did not expect to see Adrian till dinner-time, but to her surprise there he was, sitting in a low armchair by the hearth, figure and face both in shadow, as she approached him.

She stole towards him on tiptoe, bent over the back of his chair and kissed him.

The kiss was returned with interest. Two strong arms were thrown back to clasp and encircle her. She was caught and pinioned as she bent over the chair.

But in the next instance she snatched herself from those encircling arms, and drew back with an indignant exclamation, crimson with rage.

"It is not Adrian," she said. "How dare you? How dare you?"

A tall figure rose from the chair with a careless, easy movement, and stood before her, erect. Taller and broader than Adrian's figure, stronger

—different somehow, and yet so like, so like—that it was difficult to believe that this man was not Adrian himself.

"How dare you?" she muttered again, almost beside herself with anger; all her Irish blood boiling in her veins.

"My dear young lady, you must allow me to observe that it was you who began the assault," said the stranger, with provoking placidity. "That consideration ought at least to mitigate your wrath."

"To—to kiss me like that!"

He laughed at her rage, as if she had been an angry child.

"Would you have a man's lips meet the lips of beauty as if he were kissing his laundress?" he asked lightly. "Besides, I had a right to kiss you —as your future brother."

"No gentleman would have acted so," she said, still fuming, her riding whip vibrating in her clenched hand.

What would she have given to have horsewhipped him! There were women in the world who had done such things.

"No gentleman! Perhaps not," said Valentine. "I have never prided myself upon that conventional distinction, to which every grocer's son aspires from his cradle. I would rather be a blackguard, and a MAN. I am a being of nerves and muscles, passions and impulses. Whether that kind of thing can be gentlemanlike, I don't know and don't care. Come, Helen, don't be angry. 'Twas no stranger who returned your kiss just now, but your lover's twin brother, who claims the right to love you. You cannot be greatly loved by him without being a little loved by me. We are two halves of one whole, and I am the stronger half. You cannot be wax to him and marble to me; melt at his touch, and freeze at mine. Our natures are too closely interwoven. To love one of us is to love the other. Come, Helen, forgive and be friends."

He held out his hand, and she could not refuse to give him her own. But the little gloved hand lay supine in his strong clasp, and there was no such thing as pardon in her heart.

"I have always heard that you are a very

strange person," she said, "but as you are Adrian's brother, I suppose we must be friends."

And with this not over-civil speech she left him to his reflections.

He threw himself into the chair by the fire, stirred up the logs, and took out his cigar-case for a comfortable smoke before he went to his dressing-room. When the door was shut upon Helen—he had not troubled himself to open it for her—he laughed softly to himself.

"As lovely as her namesake and as spirited as Kate the curst," he muttered. "I like her ever so much better for that flash of temper. Upon my soul, Adrian has not made half a bad choice. I hardly gave him credit for such good taste. But then the girl was flung into his lap, as it were. No doubt Deverill came here of malice aforethought, to plant his daughter upon my mother's son. Hark, there's the cart, and Adrian."

He went out to the porch to receive his brother, who was almost overcome with delight at seeing him.

"My dear fellow, what ages you have been

away. How glad my mother must be! You have seen her, of course."

"Not yet. I have only been here an hour; came by the slow afternoon train from Exeter. They told me my mother was lying down, not overwell, so I wouldn't have her disturbed. I've been sitting over the fire in the library, half asleep. I came by the *Rapide* from Marseilles, straight ahead, crossed the Channel last night, and have been travelling ever since."

"And you have not seen Helen?"

"Oh, yes, I have. Helen and I have made friends already."

He laughed a little as he spoke of her, and the light danced merrily in his eyes. He wondered whether she would give her betrothed a detailed account of their skirmish. The odds were against it, he thought. Women are curiously shy about trifles. She would lock the story up in her own heart, and always bear malice against him on account of it.

"And you like her?" asked Adrian eagerly.

"There has been no time for liking, but I ad-

mire her immensely, and I congratulate you on your good luck."

"Yes, she is lovely, is she not? And as dear as she is lovely."

"Clever and accomplished into the bargain, I suppose?"

"I doubt if you would call her either; yet she is the most fascinating girl I ever met."

"I'm glad she's not learned, or a paragon in the way of accomplishments. Every step that a woman travels in the road to mental perfection is a step that leads away from feminine loveliness. A beautiful woman should be only beautiful. All the rest is outside her sphere. Imagine a lovely forehead that has grown wrinkled over Darwin."

He rattled on lightly, with his arm through Adrian's, as they went into the house and upstairs together.

"Not a word to my mother," said Valentine, as they parted; "I want to surprise her when I go down to dinner."

"I sha'n't see her till then. I've only just time to dress."

Half-an-hour later and Lady Belfield was sitting in her accustomed chair at a respectful distance from the drawing-room fire, with her book-table on one side and her work-basket on the other, when her two sons came in together, more like than usual in their evening dress, which hardly varied in the smallest detail.

The mother rose in a tumult of delight to receive the wanderer.

"My dearest, how could you stay away so long?" she asked, almost piteously.

"A truant disposition, and the perversity of my favourite colour. Never mind, mother. Here I am, and here I mean to stay till after Adrian's wedding."

"I am so glad. I am so happy. How well you are looking. You must have enjoyed yourself very much to stop away so long."

"Oh, I was with very good fellows, and the sky was blue and the wines were good, and we had a yacht, and knocked about a good deal in some deuced rough weather. The Mediterranean isn't all jam. But altogether the life suited me. There

were plenty of pretty women, but not one so pretty as my future sister-in-law," he added in an undertone as Helen entered, in her æsthetic frock of pale blue cashmere, with short sleeves and a short waist, and a babyish bodice which set off her perfect shoulders and swan-like throat.

She came into the room more slowly than her wont, and a sudden rosy flush swept over her face and neck as she drew near the spot where the two brothers were standing.

"Helen, let me introduce my other son," began Lady Belfield.

"We are friends already," answered Valentine. "Are we not, Helen?"

He called her by her Christian name in the easiest way, as a right.

"And will be more than friends—brother and sister, in the future, I hope," said his mother.

"Amen to that sweet prayer," answered Valentine. "Come, mother, it is my privilege to take you in to dinner to-night," as the butler made his announcement, "and I shall astonish you by the justice which a man who has been fed on kickshaws

at a Monte Carlo hotel can do to your old-fashioned English fare—your inevitable saddle of mutton and your elderly pheasants."

They went in to dinner, a snug little party of four. The room looked all the brighter for that fourth presence. Their triangular dinners had been marked of late by a gentle dulness.

Lady Belfield was in high spirits, enraptured at the return of her younger born, and Valentine was full of talk about himself and his adventures, good luck and bad luck, the people he had met, and the women with whom he had flirted.

Helen was unusually silent, as if somewhat oppressed by that exuberant gaiety.

Valentine was right in his surmise. Not one word did she say to her betrothed, on that night or afterwards, about her skirmish with Valentine in the library.

CHAPTER IX.

NOT THE AVERAGE GIRL

"ADRIAN," said Helen, in the breakfast-room next morning, "I want to go home."

It was half-past nine o'clock. Breakfast was over, and Lady Belfield had gone off to her hot-houses and morning interview with the head gardener. It was a hunting day, and Valentine was lolling in an easy chair by the fireplace, waiting for his horse to be brought to the door.

Helen and Adrian were standing in front of the window watching the drizzling rain. It was a Devonshire morning, wet and warm, with a low grey sky, and a mist from the distant sea.

"Go home, dearest—but why?"

"First, I have been here much too long already. I have no doubt the Treduceys and Toffstaffs are talking about my living here, and expatiating upon my pauperism. 'Hardly bread to eat at home, poor

creature!' and so on. But that is a detail. My secondly is more important. Leo and the governor went to Paris ostensibly for a few days, and have stayed three weeks."

"Darling, if you knew how it sets my teeth on edge to hear you say 'the governor.'"

"Then in future it shall be 'my Father,'" with a solemn air. "But if I really were your darling, nothing I could say would ever set your teeth on edge. However, as I was saying, those people have stayed too long in Paris. They must be spending a great deal of money. Somebody told me the Grand is an expensive hotel."

"It is not cheap."

"I shall order them home immediately, and the only way to make them obey is to go home myself. As long as the gov—my father knows I am provided for here, he will pursue his reckless career abroad."

"We can't spare you yet awhile, Helen," said Adrian tenderly. "You have become the daughter of the house. My mother couldn't do without you. We shall only let you go home in time to get your frocks ready for your metamorphosis. I

believe the law which insists upon new frocks as a preliminary of marriage is like the laws of the Medes and Persians, and altereth not with the march of enlightenment."

"Perhaps when a man marries a girl out of the gutter he does it to escape being pestered about her trousseau," said Valentine; "and that when a fellow runs away with another man's wife, it is for the sake of skipping the horrors of the marriage ceremony and the ordeal by wedding presents."

"No, Helen, we can't spare you yet," pursued Adrian, ignoring this ribald commentary.

"No, Helen, we can't spare you yet," echoed Valentine, from his easy chair. "There's my horse. I'd better be off pretty sharp. It's a long way to Tadpole Pond."

He jumped up, took his hat and whip, and hurried out. Adrian and Helen watched him mount and ride away, tall and straight, wearing his weather-stained scarlet coat with an easy grace, as much at home on the impatient hunter as he had been in his easy chair.

The horse reared straight on end, while Helen

and Adrian were watching, and his progress for the first few hundred yards seemed to be more upon two legs than on four.

"Oh, how I envy him! how I should like to be going with him!" cried Helen spontaneously, forgetting that only a few minutes before she had been trying to get herself out of that house, deeming that she could not exist beneath the same roof with Valentine Belfield. "Would he take me next Friday, do you think? Would you mind?"

"Would I mind? Well, no, not if you really care for hunting so very much."

"Care for it? I adore it. Why, you know it is my passion. I wish with all my heart it were not. Just for once in a way, that I may see a little more of your picturesque country," she pleaded.

"I could drive you all over Devonshire, Helen."

"Oh, but there is no fun in driving; and there are lots of places where you could not drive—break-neck hills, boggy bits of moorland, woods and winding streams. The only proper way to see

a country is after the hounds, when one's blood is up, and one's horse is on fire with eagerness. You'll let me hunt a little more before the season is over—just once or twice or so—won't you, Adrian? Think how very good I have been for the last three weeks."

This was said with the air of a martyr.

"My poor, self-sacrificing Helen," said her lover, half sad and half ironical. "Yes, you must hunt, I suppose. You must go and hazard that life on which hangs my own in the most break-neck country in England. I will go out with you and potter about while you follow Valentine, who always takes the most hazardous line, and will lead you over some of the worst ground in Devonshire."

"Then may I send for my little Irish mare to-morrow? Your horses have charming manners, but they are not quick enough for hounds. Norah Creina is nothing much to look at, but she's a splendid goer."

Naturally, Helen had her way. The Irish mare was sent for that afternoon, and the young lady

said no more about her desire to go back to Morcomb.

She tried to forget Valentine's offence and her own indignation. "After all, he is to be my brother," she told herself.

His presence in the house was a disturbing influence; even the expectation of his return fluttered her spirits a little as she sat at work with Lady Belfield that afternoon, while the rain pattered against the windows. She was not very fond of needlework, but she had felt constrained to put on an air of occupation in the long wet afternoons, lest her future mother-in-law should take offence at her idleness.

This afternoon her thoughts were in the steep break-neck lanes or on the brown barren moorland, rather than with her basket of many-coloured silks, or the bunch of poppies which she was stitching at mechanically, caring very little whether the shading came out well or ill, stopping every now and then to stifle a yawn.

Adrian was in the library writing letters, and the two women were alone together.

"What dreadful weather for the hunting," said Lady Belfield, looking up at the window for the twentieth time in half-an-hour.

"*They* won't mind it," exclaimed Helen, with a regretful air. "What does rain matter if they have a run? There is nothing more enjoyable than dashing through wind and bad weather after a good fox. It is only when one is standing about in a hopeless condition that one minds the rain. I only wish I were with them under that downpour."

"My dear Helen, I hope you will never forget that Adrian has been strongly warned against hunting."

"I am not likely to forget it," answered Helen, with a touch of pettishness.

"And you won't tempt him to disobey his doctor, will you, dear?"

"Of course not. But I suppose there will be no harm in my going out with Mr. Belfield next Friday. I should not give him any trouble. I can always take care of myself."

"Any harm—no I suppose not," replied Lady

Belfield, with an air which implied that she thought the proposition somewhat incorrect.

Valentine came home earlier than usual. The day had been unsatisfactory. He had had two of his best horses out, and there had not been work enough for one. He went off to change his clothes in no very agreeable humour. It was dusk when he left his dressing-room, but the lamp was lighted in the corridor, and there was light enough for him to see the face of a girl whom he met half way between his room and the open gallery above the hall.

She was dressed in the Abbey livery of dark red merino and long white apron. She wore the muslin mob cap of the Abbey housemaids; but she looked no more like them than if she had been a duchess who had just put on that costume in a frolic, a duchess whom Gainsborough might paint and *cognoscenti* adore.

Her dark eyes flashed upon Valentine Belfield like a danger signal. He pulled up suddenly, and stood face to face with her.

"What in the devil's name brings you here?" he exclaimed.

"I hope you are not sorry to see me, Mr. Belfield?"

"Never mind what I am. Tell me what devilry has brought you here, in that get up. You are not a servant here, I hope?"

"But I am. I have been living here more than a month. There was no devilry in it, I assure you. It was my first and only friend, the Vicar, who got me the place—and it was Lady Belfield's kindness which made room for me. I have been trying to improve myself," she added, looking up at him shyly. "I get a glimpse of your mother and of other ladies now and then, and I am trying to find out what ladies are like and how they behave, that I may learn to be a lady."

"You are a fool," muttered Valentine scornfully. "Your wildness was your charm. What have you to do with women of my mother's status? You were a beautiful, ignorant creature, knowing nothing of the world and its deadly-lively ways. You were a woman for a man to love—a splendid, untamed, perhaps untameable, being, for whom a man might go to the devil. Do you suppose that

electro-plated gentility will improve you? Do you think your gipsy blood will show to advantage in a Paris bonnet and gown?"

"I think that if I am ever to be a gentleman's wife I must first learn to be a lady," she answered gravely.

"Come, Madge, don't be a fool," said Valentine, with a touch of tenderness, putting his arm round her, and trying to draw her towards him.

She drew herself away from him, pushing him from her with an arm which was a good deal stronger than the average young lady's arm.

He laughed at her vehemence.

"By Jove," he cried, "was that a specimen of your new manners? Is that Herculean style your notion of gentility? Why, my girl, ladies are like lilies: they snap at a gust of wind. Listen here, Madge, there's no use in our talking nonsense. You know I am ridiculously fond of you, and that I would do anything in reason to make you happy; but there is no use in our talking about marriage. You must have seen a little more of what life is

like since you have been under this roof, and you must begin to understand that——"

He hesitated, looking down at his embroidered slippers—the mother's gift—at a loss how to frame a sentence that would not end in a brutal admission.

"I must understand that gentlemen don't marry girls of my class," said Madge, finishing his sentence for him, with those brilliant eyes of hers fixed with steady gaze upon his downcast countenance. He could feel their light, was conscious of that earnest scrutiny, though his eyelids were lowered. "Was that what you were going to say?"

"Something like that."

"Well, that's what I don't understand. What I do understand is that if a man loves a girl well enough he will have her for his wife, however low she may be. If he really and truly loves her, he doesn't want to bring shame upon her. It is only half-hearted love that would do that. If a man loves in earnest, and with his whole heart, he will marry the girl he loves. Yes, if he were a duke,

and she a girl of blemished character. There is nothing against my character, Mr. Belfield, and you know it. So you had best understand at once that I shall never be anything more to you than your mother's servant—unless I am your wife."

"That's hard upon me, seeing that I am a younger son and not a free agent. Dukes can do as they like, but I can't. You know I am passionately fond of you, Madge. Come, child, don't be unreasonable."

Again he tried to draw her nearer to him, to bring those lips closer to his own, and entangle those flashing glances of hers in the light of his own dark eyes, which were hardly less brilliant.

"My dearest girl," he pleaded, "you know I adore you. What more can you want to know? You ought never to have put yourself into this false position. A servant, you! The queen of beauty handling a broom! You should have listened to me, Madge. I know of the sweetest little cottage, in a garden on the bank of the Chad, far away from your vile swamp. A gentle-

man's cottage, half hidden under flowering creepers, with a verandah where a fellow could smoke his cigarette after dinner in the summer evenings, and a boathouse where a fellow could keep his boat. You would be in your place, Madge, in that cottage, with a couple of servants to wait upon you. Why should we not be happy, sweet? This world was made for love and lovers."

"This world was made for honest men and women. You are a scoundrel. Yes, you are right, I was a fool to come to this house. But the temptation was too great—to see you—to be near you."

"You might be more than that, my dearest. You might be with me always, if you would. Will you go with me to-morrow to see that cottage, Madge? You could slip out at the back of the house quietly, and I could pick you up near the stables, and drive you there in an hour. The place would not look so pretty as in summer, but it is always picturesque, and—Madge," pleadingly, "we might be so happy there."

"No," she answered resolutely, not with the air

of a woman who means yes; "I could never be happy that way."

"Your mother was of another way of thinking, Madge."

"How dare you throw my mother's shame in my face. What do you know of my mother?"

"I have had the honour of meeting her in London society," he answered, with a malicious sparkle in his eyes.

"And I do not even know if she is alive."

"Oh, she is a lady who has made herself a reputation in London, I assure you. When was it I met her? About five years ago, I think, my second year at Cambridge. I was up in town on the quiet, went to a theatre, and supper-party afterwards—a sporting nobleman's party. Your mother was there. Mature, gone to seed a little, perhaps, but remarkably handsome still, and dressed as only a woman of genius knows how to dress at forty—dressed to make forty more attractive than twenty. Your mother would never wear a housemaid's cap, or trundle a mop, I can assure you. She knows her own value too well. She has better sense."

"What is her name in London? I have never heard of her by any name but my own, Madge."

"Oh, she has a name of greater dignity than that. I was introduced to her as Mrs. Mandeville. There was a Major Mandeville, about whom people told some curious stories, but I did not see much of him."

"Do you know where my mother is living now?"

"No, child. But I dare say I could find out. Do you want to know?"

"Yes, I want to know all I can about my mother. Even if she is a wicked woman, leading a bad life, she is more to me than any other woman on this earth. The day may come when she will want my help."

"I fancy she is too clever for that, Madge; but I have no doubt she would be glad to see you, if it were only to be reminded how handsome she was twenty years ago."

A bell rang in a lobby below, the servants' tea-bell.

"I must go," said Madge hurriedly, and so they parted, Madge to the back stairs and the servants'

hall, Valentine to his mother's drawing-room, where tea had been waiting for him for a quarter of an hour, Lady Belfield excusing the delay to Helen and Adrian, on the ground that afternoon tea was more to the returning sportsman than to any one else. "And it is so much nicer for us all to have our tea together," she said.

"Don't apologize, mother," said Adrian, smiling at her, "as if we didn't know that your tea would be worse than tasteless if you began without Valentine."

"You have not been so expeditious as usual, Val," said the mother, as her younger son sauntered into the room in velvet jacket and slippers, and with a Byronic throat.

"I was wetter than usual, mother, and taking off my boots was like drawing double teeth," he answered, as he seated himself at Lady Belfield's side and attacked a pile of toast.

He looked across at Helen, who was sitting on the other side of the fireplace with her workbasket in her lap, the image of propriety. He looked at her critically, as he sipped his tea and munched

his toast, comparing her delicate beauty with that darkly brilliant face he had just now been gazing upon. No two faces could have been more distinct in their beauty, more widely diverse in their characteristics. In Helen's countenance the lightness of a frivolous and shallow nature was as obvious as her beauty; in that other face there were suggestions of the sublime in passion or in thought. It was the face of a woman strong for good or for evil.

There was a relief in watching the play of Helen's countenance after the passionate earnestness and fixed purpose of that other face, so full of evil augury to him, the would-be seducer. Here he could gaze unappalled.

"How pretty she is, just as butterflies and flowers that last a day are pretty," he said to himself, "and how soon a sensible man would get tired of her. Perhaps she may do for my brother all the same," he went on, musing lazily as he ate and drank, "he is a *dilettante;* loves prettiness in everything, from architecture to bookbinding. Yes, she may succeed in making him happy, shallow as

she is. He will play the organ to her, expatiate upon Bach and Beethoven, read Shelley and Keats to her, and she will pretend to be interested; and they will get on pretty well together in their namby-pamby way."

He could read Helen's thoughts easily enough as he watched her face in the lamplight. Her eyes were cast down for the most part on her teacup or her work-basket, but now and then she glanced shyly, inquisitively, in his direction.

"She feels embarrassed still on account of yesterday's escapade," he said to himself, "yet she is monstrous curious about me, would like to know what manner of man I am; would like to be friends."

He condescended to describe his day presently, when he had taken the edge off his appetite, and then asked Helen why she was not out.

"The Toffstaffs and the Treduceys were full of inquiries about you, thinking it such a pity you don't hunt now. You seemed to enjoy it so much they said."

"They were not over civil to me when I was

out," said Helen; "I shouldn't ride to hounds for the pleasure of their society—but, but," faltering a little, and with a deprecating glance at Adrian, "I should very much like to get one or two more days before the end of the season."

"One or two more days," cried Valentine. "What bosh! You must go every day—get every chance you can. There are horses enough to give you two a day if you like. I hope Adrian is not so selfish as to want to keep you at home."

"Does it rank as selfishness, Val, for a man to want his wife's society? If Helen were to hunt three days a week after we are married, it would be a kind of semi-divorce, for which I am not prepared."

"All the more reason that she should make the most of her time while she is single," retorted Valentine. "If I were you, Helen, I would not be denied a single day. I would make the most of my freedom in anticipation of a life of captivity."

"I shall not think it captivity," murmured Helen, with her sweetest smile; and Adrian was content.

There was a telegram from Colonel Deverill next morning to announce his arrival in London. He would be at Morcomb next day with Major and Mrs. Baddeley, and hoped to find Helen at home.

"Then I shall not have to trouble you, Mr. Belfield," said Helen. "Frank is devoted to hunting, and he will take care of Leo and me—if, if you don't mind my having one or two more days, Adrian."

"You will be out of my jurisdiction, Helen—if you really must go home."

"Oh, indeed I must. Father is very peremptory. I ought to go, dear Lady Belfield, though I am heart-broken at ending this happy visit."

"It will not be long, dear, before this house will be your home," answered Lady Belfield gently.

"Do you know that this is a very uncivil way of throwing me over, Helen," said Valentine laughingly. "You engage a man to show you the country—a man who knows every inch of the ground; and then you inform him that a certain Major Baddeley, who perhaps never put his nose

in North Devon before, will be ever so much better a guide."

"Only because he is an old friend, almost a relation."

"And am I an enemy; and am I not to be almost a relation?"

"I think you know what I mean, Mr. Belfield."

She was going to answer her telegram. Quicker in his movements always than his brother, Valentine sprang to the door.

"Why am I Mr. Belfield?" he asked in a lowered voice, as he opened it for her, "why not Valentine as well as Frank?"

"Oh, I could not—not yet," she said.

"Strangers yet? Strangers, after the day before yesterday?" in still lower tones, detaining her on the threshold.

She flushed crimson, looked at him angrily, and passed him as if he were dirt.

"The butterfly can hold her own," he thought, as he went back to the table to finish his breakfast.

He did not see Helen again till they met at the covert side, where he was presented by her to Mrs.

Baddeley, who was in high glee at returning to country life after her Parisian dissipations.

"What did we see? Everything!" she answered, when Valentine questioned her about "Le petit Muffle," the last burlesque opera which was convulsing the boulevards and commanding forty francs for a stall. "We sent for an agent on the morning after our arrival, gave him a list of the pieces we wanted to see, and gave him carte blanche as to the price of seats. The tickets were dear, but we saw all the pieces which native Parisians had been waiting for months to see. It is the only way."

"Yes, it is the only way," said Major Baddeley, a fat fair man, who looked too heavy for his horse, and whose province in life was to coincide with his wife.

Valentine contrived to show his future sister-in-law the way, in spite of Major Baddeley's prior claim as a brother-in-law *in esse*. He led her up and down break-neck hills, and forded the stream in all manner of risky places. Those two never lost sight of the hounds, nor of each other, and

were the first in at the death after the hunt servants. When the Baddeleys came up, Helen and Valentine had dismounted, and were standing side by side, while the hounds were fighting over the mutilated remains of poor pug.

It was their first day together, but not their last. Mrs. Baddeley was devoted to fox-hunting, and her devotion was an excuse for Helen.

"It is my last season," she told Adrian. "I shall give up all masculine sports when I am married."

"Will you, dearest? Then your self-sacrifice shall not be unrewarded, for I will get you the prettiest yacht that can be built at Devonport. Shall it be steam or sailing, eh, Helen?"

"Will you really? Oh, you darling. Yachting is my ruling passion. Yes, you may think I am mad about hunting, but my real lunacy is the sea. Give me a yacht—a schooner, sailing of course, I hate steam—and I shall adore you."

"Helen!" reproachfully.

"More than I do now, if that be possible."

"I will write to the builders this evening, and

ask them to send me drawings and estimates for the handsomest two-hundred ton schooner they can build."

"Two-hundred ton! Oh Adrian, you are only too adorable."

He smiled at her eagerness, her childish delight in the pleasures she loved. She had taken his gifts of jewellery almost with indifference, pleased with the glitter and dazzle at the first opening of the cases, but seeming to care very little to ornament herself with her spoil.

"They never look so lovely as in their velvet beds," she said.

Perhaps she knew that a limp white gown and a cluster of Dijon roses were enough for her fresh young loveliness, that neither gems nor gold could add to her beauty.

And so things went on to the end of the hunting season. Adrian spent a great deal of his time at Morcomb, and the sisters came very often to lunch or afternoon tea at the Abbey. There were dinner parties also at both houses.

Morcomb was much gayer than it had been be-

fore the advent of Major Baddeley. If not brilliant himself—and it appeared to Sir Adrian that he was a good-natured dullard—Frank Baddeley was the cause of brilliancy in others. The house brightened at his coming. He seemed to be popular with his friends, for two of them came all the way from London, with a string of horses, and put up at the old-fashioned family inn by Chadford-Bridge, in order to be near him.

These two gentlemen were Lord St. Austell and Mr. Beeching, and their appearance in the hunting field was not without interest to the native mind.

The Miss Treduceys had met St. Austell "in society," and knew all about him. Sir Nathaniel had been at Eton and Christ Church with his lordship's father. It was almost a kind of cousinship. Matilda affected to know the gentleman's history from his cradle.

"The St. Austells have gone to Oxford for centuries, but this one is a Cambridge man. He was at Trinity, and went out a low wrangler;" she said. "He went into Parliament directly he left

college. People thought he was going to distinguish himself, but when his father died he went wron gsomehow—racing, I suppose—and he quarrelled with his wife. I believe it was *she* who ran away from *him,* but I've heard my father say he drove her to it, so one couldn't help feeling sorry for her, especially as she was Lord Helvellyn's daughter—and we knew her people. They were not divorced—and she went to live abroad with an old aunt."

This to Dorothy Toffstaff, who listened inwardly writhing. It was hard to be so instructed, when as a young lady aspiring to be in society she ought to have known all about Lord and Lady St. Austell.

"I believe my father knows him," she said carelessly. "I fancy I have heard these old stories."

But it was made clear presently that Mr. Toffstaff, who was sitting on the roadside in his mail phaeton, pretending to criticize the appearance of the hounds, did not know Lord St. Austell, for there was Mr. Beeching introducing Toffstaff to that nobleman.

Toffstaff and Beeching were old friends. Toffstaff had made his money out of colonial produce in the days when fortunes were to be made in Mincing Lane. The Beeching family had grown rich on the Stock Exchange. Mr. Beeching knew all about the money market, but he had never soiled his fingers with scrip. The Beeching fortune had been growing and quadrupling itself for three generations, since Beeching, grandfather, had made his great coup in the railway mania year. Joseph Beeching was an only son, and was reputed to be fabulously rich. His wealth was a standing joke among his particular friends. He did not mind being chaffed about his millions. He took the thing quite calmly.

"Hang it all, you know, a fellow can't help it if he comes of a money-making ancestry. I know its deuced vulgar to have plenty of cash nowadays. One ought to be ruined. Every gentleman is hard up. To own oneself rich is to confess oneself a cad; only I'd rather be a rich cad than a poor cad, if it's all the same to you."

Lord St. Austell and Mr. Beeching were received

at Morcomb with the open hand of friendship. Colonel Deverill had an Irishman's ideas of hospitality, and considered it his duty to receive all comers, in and out of season. The entertainment might be of a somewhat scrambling and slovenly order, the dinner might be very good or very bad—a feast or a famine, as the Colonel said; the wine might be abundant or the last bottle out of the cellar. The Colonel was equally at ease among his guests, and equally delighted to have them round him. What he wanted most, perhaps, was an excuse for enjoying himself and forgetting black care.

No house could be well conducted where the going and coming was always an uncertainty, and the number of guests at dinner a riddle that was only solved when they sat down. Neither Leo nor Helen pretended to any talent for housekeeping; they left everything to Donovan, the butler, and to an old Irish cook and housekeeper who had been in the Colonel's service ever since his marriage, and from whom he had no secrets.

Lord St. Austell rode by Mrs. Baddeley's side

when the hounds moved off, while Major Baddeley followed, in conversation with Dorothy Toffstaff, who was social and loquacious. Mr. Beeching rode alone, and talked to nobody. He was not a particularly agreeable looking young man. He had a low forehead, a pug nose, a large jaw, and altogether too much of the bulldog type for beauty; and his dark sallow countenance and sullen expression contrasted curiously with St. Austell's delicately fair skin, blue eyes, and pale auburn moustache. St. Austell had the air of having just stepped out of a picture by Sir Peter Lely.

Miss Toffstaff was extremely gracious to Major Baddeley, but she was debating in her own mind all the time how she could easiest get at St. Austell, who must be captured at once for display at Wilmington. It was not to be endured that there should be a nobleman in the neighbourhood who was not an intimate of the Toffstaffs.

"Father must ask him to dinner immediately," she thought, "even if we are obliged to ask the Morcomb people too."

CHAPTER X.

CHANGEFUL AS THE WIND

THE LAMB at Chadford was a spacious old-fashioned family inn and posting-house, with long passages, low-pitched rooms, a garden, and a pretty view from almost every window. The garden was on the banks of the Chad, and the house stood close to the bridge, and commanded a winding reach of the river, the hilly high street, and the old Norman church whose chimes marked the progress of the hours for those who lay at the Lamb.

Lord St. Austell and Mr. Beeching shared the prettiest sitting-room of the inn, a room with a bow window facing the bridge and the town, and with two other windows opening on to a balcony above the garden and the river. They sat in this balcony after breakfast, smoking their cigars and hearing the dip of the oars as a boat went slowly

by in the morning sunshine. But neither St. Austell nor his friend spent much of their time at the Lamb. Colonel Deverill was too hospitable to leave his son-in-law's friends to mope at an inn. They were welcome at Morcomb at all hours, and were to be found there at all hours. With Beeching's five horses, and St. Austell's three, there was always an animal of some kind to carry the two young men to Morcomb, or they would ride home with Mrs. Baddeley after the kill, and have their dress clothes brought over to them by a valet.

"We might almost as well be living here altogether," said St. Austell. "I think we must be more trouble than if we were in the house."

Mr. Beeching said nothing. He accepted everything tacitly, almost as if it were his due. He was the most unemotional young man Colonel Deverill had ever encountered. He was polite and accommodating enough in social intercourse, but he was—or seemed to be—as cold as a stone.

"I can't think what you can see in him to

like," the Colonel said to St. Austell one night, in the confidence of the smoking-room.

"I don't see anything in him, and I don't like him particularly."

"Well, then, put it in another way. I can't think how you can get on with him so well."

"Oh, I can get on with anybody, from Satan downwards. That's my temperament. Beeching is a useful person to know. He has a capital stud, which his friends use pretty freely. His drag and his yacht are good and serviceable; and he has a kind of table d'hôte at his chambers which we all use. In fact, he does whatever we want, and makes no fuss about it."

"I shouldn't think he would make a fuss about anything—not if you cut his head off. I never saw such an unimpressionable young man!"

"Oh, I don't know about that. Still waters run deep, you know. I have an idea there are depths under that dulness of Beeching's. He is not a fool, and I believe he could be a blackguard."

So much for Joseph Beeching from his dearest

friend's standpoint. There was a link between the two which St. Austell had not taken the trouble to explain. They were partners in a racing stable. Beeching found the money, St. Austell the intellect and social status. St. Austell had got the commoner into the Jockey Club, and into a certain fast and furious set in London, which esteemed itself the very cream of Society—a set on which royalty had been known to smile, and every member of which was on the high road to moral or financial ruin.

Sir Adrian Belfield saw a great deal of the two men. He liked St. Austell, who was eminently likeable, and never showed the cloven foot except to his intimates; but he did not like Mr. Beeching, still less did he like his future sister-in-law's manner with that young gentleman.

It was not that Mrs. Baddeley openly flirted with him, or encouraged his attentions. She only allowed herself to be worshipped by him: let him follow her about like her dog, and screw himself insiduously into the chair nearest hers on all occasions. She had a charming air of being

totally unconscious of his admiration, and almost ignored his presence; and yet Adrian felt instinctively that she knew all about him and his feelings for her, and that she tacitly permitted his adoration.

"I wonder Baddeley doesn't see what is going on and give his wife a hint," thought Adrian.

But Frank Baddeley was one of those easy tempered mediocrities who never do see what they ought to see; men who, so long as they have good dinners and good horses to ride, and pretty wives to smile upon them, think that life is as it should be. It never occurred to Frank that a wife who was so invariably complacent could hardly be seriously attached to him. He never asked himself whether love would not have been more exacting and more fitful in its manifestations—whether that monotony of sweetness might not mean indifference. He was a sleepy kind of man, fond of commonplace pleasures, and not on the alert to find a thorn among his roses.

He had been a little perplexed by his wife's display of jewellery one evening, and had questioned

her about it as they drove *tête-à-tête* in a fly to a dinner at the Abbey.

"Where did you get those diamonds, Leo? You hadn't them in India. You had to borrow some jewellery for the ball at Government House."

"No, I left them with father. They are my grandmother's diamonds—old Lady Ledbury's, don't you know."

"Oh, she left you her jewels, did she?"

"Some of them. I was her god-daughter."

"Ah, to be sure. But you've had them re-set, I suppose. They don't look a bit old-fashioned."

"No; they are just as they came to me. Diamonds are never old-fashioned."

He asked no more questions, perfectly satisfied with the explanation; but that night, when the sisters went home after the dinner party, Leo followed Helen to her room.

"Helen, I want you to do me a favour."

"What is it, dear?"

"You know the old garnet necklace Lady Ledbury left me?"

"Of course I do; but you never wear it."

"I told Frank she left me diamonds. Don't let the cat out of the bag, that's a darling. I didn't want him to know that I had bought them out of the money I won backing horses last spring. He mightn't like me to bet."

"Of course he wouldn't like it. No, I won't betray you. But if I were you, Leo, I wouldn't tell my husband lies. It can't answer long."

"Wait till you have a husband of your own before you sermonize. Anything for a quiet life, Helen. That is my motto."

Adrian and Helen were to be married in June—the first of June. The date had been fixed, the trousseau had been put in hand under Mrs. Baddeley's instructions. A forewoman from one of the most modish houses in London came down to Morcomb to measure Miss Deverill for her gowns.

"I am afraid my things will cost a lot of money, Leo," Helen said doubtfully, when this Parisian personage was gone with her pattern boxes.

"They will cost a goodish bit, but we are not ordering many gowns, you see. Those we have chosen will be lovely; but there will be none to hang idle in your wardrobes, getting dusty and old-fashioned, as some brides' gowns do."

"But the prices seem enormous. Will father be able to pay for them?"

Mrs. Baddeley made a wry face, which expressed doubtfulness on this point.

"Some one will have to pay," she said.

"Not Adrian. You will not let him ever see those bills."

"Adrian's wife, perhaps. Mrs. Ponsonby will not press for her money, knowing what a good match you are making."

"But to let Adrian pay for my wedding clothes, directly or indirectly, would be so degrading, so humiliating!"

"My dear child, you can't be married without clothes, and it's my opinion your father has not a stiver."

"I wish I could win money on the turf, Leo, like you."

Mrs. Baddeley reddened at the allusion.

"Oh, that is all very well once in a way; a mere fluke. It is not to be thought of."

"But you always seem to have money for everything. If Frank were a rich man you could not dress more extravagantly."

"My dear child, I am awfully in debt. I dare not think about my affairs. They are horribly entangled. But you are such a lucky creature. What can it matter who pays for your trousseau, or when it is paid for? Adrian has offered the most liberal settlement. You will have six hundred a year to do what you like with."

"Six hundred! It seems a great deal. I shall be able to help you, Leo."

"You are very good, darling; but I hope I shall never be obliged to sponge upon you. Women were not made to prey upon each other. Man is our natural quarry."

As the days went by and the hunting season drew to its close, it seemed to that acute observer, Lord St. Austell, to whom the study of a pretty

woman's sentiments was more interesting than any other problem, that Helen Deverill had not quite so happy an air as she ought to have had, considering that she was soon to be married to the man of her choice, and the very best match in the neighbourhood. It interested that student of character to perceive that the young lady had often a preoccupied manner, even in her lover's society, as they sat side by side in a corner of the drawing-room after dinner, or loitered in the billiard-room at dusk.

"She never seems preoccupied when the brother is showing her the way across the moors," said Lord St. Austell.

He had watched those two riding together across the rough broken ground on the moor, over hillock and hollow, their horses neck and neck, the riders full of talk and happy laughter, enjoying sky, landscape, rapid movement, everything, as it seemed to St. Austell, as he passed close beside them, or followed in their track. Little gusts of laughter were blown towards him on the keen, moorland air.

"How well you and your future brother-in-law suit each other," he said to Helen one day, when they were out with the hounds.

She crimsoned, and was suddenly speechless.

"He really is a fine fellow, and I don't wonder you like him: but a very rough diamond as compared with his brother, I should say."

"Yes," she faltered, "Adrian is ever so much more accomplished."

"Musical, artistic, highly cultured, a young man in a thousand," pursued St. Austell, cruelly persistent. "I believe you are quite the luckiest young lady of my acquaintance, Miss Deverill."

She was silent; all the happy light had gone out of her face. Lips and eyes were grave and mute. St. Austell watched the downcast face with a deepening interest. He thought he had never seen a lovelier countenance, and he was a man who worshipped beauty.

"I used to think her sister the most beautiful woman I ever met," he said to himself, "but this one is lovelier. There is more of the wild rose—the pure and delicate perfection which blooms and

dies in a day. To be true to her type this girl ought not to live to be thirty. And she does not care a rap for Sir Adrian Belfield, and she is over head and ears in love with his brother. A troublesome complication in the present stage of affairs. She should have waited till she was married."

Adrian was not jealous either of Lord St. Austell, whom he admired, or of Mr. Beeching, whom he disliked: but the atmosphere of Morcomb was not agreeable to him after Major Baddeley's arrival. The house had too much the tone of bachelor shooting quarters. Every room was steeped in tobacco; for although men were supposed not to smoke in the drawing-room or morning-room, there were so many exceptions to that rule, and Mrs. Baddeley and her sister were so ready to rescind it upon all occasions, that, practically, there was smoking everywhere. Cigarettes and whiskey and water were the pervading atmosphere. Whatever the hour or the occasion there was generally a little table lurking in a

corner with a brace of spirit decanters and a syphon. The talk, too, had the same masculine flavour, and ranged from the stable to the kennels, from billiards to baccarat. Reminiscences of high play in London clubs or foreign casinos were a favourite topic; and the sharp things that had been done on the turf by men of high standing afforded a perennial source of interest.

The sisters seemed in no wise out of their element in this barrack-room society. They spent their days in idleness, sat about among the men, first in one room and then in another: played billiards, pool, or pyramids with skill and success, asked no points from any one, and pocketed a pool with the easiest air in the world.

To Adrian the whole thing was hateful. He could not tell Helen that her father's house and manner of living were detestable, nor could he ask her to live a life apart under her father's roof, or to put on an air of exclusiveness which would provoke ridicule. All he could do was to try and get her away from that obnoxious abode.

He came one morning charged with a letter from his mother.

"Dear Helen,

"Adrian wants you here again, and I want you almost as badly. I lost my new daughter just as I had learned to feel that she was a part of my existence. Come back, dear. You have had quite enough hunting and excitement of all kinds since you left us. Come back and learn to reconcile yourself to the quiet life and the grave old house that must be yours in the future. However happy you may be in the old home with your father, dear, I think it must be better for you to be in your new home with your mother.

"Ever your affectionate,

"C. B."

"You made her write this, Adrian."

"Made her! My mother is not a woman to be made to write what she does not feel, Helen. You should know her well enough by this time to know that."

"Oh, but I believe she would make any sacrifice for her son."

"There is no sacrifice. She really wants you."

"She is too good, too sweet to me. How shall I ever repay her?"

"You will come, won't you?"

"Of course I will come. This letter is a command. Yes, I shall like to come," she added eagerly. "I have had more than enough hunting, and this house is hateful since Frank's return."

"I am so glad. I feared you liked the life."

"No, I am used to it, and the days go by somehow. I shall be very pleased to get away from home."

Mrs. Baddeley was not so pleased at losing her sister.

"You put me in a false position," she said. "It won't be very nice for me to be the only woman among all these men."

"I thought you only cared for men's society. I have never known you to cultivate women."

"That was because I had you. Sisters can go anywhere and do anything. But now I suppose I shall have to take up with an outsider. Perhaps one of those Treducey girls would answer. They seem to like flirting with St. Austell, though he's a detrimental."

CHAPTER XI.

A DANGEROUS PILOT

Lady Belfield came next morning to fetch her future daughter-in-law, and Colonel Deverill was not displeased to see his younger daughter carried off to a haven of safety. He had a vague idea that the billiard-room at Morcomb was hardly the best place for an engaged girl, and that a kind of society which was all very well for Helen Deverill was not good enough for the future Lady Belfield.

"It is a capital match, and it would be a deuced pity to burke it," thought the Colonel.

So Helen drove away in the roomy barouche, sitting by Lady Belfield's side, with Adrian seated opposite. She seemed pleased to go with them, and she had a quieter and more thoughtful air, which charmed her lover. That chastened and softened manner seemed only natural to a girl on the eve of a new life: a girl for whom the

responsibilities of womanhood were so soon to begin.

It was early in April, the hedgerows were budding in the soft Devonian air, and there were violets nestling here and there along the grassy banks. The final meet of the foxhounds had been advertised, and people were beginning to put up tennis nets on asphalte courts, and to talk of the otter hounds that were to be out in June.

Lady Belfield was delighted with Helen's more thoughtful mood. It seemed to bring them nearer together. They sat together, and worked and talked in the quiet morning hours; and in the evening, when Valentine had carried his brother off to the billiard-room, Constance Belfield would sit down to her beloved piano and play; while her young companion sat on a low chair close by, listening, thinking, or dreaming, with her work-basket standing by untouched, or her book open in her lap.

That dreaming mood was a new phase in Helen's character. On her former visit she had been all gaiety and lightness, full of movement and fitfulness.

The mother loved to talk of her sons, and she found a sympathetic listener in Helen. She talked of both, but she talked most of Valentine; of his errors and failings, his wildness, recklessness, follies of all kinds; but somehow or other the result of all the mother's talk was to prove that wayward son the most brilliant and loveable of young men. Unconsciously, that favouring love pleaded for him, and spread a gloss over all the dark spots in his character.

"I am sorry you and he are not better friends," said Lady Belfield, after one of these conversations.

"Oh, but we are excellent friends. Mr. Belfield was very kind to me out hunting. He was my pilot through some of our best runs."

"A dangerous pilot, I fear, child. But you are so very distant to each other."

"Are we?" faltered Helen. "Perhaps we have very little in common except our love of fox-hunting. Mr. Belfield cannot care to talk to an inexperienced girl."

"Oh, but I think it is you who keep him at a

distance. You might be a little more sisterly in your manner."

"I'll try," said Helen, "but as I never had a brother, I hardly know how brothers are to be treated."

"If you liked him there would be no difficulty," answered Lady Belfield, reproachfully.

Helen hung her head and said never a word.

Constance Belfield had been struck by something strange in her son's manner to his brother's betrothed, and in her manner to him. There was not that frank, easy friendliness which the mother would have liked to see; and, knowing Valentine's difficult temper, she foresaw trouble in the future.

The Abbey belonged to Lady Belfield for her lifetime, but it had been agreed between Adrian and his mother that he and his wife were to live there, and to be master and mistress in all things. Constance Belfield would slip into the second place. She could lead her quiet intellectual life just as happily as queen dowager as she had done when she was queen regnant. She would have her own

rooms, and her own occupations, her own old friends.

"Everybody will naturally look to your wife as the principal personage in this house," said Lady Belfield. "It would never do for her to be secondary in anything. She had better begin as sole mistress. She will fall into her place more naturally, and fill it better in the days to come. With such a housekeeper as Mrs. Marrable, she can have no difficulties. As for myself, I shall be quite happy when I am no longer sovereign. And I shall not be too continually with you. I am contemplating a cottage by the sea, somewhere on the north coast of Cornwall—a wild, lonely spot—where I can take an occasional rest from all society."

"Dear mother, do you suppose I could ever have too much of you, or Helen either. She will look to you for help and counsel in all things. And when you start your Cornish cottage, it must be big enough for all three of us."

"I have only one difficulty about the future, Adrian."

"What is that?"

"Your brother Valentine has been used to think of this house as his home."

"And it will be his home still, after I am married. There will not be the slightest lessening of his freedom. You know what he and I have been to each other, and that I could hardly live without him."

This was satisfactory, but Lady Belfield had a lurking dread of evil. She could not help thinking that there was a silent antagonism between Valentine and Helen. There was such a chilling reserve in their manner towards each other; they seemed so scrupulously to avoid all occasions of friendly companionship. Valentine seemed to take a diabolical delight in withdrawing Adrian from the society of his betrothed. There was always an excuse for carrying him off somewhere in the morning; and in the evening there was the billiard-room, which at the Abbey was an exclusively masculine apartment. Valentine smoked there, and smoked furiously. He kept his guns and single-sticks there, his foils and fencing apparatus,

and had contrived to stamp the room with his own individuality. The billiard-room was as much his peculiar den as the library was Adrian's.

Madge had been more than three months at the Abbey, and she had given no reason for fault-finding in either Mrs. Marrable or the upper housemaid. She had worked well, and had shown herself quick and clever in learning the duties of domestic service. She was very quiet in her demeanour, kept herself to herself, as the other servants said, and was not good company. She had a little room of her own in the great gabled roof, a room with a dormer window that overlooked the wooded valley and that broad deep stream which was the chief glory of Belfield Park. She would stand for an hour looking out of this window, far away over the valley to the distant moorland, thinking or dreaming, just as Helen sat thinking or dreaming in the drawing-room below stairs, lulled by the pathetic melodies of Beethoven or Mozart, or by soft, sad, wordless songs by Schumann or Schubert.

In the heart of each girl there dwelt a profound sadness, a yearning for escape from the actual into the unreal.

Madge had seen Valentine but few times since their conversation in the corridor, and their meetings on those occasions had been accidental and brief. The girl would have passed him without a word, without a look even; but on their latest meeting Valentine was in a conversational humour, and he stopped her with a strong hand upon her arm.

"Well, Madge, how are you getting on?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

"Sir. That's rather formal, ain't it?"

"No, sir. You are a gentleman, and a stranger."

"A stranger. Come, Madge——"

"I told you I could be nothing to you if I wasn't to be your wife. I could never be that, you said—so there it ended. Can't you understand that?"

She spoke as deliberately as a man of business who wants to be decisive and definite about a

business matter: she looked him in the face as resolutely as a man looks at a man.

"No, I can't," he answered doggedly. "What devilish hard wood you are made of, Madge. I never met a woman like you."

"I know my own mind. Some women don't know even as much as that. There's one in this house that doesn't, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" he asked, angrily.

"No need to say. You know well enough. Good afternoon, sir. I'm too busy to stop here talking."

She made him a courtesy, and left him, left him brooding, with his head down and his hands in the pockets of his shooting jacket.

The corridors at Belfield Abbey were places to live in: low and wide, with Tudor windows deeply recessed, and provided with cushioned seats, on which a man might loll at full length. There were old pictures, old china jars, old cabinets to break the monotony of the long straight passages; there were thick damask curtains to keep out the cold.

"Trust a jealous woman for scenting a rival,"

muttered Valentine, flinging himself upon one of those comfortable window seats, and taking out his cigar case. "Yet I thought I had kept things very dark, and that no one but my angel herself knew the state of the case. She knows. She knows, I'll swear. I've seen it in her face when we rode over the break-neck ground together. Once when I was leading her across a stone wall that might mean broken bones, I looked back as my horse rose for the leap, and saw her eyes. They said as plain as words can speak, 'I don't care if I follow you to your death.' Yes, I saw the love-light in those eyes, and I knew she was mine. Poor Adrian. He's so absurdly fond of her that it seems a pity to come between them; and she hasn't a stiver, and it will be altogether a wretched match for me. I certainly ought to fight it out, and give her up."

The third week in April began with south-west winds and sunny skies. The old oaks and beeches in Belfield Park seemed to smile in the sunshine, though not a leaf showed upon their rugged

branches. But there was the purple of ripening leaf-buds, there was the warmth of reviving nature, even in things that seemed dead.

It was glorious weather for tennis, and everybody at Chadford and in the neighbourhood seemed to be seized with a tennis mania. All the young men and women put on flannel garments, and met at each other's houses, and played with all their might and main.

There was no tennis club at Chadford. There had been talk of such an institution, but no one had been enterprising enough to set the thing going; so play on private lawns, and tea drinkings after the play, were eminently popular. Valentine excelled at tennis, as at all athletic games; so directly the hunting was over, he had the ground marked and the nets out, and invited Helen to play with him. They played all the morning, and a messenger was sent to Morcomb to invite Mrs. Baddeley and Mr. Beeching over for the afternoon.

"Do you know, that surly fellow, Beeching, is a crack player?" said Valentine, at lunch.

"I'm rather sorry you've asked him over, how-

ever good he may be," answered Adrian. "I dislike him intensely, and so I think does Helen."

"He certainly is no favourite of mine," agreed Helen, "but Frank seems deeply attached to him. Frank has always some friend of that kind, without whom he seems hardly able to exist."

"Oh, but one doesn't ask for a certificate of character from a man who is wanted to play tennis," said Valentine contemptuously. "All I ever inquire is, Can the fellow play, and will he help me to keep up my form? There's no use in playing against one's inferiors."

Helen and Valentine went off to the lawn again directly after lunch. It was hardly weather for sitting in the garden yet, or Adrian would have sat by and watched the play. As it was, he strolled up and down an adjacent path with his mother, stopping now and then to look at the players.

"How well she plays, and how graceful she is," said Lady Belfield, watching the slim, girlish figure in a simple cream white gown.

"Yes; she is like Valentine. She excels in all

outdoor sports, in all games of skill. She plays billiards better than many young men, and she rides better than any woman I know. She is just the wife for a country squire. I only wish I were better fitted for making her happy."

"My dearest Adrian, how can she fail to be happy with you, who are so kind and good to her?"

"Ah, but goodness doesn't count for very much in this life. People would rather have congenial tastes. It is a constant trouble to me that I cannot share the pleasures Helen loves—that if we are to be much together by-and-by, as man and wife, she may feel like a snared bird in a cage."

"She will never feel that if she loves you."

"Oh, I know that she loves me. I have been sure of that from the first; but I don't know if I am right in accepting the sacrifice she will have to make in marrying a man who may be always something of an invalid—forbidden to do this and that—a dull companion for a high-spirited girl."

"But as a wife her whole nature will undergo a change. You will not have a high-spirited girl to deal with, but a woman, full of loving care and womanly thoughts."

"Do you think so?" he asked, wonderingly. "Will not that be asking too much of her—that she should pass all at once from girlhood to womanhood, from the holiday of life to the bearing of burdens. She is so bright a creature; she does not seem made for thoughtfulness or care."

"Oh, but she has been much more serious of late. I have seen a marked change in her."

"Yes, she is certainly more serious."

A ripple of girlish laughter came like a mocking commentary upon his words. Helen and Valentine were finishing a single sett, in wild spirits.

"You play as if you were bewitched," said Valentine, when they had finished. "I never saw such strokes from a bit of a girl like you."

Mrs. Baddeley and Mr. Beeching appeared upon

the lawn at this moment—the lady in a terra-cotta tailor gown, which would do for tennis or anything; the gentleman in flannels. They would only stop to shake hands and say a few words to Lady Belfield, and then began a double sett, with Valentine and Helen on the same side.

Mr. Beeching distinguished himself at tennis, and behaved rather nicely at tea. He unbent considerably, and showed a somewhat boyish simplicity which pleased Lady Belfield. Mrs. Baddeley was superbly patronizing to the three young men, allowing them to wait upon her and administer to her appetite for pound-cake and chocolate biscuits. It was arranged that they were to play tennis on the Abbey lawn every afternoon until Lady Belfield gave them notice to quit.

"I am not likely to do that," said that lady; "I am very glad for Helen to be amused. Her life here has been somewhat dull hitherto."

The tennis afternoons were highly appreciated. Jack Freemantle and his sister Lucy were invited, and came frequently. The Miss Toffstaffs and the

Miss Treduceys put in an appearance, and Major Baddeley sometimes drove over to the Abbey, not to play—he was too lazy for that—but to fetch his wife.

"I am bound to show my allegiance occasionally," he said; and people agreed that the Major's devotion was altogether occasional.

He was a large, placid man, with a broad, good-tempered face—a man who liked to take everything easily, and to whom dinner was the leading event of every day. He admired his wife as much as it was in his power to admire anybody, but he had never known what it was to feel a pang of jealousy. He had far too high an estimate of his own merits, and had never met with a better fellow than himself. He was very particular as to what kind of champagne he bought or drank, but he was not over choice in the selection of his friends. So long as they amused and served him he never stopped to consider whether they might or might not be worthy associates for his wife. In a word, he was frankly and unconsciously selfish.

Lord St. Austell had vanished from Chadford with his hunters at the end of the season, but Mr. Beeching and his string of horses still remained at the Lamb, and there was no talk of his departure.

CHAPTER XII.

TOTAL SURRENDER

All Helen's seriousness seemed to have taken flight, as if blown away by the balmy west wind. Once more she was gay and volatile, for ever on the wing, with a ceaseless vivacity. The change puzzled Lady Belfield, who liked her daughter better in her serious mood.

"My dear child, you seem as if you were bewitched," she said.

Helen blushed and was silent for a few moments, then replied, with a laugh:

"I am so glad summer is coming, so glad to be out of doors again. You must not forget that I am a wild Irish girl, and love my liberty."

"I am pleased to see you happy, Helen," answered the mother kindly, and then Helen went back to the tennis court, and the balls were flying across the net again, and the girl's graceful form

was skimming over the grass, swift as the flight of a bird.

She came back to the drawing-room flushed and excited at tea time, and then Adrian had her all to himself for an hour or so, while she lolled in a low easy chair, resting from the fatigues of the afternoon, and allowing her lover to wait upon her. She had a prettily deprecating air, as if apologizing for taking pleasure in a sport which had no interest for him.

"It is a foolish, childish game, I dare say," she said; "but it is something to live for."

She did not know how such a speech as that wounded Adrian; or how much it revealed to him.

He went up to his room to dress for dinner one evening, after having lingered longer than usual in the drawing-room with Helen. She had been out of spirits, fretful, like a child overtired with play, and he had been soothing her as tenderly as a mother might soothe a wilful child.

He was so deeply in love that all her failings, her childishness, her triviality, endeared her to him

only the more. There was a fascination in her very faults which seemed to be inseparable from her beauty.

Fastened to the pincushion upon his dressing table he saw a slip of paper, with four words written upon it in a firm round hand, "Somebody is false. Watch."

He felt as a man feels who finds a cobra on his pillow. Who could have dared to put that diabolical scrawl there? Some one in his mother's household—some servant eating his mother's bread, had been black-hearted enough to stab an innocent girl's reputation.

His first impulse was to tear the paper to atoms; his next was to put it in his letter case, with a view to identifying the writer.

"I will have every one of the servants in the library to-morrow morning," he thought, "and each shall write those four words before my eyes, until I discover the wretch who penned that lie."

Yet to do this would create a scandal. Better that than to exist under the same roof with the venomous traitor who wrote that insult to truth and

purity. False? With whom should she be false? What tempter had ever tried to seduce her from the straight line of faith and honour since she had been his plighted wife? Spurn that paper as he might the suspicion it suggested forced itself upon his mind; haunted him and goaded him almost to madness as he hurriedly dressed, anxious to be early in the drawing-room, to see Helen again before dinner, to be reassured by her presence, by the steady light of truth in those lovely eyes.

Not a word would he say to her of that foul slander, that stab in the dark; not for worlds would he have her know of that base attempt to blemish her name. But he wanted to be with her again. Never since the first hour of their betrothal had he been so eager to see her.

It was a little more than half-past seven when he went downstairs, his heart beating impatiently for the sound of the only voice that could give him comfort. There was the sound of the piano in the drawing-room, but not his mother's touch. A modern waltz lightly played; fitfully, as if the player were preoccupied.

He noticed this detail as he opened the door and went in. Helen was seated at the piano at the further end of the room, her head bent over the keys, in an attitude of self-abasement; Valentine was leaning upon the piano, talking to her, his head close to hers, his lips almost touching her hair.

The girl started guiltily at the opening of the door; the man went on talking.

"Say yes," he urged; "say yes."

"Well, yes, if you like," she answered carelessly, and resumed the waltz, which she had stopped for a moment.

She played more brilliantly than usual, it seemed to Adrian, with the spasmodic brilliancy of an indifferent, unscientific player, who has spurts of execution and dash now and then, occasional moments in which the fingers have an unaccustomed precision and power. She played for the next ten minutes—a waltz, a mazurka, a nocturne of Chopin's; all with the same air of being engrossed by the music.

Then she rose from the piano suddenly, and went across the room to Adrian.

"How early you are down!" she said.

"There is nothing strange in that," he answered coldly, "but *you* are not generally so early. What compact were you making with Valentine just now?"

His brother was sitting at a book-table near the piano, reading a newspaper, and apparently unconscious of anything going on in the room.

"It was about our tennis tournament. We are thinking of a tournament, you know."

"Indeed I know nothing about it. The tournament will be something to live for, I suppose."

"Oh, Adrian, you never spoke to me before with a sneer."

"Did I not? There must be a beginning for all things."

She stood looking at him, stricken, guilty. That light nature might be false, but was not yet skilled in hypocrisy. His mother entered the room at this moment, and he went over to her, taking no further notice of Helen.

His heart was as heavy as lead. Good heavens! What an idiot he had been to need this rough

awakening to an obvious bitter fact; what a blind besotted idiot he must have been not to see that which was visible to every servant in his mother's house.

"I trusted her so completely," he said to himself; "I thought her so pure and true."

Pure! True! He could never think her either of these again, after that little scene by the piano. It was so little, yet it had told him so much. The drooping head and arms, the half-despairing languor, as of one who submits to superior will; and Valentine's attitude, his lips so close to her hair and brow, his easy air of mastery.

Not for a moment after that revelation could Adrian doubt that his brother had stolen the heart of his betrothed.

"Nature made him to rule and me to serve," he told himself. "How could I ever hope to be victorious where he could be a competitor. He has beaten me in all things in which men care to conquer. He has left me my books, and my music: a woman's occupation, not a man's. He might have left me my bride. There are women

enough in the world for him to subjugate. He might have left her free."

"Watch," wrote the anonymous denouncer. He had not watched; but the discovery had been made; the humiliating truth had been forced upon him; accident had given him the key to that secret accusation.

He had considerable power of self-control, and exercised it this evening. He talked easily and even gaily all through dinner, but the conversation was a trio. Valentine talked much and seemed in excellent spirits, Helen sat silent, and Adrian did not attempt to draw her into the conversation.

"How tired you look, Helen," said Lady Belfield, after an animated discussion upon the news in the papers of the day.

Adrian and his mother were strong Conservatives, but Valentine had taken upon himself the opinions and the arrogance of an advanced Radical. Hence politics always offered a theme for lively discussion and a little temper. Nothing so dull as a one-opinioned family!

"Yes, I am rather tired," answered Helen,

listlessly. "The day has been so dreadfully warm."

Adrian went back to the drawing-room with the two ladies. Valentine stopped behind, ostensibly for his after-dinner smoke.

The old mullioned windows were closed and curtained, but a large bay window, which had been added to the drawing-room twenty years ago, both to give more light and as an outlet to the garden, stood wide open to the moonlight and the soft evening air. This modern window was an eyesore to architects and all persons of artistic temperament; but it was very convenient to the dwellers in the room, and it brought Lady Belfield's drawing-room and Lady Belfield's garden into one perfect whole. In summer, people sat indifferently in room and garden, and teacups circulated freely between the Persian carpet within and the velvet lawn without.

The day had been one of those precocious summer days that perk themselves up in the midst of the spring, and Helen's complaint of its sultriness was not unfounded. There were two or three

small logs burning on the open hearth, for show and not for heat, and Lady Belfield took her accustomed chair, not remote from the hearth; but Helen went at once to the open window, and seated herself on a low ottoman close to the threshold.

The moon was near the full, and all the garden was steeped in light. The girl sat idle, watching the night sky, above the tall cypresses and deodâras that bounded the shrubbery.

Adrian seated himself at his mother's book-table, and took up a volume of biography which had arrived that afternoon. Helen stole a look at him presently, and saw him engrossed in his book. She was not surprised that he should be so, as it was a book he had been particularly impatient to see, and the librarian had been slow in sending it. Lady Belfield, finding the other two silent, had resumed a new German novel which she had been reading in the afternoon. They had been all three seated thus for about a quarter of an hour, when Helen rose quietly and went out into the garden.

Softly as she moved, Adrian heard the flutter of her muslin gown as she passed out. He lifted his

eyes from the page which he had been staring at fixedly, without the faintest knowledge of its contents.

"Watch."

He put down his book softly, and went across to the window.

Helen was slowly walking along a path that skirted the lawn. His eyes followed the white-robed figure till it disappeared at a turn of the path which led into the heart of the shrubbery, where a narrow walk wound in and out among thickets of coniferæ laurels and arbutus.

Those shrubberies had been laid out and planted a century before, and had been improved and added to by every new owner of Belfield Abbey.

The ground fell away steeply on the other side of the shrubberies, and there were grassy banks sloping down to a long Italian terrace beside the river.

This terrace had always been a favourite promenade with the ladies of the Belfield family.

Scarcely had the white gown vanished into darkness, when a man's figure skirted the lawn

upon the opposite side, and then disappeared in the shrubbery. There was just light enough for Adrian to identify that hurrying figure as his brother Valentine.

He went out, bareheaded, and crossed the lawn to the shrubbery. His quick ear caught the sound of a man's footsteps on the winding path, and with that sound for his guide it was easy for him to follow in the right direction, though there was no one visible in the leafy labyrinth.

Presently, that quick firm step stopped, and then, after a pause, went on with slackened pace. He could guess that those two were now together, walking slowly side by side, the girl's light footfall inaudible amidst the sound of the man's firmer tread.

He knew he was gaining upon them presently, for he could hear their voices at intervals, faint gusts of sound blown towards him on the evening air. He followed to a narrow walk, parallel with the river-terrace, and standing there in the shadow of a cypress saw them on the moonlit walk below him. He was near enough to hear every word,

every breath, and he had to control his own hurried breathing lest they should hear him. They were standing by the waterside, she clasped in Valentine's arms, with her head upon his breast, and Adrian could hear her sobs in the stillness, the passionate sobs of a despairing love. Never had his arms so held her, never had her passionate tears been shed for him. They had been like children playing at love. Here was love's stern reality—tears and despair. Valentine's head was bent over the half-hidden face. He was trying to kiss those sobs into silence. And then came the sound of his voice, deep and resolute.

"Break with him, dearest?—yes, of course you must break with him. You were meant to be mine, not his. He has most of the good things in this life. He is the elder born, the honoured and wealthy. But I have you, and I mean to keep you, and hold you against all the world."

"Lady Belfield has been so good to me," faltered the girl's tearful voice. "She has been so loving—and for me to disappoint her——"

"Who knows that you will disappoint her? She

shall love you still, my sweetest—love you all the better perhaps for that which you call treason. Don't you know the secret of my mother's heart, Helen? She does her duty to Adrian, but she gives the lion's share of love to me. She will love any wife who loves me."

"You are cruel to say so," cried Helen, escaping from his arms. "What, are you to have everything and he nothing, he who is so good?"

"He has the estate, and he is Sir Adrian. Do you call that nothing?"

"Yes, nothing, nothing, nothing, if he is not happy. No, I won't betray him, I won't be called a jilt and a hypocrite. I loved him before I knew you. I will try to forget you, and to be true to him."

"Helen, don't be a fool."

He drew her to his breast again, snared her as easily with an unmannerly speech as with the honeyed phrases of a modern Romeo. His influence over her was a thing apart from words. It was the despotic power of a strong man's will, which to a weak woman represents destiny.

Adrian stepped lightly down the sloping bank, and stood suddenly beside them. The girl started away from her lover, horrified at being seen by a gamekeeper or some such insignificant person; but at sight of Adrian she clasped her hands before her face and stood motionless, as if she had been turned to stone.

"I did not think myself passing rich, Valentine," he said quietly, as his brother faced him boldly and resolutely, with the defiant look with which he had faced angry college dons and aggrieved authorities of all kinds. "I was like the poor shepherd with his one ewe lamb," laying his hand lightly upon Helen's shoulder, "and you have robbed me of my one inestimable possession."

"Don't talk about robbery," said Valentine, "that's arrant nonsense. Men are the slaves of circumstances in such matters. You bring a lovely fascinating girl into the house where I live, and say, 'She is mine, she is taboo, you are not to fall in love with her.' But I am mortal. I am of a clay that is quicker to take fire than most other clay. I have not been under the same roof for

four-and-twenty hours with your privileged young lady, before I am over head and ears in love with her. I don't give myself up without a struggle. I say, No surrender, and try to be as uncivil as I possibly can to the young lady. Helen will bear me out that I was a thorough savage during the earlier part of our acquaintance. And then we hunted together, and I got fonder and fonder of her, and she—yes, I know she began to get rather fond of me. But she too cried No surrender, and then she took to being uncivil; and then I knew it was all over with us both. Tennis finished us; and you will please to remember, Adrian, that tennis was my mother's proposition, not mine. Poor simple soul, she wanted to see Helen and me more like brother and sister, and she thought tennis might help to bring us together."

"You are laudably candid now," said Adrian. "Would it not have been better to be candid before resorting to a secret meeting like this, and degrading your future wife by a clandestine courtship while she was betrothed to your brother? Would it not at least have been wise to spare her

the humiliation of being spied upon by servants?"

"What do you mean?"

"Only that it was some servant or hanger-on in the Abbey who gave me the hint that brought me here to-night."

"One of the servants spoke to you about me, about Helen?"

"No one spoke to me. I found a paper in my room, with a suggestion that there was falsehood, and that I should watch."

"The she-devil," muttered Valentine, between his set teeth.

"What! you know who wrote it?" asked Adrian.

"No, but I can guess; some old busybody. The housekeeper perhaps."

"What! Mrs. Marrable? That good old soul never did anything underhand in her life. But whoever my informant was I am grateful to the hand that lifted the veil. You and Miss Deverill might have left me in my fool's paradise ever so much longer."

"There you wrong us both. Things had come

to a crisis to-night, and it would have been our duty to confess the truth to you to-morrow. All I wanted to be sure of was that Helen would give up an ample fortune and the privilege of being Lady Belfield, in order to share the obscurity of a younger brother's position."

"And Miss Deverill has made her choice?"

"Well, I believe she was on the point of making it definitely when you interrupted us."

"I can at least simplify the question," said Adrian, "by assuring Miss Deverill that after what has happened to-night I withdraw all claim upon her fidelity or her consideration. She may hold herself as free as the wind that is moving yonder leaves."

Helen's hands had fallen from before her face, which showed death-like in the moonlight. She tried to take Adrian's hand, but he recoiled from her touch.

"Forgive me!" she cried, with passionate entreaty; "oh, forgive me, Adrian. I hate myself for my inconstancy, my weakness, my folly. Be more merciful to me than I am to myself. Forgive me!"

"When I can," he answered, and left them without another word.

He had left the Abbey before Helen came down to breakfast next morning, and he left the following letter for his brother:—

"You have shown yourself my superior as a lover, as you have in all other accomplishments in which men wish to excel. I submit to fate, which gave me failure and disappointment as a part of my birthright. I think you have used me ill, and that Helen has used me worse; but it is a quality of my nature to love you, and, even while smarting under the sense of a deep wrong, you are still to me something more than a brother. You are a part of myself. Be as happy as you can, and I will take comfort in my desolation from the thought of your happiness. But above all things make her happy. She is all that is lovely and sweet in womanhood, but she lacks strength of character and stability of purpose, as you have already proved. Bear with her, and be patient with her, as I would have been. Her nature will

expand like a flower in the warmth of your love, but it will be warped and withered by unkindness or neglect. I resign her to you as a sacred trust. Let me never have to call you to account for her peace of mind. When once my mind and heart are reconciled to my loss, I shall accept my position as your wife's brother, and shall assume all a brother's responsibilities. Tell Helen I am leaving England in the hope that absence may teach me the lesson of forgiveness. Good-bye."

This was all: but in a letter to Lady Belfield Adrian explained that he was going to London, whence he would start for Norway, after a day or two spent in preparation for his journey. He meant to spend the summer and early autumn in Norway and Sweden, and thence to go to Vienna, and to follow the Danube southward, and winter in Greece.

"If you should feel tempted to join me during any part of my travels, I would go to Frankfort to meet you, and would adapt my wanderings to your comfort and pleasure. My engagement is broken —suddenly, like a dream from which one awak-

eneth. All the good fairies were at my brother's christening feast, and one of them gave him power over the heart of woman. He has stolen Helen's love—almost involuntarily, I believe, so you must not upbraid him with treachery. Make the best of the position, dear mother. Do all you can for your younger son and his betrothed, and be assured of my co-operation in all you do."

The letter was a shock to Lady Belfield. Her loyal nature revolted against Helen's treachery. She, who was truth itself, could not understand how any other woman could be false. However her heart might secretly incline to the wayward self-indulgent younger son, her sense of honour and justice were outraged by his triumph.

Helen came into the breakfast-room while Lady Belfield sat with Adrian's letter in her hand. The girl's white face and hollow eyes, with traces of prolonged weeping, made a silent appeal to the mother's pity, but even that remorseful countenance could not lessen Constance Belfield's contempt for the offender.

"I find, Helen," she began coldly, "that I have

been looking on at a comedy, and that you had your secrets, while I thought that you were to me as a daughter, and that I knew your heart as a mother knows the heart of her child."

"Do mothers always know?" faltered Helen. "There are things in life that no one can reckon against. Oh, Lady Belfield, forgive me if you can. I can't help your despising me; I don't wonder at it. He has told you how base I have been," with a glance at the open letter, "but indeed if you only knew, if I could ever make you understand how I struggled, how I tried to be good and true, and how my heart went to Valentine in spite of myself. Indeed I tried not to love him—tried to hate him, to avoid him, to shrink from all contact with him, but it was all in vain. From the hour we first met—a fatal, foolish, mistaken meeting on my part, a cruel sport on his—from that hour I was lost, my fidelity to Adrian was shaken, and I began to ask myself if I had ever really loved him."

She flung herself on her knees before Lady Belfield and buried her tearful face in the mother's

lap, sobbing heart-brokenly. It was hardly possible to be angry with a creature so bowed down by remorse and the consciousness of her own sin.

"My child, it is the most miserable turn that fate could have taken," said Constance Belfield gravely. "You were all the world to Adrian, and the loss of your love may darken all the best years of his life. He is not the kind of man to recover quickly or easily from such a blow. You will never be all the world to my other son. I have studied them both from their cradles, and know what stuff each is made of. Fondly as I love Valentine, I am not blind to his faults. He has a passionate self-willed nature, and to be loved by him will not be all sunshine. This young head will not escape the storms of life, Helen, if you are mated with my son Valentine. It is your heart that will have to bear the heavier burdens in your life journey, it is you who will have to suffer and submit. Adrian would have subjugated his own inclinations to make you happy. Valentine will expect you to yield to him in all things."

"I know that he is my master," answered

Helen, in a low voice. "If his will were not stronger than mine I should have been true to Adrian. I know that in our life to come I shall be his slave—his fond adoring slave. But I shall be utterly happy if he always loves me as he loves me now."

"It would be hard if that should ever waver, when you have sacrificed so much for his sake. You know that your position as Valentine's wife will be very different from what it would have been as Lady Belfield."

"I have never thought of position—not even when I accepted Adrian. I thought it would be nice to have a home of my own, and to hear no more of debts and difficulties and unpaid rents. That is all I ever thought of from a mercenary point of view."

"Well, Helen, the die is cast, and we must make the best of fate," said Constance Belfield gently. "Adrian is gone, and if we were to ask him to come back he would not come."

"He has gone? So soon," exclaimed Helen.

"Yes; he knew, no doubt, that his presenee here

would have been an embarrassment to you and Valentine. He leaves you mistress of your own life. And now I think, to lessen scandal, the sooner you and Valentine are married the better. But the first thing is to obtain your father's consent."

"He will be dreadfully angry," said Helen, with a shiver of apprehension.

She was still crouching at Lady Belfield's feet. Her sobs had ceased, but her whole attitude betokened the depth of self-abasement.

"He is a man of the world, and we can scarcely expect him to be pleased."

"I dare not see him," said Helen. "Oh, Lady Belfield, you are so good to me, even in my disgrace. Will you break the news to my father? You have only seen the sunny side of his character. He is dreadful when he is angry."

"I will do all I can, Helen. I will send for him this morning."

"No, no; not so soon. Not to-day. There is no hurry."

"I will not delay an hour, Helen."

Valentine came into the room, carrying himself as easily as if his conscience were without stain. He had received his brother's valedictory letter, and had digested its contents at his leisure. He thought that everything was settling itself in a very comfortable manner, and that there need be no more fuss.

He went over to his mother and kissed her.

"I see you know all about it," he said; "that foolish child has been crying and confessing, and breaking her poor little heart about that which neither she nor I could help."

He took the tone of a master at once, spoke of his newly-betrothed with the free and easy air of a husband of five years' standing. There was none of the reverential tone with which a lover usually speaks of his mistress, none of the respect which the worshipper gives his divinity in the early days of betrothal.

"It is all very sad, Valentine," said Lady Belfield, while Helen rose slowly, and went to her place at the breakfast table, downcast, pale, and unhappy-looking.

"Bosh, my dear mother. There need be no sadness about it," answered her son, seating himself before a savoury dish, and helping himself with the air of being in excellent appetite. "I wish you'd pour out my coffee, Helen, instead of sitting there like a statue. Pray, mother, let us have no funereal faces. Adrian is disappointed, I admit, and has the right to feel angry, with us or with his destiny. But he has acted like a sensible fellow, and he is going the right way to get the better of his disappointment. Six months hence I dare say he will be engaged to somebody else; and then you will feel what a simpleton you have been to make a tragedy out of such a very simple matter."

Constance Belfield said no more. She knew her son's temper too well to argue with him. To her mind the whole business was fraught with wrong and folly; but if Valentine's happiness were at stake—if he could be happy this way, and in no other, her love for him forbade her opposition. It might be that in this strong and passionate nature there might be a greater capacity for love than in

Adrian's calmer temperament; that Adrian could better bear the loss of his promised wife than Valentine could have borne disappointment in his unreasonable love.

A mounted messenger was depatched to Morcomb directly after breakfast, and Colonel Deverill was with Lady Belfield before luncheon.

The interview was long, and in some parts stormy. Colonel Deverill was deeply indignant. He would have sent for Helen and wreaked his wrath upon her, but Lady Belfield interfered.

"You shall not see her till you are calmer, till you have taught yourself to think more indulgently of her error," she said. "She is in my charge, poor motherless girl, and I am beholden to act to her as a mother."

"She was engaged—engaged herself of her own free will, mark you—to a gentleman of high position, a man of wealth and substance: and without the faintest justification she jilts that estimable highly accomplished young man to take up with his brother. She is so false and fickle that she cannot keep steadfast for half a year to the man

who has honoured her by his choice. She is a shameless——"

"She is your daughter and my future daughter-in-law, Colonel Deverill."

"Pardon me, Lady Belfield, she was to have been your daughter-in-law, and that connection would have been at once an honour and a source of supreme happiness to me; but I have not consented to her marriage with your younger son. Forgive me if I say that with my daughter's exceptional attractions she ought to make a good match. Beauty rules high in Society just now; a really beautiful girl has the ball at her feet. Now, Mr. Belfield is a very fine fellow, but he is not a good match."

"Your daughter loves him, Colonel Deverill, and she will never be happy with any one else."

"My dear Lady Belfield, you know that is a *façon de parler*. Every girl says as much when she fancies herself in love. I have known a girl say as much six times about six different men. My daughter Helen will have to subjugate her inclinations. She has forfeited a splendid position and

stamped herself as a jilt. She has shown herself incapable of managing her own life. It will be my business to look after her in future."

Lady Belfield was silent for some moments. She knew her son's determined character, and she told herself that, once having won Helen's heart, he would find a way of marrying her with or without the father's consent. He was not the kind of young man to submit his inclinations to Colonel Deverill's authority. Opposition would only lead to a clandestine marriage.

"My younger son may not be a good match," she said quietly, after that interval of thought, "but he will not be penniless. He will inherit my fortune."

"May it be long before his day of inheritance, dear Lady Belfield. But in the meantime, if he marries he will have to maintain his wife. Pardon me if I remind you that he can't do that—upon expectations."

"I would make a settlement. I could spare five or six hundred a year."

"You would settle that upon my daughter. A

very liberal settlement on your part, and more than a penniless girl like Helen has the right to expect; but if the young people had to live upon it—starvation, or at least genteel penury. I should be sorry to see my pretty daughter fading in a third-rate West End lodging, afraid to accept invitations on account of the expense of cabs, or dying of dulness in a small country town."

"If my son marries, he must turn bread-winner, take up a profession."

"Very good in intention, dear Lady Belfield, but there are so few professions that will take up a young man who has not been bred to work from his fifteenth year. Your son Valentine has a splendid intellect, but I doubt if he will ever earn sixpence."

"Then I must do more for him. Trust me with your daughter's future, Colonel Deverill, and she shall be to me as my own child."

"She is a fool, and I have no patience with her," said the Colonel, pacing the room. "She had as fine a chance as a girl need have, and she flung it away. And now you ask me to reconcile myself to

genteel poverty for a girl who might have set the town in a blaze. But you are all goodness, Lady Belfield. You would melt a stone—and I am not a stone, as you might have known nearly thirty years ago. It seems natural that my daughter should marry your son. Such a marriage links past and present curiously together. Please send for Helen."

"You will not be unkind to her—you will not scold," pleaded Constance, as she rang the bell.

"There is no good in scolding. The girl is a fool, and there is no more to be said about her."

Helen came, pale and trembling.

"You have trifled with a good man's affection, and with a splendid position, girl," said her father sternly. "You ought to be desperately in love with Mr. Belfield."

"I love him with all the strength of my heart."

"And were I to forbid you to marry him? What would happen then, do you think?"

"I believe I should die."

"Well, you need not die. You can take your

own way. Lady Belfield, I leave everything to you—settlement, everything. I submit myself to you in all things; and as for this young lady, I wash my hands of her and her fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

WHILE Lady Belfield pleaded her son's cause with Colonel Deverill, Valentine himself was engaged in a business which had very little to do with Helen's future happiness.

He was trying to find out the writer of the anonymous warning which opened his brother's eyes.

Mrs. Marrable had been his mother's housekeeper for nearly twenty years, and Valentine had been her favourite as a boy. She had indulged all his juvenile whims, and had kept him liberally supplied with preserves and pickles, pound-cakes and Devonshire cream, when he was at the University. Marrable's jams had been a famous institution among the undergraduates who breakfasted with him.

He went to Mrs. Marrable's room this morning

under pretence of inquiring about a groom who had been on the sick list; and then, after allowing the housekeeper to enlarge upon the efficacy of her beef-tea and the infallibility of her mutton broth, he asked casually:

"How about that half-gipsy girl my mother took in? Does she get on pretty well?"

"It's a very curious thing, sir, that you should ask that question to-day above all other days," she said. "The young woman worked with a good heart, and did her very best to give satisfaction, up to yesterday. She was a very reserved young woman, and did not seem to be altogether happy in her mind. She was always on the watch and on the listen for what was going on in the drawing-room and library, and such like; seemed to take more interest in the family's doings than it was her place to take; but beyond that I had no fault to find with her. But this morning she did not appear at the servants' breakfast; and when one of the maids went up to her room to see if there was anything amiss with her, she found a letter pinned on her pincushion, and the bird was

flown. She had taken some of her clothes in a bundle, I suppose, and had left the rest in her drawers. There's the letter, Mr. Belfield. I took it to the morning-room an hour ago, meaning to show it to my lady; but I thought she looked worried and upset at Sir Adrian's having left home so suddenly; and I made up my mind to say nothing about Margaret for a day or two. Why should I trouble my lady about such an insignificant matter?"

"Why, indeed? I hope she hasn't eloped with my brother."

"Fie, for shame, sir! It's just like your mischievous ways to say such a thing."

"Let me look at her letter."

The letter was fairly written, in a bold hand, more masculine than feminine in character, and there were no errors in spelling:

"DEAR MRS. MARRABLE,

"You have been very kind to me, and I can assure you I am grateful to you and to all at the Abbey who have been good to a

waif and stray like me. I am going to London to seek my fortune in service or in some other employment. You need not be afraid that I am going wrong. I am not that kind of girl. I believe I am made of very hard stuff, and that I can stand the wear and tear of life. I thank Lady Belfield, if she will allow me to do so, for her goodness to a nameless girl. I shall always remember her with loving gratitude.

"Yours truly,

"MADGE."

"She must be a determined hussy," said Valentine.

"She's a curious kind of girl, but I believe what she says of herself in her letter," answered the housekeeper. "She is not the kind of girl to go wrong."

"Bosh!" cried Valentine, contemptuously. "She goes to London, and she goes to perdition as surely as a raindrop is lost when it falls into the sea. She has gone to look for her mother, I dare say. Her mother went to the bad before

this girl was born; and this girl is tired of rusticity and servitude, and has gone after her mother. I wonder you can be humbugged so easily, Mrs. Marrable."

"I know more of girls and their dispositions than you do, Mr. Belfield, and I believe this one is no common girl."

"She may be an uncommon girl, but it will all come to the same in the end," answered Valentine, as he went out of the room.

Lady Belfield had her own way. Valentine was impetuously eager to seal his fate, would not have heard of a long engagement, had the impediments to speedy marriage been ever so numerous. Happily there were no impediments. Lady Belfield's private income, inherited from her father, and settled upon her at her marriage with full disposing power, amounted to nearly three thousand a year. She settled six hundred a year upon Helen, with remainder to her children, or to Valentine in the event of his wife dying childness; and she gave her son an allowance of four hundred a year. They

would thus have a thousand a year to live upon. Lady Belfield's position as tenant for life of the Abbey and home farm obliged her to maintain a certain state, and her income would henceforward be barely adequate to her expenses; but she knew Adrian's generous temper, and that she would be assisted by him to any extent she might require. They had divided some of the expenses between them hitherto, his purse maintaining the stables and paying his mother's coachbuilder. She had saved some thousands since her husband's death, and had added two or three hundred a year to her income by the judicious investment of her accumulations: all this without detriment to her charities, which were large.

Valentine accepted her sacrifice of income lightly enough, dismissing the subject with brief and careless thanks. He was living in a lover's paradise, spending all his days with Helen, in the gardens, on the river, on horseback in the early mornings before the sun was too hot for riding; thinking only of her, living only for her, as it seemed.

They were to be married on the tenth of June, just ten days later than Adrian's appointed wedding day.

In a week after Sir Adrian's departure, everybody in the neighbourhood knew what had happened, and pretended to know every minutest detail. There were at least six different versions of the breach between Adrian and his betrothed, and not one of them was in the least like the truth. But every account was dramatic, and had a life-like air, and made excellent sport for afternoon tea parties.

Mrs. Baddeley had not been reticent. She had gone about everywhere lamenting her sister's fatuity. "Such a nice marriage, and we were all so fond of Sir Adrian, and to take up with the younger brother. I feel vexed with myself for having ordered such a lovely trousseau. It is far too good."

Happily very few wedding presents had arrived before the change of plan. Those premature gifts were sent back to the donors, with an explanation, and duly came back again to Helen. It was for

her pleasure and not for her bridegroom they were given, wrote the givers reassuringly.

Except for those early morning rides, or for boating on the river, Helen hardly left the grounds of Belfield Abbey till she went back to Morcomb at the end of May. She was never in the drawing-room when callers came to the Abbey. She ran away at the sound of the bell, and hid herself somewhere—afraid to face people, who had doubtless condemned her as a jilt and a hypocrite.

"You should brazen it out," said Valentine, laughing at her.

"So I will, when I am your wife. But now it tortures me to think of the way people talk about me."

"I never cared a straw for the opinion of my dearest friend, much less for that of a set of busy-bodies," said Valentine contemptuously.

It was all over, and Helen was Valentine Belfield's wife. The wedding had been the simplest of ceremonials: no guests had been bidden, and relatives only were present. There

were no bridesmaids, and there was no best man. Colonel Deverill, his elder daughter and her husband, and Lady Belfield were the only witnesses of the marriage, save the clerk and pew-opener. The bride was married in her travelling dress, and bride and bridegroom drove straight from the church to the station, on the first stage of their journey to Switzerland, where they were to spend a long honeymoon, moving about by easy stages as fancy led them, and not returning to England until September.

"Foolish people!" exclaimed Mrs. Baddeley. "They will have more than time enough to get tired of each other."

While they were honeymooning, Lady Belfield was to find a small house at the West End, just fitted to their requirements and their income; such a house as exists only in the mind of the seeker. She was to spend a month in London, in order to accomplish this task, and when the house was found she was to furnish it after her own taste, and at her own expense.

"No wonder they were married in that

sneaking fashion," said Miss Toffstaff, when she heard that Miss Deverill's wedding was over. "It shows how thoroughly ashamed of themselves they all are."

"Come, now, Dolly, after all, it must be owned that the girl was not mercenary," remonstrated her sister. "It ain't often a girl throws over a rich man to marry a poor one."

"How do you know it was the girl who broke off the engagement? She flirted audaciously with Mr. Belfield, and Sir Adrian threw *her* over. That's the truth of the story."

The Miss Treduceys shrugged their shoulders, and declared they had never expected any good to come of Sir Adrian's foolish entanglement. They talked of it now as an "entanglement," and congratulated dearest Lady Belfield upon her elder son's having got himself disentangled.

"You must be so glad," said Matilda.

"But I am not at all glad. I am very fond of Helen, and I am pleased to have her for my daughter upon any terms; but I had much rather she had proved true to her first love."

"She is very sweet," murmured Matilda, perceiving that it would not do to depreciate Lady Belfield's daughter-in-law, "but I cannot think, from what I have seen of her, that she has much strength of character."

"She has no strength of character," replied Lady Belfield, "but she has a warm affectionate nature, and she will make an admirable wife for Valentine. He has too strong a character himself to get on with a strong-minded wife."

"Yes, I understand. He will have his own way in all things, and she will be like an Oriental wife, Nourmahal, the Light of the Harem, and that kind of thing."

"I believe she will make him happy," said Lady Belfield decisively; whereupon the Miss Treduceys told all their acquaintance that Lady Belfield was very soft about her daughter-in-law, and inclined to be huffy at any word of disparagement.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOT A COMMON GIRL

THE thing which decided Madge upon leaving the comfort and protection of Belfield Abbey for the uncertainties of a great city, with its imminent dangers and possibility of starvation, was a passage in the police reports of that London paper which was most affected in the servants' hall.

"Mrs. Mandeville, of No. 14A, Little Leopold Street, Mayfair, was brought before the magistrates at the Westminster Police Court for attempting to commit suicide by taking oxalic acid. The evidence showed that the lady had been dining with a gentleman who passed in the house as Major Mandeville, but who is supposed to have lived there under an assumed name, and that after dinner a scene of some violence occurred between Mrs. Mandeville and the gentleman in question, in the course of which Mrs. Mandeville rushed from

the room, and ran to a cupboard upon an upper floor, where a solution of oxalic acid was kept by the housemaid for the purpose of cleaning lamp-glasses. She drank a large quantity of this solution, and was immediately seized with all the symptoms of virulent poison, and was for some hours in danger of her life. The person passing as Major Mandeville left the house while she was lying in agony. The screams of one of the servants had attracted a police-constable, who entered the house, and took the prisoner in charge as soon as she was so far recovered as to be brought to the station. It was not the first time she had attempted suicide.

"His Worship: And I suppose you had no more intention of dying on this occasion than you had upon your previous attempt. You only wanted to give Major Mandeville a lesson?

"The Prisoner: I wanted to make an end of myself on both occasions. I have been very cruelly treated, and I have nothing in the world to live for.

"His Worship: That is a bad hearing from a person of your attractive appearance.

"The Prisoner: I might have been better off if I had been as ugly as sin.

"His Worship: Is Mandeville your real name?

"The Prisoner: It is the name I have borne for nearly twenty years.

"His Worship: And you think you have a pretty good right to it—a squatter's right. But it is not your real name?

"The Prisoner: I have no real name—not in the Red Book—if that's what you mean. My father is a basket-maker in the country. He was always called John Dawley in my hearing. I never heard that he had any other name."

Hereupon followed a brief lecture from the magistrate, and the prisoner, having promised to refrain from any future attempt upon her life, was finally dismissed in a spirit of half-contemptuous pity upon the part of his worship.

The paper gave the little scene and dialogue in extenso. The offender was a handsome woman, living in Mayfair, and the case was therefore deemed of sufficient interest to be reported fully, with a sensational side-heading, "MAYFAIR MORALS."

The perusal of this report turned the scale of Madge's mind, which had been wavering for some time. She would go to London and seek out her mother, rescue that brand from the burning, if it were in the power of her intelligence and her affection to do as much. It would be something for her to do, some fixed purpose and useful end in life at the least. Here she had neither end nor aim. She despised herself as an impostor and a spy. To watch Valentine from a distance, to see him falling deeper and deeper in love with Helen Deverill, to hear an occasional snatch of talk between those two; words and tones which said so much to that eager ear—to know that whatever fancy he had once had for her was dead and forgotten: all this had been acutest agony: and yet she had stayed on at the Abbey to endure that jealous pain, that bitter humiliation.

The report in the newspapers decided her. She would go to her mother at once, in the hour of her despair. That was surely the time in which a daughter's love might avail most, might mean redemption.

She would go; but before leaving she would launch a thunderbolt. Those two—traitor and traitress—should stand revealed to the man who so blindly trusted them. She wrote her few words of warning, and put the slip of paper in Sir Adrian's room in the twilight, after his valet had laid out his master's dress clothes and made all ready for the evening toilet.

Within an hour of daybreak next morning she had left the Abbey, and was trudging along the road to the station. She had a little money, just enough to pay for a third-class ticket for Waterloo, and to leave her a few shillings in hand. Mrs. Marrable had given her three sovereigns on account of wages to be fixed in the future, when it was decided how much her services were worth in the household.

She had been on trial hitherto, as it were, an apprentice to domestic service. She had taken one of her sovereigns to Mr. Rockstone, and had insisted upon his receiving it as part payment for the money he had advanced for her clothes. She had given ten shillings to her grandfather on her last Sunday visit to the hovel by the river. She had thus thirty

shillings with which to begin the world. What was she to do when those few shillings were exhausted, when she found herself penniless in the great desert of London?

Did she mean to live upon her mother, Mrs. Mandeville, whose West End house might be an abode of wealth and luxury?

No, she had no intention of accepting either food or shelter in that house, which seemed to her as Tophet in little. Mrs. Marrable had said of her that she was not a common girl, and her intentions as to her future life were not those of a common girl.

She was exceptionally strong, and she meant to work for a living, to labour with those strong hands and robust arms of hers, to accept the roughest toil, were it necessary, to earn her bread in the sweat of her brow, and if possible to earn her mother's bread also.

"I will rescue her out of that hell upon earth, if I can," she said to herself. "People can live upon so little if they have only a mind to do it. Bread is cheap, and I have lived upon dry bread before now."

In the basket-maker's household life had been

sustained upon the hardest fare. Madge had never seen smoking joints or good cheer of any kind till she went to the Abbey. Her soul had almost revolted against that plethora of food in the servants' hall. She thought of the multitudes who were starving, those seething masses of London poor about whom the Vicar had told her, and she sickened in that atmosphere of plenty. Not by any means a common girl. She thought she had a mission, something to do in this life; and that her first duty was to care for the mother who had never cared for her.

She had been carefully taught in her place in the village school, taught earnestly and conscientiously by Mr. Rockstone, and she had a stronger idea of duty than many a girl who has been expensively trained by French and German governesses, with occasional supervision from the parental eye. She had taken the Vicar's teaching in her own way; worked it out in her own way; and she was assuredly not a common girl.

She knew that she was handsomer than one woman in fifty. She had looked at herself in the

shabby little glass which her mother had bought of a travelling hawker five-and-twenty years before —the blurred and clouded glass which hung against the whitewashed wall in the old basket-maker's cabin—and the reflection had told her that she was beautiful. Those flashing eyes with their long black lashes and arched brows, that rich olive complexion with its warmth and colour, the perfect mouth and teeth, and beautifully moulded chin, set on to a throat that might have given immortality to marble—these were elements of beauty not to be mistaken or underrated by the ignorance of an inexperienced girl.

She knew that she was beautiful, and in her scanty converse with the world she had learnt just enough to understand that beauty is a rare and wonderful gift, and that her whole future life might depend upon the use she made of it.

Beauty has its price all the world over. What was to be the price of hers? Not shame and infamy, she told herself. Not such a name as her mother had left behind her amongst the villagers, who still remembered and talked of her.

Thus it was that when Valentine Belfield came to the basket-maker's hovel, prepared for easy conquest, he found a woman of a different stamp from other women whom he had admired and pursued in the past. Not so easily did the bird fall into the net of the fowler.

He came upon her unawares one day as she stood at the cabin door, watching his boat drift slowly by with the tide, while he sat lazily reloading his gun. He looked up and saw her at her cottage door, a dazzling apparition.

He put down his gun and took up a boat-hook and pushed in towards the bank, tied his boat to the trunk of a pollard willow, and landed.

He went straight up to the threshold where the girl was standing, and accosted her easily and frankly, asking some commonplace questions about the ground and the shooting. She answered him as freely, looking him full in the face, in no wise abashed by his striking presence or superior rank. She told him all that could be told about the sport on that dreary bit of marsh. And then he went on to talk of other things, and asked her for a light for his cigar, and seated himself on a bench by the door to smoke.

She had seen him in church occasionally with his mother, and had recognized him at the first glance. She was in no wise abashed by his presence. She looked at him fearlessly with those deep inscrutable eyes of hers, which seemed fraught with the mysterious influences of an ancient race. It was he who felt abashed in her presence, as she stood in a careless attitude, leaning against the door post, looking gravely down at him.

He lingered for an hour; went again the next day; and the next, and the next, and so on daily, remaining longer and longer each day, until he reached the limit of safety, and only left just early enough to escape a meeting with the basket-maker. He went as one drawn by a spell. He carried his gun and game-bag with him every morning, but the birds had an easy time. The only bird he wanted to snare wore a different plumage.

He had practised all the tempter's arts, and yet he seemed no nearer success than he had been when he first stopped his boat, surprised by that sudden vision of low-born beauty. His proffered gifts had been refused with a quiet scorn which was

a new thing in his experience. His subtlest flatteries had been resisted with a steadfastness which might be pride or calculation. And yet he thought she loved him; that beneath this strength of character there burned hidden fires. Yes, he had seen her face light up at his coming, and had noted the cloud of sadness when he bade her good-night. Yet to his reiterated prayer that there should be no such parting, that their lives should flow on together in some luxurious retreat, some dainty villa beside yonder river where its banks were loveliest, some hidden haven where they might make their mutual paradise apart from the outer world, she had been as adamant.

She provoked him at last into quarrelling with her. That stubborn persistance roused his worst passions, his pride, his cruelty, his anger against any creature who opposed his will. He upbraided her with her coldness, her selfish, calculating temper.

"You are playing me as an angler plays a fish," he said. "You think that by keeping me at bay, driving me to madness with your cold-hearted obstinacy, you will make a better

bargain. It is a matter of exchange and barter with you. If you loved me you would not treat me so."

"Perhaps I don't love you."

"You are a strange girl, with a heart as hard as the nethermost millstone," he answered, and left her in a fit of temper.

Never before had he been so thwarted, never had he been so resolved on conquest. He hardly knew whether he loved or hated her most, that winter evening, as he tramped along the causeway, leaving tell-tale footprints in the clay which were to be frozen hard before to-morrow morning.

He would leave her to her pride and her folly; he would leave her to find out what life was worth without him, once having known the sweetness of his flatteries, the delight of his company. He had a letter from an old college friend in his pocket, a letter proposing a month at Monte Carlo. Yes, he would go; he would forget this gipsy girl, and let her forget him if she could.

He returned from his holiday half cured of his passion for that strange girl, and it was a shock to

him, and far from a pleasant one, to find her in his mother's house.

He accepted her presence there as a sign of her complete subjugation. She had risked everything to be near him. He felt certain of ultimate conquest. She might carry herself ever so proudly, but at heart she was his slave.

Then came an unexpected distraction in the presence of another woman. He began to make love to his brother's betrothed in sport. It pleased him to discover his influence over that weak and giddy nature, like the power of a snake over a bird. Poor little bird, how it fluttered and drooped under the spell, and waited helplessly to be caught. His earlier feelings were those of amusement, flattered vanity only. He did not mean to be disloyal to Adrian. And then arose within him the old thirst for conquest, the hunter's passion for the chase and the kill. It was not enough to have fluttered that foolish heart. He must be sure of victory. His own fancy had been kindled in the pursuit, and he told himself, as he had often done before, that this was the most serious passion of his

life. What was fidelity to a brother that it should hinder a man's life-long happiness?

It was seven o'clock in the evening when Madge found herself at Waterloo Station. In her ignorance of railways and time-tables, she had contrived to spend a long day upon a journey that might have been easily accomplished in five or six hours. She had wasted hours at various junctions, and it seemed to her that she had been travelling for a week when she alighted amidst the crowd and bustle at Waterloo. She had eaten only a penny roll upon her journey, and she longed for the refreshment of a cup of tea after the dust and heat of the way; but she had to husband her few shillings, and so tramped off, faint and thirsty, in the direction which a policeman had indicated to her as the nearest way to Mayfair.

The nearest way seemed a very long way to that solitary explorer before she had reached her destination, and York Road, Lambeth, gave her a sorry idea of the great city. But when she came to Westminster Bridge the grandeur of colossal London burst upon her all in a moment. She was

awed by that spectacle of Senate Houses and Abbey, the broad river veiled in the mists of evening, the long lines of golden lamps. It was all grand and wonderful; but the heavy smoke-laden atmosphere oppressed her. She seemed to lose all the elasticity of her nature, the light free step of the rustic.

It was a weary walk from the bridge to Little Leopold Street, for at almost every turn she had to inquire her way, and the roar of the traffic bewildered her, while every omnibus looked like a Juggernaut car bearing down upon her with murderous intent.

Little Leopold Street seemed a haven of rest after the noise and bustle of the great thoroughfares. It was a quiet little street, lying *perdu* among streets of greater altitude and social importance. It was an exclusive little street, or gave itself airs of aristocracy, and there were flowers in all the windows. Number 14A was brightened by red silk blinds, behind which lights were shining in drawing-room and dining-room, shining dimly in the dusk. Madge's heart almost

failed her as she rang the bell. The house had such an aspect of elegance and luxury, as she waited there, with the perfume of the flowers in her nostrils. Every window was full of flowers. And it was from such a nest as this she was to ask her mother to go out with her into the stony wilderness of London, to toil for daily dread.

She had to remember the dialogue in the police court in order to give herself courage.

A smartly dressed young woman opened the door.

"I want to see Mrs. Mandeville, if you please," said Madge.

"I ain't at all sure as she can see you. What's your business?"

"You can tell her that I am a relation of hers, and that I have come a long way on purpose to see her."

"You can step inside while I go and ask; but I'm pretty sure Mrs Mandeville won't be able to see you to-night. She's expecting company."

"Please ask her to let me speak to her, if it's only for five minutes."

"Well, I'll see. You can take a seat while I go upstairs."

Madge entered the hall. It was small, but made important by the artistic trickery of the fashionable upholsterer: white panelling, Japanese curtains, Japanese lanterns, Japanese jars. Madge sat on a bamboo bench, and waited. The door of the dining-room stood open, and she saw a table luxuriously arranged for four people. While she was looking at this bright interior, the table, sideboard, and mantelpiece lighted with wax-candles, and glowing with flowers, the door of a back room was stealthily opened, and a shabby-looking old man with a grimy countenance peered curiously at her, and then withdrew. She had but just time to see a small room, with two candles and a jug and glass upon a table.

Who could that horrid looking old man be, and what had he to do amidst all this smartness and glitter?

The maid reappeared upon the narrow staircase.

"You can step this way," she said, beckoning, and Madge went up to the second floor, wondering as she went at the hothouse flowers on the staircase, the velvet-covered hand-rail, the amber

brocade curtains which veiled the large window on the landing.

The servant flung open the door with an angry air.

"She ain't in a state to see any one," she said as she retired, and left Madge standing just within the threshold.

She had never been in such a room before, so gaudily decorated and richly furnished, and so wanton in its disorder. The low French bed was draped with velvet and lace, and the silken coverlet was heaped with things that had been flung there haphazard one upon another. A silk gown, a riding habit, hat, whip, and gloves, a pearl and feather fan, a pair of satin slippers, a newspaper or two, and a volume of a novel. All the chairs were encumbered. There was a Persian cat asleep upon one, a heap of books and newspapers on another, a tea-tray on a third. Mantelpiece and fireplace were draped with point lace, over turquoise velvet. There was a fire burning in the low hearth, and the atmosphere was oppressively hot.

A woman was lying on a sofa in front of the fireplace, her long black hair hanging loose over her white muslin dressing gown. A woman who

had once been strikingly handsome, and who was handsome still, even in decay. Her cheeks were hollow, and there were lines upon the low broad forehead, but the large dark eyes had lost little of their splendour, and the finely cut features were unimpaired by time.

The woman who called herself Mrs Mandeville turned those darkly brilliant eyes upon the intruder with a look of keenest scrutiny. Then slowly, without a word, she rose with languid movements from her sofa, walked across to Madge, and laid her hands upon the girl's shoulder.

She scanned her face, silently and deliberately, as they stood thus, confronting each other. Madge's eyes seemed transfixed by those other eyes, so like her own.

"To my knowledge I have but two relations in the world," said Mrs Mandeville slowly, "my father and my daughter. Are you my daughter?"

"Yes, mother," answered Madge, with her arms round her mother's neck.

END OF VOL. I.