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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK APRIL'S LADY: A NOVEL ***

APRIL'S LADY.

A NOVEL.

BY "THE DUCHESS"

Author of "Molly Bawn," "Phyllis," "Lady Branksmere," "Beauty's Daughters," etc., etc.

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APRIL'S LADY.

"Must we part? or may I linger?
    Wax the shadows, wanes the day."
Then, with voice of sweetest singer,
    That hath all but died away,
"Go," she said, but tightened finger
    Said articulately, "Stay!"

CHAPTER I.

"Philosophy triumphs easily over past and over future evils, but present evils triumph over philosophy."

"A letter from my father," says Mr. Monkton, flinging the letter in question across the breakfast-table to his wife.

"A letter from Sir George!" Her dark, pretty face flushes crimson.

"And *such* a letter after eight years of obstinate silence. There! read it," says her husband, contemptuously. The contempt is all for the writer of the letter.

Mrs. Monkton taking it up, with a most honest curiosity, that might almost be termed anxiety, reads it through, and in turn flings it from her as though it had been a scorpion.

"Never mind, Jack!" says she with a great assumption of indifference that does not hide from her husband the fact that her eyes are full of tears. "Butter that bit of toast for me before it is *quite* cold, and give Joyce some ham. Ham, darling? or an egg?" to Joyce, with a forced smile that makes her charming face quite sad.

"Have you two been married eight whole years?" asks Joyce laying her elbows on the table, and staring at her sister with an astonished gaze. "It seems like yesterday! What a swindler old Time is. To look at Barbara, one would not believe she could have been *born* eight years ago."

"Nonsense!" says Mrs. Monkton laughing, and looking as pleased as married women—even the happiest—always do, when they are told they look *un*married. "Why Tommy is seven years old."

"Oh! That's nothing!" says Joyce airily, turning her dark eyes, that are lovelier, if possible, than her sister's, upon the sturdy child who is sitting at his father's right hand. "Tommy, we all know, is much older than his mother. Much more advanced; more learned in the wisdom of *this* world; aren't you, Tommy?"

But Tommy, at this present moment, is deaf to the charms of conversation, his young mind being nobly bent on proving to his sister (a priceless treasure of six) that the salt-cellar planted between them belongs *not* to her, but to him! This sounds reasonable, but the difficulty lies in making Mabel believe it. There comes the pause eloquent at last, and then, I regret to say, the free fight!

It might perhaps have been even freer, but for the swift intervention of the paternal relative, who, swooping down upon the two belligerents with a promptitude worthy of all praise, seizes upon his daughter, and in spite of her kicks, which are noble, removes her to the seat on his left hand.

Thus separated hope springs within the breasts of the lookers-on that peace may soon be restored; and indeed, after a sob or two from Mabel, and a few passes of the most reprehensible sort from Tommy (entirely of the facial order), a great calm falls upon the breakfast-room.

"When I was your age, Tommy," says Mr. Monkton addressing his son, and striving to be all that the orthodox parent ought to be, "I should have been soundly whipped if I had behaved to my sister as you have just now behaved to yours!"

"You *haven't* a sister," says Tommy, after which the argument falls flat. It is true, Mr. Monkton is innocent of a sister, but how did the little demon remember that so *apropos*.

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Monkton, "if I *had* had a sister, I *know* I should not have been unkind to her."

"Then she'd have been unkind to you," says Tommy, who is evidently not afraid to enter upon a discussion of the rights and wrongs of mankind with his paternal relative. "Look at Mabel! And I don't care *what* she says," with a vindictive glance at the angelic featured Mabel, who glares back at him with infinite promise of a future settlement of all their disputes in her ethereal eyes. "'Twas *my* salt-cellar, not hers!"

"Ladies first—pleasure afterwards," says his father somewhat idly.

"Oh *Freddy*!" says his wife.

"Seditious language *I* call it," says Jocelyne with a laugh.

"Eh?" says Mr. Monkton. "Why what on earth have I been saying now. I quite believed I was doing the heavy father to perfection and teaching Tommy his duty."

"Nice duty," says Jocelyne, with a pretence of indignation, that makes her charming face a perfect picture. "Teaching him to regard us as second best! I like that."

"Good heavens! did I give that impression? I must have swooned," says Mr. Monkton penitently. "When last in my senses I thought I had been telling Tommy that he deserved a good whipping; and that if good old Time could so manage as to make me my own father, he would assuredly have got it."

"Oh! *your* father!" says Mrs. Monkton in a low tone; there is enough expression in it, however, to convey the idea to everyone present that in her opinion her husband's father would be guilty of any atrocity at a moment's notice.

"Well, *'twas* my salt-cellar," says Tommy again stoutly, and as if totally undismayed by the vision of the grand-fatherly scourge held out to him. After all we none of us feel things much, unless they come personally home to us.

"Was it?" says Mr. Monkton mildly. "Do you know, I really quite fancied it was mine."

"What?" says Tommy, cocking his ear. He, like his sister, is in a certain sense a fraud. For Tommy has the face of a seraph with the heart of a hardy Norseman. There is nothing indeed that Tommy would not dare.

"Mine, you know," says his father, even more mildly still.

"No, it wasn't," says Tommy with decision, "it was at *my* side of the table. *Yours* is over there."

"Thomas!" says his father, with a rueful shake of the head that signifies his resignation of the argument; "it is indeed a pity that I am *not* like my father!"

"Like him! Oh *no*," says Mrs. Monkton emphatically, impulsively; the latent dislike to the family who had refused to recognize her on her marriage with their son taking fire at this speech.

Her voice sounds almost hard—the gentle voice, that in truth was only meant by Mother Nature to give expression to all things kind and loving.

She has leant a little forward and a swift flush is dyeing her cheek. She is of all women the youngest looking, for her years; as a matron indeed she seems absurd. The delicate bloom of girlhood seems never to have left her, but—as though in love of her beauty—has clung to her day by day. So that now, when she has known eight years of married life (and some of them deeply tinctured with care—the cruel care that want of money brings), she still looks as though the morning of womanhood was as yet but dawning for her.

And this is because love the beautifier went with her all the way! Hand in hand he has traveled with her on the stony paths that those who marry must undoubtedly pursue. Never once had he let go his hold, and so it is, that her lovely face has defied Time (though after all that obnoxious Ancient has not had yet much opportunity given him to spoil it), and at twenty-five she looks but a little older than her sister, who is just eighteen, and seven years younger than she is.

Her pretty soft grey Irish eyes, that are as nearly *not* black as it is possible for them to be, are still filled with the dews of youth. Her mouth is red and happy. Her hair—so distinctly chestnut as to be almost guilty of a shade of red in it here and there—covers her dainty head in rippling masses, that fall lightly forward, and rest upon a brow, snow-white, and low and broad as any Greek's might be.

She had spoken a little hurriedly, with some touch of anger. But quick as the anger was born, so quickly does it die.

"I shouldn't have said that, perhaps," says she, sending a little tremulous glance at her husband from behind the urn. "But I couldn't help it. I can't *bear* to hear you say you would like to be like him."

She smiles (a little, gentle, "don't-be-angry-with-me" smile, scarcely to be resisted by any man, and certainly not by her husband, who adores her). It is scarcely necessary to record this last fact, as all who run may read it for themselves, but it saves time to put it in black and white.

"But why not, my dear?" says Mr. Monkton, magisterially. "Surely, considering all things, you have reason to be deeply grateful to Sir George. Why, then, abuse him?"

"Grateful! To Sir George! To your father!" cries his wife, hotly and quick, and——

"Freddy!" from his sister-in-law brings him to a full stop for a moment.

"Do you mean to tell me," says he, thus brought to bay, "that you have nothing to thank Sir George for?" He is addressing his wife.

"Nothing, nothing!" declares she, vehemently, the remembrance of that last letter from her husband's father, that still lies within reach of her view, lending a suspicion of passion to her voice.

"Oh, my dear girl, *consider*!" says Mr. Monkton, lively reproach in his tone. "Has he not given you *me*, the best husband in Europe?"

"Ah, what it is to be modest," says Joyce, with her little quick brilliant laugh.

"Well, it's not true," says Mrs. Monkton, who has laughed also, in spite of herself and the soreness at her heart. "He did *not* give you to me. You made me that gift of your own free will. I have, as I said before, nothing to thank him for."

"I always think he must be a silly old man," says Joyce, which seems to put a fitting termination to the conversation.

The silence that ensues annoys Tommy, who dearly loves to hear the human voice divine. As expressed by himself first, but if that be impracticable, well, then by somebody else. *Anything* is better than dull silence.

"Is he that?" asks he, eagerly, of his aunt.

Though I speak of her as his aunt, I hope it will not be misunderstood for a moment that Tommy totally declines to regard her in any reverential light whatsoever. A playmate, a close friend, a confidante, a useful sort of person, if you will, but certainly not an *aunt*, in the general acceptation of that term. From the very first year that speech fell on them, both Mabel and he had refused to regard Miss Kavanagh as anything but a confederate in all their scrapes, a friend to rejoice with in all their triumphs; she had never been aunt, never, indeed, even so much as the milder "auntie" to them; she had been "Joyce," only, from the very commencement of their acquaintance. The united commands of both father and mother (feebly enforced) had been insufficient to compel them to address this most charming specimen of girlhood by any grown up title. To them their aunt was just such an one as themselves—only, perhaps, a little *more* so.

A lovely creature, at all events, and lovable as lovely. A little inconsequent, perhaps at times, but always amenable to reason, when put into a corner, and full of the glad, laughter of youth.

"Is he what?" says she, now returning Tommy's eager gaze.

"The best husband in Europe. He *says* he's that," with a doubtful stare at his father.

"Why, the *very* best, of course," says Joyce, nodding emphatically. "Always remember that, Tommy. It's a good thing to *be*, you know. *You'll* want to be that, won't you?"

But if she has hoped to make a successful appeal to Tommy's noble qualities (hitherto, it must be confessed, carefully kept hidden), she finds herself greatly mistaken.

"No, I won't," says that truculent person distinctly. "I want to be a big general with a cocked hat, and to kill people. I don't want to be a husband *at all*. What's the good of that?"

"To pursue the object would be to court defeat," says Mr. Monkton meekly. He rises from the table, and, seeing him move, his wife rises too.

"You are going to your study?" asks she, a little anxiously. He is about to say "no" to this, but a glance at her face checks him.

"Yes, come with me," says he instead, answering the lovely silent appeal in her eyes. That letter has no doubt distressed her. She will be happier when she has talked it over with him—they two alone. "As for you, Thomas," says his father, "I'm quite aware that you ought to be consigned to the Donjon keep after your late behavior, but as we don't keep one on the premises, I let you off this time. Meanwhile I haste to my study to pen, with the assistance of your enraged mother, a letter to our landlord that will induce him to add one on at once to this building. After which we shall be able to incarcerate you at our pleasure (but *not* at yours) on any and every hour of the day."

"Who's Don John?" asks Tommy, totally unimpressed, but filled with lively memories of those Spaniards and other foreign powers who have unkindly made more difficult his hateful lessons off and on.

CHAPTER II.

"No love lost between us."

"Well," says Mr. Monkton, turning to his wife as the study (a rather nondescript place) is reached. He has closed the door, and is now looking at her with a distinctly quizzical light in his eyes and in the smile that parts his lips. "Now for it. Have no qualms. I've been preparing myself all through breakfast and I think I shall survive it. You are going to have it out with me, aren't you?"

"Not with *you*," says she, returning his smile indeed, but faintly, and without heart, "that horrid letter! I felt I *must* talk of it to someone, and——"

"*I* was that mythical person. I quite understand. I take it as a special compliment."

"I know it is hard on you, but when I am really vexed about anything, you know, I always want to tell you about it."

"I should feel it a great deal harder if you *didn't* want to tell me about it," says he. He has come nearer to her and has pressed her into a chair—a dilapidated affair that if ever it *had* a best day has forgotten it by now—and yet for all that is full of comfort. "I am only sorry"—moving away again and leaning against the chimney piece—"that you should be so foolish as to let my father's absurd prejudices annoy you at this time of day."

"He will always have it in his power to annoy me," says she quickly. "That perhaps," with a little burst of feeling, "is why I can't forgive him. If I could forget, or grow indifferent to it all, I should not have this *hurt* feeling in my heart. But he is your father, and though he is the most unjust, the cruellest man on earth, I still hate to think he should regard me as he does."

"There is one thing, however, you do forget," says Mr. Monkton gravely. "I don't want to apologize for him, but I would remind you that he has never seen you."

"That's only an aggravation of his offence," her color heightening; "the very fact that he should condemn me unseen, unheard, adds to the wrong he has done me instead of taking from it." She rises abruptly and begins to pace up and down the room, the hot Irish blood in her veins afire. "No"—with a little impatient gesture of her small hand—"I *can't* sit still. Every pulse seems throbbing. He has opened up all the old wounds, and——" She pauses and then turns upon her husband two lovely flashing eyes. "Why, *why* should he suppose that I am vulgar, lowly born, unfit to be your wife?"

"My darling girl, what can it matter what he thinks? A ridiculous headstrong old man in one scale, and——"

"But it does matter. I want to *convince* him that I am not—not—what he believes me to be."

"Then come over to England and see him."

"No—never! I shall never go to England. I shall stay in Ireland always. My own land; the land whose people he detests because he knows nothing about them. It was one of his chief objections to your marriage with me, that I was an Irish girl!"

She stops short, as though her wrath and indignation and contempt is too much for her.

"Barbara," says Monkton, very gently, but with a certain reproach, "do you know you almost make me think that you regret our marriage."

"No, I don't," quickly. "If I talked for ever I shouldn't be able to make you think *that*. But——" She turns to him suddenly, and gazes at him through large eyes that are heavy with tears. "I shall always be sorry for one thing, and that is—that you first met me where you did."

"At your aunt's? Mrs. Burke's?"

"She is *not* my aunt," with a little frown of distaste; "she is nothing to me so far as blood is concerned. Oh! Freddy." She stops close to him, and gives him a grief-stricken glance. "I wish my poor father had been alive when first you saw me. That we could have met for the first time in the old home. It was shabby—faded"—her face paling now with intense emotion. "But you would have known at once that it *had been* a fine old place, and that the owner of it——" She breaks down, very slightly, almost imperceptibly, but Monkton understands that even one more word is beyond her.

"That the owner of it, like St. Patrick, came of decent people," quotes he with an assumption of gaiety he is far from feeling. "My good child, I don't want to see *anyone* to know that of you. You carry the sign manual. It is written in large characters all over you."

"Yet I wish you had known me before my father died," says she, her grief and pride still unassuaged. "He was so unlike anybody else. His manners were so lovely. He was offered a baronetcy at the end of that Whiteboy business on account of his loyalty—that nearly cost him his life—but he refused it, thinking the old name good enough without a handle to it."

"Kavanagh, we all know, is a good name."

"If he had accepted that title he would have been as—the same—as your father!" There is defiance in this sentence.

"*Quite* the same!"

"No, no, he would not," her defiance now changes into, sorrowful honesty. "Your father has been a baronet for *centuries*, my father would have only been a baronet for a few years."

"For centuries!" repeats Mr. Monkton with an alarmed air. There is a latent sense of humor (or rather an appreciation of humor) about him that hardly endears him to the opposite sex. His wife, being Irish, condones it, because she happens to understand it, but there are moments, we all know, when even the very best and most appreciative women refuse to understand *anything*. This is one of them. "Condemn my father if you will," says Mr. Monkton, "accuse him of all the crimes in the calendar, but for *my* sake give up the belief that he is the real and original Wandering Jew. Debrett—Burke—either of those immaculate people will prove to you that my father ascended his throne in——"

"You can laugh at me if you like, Freddy," says Mrs. Monkton with severity tempered with dignity; "but if you laughed until this day month you couldn't make me forget the things that make me unhappy."

"I don't want to," says Mr. Monkton, still disgracefully frivolous. "*I'm* one of the things, and yet ——"

"Don't!" says his wife, so abruptly, and with such an evident determination to give way to mirth, coupled with an equally strong determination to give way to tears, that he at once lays down his arms.

"Go on then," says he, seating himself beside her. She is not in the arm-chair now, but on an ancient and respectable sofa that gives ample room for the accommodation of two; a luxury denied by that old curmudgeon the arm-chair.

"Well, it is this, Freddy. When I think of that dreadful old woman, Mrs. Burke, I feel as though you thought she was a fair sample of the rest of my family. But she is *not* a sample, she has nothing to do with us. An uncle of my mother married her because she was rich, and there her relationship to us began and ended."

"Still——"

"Yes, I know, you needn't remind me, it seems burnt into my brain, I know she took us in after my father's death, and covered me and Joyce with benefits when we hadn't a penny in the world we could call our own. I quite understand, indeed, that we should have starved but for her, and yet—yet—" passionately, "I cannot forgive her for perpetually reminding us that we had *not* that penny!"

"It must have been a bad time," says Monkton slowly. He takes her hand and smoothes it lovingly between both of his.

"She was vulgar. That was not her fault; I forgive her that. What I can't forgive her, is the fact that you should have met me in her house."

"A little unfair, isn't it?"

"Is it? You will always now associate me with her!"

"I shan't indeed. Do you think I have up to this? Nonsense! A more absurd amalgamation I couldn't fancy."

"She was not one of us," feverishly. "I have never spoken to you about this, Freddy, since that first letter your father wrote to you just after our marriage. You remember it? And then, I couldn't explain somehow—but now—this last letter has upset me dreadfully; I feel as if it was all different, and that it was my duty to make you aware of the *real* truth. Sir George thinks of me as one beneath him; that is not true. He may have heard that I lived with Mrs. Burke, and that she was my aunt; but if my mother's brother chose to marry a woman of no family because she had money,"—contemptuously, "that might disgrace *him*, but would not make her kin to *us*. You saw her, you—" lifting distressed eyes to his—"you thought her dreadful, didn't you?"

"I have only had one thought about her. That she was good to you in your trouble, and that but for her I should never have met you."

"That is like you," says she gratefully, yet impatiently. "But it isn't enough. I want you to understand that she is quite unlike my own *real* people—my father, who was like a prince," throwing up her head, "and my uncle, his brother."

"You have an uncle, then?" with some surprise.

"Oh no, *had*," sadly.

"He is dead then?"

"Yes. I suppose so. You are wondering," says she quickly, "that I have never spoken to you of him or my father before. But I *could* not. The thought that your family objected to me, despised me, seemed to compel me to silence. And you—you asked me very little."

"How could I, Barbara? Any attempt I made was repulsed. I thought it kinder to——"

"Yes—I was wrong. I see it now. But I couldn't bear to explain myself. I told you what I could about my father, and that seemed to me sufficient. Your people's determination to regard me as impossible tied my tongue."

"I don't believe it was that," says he laughing. "I believe we were so happy that we didn't care to discuss anything but each other. Delightful subjects full of infinite variety! We have sat so lightly to the world all these years, that if my father's letter had not come this morning I honestly think we should never have thought about him again."

This is scarcely true, but he is bent on giving her mind a happier turn if possible.

"What's the good of talking to me like that, Freddy," says she reproachfully. "You know one never forgets anything of that sort. A slight I mean; and from one's own family. You are always thinking of it; you know you are."

"Well, not always, my dear, certainly—" says Mr. Monkton temporizing. "And if even I *do* give way to retrospection, it is to feel indignant with both my parents."

"Yes; and I don't want you to feel like that. It must be dreadful, and it is my fault. When I think how I felt towards my dear old dad, and my uncle—I——"

"Well, never mind that. I've got you, and without meaning any gross flattery, I consider you worth a dozen dads. Tell me about your uncle. He died?"

"We don't know. He went abroad fifteen years ago. He must be dead I think, because if he were alive he would certainly have written to us. He was very fond of Joyce and me; but no letter from him has reached us for years. He was charming. I wish you could have known him."

"So do I—if you wish it. But—" coming over and sitting down beside her, "don't you think it is a little absurd, Barbara, after all these years, to think it necessary to tell me that you have good blood in your veins? Is it not a self-evident fact; and—one more word dearest—surely you might do me the credit to understand that I could never have fallen in love with anyone who hadn't an ancestor or two."

"And yet your father——"

"I know," rising to his feet, his brow darkening. "Do you think I don't suffer doubly on your account? That I don't feel the insolence of his behavior toward you *four-fold*? There is but one excuse for him and my mother, and that lies in their terrible disappointment about my brother—their eldest son."

"I know; you have told me," begins she quickly, but he interrupts her.

"Yes, I have been more open with you than you with me. *I* feel no pride where you are concerned. Of course my brother's conduct towards them is no excuse for their conduct towards you, but when one has a sore heart one is apt to be unjust, and many other things. You know what a heart-break he has been to the old people, *and is*! A gambler, a dishonorable gambler!" He turns away from her, and his nostrils dilate a little; his right hand grows clenched. "Every spare penny they possess has been paid over to him of his creditors, and they are not over-burdened with riches. They had set their hearts on him, and all their hopes, and when he failed them they fell back on

me. The name is an old one; money was wanted. They had arranged a marriage for me, that would have been worldly wise. I *too* disappointed them!"

"Oh!" she has sprung to her feet, and is staring at him with horrified eyes. "A marriage! There was someone else! You accuse me of want of candor, and now, you—did you ever mention this before?"

"Now, Barbara, don't be the baby your name implies," says he, placing her firmly back in her seat. "I *didn't* marry that heiress, you know, which is proof positive that I loved you, not her."

"But she—she—" she stammers and ceases suddenly, looking at him with a glance full of question. Womanlike, everything has given way to the awful thought, that this unknown had not been unknown to him, and that perhaps he had admired—loved——

"Couldn't hold a candle to you," says he, laughing in spite of himself at her expression which, indeed, is nearly tragic. "You needn't suffocate yourself with charcoal because of her. She had made her pile, or rather her father had, at Birmingham or elsewhere, I never took the trouble to inquire, and she was undoubtedly solid in *every way*, but I don't care for the female giant, and so I—you know the rest, I met *you*; I tell you this only to soften your heart, if possible, towards these lonely, embittered old people of mine."

"Do you mean that when your brother disappointed them that they——" she pauses.

"No. They couldn't make me their heir. The property is strictly entailed (what is left of it); you need not make yourself miserable imagining you have done me out of anything more than their good-will. George will inherit whatever he has left them to leave."

"It is sad," says she, with downcast eyes.

"Yes. He has been a constant source of annoyance to them ever since he left Eton."

"Where is he now?"

"Abroad, I believe. In Italy, somewhere, or France—not far from a gaming table, you may be sure. But I know nothing very exactly, as he does not correspond with me, and that letter of this morning is the first I have received from my father for four years."

"He must, indeed, hate me," says she, in a low tone. "His elder son such a failure, and you—he considers you a failure, too."

"Well, *I* don't consider myself so," says he, gaily.

"They were in want of money, and you—you married a girl without a penny."

"I married a girl who was in herself a mine of gold," returns he, laying his hands on her shoulders and giving her a little shake. "Come, never mind that letter, darling; what does it matter when all is said and done?"

"The first after all these years; and the, *last*—you remember it? It was terrible. Am I unreasonable if I remember it?"

"It was a cruel letter," says he slowly; "to forget it would be impossible, either for you or me. But, as I said just now, how does it affect us? You have me, and I have you; and they, those foolish old people, they have——" He pauses abruptly, and then goes on in a changed tone, "their memories."

"Oh! and sad ones!" cries she, sharply, as if hurt. "It is a terrible picture you have conjured up. You and I so happy, and they—Oh! *poor* old people!"

"They have wronged you—slighted you—ill-treated you," says he, looking at her.

"But they are unhappy; they must be wretched always about your brother, their *first* child. Oh! what a grief is theirs!"

"What a heart is *yours*!" says he, drawing her to him. "Barbara! surely I shall not die until they have met you, and learned why I love you."

CHAPTER III.

"It was a lover and his lass
  With a hey and a ho, and a hey-nonino!
That o'er the green cornfield did pass
In the Spring-time, the only pretty ring-time,
  When birds do sing hey-ding-a-ding,
  Sweet lovers love the Spring."

Joyce is running through the garden, all the sweet wild winds of heaven playing round her. They are a little wild still. It is the end of lovely May, but though languid Summer is almost with us, a suspicion of her more sparkling sister Spring fills all the air.

Miss Kavanagh has caught up the tail of her gown, and is flying as if for dear life. Behind her come the foe, fast and furious. Tommy, indeed, is now dangerously close at her heels, armed with a ferocious-looking garden fork, his face crimson, his eyes glowing with the ardor of the chase; Mabel, much in the background, is making a bad third.

Miss Kavanagh is growing distinctly out of breath. In another moment Tommy will have her. By this time he has fully worked himself into the belief that he is a Red Indian, and she his lawful prey, and is prepared to make a tomahawk of his fork, and having felled her, to scalp her *somehow*, when Providence shows her a corner round a rhododendron bush that may save her for the moment. She makes for it, gains it, turns it, dashes round it, and *all but* precipitates herself into the arms of a young man who has been walking leisurely towards her.

He is a tall young man, not strictly handsome, but decidedly good to look at, with honest hazel eyes, and a shapely head, and altogether very well set up. As a rule he is one of the most cheerful people alive, and a tremendous favorite in his regiment, the —— Hussars, though just now it might suggest itself to the intelligent observer that he considers he has been hardly used. A very little more haste, and that precipitation *must* have taken place. He had made an instinctive movement towards her with protective arms outstretched; but though a little cry had escaped her, she had maintained her balance, and now stands looking at him with laughing eyes, and panting breath, and two pretty hands pressed against her bosom.

Mr. Dysart lets his disappointed arms fall to his sides, and assumes the aggrieved air of one who has been done out of a good thing.

"You!" says she, when at last she can speak.

"I suppose so," returns he discontentedly. He might just as well have been anyone else, or anywhere else—such a chance—and *gone*!

"Never were you so welcome!" cries she, dodging behind him as Tommy, fully armed, and all alive, comes tearing round the corner. "Ah, ha, Tommy, *sold*! I've got a champion now. I'm no longer shivering in my shoes. Mr. Dysart will protect me—*won't* you, Mr. Dysart?" to the young man, who says "yes" without stirring a muscle. The heaviest bribe would not have induced him to move, because, standing behind him, she has laid her dainty fingers on his shoulders, from which safe position she mocks at Tommy with security. Were the owners of the shoulders to stir, the owners of the fingers might remove the delightful members. Need it be said that, with this awful possibility before him, Mr. Dysart is prepared to die at his post rather than budge an inch.

And, indeed, death seems imminent. Tommy charging round the rhododendron, finding himself robbed of his expected scalp, grows frantic, and makes desperate passes at Mr. Dysart's legs, which that hero, being determined, as I have said, not to stir under any provocation, circumvents with a considerable display of policy, such as:

"I say, Tommy, old boy, is that you? How d'ye do? Glad to see me, aren't you?" This last very artfully with a view to softening the attacks. "You don't know what I've brought you!" This is more artful still, and distinctly a swindle, as he has brought him nothing, but on the spot he determines to redeem himself with the help of the small toy-shops and sweety shops down in the village. "Put down that fork like a good boy, and let me tell you how——"

"Oh, *bother* you!" says Tommy, indignantly. "I'd have had her only for you! What brought you here now? Couldn't you have waited a bit?"

"Yes! what brought you?" says Miss Kavanagh, most disgracefully going over to the other side, now that danger is at an end, and Tommy has planted his impromptu tomahawk in a bed close by.

"Do you want to know?" says he quickly.

The fingers have been removed from his shoulders, and he is now at liberty to turn round and look at the charming face beside him.

"No, no!" says she, shaking her head. "I've been rude, I suppose. But it is such a wonderful thing to see you here so soon again."

"Why should I not be here?"

"Of course! That is the one unanswerable question. But you must confess it is puzzling to those who thought of you as being elsewhere."

"If you are one of 'those' you fill me with gratitude. That you should think of me even for a moment——"

"Well, I haven't been thinking much," says she, frankly, and with the most delightful if scarcely satisfactory little smile: "I don't believe I was thinking of you at all, until I turned the corner just now, and then, I confess, I was startled, because I believed you at the Antipodes."

"Perhaps your belief was mother to your thought."

"Oh, no. Don't make me out so nasty. Well, but *were* you there?"

"Perhaps so. Where are they?" asks he gloomily. "One hears a good deal about them, but they comprise so many places that now-a-days one is hardly sure where they exactly lie. At all events no one has made them clear to me."

"Does it rest with me to enlighten you?" asks she, with a little aggravating half glance from under her long lashes; "well—the North Pole, Kamtschatka, Smyrna, Timbuctoo, Maoriland, Margate ——"

"We'll stop there, I think," says he, with a faint grimace.

"There! At Margate? No, thanks. *You* can, if you like, but as for me——"

"I don't suppose you would stop anywhere with me," says he. "I have occasional glimmerings that I hope mean common sense. No, I have not been so adventurous as to wander towards Margate. I have only been to town and back again."

"What town?"

"Eh? What town?" says he astonished. "*London*, you know."

"No, I don't know," says Miss Kavanagh, a little petulantly. "One would think there was only one town in the world, and that all you English people had the monopoly of it. There are other towns, I suppose. Even we poor Irish insignificants have a town or two. Dublin comes under that head, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. Of *course*," making great haste to abase himself. "It is mere snobbery our making so much of London. A kind of despicable cant, you know."

"Well, after all, I expect it is a big place in every way," says Miss Kavanagh, so far mollified by his submission as to be able to allow him something.

"It's a desert," says Tommy, turning to his aunt, with all the air of one who is about to impart to her useful information. "It's raging with wild beasts. They roam to and fro and are at their wits' ends——" here Tommy, who is great on Bible history, but who occasionally gets mixed, stops short. "Father says they're there," he winds up defiantly.

"Wild beasts!" echoes Mr. Dysart, bewildered. "Is *this* the teaching about their Saxon neighbors that the Irish children receive at the hands of their parents and guardians. Oh, well, come now, Tommy, really, you know——"

"Yes; they are there," says Tommy, rebelliously. "*Frightful* beasts! *Bears!* They'd tear you in bits if they could get at you. They have no reason in them, father says. And they climb up posts, and roar at people."

"Oh, nonsense!" says Mr. Dysart. "One would think we were having a French Revolution all over again in England. Don't you think," glancing severely at Joyce, who is giving way to unrestrained mirth, "that it is not only wrong, but dangerous, to implant such ideas about the English in the breasts of Irish children? There isn't a word of truth in it, Tommy."

"There *is*!" says Monkton, junior, wagging his head indignantly. "Father *told* me."

"Father told us," repeats the small Mabel, who has just come up.

"And father says, too, that the reason that they are so wicked is because they want their freedom!" says Tommy, as though this is an unanswerable argument.

"Oh, I see! The socialists!" says Mr. Dysart. "Yes; a troublesome pack! But still, to call them wild beasts——"

"They *are* wild beasts," says Tommy, prepared to defend his position to the last. "They've got *manes*, and *horns*, and *tails*!"

"He's romancing," says Mr. Dysart looking at Joyce.

"He's not," says she demurely. "He is only trying to describe to you the Zoological Gardens. His father gives him a graphic description of them every evening, and—the result you see."

Here both she and he, after a glance at each other, burst out laughing.

"No wonder you were amused," says he, "but you might have given me a hint. You were unkind to me—as usual."

"Now that you have been to London," says she, a little hurriedly, as if to cover his last words and pretend she hasn't heard them, "you will find our poor Ireland duller than ever. At Christmas it is not so bad, but just *now*, and in the height of your season, too,——"

"Do you call this place dull?" interrupts he. "Then let me tell you you misjudge your native land; this little bit of it, at all events. I think it not only the loveliest, but the liveliest place on earth."

"You are easily pleased," says she, with a rather embarrassed smile.

"He isn't!" says Tommy, breaking into the conversation with great aplomb. He has been holding on vigorously to Mr. Dysart's right hand for the last five minutes, after a brief but brilliant skirmish with Mabel as to the possession of it—a skirmish brought to a bloodless conclusion by

the surrender, on Mr. Dysart's part, of his left hand to the weaker belligerent. "He hates Miss Maliphant, nurse says, though Lady Baltimore wants him to marry her, and she's a fine girl, nurse says, an' raal smart, and with the gift o' the gab, an' lots o' tin——"

"*Tommy!*" says his aunt frantically. It is indeed plain to everybody that Tommy is now quoting nurse, *au naturel*, and that he is betraying confidences in a perfectly reckless manner.

"Don't stop him," says Mr. Dysart, glancing at Joyce's crimson cheeks with something of disfavor. "'What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?' I *defy* you," a little stormily, "to think I care a farthing for Miss Maliphant or for any other woman on earth—*save one*!"

"Oh, you mustn't press your confidences on me," says she, smiling and dissembling rather finely; "I know nothing. I accuse you of nothing. Only, Tommy, you were a little rude, weren't you?"

"I wasn't," says Tommy, promptly, in whom the inborn instinct of self-defence has been largely developed. "It's true. Nurse says she has a voice like a cow. Is *that* true?" turning, unabashed to Dysart.

"She's expected at the Castle, next week. You shall come up and judge for yourself," says he, laughing. "And," turning to Joyce, "you will come, too, I hope."

"It is manners to wait to be asked," returns she, smiling.

"Oh, as for that," says he, "Lady Baltimore crossed last night with me and her husband. And here is a letter for you." He pulls a note of the cocked hat order out of one of his pockets.

CHAPTER IV.

> "Tell me where is fancy bred,
> Or in the heart, or in the head?
> How begot, how nourished?
> Reply, reply."

"An invitation from Lady Baltimore," says Joyce, looking at the big red crest, and coloring slightly.

"Yes."

"How do you know?" asks she, rather suspiciously.

The young man raises his hands and eyes.

"I *swear* I had nothing to do with it," says he, "I didn't so much as hint at it. Lady Baltimore spent her time crossing the Channel in declaring to all who were well enough to hear her, that she lived only in the expectation of soon seeing you again."

"Nonsense!" scornfully; "it is only a month ago since I was staying there, just before they went to London. By the bye, what brings them home now? In the very beginning of their season?"

"*I* don't know. And it is as well not to inquire perhaps. Baltimore and my cousin, as all the world knows, have not hit it off together. Yet when Isabel married him, we all thought it was quite an ideal marriage, they were so much in love with each other."

"Hot love soon cools," says Miss Kavanagh in a general sort of way.

"I don't believe it," sturdily, "if it's the right sort of love. However, to go back to your letter—which you haven't even deigned to open—you *will* accept the invitation, won't you?"

"I don't know," hesitating.

"Oh! I say, *do* come! It is only for a week, and even if it does bore you, still, as a Christian, you ought to consider how much, even in that short time, you will be able to add to the happiness of your fellow creatures."

"Flattery means insincerity," says she, tilting her chin, "keep all that sort of thing for your Miss Maliphant; it is thrown away upon me."

"*My* Miss Maliphant! Really I must protest against your accrediting me with such a possession. But look here, *don't* disappoint us all; and you won't be dull either, there are lots of people coming. Dicky Brown, for one."

"Oh! will he be there?" brightening visibly.

"Yes," rather gloomily, and perhaps a little sorry that he has said anything about Mr. Browne's possible arrival—though to feel jealousy about that social butterfly is indeed to sound the depths of folly; "you like him?"

"I *love* him," says Miss Kavanagh promptly and with sufficient enthusiasm to restore hope in the bosom of any man except a lover.

"He is blessed indeed," says he stiffly. "Beyond his deserts I can't help thinking. I really think he is the biggest fool I ever met."

"Oh! not the biggest, surely," says she, so saucily, and with such a reprehensible tendency towards laughter, that he gives way and laughs too, though unwillingly.

"True. I'm a bigger," says he, "but as that is *your* fault, you should be the last to taunt me with it."

"Foolish people always talk folly," says she with an assumption of indifference that does not hide her red cheeks. "Well, go on, who is to be at the Court besides Dicky?"

"Lady Swansdown."

"I like her too."

"But not so well as you like Dicky, *you* love him according to your own statement."

"Don't be matter-of-fact!" says Miss Kavanagh, giving him a well-deserved snub. "Do you always say exactly what you mean?"

"Always—to *you*."

"I daresay you would be more interesting if you didn't," says she, with a little, lovely smile, that quite spoils the harshness of her words. Of her few faults, perhaps the greatest is, that she seldom knows her own mind, where her lovers are concerned, and will blow hot and cold, and merry and sad, and cheerful, and petulant all in one breath as it were. Poor lovers! they have a hard time of it with her as a rule. But youth is often so, and the cold, still years, as they creep on us, with dull common sense and deadly reason in their train, cure us all too soon of our pretty idle follies.

Just now she was bent on rebuffing him, but you see her strength failed her, and she spoiled her effect by the smile she mingled with the rebuff. The smile indeed was so charming that he remembers nothing but it, and so she not only gains nothing, but loses something to the other side.

"Well, I'll try to mend all that," says he, but so lovingly, and with such unaffected tenderness, that she quails beneath his glance. Coquette as undoubtedly Nature has made her, she has still so gentle a soul within her bosom that she shrinks from inflicting *actual* pain. A pang or two, a passing regret to be forgotten the next hour—or at all events in the next change of scene—she is not above imparting, but when people grow earnest like—like Mr. Dysart for example—they grow troublesome. And she hasn't made up her mind to marry, and there are other people——

"The Clontarfs are to be there too," goes on Dysart, who is a cousin of Lady Baltimore's, and knows all about her arrangements; "and the Brownings, and Norman Beauclerk."

"The—Clontarfs," says Joyce, in a hurried way, that might almost be called confused; to the man who loves her, and who is watching her, it is quite plain that she is not thinking of Lord and Lady Clontarf, who are quite an ordinary couple and devoted to each other, but of that last name spoken—Norman Beauclerk; Lady Baltimore's brother, a man, handsome, agreeable, aristocratic—the man whose attentions to her a month ago had made a little topic for conversation amongst the country people. Dull country people who never go anywhere or see anything beyond their stupid selves, and who are therefore driven to do something or other to avoid suicide or the murdering of each other; gossip unlimited is their safety valve.

"Yes, and Beauclerk," persists Dysart, a touch of despair at his heart; "you and he were good friends when last he was over, eh?"

"I am generally very good friends with everybody; not an altogether desirable character, not a strong one," says she smiling, and still openly parrying the question.

"You liked Beauclerk," says he, a little doggedly perhaps.

"Ye—es—very well."

"Very *much*! Why can't you be *honest*!" says he flashing out at her.

"I don't know what you mean," coldly. "If, however, you persist on my looking into it, I—" defiantly—"yes, I *do* like Mr. Beauclerk very much."

"Well, I don't know what you see in that fellow."

"Nothing," airily, having now recovered herself, "that's his charm."

"If," gravely, "you gave that as your opinion of Dicky Browne I could believe you."

She laughs.

"Poor Dicky," says she, "what a cruel judgment; and yet you are right;" she has changed her whole manner, and is now evidently bent on restoring him to good humor, and compelling him to forget all about Mr. Beauclerk. "I must give in to you about Dicky. There isn't even the vaguest suggestion of meaning about *him*. I—" with a deliberate friendly glance flung straight into his

eyes—"don't often give in to you, do I?"

On this occasion, however, her coquetry—so generally successful—is completely thrown away. Dysart, with his dark eyes fixed uncompromisingly upon hers, makes the next move—an antagonistic one.

"You have a very high opinion of Beauclerk," says he.

"Have I?" laughing uneasily, and refusing to let her rising temper give way. "We all have our opinions on every subject that comes under our notice. You have one on this subject evidently."

"Yes, but it is not a high one," says he unpleasantly.

"After all, what does that matter? I don't pretend to understand you. I will only suggest to you that our opinions are but weak things—mere prejudices—no more."

"I am not prejudiced against Beauclerk, if you mean that," a little hotly.

"I didn't," with a light shrug. "Believe me, you think a great deal more about him than I do."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am at all events sure of one thing," says she quickly darting at him a frowning glance, "that you have no right to ask me that question."

"I have not indeed," acknowledges he stiffly still, but with so open an apology in his whole air that she forgives him. "Many conflicting thoughts led me astray. I must ask your pardon."

"Why, granted!" says she. "And—I was cross, wasn't I? After all an old friend like you might be allowed a little laxity. There, never mind," holding out her hand. "Let us make it up."

Dysart grasps the little extended hand with avidity, and peace seems restored when Tommy puts an end to all things. To anyone acquainted with children I need hardly remark that he has been listening to the foregoing conversation with all his ears and all his eyes and every bit of his puzzled intelligence.

"Well, go on," says he, giving his aunt a push when the friendly hand-shake has come to an end.

"Go on? Where?" asks she, with apparent unconcern but a deadly foreboding at her breast. She knows her Tommy.

"You *said* you were going to make it up with him!" says that hero, regarding her with disapproving eyes.

"Well, I have made it up."

"No, you haven't! When you make it up with me you always kiss me! Why don't you kiss him?"

Consternation on the part of the principal actors. Dysart, strange to say, is the first to recover.

"Why indeed?" says he, giving way all at once to a fatal desire for laughter. This, Miss Kavanagh, being vexed with herself for her late confusion, resents strongly.

"I am sure, Tommy," says she, with a mildness that would not have imposed upon an infant, "that your lesson hour has arrived. Come, say good-bye to Mr. Dysart, and let us begin at once. You know I am going to teach you to-day. Good-bye, Mr. Dysart—if you want to see Barbara, you will find her very probably in the study."

"Don't go like this," says he anxiously. "Or if you *will* go, at least tell me that you will accept Lady Baltimore's invitation."

"I don't know," smiling coldly. "I think not. You see I was there for such a *long* time in the beginning of the year, and Barbara always wants me, and one should not be selfish you know."

"One should not indeed!" says he, with slow meaning. "What answer, then, must I give my cousin? You know," in a low tone, "that she is not altogether happy. You can lighten her burden a little. She is fond of you."

"I can lighten Barbara's burden also. Think me the very incarnation of selfishness if you will," says she rather unjustly, "but still, if Barbara says 'don't go,' I shall stay here."

"Mrs. Monkton won't say that."

"Perhaps not," toying idly with a rose, in such a careless fashion as drives him to despair. Brushing it to and fro across her lips she seems to have lost all interest in the question in hand.

"If she says to you 'go,' how then?"

"Why then—I may still remain here."

"Well stay then, of course, if you so desire it!" cries he angrily. "If to make all your world *un*happy is to make you happy, why be so by all means."

"*All* my world! Do you suppose then that it will make Barbara and Freddy unhappy to have my company? What a gallant speech!" says she, with a provoking little laugh and a swift lifting of her eyes to his.

"No, but it will make other people (more than *twice* two) miserable to be deprived of it."

"Are you one of that quartette?" asks she, so saucily, yet withal so merrily that the hardest-hearted lover might forgive her. A little irresistible laugh breaks from her lips. Rather ruefully he joins in it.

"I don't think I need answer that question," says he. "To you at all events."

"To me of all people rather," says she still laughing, "seeing I am the interested party."

"No, that character belongs to me. You have no interest in it. To me it is life or death—to—you ——"

"No, no, you mustn't talk to me like that. You know I forbid you last time we met, and you promised me to be good."

"I promised then the most difficult thing in the world. But never mind me; the principal thing is, your acceptance or rejection of that note. Joyce!" in a low tone, "*say* you will accept it."

"Well," relenting visibly, and now refusing to meet his eyes, "I'll ask Barbara, and if she says I may go I——" pause.

"You will then accept?" eagerly.

"I shall then—think about it."

"You look like an angel," says he, "and you have the heart of a flint."

This remark, that might have presumably annoyed another girl, seems to fill Miss Kavanagh with mirth.

"Am I so bad as that?" cries she, gaily. "Why I shall make amends then. I shall change my evil ways. As a beginning, see here. If Barbara says go to the Court, go I will. Now, stern moralist! where are you?"

"In the seventh heaven," says he, promptly. "Be it a Fool's Paradise or otherwise, I shall take up my abode there for the present. And now you will go and ask Mrs. Monkton?"

"In what a hurry to get rid of me!" says this coquette of all coquettes. "Well, good-bye then——"

"Oh no, don't go."

"To the Court? Was ever man so unreasonable? In one breath 'do' and 'don't'!"

"Was ever woman so tormenting?"

"Tormenting? No, so discerning if you will, or else so——"

"Adorable! You can't find fault with *that* at all events."

"And therefore my mission is at an end! Good-bye, again."

"Good-bye." He is holding her hand as though he never means to let her have it again. "That rose," says he, pointing to the flower that had kissed her lips so often. "It is nothing to you, you can pick yourself another, give it to me."

"I can pick you another too, a nice fresh one," says she. "Here," moving towards a glowing bush; "here is a bud worth having."

"Not that one," hastily. "Not one this garden, or any other garden holds, save the one in your hand. It is the only one in the world of roses worth having."

"I hate to give a faded gift," says she, looking at the rose she holds with apparent disfavor.

"Then I shall take it," returns he, with decision. He opens her pretty pink palm, releases the dying rosebud from it and places it triumphantly in his coat.

"You haven't got any manners," says she, but she laughs again as she says it.

"Except bad ones you should add."

"Yes, I forgot that. A point lost. Good-bye now, good-bye indeed."

She waves her hand lightly to him and calling to the children runs towards the house. It seems as if she has carried all the beauty and brightness and sweetness of the day with her.

As Dysart turns back again, the afternoon appears grey and gloomy.

CHAPTER V.

"Look ere thou leap, see ere thou go."

"Well, Barbara, can I go?"

"I don't know"—doubtfully. There is a cloud on Mrs. Monkton's brow, she is staring out of the window instead of into her sister's face, and she is evidently a little distressed or uncertain. "You have been there so lately, and——"

"You want to say something," says the younger sister, seating herself on the sofa, and drawing Mrs. Monkton down beside her. "Why don't you do it?"

"You can't want to go so very much, can you now?" asks the latter, anxiously, almost entreatingly.

"It is I who don't know this time!" says Joyce, with a smile. "And yet——"

"It seems only like yesterday that you came back after spending a month there."

"A yesterday that dates from six weeks ago," a little reproachfully.

"I know. You like being there. It is a very amusing house to be at. I don't blame you in any way. Lord and Lady Baltimore are both charming in their ways, and very kind, and yet——"

"There, don't stop; you are coming to it now, the very heart of the meaning. Go on," authoritatively, and seizing her sister in her arms, "or I'll *shake* it out of you."

"It is this then," says Mrs. Monkton slowly. "I don't think it is a *wise* thing for you to go there so often."

"Oh Barbara! Owl of Wisdom as thou art, why not?" The girl is laughing, yet a deep flush of color has crept into each cheek.

"Never mind the why not. Perhaps it is unwise to go *anywhere* too often; and you must acknowledge that you spent almost the entire spring there."

"Well, I hinted all that to Mr. Dysart."

"Was he here?"

"Yes. He came down from the Court with the note."

"And—who else is to be there?"

"Oh! the Clontarfs, and Dicky Browne, and Lady Swansdown and a great many others."

"Mr. Beauclerk?" she does not look at Joyce as she asks this question.

"Yes."

A little silence follows, broken at last by Joyce.

"*May* I go?"

"Do you think it is the best thing for you to do?" says Mrs. Monkton, flushing delicately. "*Think*, darling! You know—you *must* know, because you have it always before you," flushing even deeper, "that to marry into a family where you are not welcomed with open heart is to know much private discomfiture."

"I know this too," says the girl, petulantly, "that to be married to a man like Freddy, who consults your lightest wish, and is your lover always, is worth the enduring of anything."

"I think that too," says Mrs. Monkton, who has now grown rather pale. "But there is still one more thing to know—that in making such a marriage as we have described, a woman lays out a thorny path for her husband. She separates him from his family, and as all good men have strong home ties, she naturally compels him to feel many a secret pang."

"But he has his compensations. Do you think if Freddy got the chance, he would give you up and go back to his family?"

"No—not that. But to rejoice in that thought is to be selfish. Why should he not have my love and the love of his people too? There is a want somewhere. What I wish to impress upon you, Joyce, is this, that a woman who marries a man against his parents' wishes has much to regret, much to endure."

"I think you are ungrateful," says the girl a little vehemently. "Freddy has made you endure nothing. You are the happiest married woman I know."

"Yes, but I have made *him* endure a great deal," says Mrs. Monkton in a low tone. She rises, and going to the window, stands there looking out upon the sunny landscape, but seeing nothing.

"Barbara! you are crying," says Joyce, going up to her abruptly, and folding her arms round her.

"It is nothing, dear. Nothing at all, darling. Only—I wish he and his father were friends again. Freddy is too good a man not to regret the estrangement."

"I believe you think Freddy is a little god!" says Joyce laughing.

"O! not a *little* one," says Mrs. Monkton, and as Freddy stands six foot one in his socks, they both laugh at this.

"Still you don't answer me," says the girl presently. "You don't say 'you may' or 'you shan't'—which is it to be, Barbara?"

Her tone is distinctly coaxing now, and as she speaks she gives her sister a little squeeze that is plainly meant to press the desired permission out of her.

Still Mrs. Monkton hesitates.

"You see," says she temporizing, "there are so many reasons. The Court," pausing and flushing, "is not *quite* the house for so young a girl as you."

"Oh Barbara!"

"You can't misunderstand me," says her sister with agitation. "You know how I like, *love* Lady Baltimore, and how good Lord Baltimore has been to Freddy. When his father cast him off there was very little left to us for beginning housekeeping with, and when Lord Baltimore gave him his agency—Oh, *well*! it isn't likely we shall either of us forget to be grateful for *that*. If it was only for ourselves I should say nothing, but it is for you, dear; and—this unfortunate affair—this determined hostility that exists between Lord and Lady Baltimore, makes it unpleasant for the guests. You know," nervously, "I hate gossip of any sort, but one must defend one's own."

"But there is nothing unpleasant; one sees nothing. They are charming to each other. I have been staying there and I know."

"Have I not stayed there too? It is impossible Joyce to fight against facts. All the world knows they are not on good terms."

"Well, a great many other people aren't perhaps."

"When they aren't the tone of the house gets lowered. And I have noticed of late that they have people there, who——"

"Who what, Barbara?"

"Oh yes, I *know* they are all right; they are received everywhere, but are they good companions for a girl of your years? It is not a healthy atmosphere for you. They are rich people who think less of a hundred guineas than you do of five. Is it wise, I ask you again to accustom yourself to their ways?"

"Nonsense, Barbara!" says her sister, looking at her with a growing surprise. "That is not like you. Why should we despise the rich, why should we seek to emulate them? Surely both you and I have too good blood in our veins to give way to such follies." She leans towards Mrs. Monkton, and with a swift gesture, gentle as firm, turns her face to her own.

"Now for the real reason," says she.

Unthinkingly she has brought confusion on herself. Barbara, as though stung to cruel candor, gives her the real reason in a sentence.

"Tell me this," says she, "which do you like best, Mr. Dysart, or Mr. Beauclerk?"

Joyce, taking her arm from round her sister's neck, moves back from her. A deep color has flamed into her cheeks, then died away again. She looks quite calm now.

"What a question," says she.

"Well," feverishly, "answer it."

"Oh, no," says the girl quickly.

"Why not? Why not answer it to me, your chief friend? You think the question indelicate, but why should I shrink from asking a question on which, perhaps, the happiness of your life depends? If—if you have set your heart on Mr. Beauclerk——" She stops, checked by something in Miss Kavanagh's face.

"Well, what then?" asks the latter coldly.

"It will bring you unhappiness. He is Lady Baltimore's brother. She already plans for him. The Beauclerks are poor—he is bound to marry money."

"That is a good deal about Mr. Beauclerk, but what about the other possible suitor whom you suppose I am madly in love with?"

"Don't talk to me like that, Joyce. Do you think I have anything at heart except your interests? As to Mr. Dysart, if you like *him*, I confess I should be glad of it. He is only a cousin of the Baltimores, and of such moderate means that they would scarcely object to his marrying a penniless girl."

"You rate me highly," says Joyce, with a sudden rather sharp little laugh. "I am good enough for the cousin—I am *not* good enough for the brother, who may reasonably look higher."

"Not higher," haughtily. "He can only marry a girl of good birth. *You* are that, but he, in his position, will look for money, or else his people will look for it for him. Whereas, Mr. Dysart——"

"Yes, you needn't go over it all. Mr. Dysart is about on a level with me, he will *never* have any

money, neither shall I." Suddenly she looks round at her sister, her eyes very bright. "Tell me then," says she, "what does it all come to? That I am bound to refuse to marry a man because he has money, and because I have none."

"That is not the argument," says Barbara anxiously.

"I think it is."

"It is not. I advise you strongly not to think of Mr. Beauclerk, yet *he* has no money to speak of."

"He has more than Freddy."

"But he is a different man from Freddy—with different tastes, different aspirations, different—— He's different," emphatically, "in *every* way!"

"To be different from the person one loves is not to be a bad man," says Joyce slowly, her eyes on the ground.

"My dear girl, who has called Mr. Beauclerk a bad man?"

"You don't like him," says Miss Kavanagh, still more slowly, still with thoughtful eyes downcast.

"I like Mr. Dysart better if you mean that."

"No, I don't mean that. And, besides, that is no answer."

"Was there a question?"

"Yes. Why don't you like Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Have I said I didn't like him?"

"Not in so many words, but——Well, why don't you?"

"I don't know," rather lamely.

Miss Kavanagh laughs a little satirically, and Mrs. Monkton, objecting to mirth of that description, takes fire.

"Why do you *like* him?" asks she defiantly.

"I don't know either," returns Joyce, with a rueful smile. "And after all I'm not sure that I like him so *very* much. You evidently imagine me to be head over ears in love with him, yet I, myself, scarcely know whether I like him or not."

"You always look at him so kindly, and you always pull your skirts aside to give him a place by your side."

"I should do that for Tommy."

"Would you? That would be *too* kind," says Tommy's mother, laughing. "It would mean ruin to your skirts in two minutes."

"But, consider the gain. The priceless scraps, of wisdom I should hear, even whilst my clothes were being demolished."

This has been a mere interlude, unintentional on the part of either, and, once over, neither knows how to go on. The question *must* be settled one way or the other.

"There is one thing," says Mrs. Monkton, at length, "You certainly prefer Mr. Beauclerk to Mr. Dysart."

"Do I? I wish I knew as much about myself as you know about me. And, after all, it is of no consequence whom I like. The real thing is——Come, Barbara, you who know so much can tell me this——"

"Well?" says Mrs. Monkton, seeing she has grown very red, and is evidently hesitating.

"No. This absurd conversation has gone far enough. I was going to ask you to solve a riddle, but ——"

"But what?"

"You are too serious about it."

"Not *too* serious. It is very important."

"Oh, Barbara, do you *know* what you are saying?" cries the girl with an angry little stamp, turning to her a face pale and indignant. "You have been telling me in so many words that I am in love with either Mr. Beauclerk or Mr. Dysart. Pray now, for a change, tell me which of them is in love with *me*."

"Mr. Dysart," says Barbara quietly.

Her sister laughs angrily.

"You think everybody who looks at me is in love with me."

"Not *every*one!"

"Meaning Mr. Beauclerk."

"No," slowly. "I think he likes you, too, but he is a man who will always *think*. You know he has come in for that property in Hampshire through his uncle's death, but he got no money with it. It is a large place, impossible to keep up without a large income, and his uncle left every penny away from him. It is in great disrepair, the house especially. I hear it is falling to pieces. Mr. Beauclerk is an ambitious man, he will seek means to rebuild his house."

"Well what of that? It is an interesting bit of history, but how does it concern me? Take that troubled look out of your eyes, Barbara. I assure you Mr. Beauclerk is as little to me as I am to him."

She speaks with such evident sincerity, with such an undeniable belief in the truth of her own words, that Mrs. Monkton, looking at her and reading her soul through her clear eyes, feels a weight lifted from her heart.

"That is all right then," says she simply. She turns as if to go away, but Miss Kavanagh has still a word or two to say.

"I may go to the Court?" says she.

"Yes; I suppose so."

"But you won't be vexed if I go, Barbie?"

"No; not now."

"Well," slipping her arm through hers, with an audible sigh of delight. "*That's* settled."

"Things generally *do* get settled the way you want them to be," says Mrs. Monkton, laughing. "Come, what about your frocks, eh?"

From this out they spend a most enjoyable hour or two.

CHAPTER VI.

> "Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer,
> That leaves look pale, thinking the winter's near."

The visit to the Court being decided on, Miss Kavanagh undertakes life afresh, with a joyous heart. Lord and Lady Baltimore are the best host and hostess in the world, and a visit to them means unmixed pleasure while it lasts. The Court is, indeed, the pleasantest house in the county, the most desirable in all respects, and the gayest. Yet, strange and sad to add, happiness has found no bed within its walls.

This is the more remarkable in that the marriage of Lord and Lady Baltimore had been an almost idealistic one. They had been very much in love with each other. All the hosts of friends and relations that belonged to either side had been delighted with the engagement. So many imprudent marriages were made, so many disastrous ones; but *here* was a marriage where birth and money went together, and left no guardians or parents lamenting. All Belgravia stood still and stared at the young couple with genuine admiration. It wasn't often that love, pure and simple, fell into their midst, and such a *satisfactory* love too! None of your erratic darts that struck the wrong breasts, and created confusion for miles round, but a thoroughly proper, respectable winged arrow that pierced the bosoms of those who might safely be congratulated on the reception of it.

They had, indeed, been very much in love with each other. Few people have known such extreme happiness as fell to their lot for two whole years. They were wrapt up in each other, and when the little son came at the end of that time, *nothing* seemed wanted. They grew so strong in their belief in the immutability of their own relations, one to the other, that when the blow fell that separated them, it proved a very lightning-stroke, dividing soul from body.

Lady Baltimore could be at no time called a beautiful woman. But there is always a charm in her face, a strength, an attractiveness that might well defy the more material charms of a lovelier woman than herself. With a soul as pure as her face, and a mind entirely innocent of the world's evil ways—and the sad and foolish secrets she is compelled to bear upon her tired bosom from century to century—she took with a bitter hardness the revelations of her husband's former life before he married her, related to her by—of course—a devoted friend.

Unfortunately the authority was an undeniable one. It was impossible for Lady Baltimore to refuse to believe. The past, too, she might have condoned; though, believing in her husband as she did, it would always have been bitter to her, but the devoted friend—may all such meet their just reward!—had not stopped there; she had gone a step further, a fatal step; she had told her

something that had *not* occurred since their marriage.

Perhaps the devoted friend believed in her lie, perhaps she did not. Anyway, the mischief was done. Indeed, from the beginning seeds of distrust had been laid, and, buried in so young and unlearned a bosom, had taken a fatal grip.

The more fatal in that there was truth in them. As a fact, Lord Baltimore had been the hero of several ugly passages in his life. His early life, certainly; but a young wife who has begun by thinking him immaculate, would hardly be the one to lay stress upon *that*. And when her friend, who had tried unsuccessfully to marry Lord Baltimore and had failed, had in the kindliest spirit, *of course*, opened her eyes to his misdoings, she had at first passionately refused to listen, then *had* listened, and after that was ready to listen to anything.

One episode in his past history had been made much of. The sorry heroine of it had been an actress. This was bad enough, but when the disinterested friend went on to say that Lord Baltimore had been seen in her company only so long ago as last week, matters came to a climax. That was a long time ago from to-day, but the shock when it came shattered all the sacred feelings in Lady Baltimore's heart. She grew cold, callous, indifferent. Her mouth, a really beautiful feature, that used to be a picture of serenity and charity personified, hardened. She became austere, cold. Not difficult, so much as unsympathetic. She was still a good hostess, and those who had known her *before* her misfortune still loved her. But she made no new friends, and she sat down within herself, as it were, and gave herself up to her fate, and would probably have died or grown reckless but for her little son.

And it was *after* the birth of this beloved child that she had been told that *her* husband had again been seen in company with Madame Istray; *that* seemed to add fuel to the fire already kindled. She could not forgive that. It was proof positive of his baseness.

To the young wife it was all a revelation, a horrible one. She had been so stunned by it, that she, accepted it as it stood, and learning that the stories of his life *before* marriage were true, had decided that the stories told of his life *after* marriage were true also. She was young, and youth is always hard.

To her no doubt remained of his infidelity. She had come of a brave old stock, who, if they could not fight, could at least endure in silence, and knew well the necessity of keeping her name out of the public mouth. She kept herself well in hand, therefore, and betrayed nothing of all she had been feeling. She dismissed her friend with a gentle air, dignified, yet of sufficient haughtiness to let that astute and now decidedly repentant lady know that never again would she enter the doors of the Court, or any other of Lady Baltimore's houses; yet she restrained herself all through so well that, even until the very end came, her own husband never knew how horribly she suffered through her disbelief in him.

He thought her heartless. There was no scandal, no public separation. She said a word or two to him that told him what she had heard, and when he tried to explain the truths of that last libel that had declared him unfaithful to her since her marriage, she had silenced him with so cold, so scornful, so contemptuous a glance and word, that, chilled and angered in his turn, he had left her.

Twice afterwards he had sought to explain matters, but it was useless. She would not listen; the treacherous friend, whom she never betrayed, had done her work well. Lady Baltimore, though she never forgave *her*, would not forgive her husband either; she would make no formal attempt at a separation. Before the world she and he lived together, seemingly on the best terms; at all events on quite as good terms as most of their acquaintances; yet all the world knew how it was with them. So long as there are servants, so long will it be impossible to effectually conceal our most sacred secrets.

Her friends, when the Baltimores went to visit them, made arrangements to suit them. It was a pity, everybody said, that such complications should have arisen, and one would not have expected it from Isabel, but then she seemed so cold, that probably a climax like that did not affect her as much as it might another. She was so entirely wrapped up in her boy—some women were like that—a child sufficed them. And as for Lord Baltimore—Cyril—why——Judgment was divided here; the women taking his part, the men hers. The latter finding an attraction hardly to be defined in her pure, calm, rather impenetrable face, that had yet a smile so lovely that it could warm the seemingly cold face into a something that was more effective than mere beauty. It was a wonderful smile, and, in spite of all her troubles, was by no means rare. Lady Baltimore, they all acknowledged, was a delightful guest and hostess.

As for Lord Baltimore, he—well, he would know how to console himself. Society, the crudest organization on earth, laughed to itself about him. He had known how to live before his marriage; now that the marriage had proved a failure, he would still know how to make life bearable.

In this they wronged him.

CHAPTER VII.

"Ils n'employent les paroles qué pour déguiser leurs pensées."—VOLTAIRE.

Even the most dyspeptic of the guests had acknowledged at breakfast, some hours ago now, that a lovelier day could hardly be imagined. Lady Baltimore, with a smile, had agreed with him. It was, indeed, impossible not to agree with him. The sun was shining high in the heavens, and a soft, velvetty air blew through the open windows right on to the table.

"What shall we do to-day?" Lady Swansdown, one of the guests, had asked, addressing her question to Lord Baltimore, who just then was helping his little son to porridge.

Whatever she liked.

"Then *nothing*!" says she, in that soft drawl of hers, and that little familiar imploring, glance of hers at her hostess, who sat behind the urn, and glanced back at her ever so kindly.

"Yes, it was too warm to dream of exertion; would Lady Swansdown like, to remain at home then, and dream away the afternoon in a hammock?"

"Dreams were delightful; but to dream *alone*——"

"Oh, no; they would all, or at least most of them, stay with her." It was Lady Baltimore who had said this, after waiting in vain for her husband to speak—to whom, indeed, Lady Swansdown's question had been rather pointedly addressed.

So at home they all had stayed. No one being very keen about doing anything on a day so sultry.

Yet now, when luncheon is at an end, and the day still heavy with heat, the desire for action that lies in every breast takes fire. They are all tired of doing nothing. The Tennis-courts lie invitingly empty, and rackets thrust themselves into notice at every turn; as for the balls, worn out from *ennui*, they insert themselves under each arched instep, threatening to bring the owners to the ground unless picked up and made use of.

"Who wants a beating?" demands Mr. Browne at last, unable to pretend lassitude any longer. Taking up a racket he brandishes it wildly, presumably to attract attention. This is necessary. As a rule nobody pays any attention to Dicky Browne.

He is a nondescript sort of young man, of the negative order; with no features to speak of, and a capital opinion of himself. Income vague. Age unknown.

"Well! That's *one* way of putting it," says Miss Kavanagh, with a little tilt of her pretty chin.

"Is it a riddle?" asks Dysart. "If so I know it. The answer is—Dicky Browne."

"Oh, I *like* that!" says Mr. Browne unabashed. "See here, I'll give you plus fifteen, and a bisque, and start myself at minus thirty, and beat you in a canter."

"Dear Mr. Browne, consider the day! I believe there are such things as sunstrokes," says Lady Swansdown, in her sweet treble.

"There are. But Dicky's all right," says Lord Baltimore, drawing up a garden chair close to hers, and seating himself upon it. "His head is safe. The sun makes no impression upon granite!"

"Ah, *granite*! that applies to a heart not a head," says Lady Swansdown, resting her blue eyes on Baltimore's for just a swift second.

It is wonderful, however, what her eyes can do in a second. Baltimore laughs lightly, returns her glance four-fold, and draws his chair a quarter of an inch closer to hers. To move it more than that would have been an impossibility. Lady Swansdown makes a slight movement. With a smile seraphic as an angel's, she pulls her lace skirts a little to one side, as if to prove to Baltimore that he has encroached beyond his privileges upon her domain. "People should not *crush* people. And *why* do you want to get so very close to me?" This question lies within the serene eyes she once more raises to his.

She is a lovely woman, blonde, serene, dangerous! In each glance she turns upon the man who happens at any moment to be next to her, lies an entire chapter on the "Whole Art of Flirtation." Were she reduced to penury, and the world a little more advanced in its fashionable ways, she might readily make a small fortune in teaching young ladies "How to Marry Well." No man could resist her pupils, once properly finished by her and turned out to prey upon the stronger sex. "The Complete Angler" would be a title they might filch with perfect honor and call their own.

She is a tall beauty, with soft limbs, graceful as a panther, or a cat. Her eyes are like the skies in summer time, her lips sweet and full. The silken hair that falls in soft masses on her Grecian brow is light as corn in harvest, and she has hands and feet that are absolutely faultless. She has even more than all these—a most convenient husband, who is not only now but apparently always in a position of trust abroad. Very *much* abroad. The Fiji, or the Sandwich Islands for choice. One can't hear from those centres of worldly dissipation in a hurry. And after all, it really doesn't very much matter *where* he is!

There had been a whisper or two in the County about her and Lord Baltimore. Everybody knew the latter had been a little wild since his estrangement with his wife, but nothing to signify very much—nothing that one could lay one's finger on, until Lady Swansdown had come down last year to the Court. Whether Baltimore was in love with her was uncertain, but all were agreed

that she was in love with him. Not that she made an *esclandre* of any sort, but *one could see*! And still! she was such a friend of *Lady* Baltimore's—an old friend. They had been girls together—that was what was so wonderful! And Lady Baltimore made very much of her, and treated her with the kindliest observances, and——But one had often heard of the serpent that one nourished in one's bosom only that it might come to life and sting one! The County grew wise over this complication; and perhaps when Mrs. Monkton had hinted to Joyce of the "odd people" the Baltimores asked to the Court, she had had Lady Swansdown in her mind.

"Whose heart?" asks Baltimore, *à propos* of her last remark. "Yours?"

It is a leading remark, and something in the way it is uttered strikes unpleasantly on the ears of Dysart. Baltimore is bending over his lovely guest, and looking at her with an admiration too open to be quite respectful. But she betrays no resentment. She smiles back at him indeed in that little slow, seductive way of hers, and makes him an answer in a tone too low for even those nearest to her to hear. It is a sort of challenge, a tacit acknowledgment that they two are alone even in the midst of all these tiresome people.

Baltimore accepts it. Of late he has grown a little reckless. The battling against circumstances has been too much for him. He has gone under. The persistent coldness of his wife, her refusal to hear, or believe in him, has had its effect. A man of a naturally warm and kindly disposition, thrown thus back upon himself, he has now given a loose rein to the carelessness that has been a part of his nature since his mother gave him to the world, and allows himself to swim or go down with the tide that carries his present life upon its bosom.

Lady Swansdown is lovely and kind. Always with that sense of injury full upon him, that half-concealed but ever-present desire for revenge upon the wife who has so coldly condemned and cast him aside, he flings himself willingly into a flirtation, ready made to his hand, and as dangerous as it seems light.

His life, he tells himself, is hopelessly embittered. The best things in it are denied him; he gives therefore the more heed to the honeyed words of the pretty creature near him, who in truth likes him too well for her own soul's good.

That detested husband of hers, out there *somewhere*, the only thought she ever gives him is when she remembers with horror how as a young girl she was sold to him. For years she had believed herself heartless—of all her numerous love affairs not one had really touched her until now, and *now* he is the husband of her oldest friend; of the one woman whom perhaps in all the world she really respects.

At times her heart smites her, and a terrible longing to go away—to die—to make an end of it—takes possession of her at other times. She leans towards Baltimore, her lovely eyes alight, her soft mouth smiling. Her whispered words, her only half-averted glances, all tell their tale. Presently it is clear to everyone that a very fully developed flirtation is well in hand.

Lady Baltimore coming across the grass with a basket in one hand and her little son held fondly by the other, sees and grasps the situation. Baltimore, leaning over Lady Swansdown, the latter lying back in her lounging chair in her usual indolent fashion, swaying her feather fan from side to side, and with white lids lying on the azure eyes.

Seeing it all, Lady Baltimore's mouth hardens, and a contemptuous expression destroys the calm dignity of her face. For the moment *only*. Another moment, and it is gone: she has recovered herself. The one sign of emotion she has betrayed is swallowed up by her stern determination to conceal all pain at all costs, and if her fingers tighten somewhat convulsively on those of her boy's, why, who can be the wiser of *that*? No one can see it.

Dysart, however, who is honestly fond of his cousin, has mastered that first swift involuntary contraction of the calm brow, and a sense of indignant anger against Baltimore and his somewhat reckless companion fires his blood. He springs quickly to his feet.

Lady Baltimore, noting the action, though not understanding the motive for it, turns and smiles at him—so controlled a smile that it quiets him at once.

"I am going to the gardens to try and cajole McIntyre out of some roses," says she, in her sweet, slow way, stopping near the first group she reaches on the lawn—the group that contains, amongst others, her husband, and——her friend. She would not willingly have stayed where they were, but she is too proud to pass them by without a word. "Who will come with me? Oh! *no*," as several rise to join her, laughing, though rather faintly. "It is not compulsory—even though I go alone, I shall feel that I am equal to McIntyre."

Lord Baltimore had started as her first words fell upon his ears. He had been so preoccupied that her light footfalls coming over the grass had not reached him, and her voice, when it fell upon the air, gave him a shock. He half rises from his seat:

"Shall I?" he is beginning, and then stops short, something in her face checking him.

"*You!*" she conquers herself a second later; all the scorn and contempt is crushed, by sheer force of will, out of look and tone, and she goes on as clearly, and as entirely without emotion, as though she were a mere machine—a thing she has taught herself to be. "Not you," she says gaily, waving him lightly from her. "You are too useful here"—as she says this she gives him the softest if fleetest smile. It is a masterpiece. "You can amuse one here and there, whilst I—I—I want a

girl, I think," looking round. "Bertie,"—with a fond, an almost passionate glance at her little son—"always likes one of his sweethearts (and they are many) to accompany him when he takes his walks abroad."

"Like father, like son, I daresay. Ha, ha!" laughs a fatuous youth—a Mr. Courtenay—who lives about five miles from the Court, and has dropped in this afternoon, very unfortunately, it must be confessed, to pay his respects to Lady Baltimore. Fools always hit on the truth! *Why*, nobody knows, except the heavens above us—but so it is. Young Courtenay, who has heard nothing of the unpleasant relations existing between his host and hostess, and who would be quite incapable of understanding them if he *had* heard, now springs a remark upon the assembled five or six people present that almost reduces them to powder.

Dysart casts a murderous glance at him.

"A clever old proverb," says Lady Baltimore lightly. She is apparently the one unconcerned person amongst them. "I always like those old sayings. There is so much truth in them."

She has forced herself to say this; but as the words pass her lips she blanches perceptibly. As if unable to control herself she draws her little son towards her; her arms tighten round him. The boy responds gladly to the embrace, and to those present who know nothing, it seems the simplest thing in the world. The mother,—the child; naturally they would caress each other on each and every occasion. The agony of the mother is unknown to them; the fear that her boy, her treasure, may inherit something of his father, and in his turn prove unfaithful to the heart that trusts him.

It is a very little scene, scarcely worth recording, yet the anguish of a strong heart lies embodied in it.

"If you are going to the gardens, Lady Baltimore, let me go with you," says Miss Maliphant, rising quickly and going toward her. She is a big, loud girl, with money written all over her in capital letters, but Dicky Browne watching her, tells himself she has a good heart. "I should *love* to go there with you and Bertie."

"Come, then," says Lady Baltimore graciously. She makes a step forward; little Bertie, as though he likes and believes in her, thrusts his small fist into the hand of the Birmingham heiress, and thus united, all three pass out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

> "I have no other but a woman's reason: I think him so, because I think him so."

When a corner near the rhododendrons has concealed them from view, Dysart rises from his seat and goes deliberately over to where Lady Swansdown is sitting. She is an old friend of his, and he has therefore no qualms about being a little brusque with her where occasion demands it.

"Have a game?" says he. His suggestion is full of playfulness, his tone, however, is stern.

"Dear Felix, why?" says she, smiling up at him beautifully. There is even a suspicion of amusement in her smile.

"A change!" says he. His words this time might mean something, his tone anything. She can read either as she pleases.

"True!" says she laughing. "There is nothing like change. You have wakened me to a delightful fact. Lord Baltimore," turning languidly to her companion, who has been a little *distrait* since his wife and son passed by him. "What do you say to trying a change for just we two. Variety they *say* is charming, shall we try if shade and coolness and comfort are to be found in that enchanting glade down there?" She points as she speaks to an opening in the wood where perpetual twilight seems to reign, as seen from where they now are sitting.

"If you will," says Baltimore, still a little vaguely. He gets up, however, and stretches his arms indolently above his head as one might who is flinging from him the remembrance of an unpleasant dream.

"The sun here is intolerable," says Lady Swansdown, rising too. "More than one can endure. Thanks, dear Felix, for your suggestion. I should never have thought of the glade if you hadn't asked me to play that impossible game."

She smiles a little maliciously at Dysart, and, accompanied by Lord Baltimore, moves away from the assembled groups upon the lawn to the dim recesses of the leafy glade.

"*Sold!*" says Mr. Browne to Dysart. It is always impossible to Dicky to hold his tongue. "But you needn't look so cut up about it. 'Tisn't good enough, my dear fellow. I know 'em both by heart. Baltimore is as much in love with her as he is with his Irish tenants, but his imagination is his strong point, and it pleases him to think he has found at last for the twentieth time a solace for all

his woes in the disinterested love of somebody, it really never much matters who."

"There is more in it than *you* think," says Dysart gloomily.

"Not a fraction!" airily.

"And what of her? Lady Swansdown?"

"Of her! Her heart has been in such constant use for years that by this time it must be in tatters. Give up thinking about that. Ah! here is my beloved girl again!" He makes an elaborate gesture of delight as he sees Joyce advancing in his direction. "*Dear* Joyce!" beaming on her, "who shall say there is nothing in animal magnetism. Here I have been just talking about you to Dysart, and telling him what a lost soul I feel when you're away, and instantly, as if in answer to my keen desire, you appear before me."

"Why aren't you playing tennis?" demands Miss Kavanagh, with a cruel disregard of this flowery speech.

"Because I was waiting for you."

"Well, I'll beat you," says she, "I always do."

"Not if you play on my side," reproachfully.

"What! Have you for a *partner*! Nonsense, Dicky, you know I shouldn't dream of that. Why it is as much as ever you can do to put the ball over the net."

"'Twas ever thus,'" quotes Mr. Browne mournfully. "The sincerest worship gains only scorn and contumely. But never mind! the day will come!—-"

"To an end," says Miss Kavanagh, giving a finish to his sentence never meant. "That," cheerfully, "is just what I think. If we don't have a game now, the shades of night will be on us before we can look round us."

"Will you play with me?" says Dysart.

"With pleasure. Keep your eye on this near court, and when this game is at an end, call it ours;" she sinks into a chair as she speaks, and Dysart, who is in a silent mood, flings himself on the grass at her feet and falls into a reverie. To be conversational is unnecessary, Dicky Browne is on the spot.

Hotter and hotter grows the sun; the evening comes on apace; a few people from the neighboring houses have dropped in; Mrs. Monkton amongst others, with Tommy in tow. The latter, who is supposed to entertain a strong affection for Lady Baltimore's little son, no sooner, however, sees Dicky Browne than he gives himself up to his keeping. What the attraction is that Mr. Browne has for children has never yet been clearly defined. It is the more difficult to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion about it, in that no child was ever yet left in his sole care for ten minutes without coming to blows, or tears, or a determined attempt at murder or suicide.

His mother, seeing Tommy veering towards this uncertain friend, turns a doubtful eye on Mr. Browne.

"Better come with me, Tommy," says she, "I am going to the gardens to find Lady Baltimore. She will have Bertie with her."

"I'll stay with Dicky," says Tommy, flinging himself broadcast on Mr. Brown's reluctant chest, that gives forth a compulsory "Wough" as he does so. "He'll tell me a story."

"Don't be unhappy, Mrs. Monkton," says the latter, when he has recovered a little from the shock—Tommy is a well-grown boy, with a sufficient amount of adipose matter about him to make his descent felt. "I'll promise to be careful. Nothing French I assure you. Nothing that could shock the young mind, or teach it how to shoot in the wrong direction. My tales are always strictly moral."

"Well, Tommy, be *good*!" says Mrs. Monkton with a last imploring glance at her son, who has already forgotten her existence, being lost in a wild wrestling match with his new friend. With deep forebodings his mother leaves him and goes upon her way. Passing Joyce, she says in a low whisper:

"Keep an eye on Tommy."

"Both eyes if you like," laughing. "But Dicky, in spite of his evil reputation, seldom goes to extremes."

"Tommy does, however," says Mrs. Monkton tritely.

"Well—I'll look after him."

And so perhaps she might have done, had not a light step sounding just behind her chair at this moment caused her to start—to look round—to forget all but what she now sees.

He is a very aristocratic-looking man, tall, with large limbs, and big indeed, in every way. His eyes are light, his nose a handsome Roman, his forehead massive, and if not grand in the distinctly intellectual way, still a fine forehead and impressive. His hands are of a goodly size, but exquisitely proportioned, and very white, the skin almost delicate. He is rather like his sister, Lady Baltimore, and yet so different from her in every way that the distinct resemblance that is surely there torments the observer.

"*Why!*" says Joyce. It is the most foolish exclamation and means nothing, but she finds herself a little taken off her guard. "I didn't know you were here!" She has half risen.

"Neither did I—how d'ye do, Dysart?—until half an hour ago. Won't you shake hands?"

He holds out his own hand to her as he speaks. There is a quizzical light in his eyes as he speaks, nothing to offend, but one can see that he finds amusement in the fact that the girl has been so much impressed by his unexpected appearance that she has even forgotten the small usual act of courtesy with which we greet our friends. She had, indeed, been dead to everything but his coming.

"You came——" falters she, stammering a little, as she notes her mistake.

"By the mid-day train; I gave myself just time to snatch a sandwich from Purdon (the butler), say a word or two to my sister, whom I found in the garden, and then came on here to ask you to play this next game with me."

"Oh! I am so sorry, but I have promised it to——"

The words are out of her mouth before she has realized the fact that Dysart is listening—Dysart, who is lying at her feet, watching every expression in her mobile face. She colors hotly, and looks down at him confused, lovely.

"I didn't mean—*that*!" says she, trying to smile indifferently, "Only——"

"*Don't!*" says Dysart, not loudly, not curtly, yet in so strange and decided a way that it renders her silent. "You mustn't mind me," says he, a second later, in his usual calm tone. "I know you and Beauclerk are wonderful players. You can give me a game later on."

"A capital arrangement," says Beauclerk, comfortably sinking into a chair beside her, with all the lazy manner of a man at peace with himself and his world, "especially as I shall have to go in presently to write some letters for the evening post."

He places his elbows on the arms of the chair, brings the ends of his fingers together, and beams admiringly at Joyce over the tops of them.

"How busy you always are," says she, slowly.

"Well you see, this appointment, or, rather, the promise of it, keeps me going. Tremendous lot of interest to work up. Good deal of bother, you know, but then, beggars—eh?—can't be choosers, can they? And I should like to go to the East; that is, if——"

He pauses, beams again, and looks boldly into Miss Kavanagh's eyes. She blushes hotly, and, dropping her fan, makes a little attempt to pick it up again. Mr. Beauclerk makes another little attempt, and so manages that his hand meets hers. There is a slight, an almost benevolent pressure.

Had they looked at Dysart as they both resumed their places, they could have seen that his face is white as death. Miss Kavanagh, too, looks a little pale, a little uncertain, but as a whole nervously happy.

"I've been down at that old place of mine," goes on Mr. Beauclerk. "Terrible disrepair—take thousands to put it in any sort of order. And where's one to get them? That's the one question that has got no answer now-a-days. Eh, Dysart?"

"There is an answer, however," says Dysart, curtly, not looking at him.

"Ah, well, I suppose so. But I haven't heard it yet."

"Oh, yes, I think you have," says Dysart, quite politely, but grimly, nevertheless.

"Dear fellow, how? where? unless one discovers a *mine* or an African diamond-field?"

"Or an heiress," says Dysart, incidentally.

"Hah! lucky dog, that comes home to *you*," says Beauclerk, giving him a playful pat on his shoulder, and stooping from his chair to do it, as Dysart still sits upon the grass.

"Not to me."

"No? You *will* be modest? Well, well! But talking of that old place, I assure you, Miss Kavanagh, it worries me—it does, indeed. It sounds like one's *duty* to restore it, and still——"

"There are better things than even an old place," says Dysart.

"Ah! you haven't one you see," cries Beauclerk, with the utmost geniality. "If you had——I really think if you had you would understand that it requires a sacrifice to give it up to moths and rust

and ruin."

"I said there were better things than old places," says Dysart doggedly, never looking in his direction. "And if there are, *make* a sacrifice."

"Pouf! Lucky fellows like you—gay soldier lads—with hearts as light as sunbeams, can easily preach; but sacrifices are not so easily made. There is that horrid word, Duty! And a man must sometimes *think*!"

Joyce, as though the last word has struck some answering chord that wounds her as it strikes, looks suddenly at him. *What* was it Barbara had said? "He was a man who would always *think*,"—is he thinking now—even now—at this moment?—is he weighing matters in his mind?

"Hah!" says Beauclerk rising and pointing to the court nearest them; "*that* game is over. Come on, Miss Kavanagh, let us go and get our scalps. I say, Dysart, will you fight it out with us?"

"No thanks."

"Afraid?" gaily.

"Of you—no," smiling; the smile is admirably done, and would be taken as the genuine article anywhere.

"Of Miss Kavanagh; then?"

For a brief instant, and evidently against his wish, Dysart's eyes meet those of Joyce.

"Perhaps," says he.

"A poor compliment to me," says Beauclerk, with his pleasant laugh that always rings *so* softly. "Well, never mind; I forgive you. Get a good partner, my dear fellow, and *she* may pull you through. You see I depend entirely upon mine," with a glance at Joyce, full of expression. "There's Miss Maliphant now—she'd make a good partner if you like."

"I shouldn't," says Dysart, immovably.

"She plays a good game, I can tell you."

"So do you," says Dysart.

"Oh, now, Dysart, don't be sarcastic," says Beauclerk laughing. "I believe you are afraid of me, not of Miss Kavanagh, and that's why you won't play. But if you were to put yourself in Miss Maliphant's hands, I don't say but that you would have a chance of beating me."

"I shall beat you by myself or not at all," says Dysart suddenly, and for the first time looking fair at him.

"A single, you mean?"

"Yes, a single."

"Well—we shall see," says Beauclerk. "Hah, there is Courtenay. Come along, Miss Kavanagh, we must make up a set as best we may, as Dysart is too lazy to face us."

"The next game is ours, Mr. Dysart, remember," says she, glancing at Dysart over her shoulder. There is a touch of anxiety in her eyes.

"I *always* remember," says he, with a rather ambiguous smile. What is he remembering now? Joyce's mouth takes a grave curve as she follows Beauclerk down the marble steps that lead to the tennis-ground below.

The evening has grown very still. The light wind that all day long has sung among the leaves has gone to sleep. Only the monotonous countings of the tennis players can be heard. Suddenly above these, another sound arises. It is *not* the voice of the charmer. It is the voice of Tommy in full cry, and mad with a desire to gain the better of the argument now going on between him and Mr. Browne. Mr. Browne is still, however, holding his own. He generally does. His voice grows eloquent. *All* can hear.

"I shall tell my story, Tommy, in my own way, or I shall not tell it at all!" The dignity that Mr. Browne throws into this threat is hardly to be surpassed.

CHAPTER IX.

> "Sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge."

"Tisn't right," says Tommy.

"*I* think it is. If you kindly listen to it once again, and give your entire attention to it, you will see

how faulty is the ignorant conclusion to which you have come."

"I'm not one bit ignorant," says Tommy indignantly. "Nurse says I'm the dickens an' all at my Bible, and that I know Genesis better'n *she* does."

"And a very engaging book it is too," says Mr. Browne, "but it isn't everything. What *you* want to study, my good boy, is natural history. You are very ignorant about that, at all events."

"A cow *couldn't* do it," says Tommy.

"History says she can. Now, listen again. It is a grand old poem, and I am grieved and distressed, Thomas, to find that you refuse to accept it as one of the gems of truth thrown up to us out of the Dark Ages. Are you ready?

> "'Diddle-dee, diddle-dee dumpty,
> The cow ran up the plum-tree.
> Half-a-crown to fetch her——'"

"She *didn't*—'twas the *cat*," cries Tommy.

"Not in *my* story," says Mr. Browne, mildly but firmly.

"A cow *couldn't* go up a plum-tree," indignantly.

"She could in *my* story," persists Mr. Browne, with all the air of one who, even to avoid unpleasantness, would not consent to go against the dictates of his conscience.

"She *couldn't*, I tell you," roars Tommy, now thoroughly incensed. "She couldn't *climb*. Her horns would stick in the branches. She'd be too *heavy*!"

"I admit, Thomas," says Mr. Browne gravely, "that your argument sounds as though there were some sense in it. But who am I that I should dare to disbelieve ancient history? It is unsafe to throw down old landmarks, to blow up the bulwarks of our noble constitution. Beware, Tommy! never tread on the tail of Truth. It may turn and rend you."

"Her name isn't Truth," says Tommy. "Our cow's name is Biddy, and she never ran up a tree in her life."

"She's young," says Mr. Browne. "She'll learn. So are *you—you'll* learn. And remember this, my boy, always respect old legends. A disregard for them will so unsettle you that finally you will find yourself—at the foot of the gallows in all human probability. I suppose," sadly, "that you are even so far gone in scepticism as to doubt the glorious truth of the moon's being made of green cheese?"

"Father says that's nonsense," says Tommy promptly, and with an air of triumph, "and father always knows."

"I blush for your father," says Mr. Browne with increasing melancholy. "Both he and you are apparently sunk in heathen darkness. Well, well; we will let the question of the moon go by, though I suppose you know, Tommy, that the real and original moon first rose in Cheshire."

"No, I don't," says Tommy, with a militant glare. "There was once a Cheshire cat; there never was a Cheshire moon."

"I suppose you will tell me next there never was a Cheshire cheese," says Mr. Browne severely. "Don't you see the connection? But never mind. Talking of cats brings us back to our mutton, and from thence to our cow. I do hope, Tommy, that for the future you will, at all events, *try* to believe in that faithful old animal who skipped so gaily up and down, and hither and thither, and in and out, and all about, that long-suffering old plum-tree."

"She never did it," says Tommy stamping with rage and now nearly in tears. "I've books—I've books, and 'tisn't in *any* of them."

"It is in *my* book," says Mr. Browne, who ought to be ashamed of himself.

"I don't believe you ever *read* a book," screams Tommy furiously. "'Twas the cat—the cat—the cat!"

"No; 'twas the horned cow," says Mr. Browne, in a sepulchral tone, whereat Tommy goes for him.

There is a wild and desperate conflict. Tooth and nail Tommy attacks, the foe, fists and legs doing very gallant service. There would indeed have been a serious case of assault and battery for the next Court day, had not Providence sent Mrs. Monkton on the scene.

"Oh, Tommy!" cries she, aghast. It is presumably Tommy, though, as he has his head thrust between Mr. Browne's legs, and his feet in mid air, kicking with all their might, there isn't much of him by which to prove identification. And—"Oh, Dicky," says, she again, "how *could* you torment him so, when you know how easy it is to excite him. See what a state he is in!"

"And what about me?" demands Mr. Browne, who is weak with laughter. "Is no sympathy to be shown me? See what a state *I'm* in. I'm black and blue from head to heel. I'm at the point of death!"

"Nonsense! you are all right, but look at *him*! Oh! Tommy, what a terrible boy you are. And you promised me if I brought you, that you——Just look at his clothes!"

"Look at *mine*!" says Mr. Browne. "My best hat is done for, and I'm afraid to examine my trousers. *You* might tell me if there is a big rent anywhere. No? Eh? Well—if you won't I must only risk it. But I feel tattered and torn. By-the-bye, Tommy, that's part of another old story. I'll tell you about it some day."

"Come with me, Tommy," says his mother, with awful severity. She holds out her hand to her son, who is still glaring at Dicky with an undying ferocity. "You are a naughty boy, and I'm sure your father will be angry with you when he hears of this."

"Oh, but he must not hear of it, must he, Tommy?" says Mr. Browne, with decision, appealing to his late antagonist as airily, as utterly without *arrière pensée* as though no unpleasant passages have occurred between them. "It's awfully good of you to desire our company, Mrs. Monkton, but really on the whole I think——"

"It is Tommy I want," says Mrs. Monkton still with a meaning eye.

"Where Tommy goes, I go," says Mr. Browne, firmly. "We are wedded to each other for the day. Nothing shall part us! Neither law nor order. Just now we are going down to the lake to feed the swans with the succulent bun. Will you come with us?"

"You are very uncertain, Dicky," says Mrs. Monkton, regarding Mr. Browne with a gravity that savors of disapproval. "How shall I be sure that if you take him to the lake you will not let him drown himself?"

"He is far more likely to drown me," says Mr. Browne. "Come along, Tommy, the biscuits are in the hall, and the lake a quarter of a mile away. The day waneth; let us haste—let us haste!"

"Where has Dicky gone?" asks Joyce, who has just returned victorious from her game.

"To the lake with Tommy. I have been imploring him not to drown my son," says Mrs. Monkton with a rather rueful smile.

"Oh, he won't do that. Dicky is erratic, but pretty safe, for all that. And he is fond of Tommy."

"He teases him, however, beyond endurance."

"That is because he *does* like him."

"A strange conclusion to arrive at, surely," says Dysart, looking at her.

"No. If he didn't like him, he wouldn't take the trouble," says she, nonchalantly. She is evidently a little *distrait*. She looks as though she wanted something.

"You won your game?" says her sister, smiling at her.

"Yes, quite a glorious victory. They had only two games out of the six; and you know Miss Connor plays very well."

"Where is Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Gone into the house to write some letters and telegrams."

"Norman, do you mean?" asks Lady Baltimore, coming up at this moment, her basket full of flowers, and minus the little son and the heiress; "he has just gone into the house to hear Miss Maliphant sing. You know she sings remarkably well, and that last song of Milton Wettings suits her so entirely. Norman is very fond of music. Have you had a game, Joyce?"

"Yes, and won it," says Joyce, smiling back at her, though her face has paled a little. *Had* she won it?

"Well, I must take these into the house before they fade. Righton wants them for the dinner-table," says Lady Baltimore. A little hurried note has crept into her voice. She turns away somewhat abruptly. Lord Baltimore and Lady Swansdown have just appeared in view, Lady Swansdown with a huge bunch of honeysuckle in her hand, looking very picturesque.

Baltimore, seeing his wife move towards the house, and Lady Swansdown displaying the spoils of her walk to Dysart, darts quickly after her.

"Let me carry that burden for you," says he, laying his hand upon the basket of flowers.

"No, oh! no, thank you," says Lady Baltimore, glancing up at him for just a moment, with a little curious expression in her eyes. "I have carried it quite a long time. I hardly feel it now. No; go back to the lawn to Lady Swansdown—see; she is quite alone at this moment. You will be doing me a real service if you will look after our guests."

"As you will," says Baltimore, coldly.

He turns back with a frown, and rejoins those he had left.

Joyce is talking to Lady Swansdown in her prettiest way—she seems, indeed, exceptionally gay even for her, who, as a rule, is the life of every party. Her spirits seem to have risen to quite an abnormal height, and her charming laugh, soft as it is sweet, rings gaily. With the advent of

Baltimore, however, Lady Swansdown's attention veers aside, and Joyce, feeling Dysart at her elbow, turns to him.

"We postponed *one* game, I think," says she. "Well—shall we play the next?"

"I am sorry," says he, deliberately, "but I think not." His eyes are on the ground.

"No?" says she, coloring warmly. There is open surprise in her glance. That he should refuse to accept an advance from her seems truly beyond belief.

"You must forgive me," says he, deliberately still. He had sworn to himself that he would not play second fiddle on *this* occasion at all events, and he holds himself to his word. "But I feel as if I could not play to-day. I should disgrace you. Let me get you another partner. Captain Grant is out there, he——"

"Thank you. I shall be able to provide myself with a partner when I want one," interrupts she, haughtily, turning abruptly away.

CHAPTER X.

"Nature has sometimes made a fool."

The fiddles are squeaking, the 'cellos are groaning, the man with the cornet is making a most ungodly row. As yet, the band have the ballroom all to themselves, and are certainly making the most of their time. Such unearthly noises rarely, if ever, have been heard in it before. Why they couldn't have tuned their instruments before coming is a question that fills the butler's mind with wrath, but perhaps the long journey down from Dublin would have untuned them all again, and left the players of them disconsolate.

The dismal sounds penetrate into the rooms right and left of the ballroom, but fail to kill the melancholy sweetness of the dripping fountains or the perfume of the hundred flowers that gave their sleeping draughts to all those who chose to come and inhale them. Mild draughts that please the senses without stealing them.

The sounds even penetrate to the library, where Joyce is standing before the low fire, that even in this July evening burns upon the hearth, fastening her long gloves. She had got down before the others, and now, finding the room empty, half wishes herself back again upstairs. But she is so young, so full of a fresh delight in all the gaiety around her, that she had hurried over her dressing, and, with the first dismal sounds of the toning, had turned her steps its way.

The library seems cold to her, bare, unfriendly. Had she expected to meet somebody there before her—somebody who had promised to get a fresh tie in a hurry, but who had possibly forgotten all about it in the joy of an after-dinner cigar?

It seems a long time since that first day when she had been startled by his sudden reappearance at the Court. A long, *long* time. Soon this last visit of hers to the Court must come to an end. The Baltimores will be going abroad in a fortnight or so—and he with them. The summer is waning—dreary autumn coming. He will go—and——

A sense of dissatisfaction sits heavily on her, toning down to rather a too cruel a degree the bright expectancy of her face. He had *said* he would come, and now——She drums in a heavy-hearted listless fashion on the table with the tips of her pale gloves, and noticing, half consciously in so doing, that they have not been sufficiently drawn up her arm, mechanically fits them closer to the taper fingers.

Certainly he had said he would be here. "Early you know. Before the others can get down." A quick frown grows upon her forehead, and now that the fingers are quiet, the little foot begins to beat a tattoo upon the ground. Leaning against the table in a graceful attitude, with the lamplight streaming on her pretty white frock, she gives a loose rein to her thoughts.

They are a little angry, a little frightened perhaps. During the past week had he not said many things that in the end proved void of meaning. He had haunted her in a degree, at certain hours, certain times, had loitered through gardens, lingered in conservatories by her side, whispered many things—looked so very many more. But——

There were other times, other opportunities for philandering (*she* does not give it this unpleasant name); how has he spent them?—A vague thought of Miss Maliphant crosses her mind. That he laughs at the plain, good-natured heiress to her (Joyce), had not prevented the fact that he is very attentive to her at times. Principally such times as when Joyce may reasonably be supposed to be elsewhere. Human reason, however, often falls short of the mark, and there have been unsuspected moments during the past week when Miss Kavanagh has by chance appeared upon the scene of Mr. Beauclerk's amusements, and has found that Miss Maliphant has had a good deal to do with them. But then—"That poor, good girl you know!" Here, Beauclerk's joyous laugh would ring forth for Joyce's benefit. "*Such* a good girl; and so—er—*don't* you know!" He was

certainly always a little vague. He didn't explain himself. Miss Kavanagh, looking back on all he had ever said against the heiress, is obliged to confess to herself that the great "er" had had to express everything. Contempt, dislike, kindly disdain—he was always *kindly*—he made quite a point of *that*. Truly, thinks Miss Kavanagh to herself after this retrospective glance, "er" is the greatest word in the English language!

And so it is. It declares. It conceals. It conveys a laugh. It suggests a frown. It helps a sorrowful confession. It adorns a lame one. It is kindly, as giving time. It is cruel, as being full of sarcasm. It ——In fact what is it it *cannot* do?

Joyce's feet have grown quite steady now. She has placed her hands on the table behind her, and thus compelled to lean a little forward, stands studying the carpet without seeing it. A sense of anger, of *shame* against herself is troubling her. If he should *not* be in earnest! If he should not—like her as she likes him!

She rouses herself suddenly as if stung by some thought. "Like" *is* the word. It has gone no deeper yet. It *shall* not. He is handsome, he has his charm, but if she is not all the world to him, why, he shall not be all the world to *her*. If it is money he craves, for the restoration of that old home of his, why money let it be. But there, shall not be the two things, the desire of one for filthy lucre, the desire of the other for love. He shall decide.

She has grown very pale. She has drawn herself up to her full height, and her lips are pressed together. And now a strange thought comes to her. If—*if* she loved him, could she bear thus to analyze him. To take him to pieces, to dissect him as it were? Once again that feeling of fear oppresses her. Is she so cold, so deliberate in herself that she suspects others of coldness. After all—if he does love her—if he only hesitates because——

A step outside the door!

Instinctively she glances at one of the long mirrors that line the walls from floor to ceiling. Involuntarily her hands rush to her head. She gives a little touch to her gown. And now is sitting in a lounging-chair, a little pale still perhaps, but in all other respects the very picture of unconsciousness. It is—it must be——

It isn't, however.

Mr. Browne, opening the door in his own delightfully breezy fashion that generally plays old Harry with the hinges and blows the ornaments off the nearest tables, advances towards her with arms outspread, and the liveliest admiration writ upon his features, which, to say the truth, are of goodly proportions.

"Oh! Thou wonder of the world!" cries he in accents ecstatic. He has been reading "Cleopatra" (that most charming of books) assiduously for the past few days, during which time he has made himself an emphatic nuisance to his friends: perpetual quotations, however apt or salutary, proving as a rule a bore.

"That will do, Dicky! We *all* know about that," says Miss Kavanagh, who is a little unnerved, a little impatient perhaps. Mr. Browne, however, is above being snubbed by anyone. He continues on his way rejoicing.

"Thou living flame!" cries he, making what he fondly supposes to be a stage attitude. "Thou thing of beauty. Though *fleshpot of Egypt*!"

He has at last surpassed himself! He stands silent waiting for the plaudits of the crowd. The crowd, however, is unappreciative.

"Nonsense!" says Miss Kavanagh shortly. "I wonder you aren't tired of *making* people tired. Your eternal quotations would destroy the patience of an anchorite. And as for that last sentence of yours, you know very well it isn't in Rider Haggard's book. He'd have been ashamed of it."

"*Would* he? Bet you he wouldn't! And if it isn't in his book, all I can say is it ought to have been. Mere oversight leaving it out. He *will* be sorry if I drop him a line about it. Shouldn't wonder if it produced a new edition. But for my part, I believe it *is* in the book. Fleshpots, Egypt, you know; hardly possible to separate 'em now from the public mind."

"Well; he could separate them any way. There isn't a single word about them in the book from start to finish."

"No? D'ye say so?" Here Mr. Browne grows lost in thought. "Fleshpots—pots—hot pots; hot *potting*! Hah!" He draws himself together with all the manner of one who has gone down deep into a thing, and comes up from it full of knowledge. "I've 'mixed those babies up,'" says he mildly. "But still I can hardly believe that that last valuable addition to Mr. Haggard's work is all my own."

"Distinctly your own," with a suggestion of scorn, completely thrown away upon the receiver of it.

"D'ye say so! By Jove! And very neat too! Didn't think I had it in me. After all to write a book is an easy matter; here am I, who never thought about it, was able to form an entire sentence full of the most exquisite wit and humor without so much as knowing I was doing it. Tell you what, Joyce, I'll send it to the author with a card and my compliments you know. Horrid thing to be *mean* about anything, and if I can help him out with a 999th edition or so, I'll be doing him a good

turn. Eh?"

"I suppose you think you are amusing," says Miss Kavanagh, regarding him with a critical eye.

"My good child, I *know* that expression," says Mr. Browne, amiably. "I know it by heart. It means that you think I'm a fool. It's politer now-a-days to look things than to say them, but wait awhile and you'll *see*. Come; I'll bet you a shilling to a sovereign that he'll be delighted with my suggestion, and put it into his next edition without delay. No charge! Given away! The lot for a penny-three-farthings. In fact, I make it a present to him. Noble, eh? Give it to him for *nothing*!"

"About its price," says Miss Kavanagh thoughtfully.

"Think you so? You are dull to-night, Jocelyne. Flashes of wit pass you by without warming you. Yet I tell you this idea that has flowed from my brain is a priceless one. Never mind the door—he's not coming yet. Attend to me."

"*Who's* not coming?" demands she, the more angrily in that she is growing miserably aware of the brilliant color that is slowly but surely bedecking her cheeks.

"Never mind! It's a mere detail; attend to *me* and I entreat you," says Mr. Browne, who is now quite in his element, having made sure of the fact that she is expecting somebody. It doesn't matter in the least who to Mr. Browne, expectation is the thing wherein to catch the embarrassment of Miss Kavanagh, and forthwith he sets himself gaily to the teazing of her.

"Attend to *what*?" says she with a little frown.

"If you had studied your Bible, Jocelyne, with that care that I should have expected from you, you would have remembered that forty odd years the Israelites hankered after those very fleshpots of Egypt to which I have been alluding. Now I appeal to you, as a sensible girl, would anybody hanker after anything for forty odd years (*very* odd years as it happens), unless it was to their advantage to get it; unless, indeed, the object pursued was *priceless*!"

"You ask too much of *this* sensible girl," says Miss Kavanagh, with a carefully manufactured yawn. "Really, dear Dicky, you must forgive me if I say I haven't gone into it as yet, and that I don't suppose I shall ever *see* the necessity for going into it."

"But, my good child, you must see that those respectable people, the Israelites, wouldn't have pursued a mere shadow for forty years."

"That's just what I *don't* see. There are such a number of fools everywhere, in every age, that one couldn't tell."

"This is evasion," says Mr. Browne sternly. "To bring you face to face with facts must be my very unpleasant if distinct duty. Joyce, do you dare to doubt for one moment that I speak aught but the truth? Will you deny that Cleopatra, that old serpent of the——"

"Ha—ha—ha," laughs Joyce ironically. "I wish she could hear you. Your life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase."

"Mere slip. Serpent of *old* Nile. Doesn't matter in the least," says Mr. Browne airily, "because she couldn't hear me as it happens. My dear girl, follow out the argument. Cleopatra, metaphorically speaking, was a fleshpot, because the world hankered after her. And—you're another."

"Really, Dicky, I must protest against your talking slang to me."

"Where does the slang come in? You're another fleshpot. I meant to say—or convey—because *we* all hanker after you."

"Do you?" with rising wrath. "May I ask what hankering means?"

"You had better not," says Mr. Browne mysteriously. "It was one of the rites of Ancient Kem!"

"Now there is *one* thing, Dicky," says Miss Kavanagh, her wrath boiling over. "I won't be called names. I won't be called a *fleshpot*. You'll draw the line there if you please."

"My dear girl, why not? Those delectable pots must have been *bric-à-brac* of the most *recherché* description. Of a most delicate shape, no doubt. Of a pattern, tint, formation, general get up—not to be hoped for in these prosaic days."

"Nonsense," indignantly. She is fairly roused now, and Mr. Browne regarding her with a proud eye, tells himself he is about to have his reward at last. "You know very well that the term 'fleshpots' referred to what was *in* the pots, not to the pots themselves."

"That's all you know about it. That's where your fatal ignorance comes in, my poor Joyce," says he, with immense compassion. "Search your Bible from cover to cover, and I defy you to find a single mention of the contents of those valuable bits of *bric-à-brac*. Of flesh*pots*—heavy emphasis on the *pots*—and ten fingers down at once if you please—we read continually as being hankered after by the Israelites, who then, as now, were evidently avid collectors."

"You've been having champagne, Dicky," says Miss Kavanagh, regarding him with a judicial eye.

"So have you. But I can't see what that excellent beverage has got to do with the ancient Jews. Keep to the point. Did you ever hear that they expressed a longing for the *flesh* of Egypt? No. So

far so good. The pots themselves were the objects of their admiration. During that remarkable run of theirs through the howling wilderness they, one and all, to a *man*, betrayed the true æsthetic tendency. They raved incessantly for the girl—I beg pardon—the *land* they had left behind them. The land that contained those priceless jars."

"I wonder how you can be so silly," says Miss Kavanagh disdainfully. Will he *never* go away! If he stays, and if—the other—comes——

"Silly! my good child. *How* silly! Why everything goes to prove the probability of my statement. The taste for articles of *vertu*—for antiquities—for fossils of all descriptions that characterized them then, has lived to the present day. *Then* they worried after old china, and who shall deny that now they have an overwhelming affection for old clo'."

"Well; your folly doesn't concern me," says Miss Kavanagh, gathering up her skirts with an evident intention of shaking off the dust of his presence from her feet and quitting him.

"I am sorry that you should consider it folly," says Mr. Browne sorrowfully. "I should not have said so much about it perhaps but that I wanted to prove to you that in calling *you* a fleshpot I only meant to——"

"I won't be called that," interrupts Miss Kavanagh angrily. "It's *horrid*! It makes me feel quite *fat*! Now, once for all, Dicky, I forbid it. I won't have it."

"I don't see how you are to get out of it," says Mr. Browne, shaking his head and hands in wild deprecation. "Fleshpots were desirable articles—you're another—ergo—you're a fleshpot. See the argument?"

"No I don't," indignantly. "I see only you—and—I wish I *didn't*."

"Very rude; *very*!" says Mr. Browne, regretfully. "Yet I entreat thee not to leave me without one other word. Follow up the argument—*do*. Give me an answer to it."

"Not one," walking to the door.

"That's because it is unanswerable," says Mr. Browne complacently. "You are beaten, you——"

There is a sound outside the door; Joyce with her hand on the handle of it, steps back and looks round nervously at Dicky. A quick color has dyed her cheeks; instinctively she moves a little to one side and gives a rapid glance into a long mirror.

"I don't think really he could find a fault," says Mr. Browne mischievously. "I should think there will be a good deal of hankering going on to-night."

Miss Kavanagh has only just barely time to wither him, when Beauclerk comes hurriedly in.

CHAPTER XI.

"Thinkest thou there are no serpents in the world
But those who slide along the grassy sod,
And sting the luckless foot that presses them?
There are, who in the path of social life
Do bask their spotted skins in fortune's son,
And sting the soul."

"Oh, there you are," cries he jovially. "Been looking for you everywhere. The music has begun; first dance just forming. Gay and lively quadrille, you know—country ball wouldn't know itself without a beginning like that. Come; come on."

Nothing can exceed his *bonhomie*. He tucks her hand in the most delightfully genial, appropriative fashion under his arm, and with a beaming nod to Mr. Browne (he never forgets to be civil to anybody) hurries Joyce out of the room, leaving the astute Dicky gazing after him with mingled feelings in his eye.

"Deuce and all of a smart chap," says Mr. Browne to himself slowly. "But he'll fall through some day for all that, I shouldn't wonder."

Meantime Mr. Beauclerk is still carrying on a charming recitative.

"*Such a bore!*" he is saying, with heartfelt disgust in his tone. It is really wonderful how he can *always* do it. There is never a moment when he flags. He is for ever up to time as it were, and equal to the occasion. "I'm afraid you rather misunderstood me just now, when I said I'd been looking for you—but the fact is, Browne's such an ass, if he knew we had made an appointment to meet in the library, he'd have brayed the whole affair to any and every one."

"Was there an appointment?" says Miss Kavanagh, who is feeling a little unsettled—a little angry with herself perhaps.

"No—no," with a delightful acceptation of her rebuke. "You are right as ever. I was wrong. But then, you see, it gave me a sort of joy to believe that our light allusion to a possible happy half-hour before the turmoil of the dance began might mean something *more*—something——Ah! well never mind! Men are vain creatures; and after all it would have been a happy half-hour to me *only*!"

"Would it?" says she with a curious glance at him.

"*You* know that!" says he, with the full and earnest glance he can turn on at a second's notice without the slightest injury to heart or mind.

"I don't indeed."

"Oh well, you haven't time to think about it perhaps. I found you very fully occupied when—at last—I was able to get to the library. Browne we all know is a very—er—lively companion—if rather wanting in the higher virtues."

"'*At last*,'" says she quoting his words. She turns suddenly and looks at him, a world of inquiry in her dark eyes. "I hate pretence," says she curtly, throwing up her young head with a haughty movement. "You said you would be in the library at such an hour, and though I did not *promise* to meet you there, still, as I happened to be dressed earlier than I believed possible, I came down, and you——? Where were you?"

There is a touch of imperiousness in that last question that augurs badly for a false wooer; but the imperiousness suits her. With her pretty chin uptilted, and that little scornful curve upon her lips, and her lovely eyes ablaze, she looks indeed "a thing of beauty." Beauclerk regards her with distinct approbation. After all—had she even *half* the money that the heiress possesses, *what* a wife she would make. And it isn't decided yet one way or the other; sometimes Fate is kind. The day may come when this delectable creature may fall to his portion.

"I can see you are thinking hard things of me," says he reproachfully; "but you little know how I have been passing the time I had so been looking forward to. Time to be passed with *you*. That old Lady Blake—she *would* keep me maundering to her about that son of hers in the Mauritius; *you* know he and I were at St. Petersburg together. I couldn't get away. You blame me—but what was I to do? An old woman—unhappy——"

"Oh no. You were *right*," says Joyce quickly. How good he is after all, and how unjustly she had been thinking of him. So kind, so careful of the feelings of a tiresome old woman. How few men are like him. How few would so far sacrifice themselves.

"Ah, you see it like that!" says, Mr. Beauclerk, not triumphantly, but so modestly that the girl's heart goes out to him even more. How *generous* he is! Not a word of rebuke to her for her vile suspicion of him.

"Why you put me into good spirits again," says he laughing gaily. "We must make haste, I fear, if we would save the first dance."

"Oh yes—come," says Joyce going quickly forward. Evidently he is going to ask her for the first dance! That *shows* that he prefers her to——

"I'm so glad you have been able to sympathize with me about my last disappointment," says Beauclerk. "If you hadn't—if you had had even one hard thought of me, I don't know *how* I should have been able to endure what still lies before me. I am almost raging with anger, but when one's sister is in question——"

"You mean?" say Joyce a little faintly.

"Oh, you haven't heard. I am so annoyed myself about it, that I fancied everybody knew. You know I hoped that you would have been good enough to give me the first dance, but when Isabel asked me to dance it with that dreadful daughter of Lady Dunscombe's, what *could* I do, now I ask you?" appealing to her with hands and eyes. "What *could* I do?"

"Obey, of course," says she with an effort, but a successful one. "You must hurry too, if you want to secure Miss Dunscombe."

"Ah; what a misfortune it is to be the brother of one's hostess," says he, with a sort of comic despair. His eyes are centred on her face, reading her carefully, and with much secret satisfaction;—rapid as that slight change upon her face had been, he had seen and noted it.

"It couldn't possibly be a misfortune to be Lady Baltimore's brother," says she smiling. "On the contrary, you are to be congratulated."

"Not just at this moment surely!"

"At this or any other moment. Ah!"—as they enter the ballroom. "The room is already fuller than I thought. Engaged, Mr. Blake?" to Lord Blake's eldest son. "No, not for this. Yes, with pleasure."

She makes a little charming inclination of her head to Beauclerk, and laying her hand on Mr. Blake's arm, moves away with him to where a set is already forming at the end of the room. It is without enthusiasm she takes her place with Dysart and one of the O'Donovan girls as *vis-à-vis*, and prepares to march, retreat, twist and turn with the best of them.

"A dull old game," she is irreverently terming the quadrilles—that massing together of inelegant movements so dear to the bucolic mind—that saving clause for the old maids and the wall-flowers; when a little change of position shows her the double quartette on the right hand side of the magnificent ballroom.

She had been half through an unimportant remark to Mr. Blake, but she stops short now and forgets to finish it. Her color comes and goes. The sides are now prancing through *their* performance, and she and her partner are standing still. Perhaps—*perhaps* she was mistaken; with all these swaying idiots on every side of her she might well have mixed up one man's partner with another; and Miss Dunscombe (she had caught a glimpse of her awhile ago) was surely in that set on the right hand side.

She stoops forward, regardless—*oblivious*—of her partner's surprised glance, who has just been making a very witty remark, and being a rather smart young man, accustomed to be listened to, is rather taken aback by her open indifference.

A little more forward she leans; yes, *now*—the couples part—for one moment the coast lies clear. She can see distinctly. Miss Dunscombe is indeed dancing in that set but *not* as Mr. Beauclerk's partner. Miss Maliphant has secured that enviable *rôle*.

Even as Joyce gazes, Beauclerk, turning his head, meets her earnest regard. He returns it with a beaming smile. Miss Maliphant, whose duty it is at this instant to advance and retire and receive without the support of a chaperone the attacks of the bold, bad man opposite, having moved out of Beauclerk's sight, the latter, with an expressive glance directed at Joyce, lifts his shoulders forlornly, and gives a serio-comic shrug of his shoulders. All to show now bored a being he is at finding himself thus the partner of the ugly heiress! It is all done in a second. An inimitable bit of acting—but unpleasant.

Joyce draws herself up. Her eyes fall away from his; unless the distance is too far, the touch of disdain that lies in them should have disconcerted even Mr. Beauclerk. Perhaps it has!

"Our turn?" says she, giving her partner a sudden beautiful glance full of fire—of life—of something that he fails to understand, but does *not* fail to consider charming. She smiles; she grows radiant. She is a different being from a moment ago. How could he—Blake—have thought her stupid. How she takes up every word—and throws new meaning into it—and *what* a laugh she has! Low-sweet—merry—music to its core!

Beauclerk in his turn finds a loop-hole through which to look at her, and is conscious of a faint feeling of chagrin. She oughtn't to have taken it like that. To be a little pensive—a little sad—that would have shewn a right spirit. Well—the night is long. He can play his game here and there. There is plenty of time in which to regain lost ground with one—to gain fresh ground with the other. Joyce will forgive him—when she hears *his* version of it.

CHAPTER XII.

"If thou canst see not, hast thou ears to hear?—Or
is thy soul too as a leaf that dies?"

"Well, after all, life has its compensations," says Mr. Beauclerk, sinking upon the satin lounge beside Miss Kavanagh, and giving way to a rapturous sigh. He is looking very big and very handsome. His close-cropped eminently aristocratic head is thrown a little back, to give full play to the ecstatic smile he is directing at Joyce.

She bears it wonderfully. She receives it indeed with all the amiable imbecility of a person who doesn't understand what on earth you are talking about. Whether this reception of his little opening speech—so carefully prepared—puzzles or nettles Mr. Beauclerk there is no way of learning. He makes no sign.

"I thought I should never be able to get a dance with you; you see,"—smiling—"when one is the belle of the evening, one grows difficult. But you *might* have kept a fifth or sixth for a poor outsider like me. An old friend too."

"Old friends don't count at a dance, I'm afraid," says she, with a smile as genial as his own; "though for the matter of that you could have had the first; *no one*—hard as it may be to make you believe it—had asked the belle of the evening for that."

This is not quite true. Many had asked for it, Dysart amongst others; but she had kept it open for —the one who didn't want it. However, fibs of this sort one blinks at where pretty girls are the criminals. Her tone is delicately sarcastic. She would willingly suppress the sarcasm altogether as beneath her, but she is very angry; and when a woman is angry there is generally somebody to pay.

"Oh! that *first*!" says he, with a gesture of impatience. "I shan't forgive Isabel in a hurry about

that; she ruined my evening—up to *this*. However," throwing off as it were unpleasant memories by a shake of his head, "don't let me spoil my one good time by dwelling upon a bad one. Here I am now, at all events; here is comfort, here is peace. The hour I have been longing for is mine at last."

"It might have been yours considerably earlier," says Miss Kavanagh with very noteworthy deliberation, unmoved by his lover-like glances, which after all have more truth in them than most of his declarations. She sits playing with her fan, and with a face expressionless as any sphinx.

"Oh! my *dear* girl!" says Mr. Beauclerk reproachfully, "how can you say that! You know in one's sister's house one must—eh? And she laid positive commands on me——"

"To dance the first dance with Miss Maliphant?"

"Now, that's not like you," says Mr. Beauclerk very gently. "It's not just. When I found Miss Dunscombe engaged for that ridiculous quadrille, what could I do? *You* were engaged to Blake. I was looking aimlessly round me, cursing my luck in that I had not thrown up even my sister's wishes and secured before it was too late the only girl in the room I cared to dance with when Isabel came again. 'Not dancing,' says she; 'and there's Miss Maliphant over there, partnerless!'"

He tells all this with as genuine an air as if it was not false from start to finish.

"You *know* Isabel," says he, laughing airily; "she takes the oddest fancies at times. Miss Maliphant is her latest craze. Though what she can see in her——A *nice* girl. Thoroughly nice—essentially *real*—a little *too* real perhaps," with a laugh so irresistible that even Miss Kavanagh against her will is compelled to join in it.

"Honest all through, I admit; but as a *waltzer*! Well, well, we shouldn't be too severe—but really, there you know, she leaves *everything* to be desired. And I've been victimized not once, but twice—*three* times."

"It is nothing remarkable," says Miss Kavanagh, coldly. "Many very charming girls do not dance well. It is a gift."

"A very precious one. When a charming girl can't waltz, she ought to learn how to sit down charmingly, and not oppress innocent people. As for Miss Maliphant!" throwing out his large handsome hands expressively, "*she* certainly should not dance. Her complexion doesn't stand it. Did you notice her?"

"No," icily.

"Ah, you wouldn't, you know. I could see how thoroughly well occupied *you* were! Not a thought for even an old friend; and besides you're a girl in ten thousand. Nothing petty or small about you. Now, another woman would not have failed to notice the fatal tendency towards rubicundity that marks Miss Maliphant's nose whenever——"

"I do so dislike discussing people behind their backs," says Miss Kavanagh, slowly. "I always think it is so *unfair*. They can't defend themselves. It is like maligning the dead."

"Miss Maliphant isn't dead at all events. She is dreadfully alive," says Mr. Beauclerk, totally unabashed. He laughs gaily. To refuse to be lectured was a rule he had laid down for his own guidance early in life. Those people who will not see when they ought to be offended have generally the best of the game.

"Would you have her dead?" asks Joyce, with calm interrogation.

"I don't remember saying I would have her *any* way," says he, still evidently clinging to the frivolous mood. "And at all events I wouldn't have her *dancing*. It disagrees with her nose. It makes her suggestive; it betrays one into the making of bad parodies. One I made to-night when looking at her; I couldn't resist it. For once in her life you see she was irresistible. Hear it. 'Oh! my love's got a red, red nose!' Ha! ha! Not half bad, eh? It kept repeating itself in my brain all the time I was looking at her."

"I thought you liked her," says Joyce, lifting her large dark eyes for the first time to his. Beautiful eyes! a little shocked now—a little cold—almost entreating. Surely, surely, he will not destroy her ideal of him.

"You think I am censorious," says he readily, "cruel almost; but to *you*"—with delicate flattery—"surely I may speak to *you* as I would speak to no other. May I not?" He leans a little forward, and compelling the girl's reluctant gaze, goes on speaking. It chafes him that she should put him on his defence; but some *one* divine instinct within him warns him not to break with her entirely. "Still," says he, in a low tone, always with his eyes on hers, "I see that you condemn me."

"Condemn you! No! Why should *I* be your judge?"

"You *are*, however—and my judge and jury too. I cannot bear to think that you should despise me. And all because of that wretched girl."

"I don't despise you," says the girl, quickly. "If you were really despicable I should not like you as well as I do; I am only sorry that you should say little unkind things of a girl like Miss Maliphant, who, if not beautiful, is surely to be regarded in a very kindly light."

"Do you know," says Mr. Beauclerk, gently, "I think you are the one sweet character in the world." There is a great amount of belief in his tone, perhaps half of it is honest. "I never met any one like you. Women as a rule are willing to tear each other to pieces but you—you condone all faults; that is why I——"

A pause. He leans forward. His eyes are eloquent; his tongue alone refrains from finishing the declaration that he had begun. To the girl beside him, however, ignorant of subterfuge, unknowing of the wiles that run in and out of society like a thread, his words sound sweet—the sweeter for the very hesitation that accompanies them.

"I am not so perfect as you think me," says she, rather sadly—her voice a little faint.

"That is true," says he quickly, as though compelled against his will to find fault with her. "A while ago you were angry with me because I was driven to waste my time with people uncongenial to me. *That* was unfair if you like." He throws her own accusation back at her in the gentlest fashion. "I danced with this, that, and the other person it is true, but do you not know where my heart was all this time?"

He pauses for a moment, just long enough to make more real his question, but hardly long enough to let her reply to it. To bring matters to a climax, would not suit him at all.

"Yes, you *do* know," says he, seeing her about to speak. "And *yet* you misjudge me. If—if I were to tell you that I would rather be with you than with any other woman in the world, you would believe me, wouldn't you?"

He stoops over her, and taking her hand presses it fondly, lingeringly. "Answer me."

"Yes," says Joyce in a low tone. It has not occurred to her that his words are a question rather than an asseveration. That he loves her, seems to her certain. A soft glow illumines her cheeks; her eyes sink beneath his; the idea that she is happy, or at all events *ought* to be happy, fills her with a curious wonderment. Do people always feel so strange, so surprised, so *unsure*, when love comes to them?

"Yet you *did* doubt," says Beauclerk, giving her hand a last pressure, and now nestling back amongst his cushions with all the air of a man who has fought and conquered and has been given his reward. "Well, don't let us throw an unpleasant memory into this happy hour. As I have said," taking up her fan and idly, if gracefully, waving it to and fro, "after all the turmoil of the fight it is sweet to find oneself at last in the haven where one would be."

He is smiling at Joyce—the gayest, the most candid smile in the world. Smiles become him. He is looking really handsome and *happy* at finding himself thus alone with her. Sincerity declares itself in every line of his face. Perhaps he *is* as sincere as he has ever yet been in his life. The one thing that he unquestionably does regard with interest beyond his own poor precious bones, is the exquisite bit of nature's workmanship now sitting beside him.

At this present moment, in spite of his flattering words, his smiles and telling glances, she is still a little cold, a little uncertain, a phase of manner that renders her indescribably charming to the one watching her.

Beauclerk indeed is enjoying himself immensely. To a man of his temperament to be able to play upon a nature as fine, as honest, as pure as Joyce's is to know a keen delight. That the girl is dissatisfied, vaguely, nervously dissatisfied, he can read as easily as though the workings of her soul lay before him in broad type, and to assuage those half-defined misgivings of hers is a task that suits him. He attacks it *con amore*.

"How silent you are," says he, very gently, when he has let quite a long pause occur.

"I am tired, I think."

"Of me?"

"No."

"Of what then?" He has found that as a rule there is nothing a woman likes better than to be asked to define her own feelings, Joyce, however, disappoints him.

"I don't know. Sitting up so late I suppose."

"Look here!" says he, in a voice so full of earnest emotion that Joyce involuntarily stares at him; "*I* know what is the matter with you. You are fighting against your better nature. You are *trying* to be ungenerous. You are trying to believe what you know is not true. Tell me—*honestly* mind—are you not forcing yourself to regard me as a monster of insincerity?"

"You are wrong," says she, slowly. "I am forcing myself, on the contrary, to believe you a very giant of sincerity."

"And you find that difficult?"

"Yes."

An intense feeling of admiration for her sways Beauclerk. How new a thing to find a girl so beautiful, with so much intelligence. Surely instinct is the great lever that moves humanity. Why has not this girl the thousands that render Miss Maliphant so very desirable? What a *bêtise* on

the part of Mother Nature. Alas! it would be too much to expect from that niggardly Dame. Beauty, intelligence, wealth! All rolled into one personality. Impossible!

"You are candid,'" says he, his tone sorrowful.

"That is what one should always be," says she in turn.

"You are *too* stern a judge. How shall I convince you," exclaims he—"of *what* he leaves open? If I were to swear——"

"*Do* not," says she quickly.

"Well, I won't. But Joyce!" He pauses, purposely. It is the first time he has ever called her by her Christian name, and a little soft color springs into the girl's cheeks as she hears him. "You know," says he, "you *do* know?"

It is a question; but *again* what? *What* does she know? He had accredited her with remarkable intelligence a moment ago, but as a fact the girl's knowledge of life is but a poor thing in comparison with that of the man of the world. She belies her intelligence on the spot.

"Yes, I think I do," says she shyly. In fact she is longing to believe, to be sure of this thing, that to her is so plain that she has omitted to notice that he has never put it into words.

"You will trust in me?" says he.

"Yes, I trust you," says she simply.

Her pretty gloved hand is lying on her lap. Raising it, he presses it passionately to his lips. Joyce, with a little nervous movement, withdraws it quickly. The color dies from her lips. Even at this supreme moment does Doubt hold her in thrall!

Her face is marvelously bright and happy, however, as she rises precipitately to her feet, much to Beauclerk's relief. It has gone quite far enough he tells himself—five minutes more and he would have found himself in a rather embarrassing position. Really these pretty girls are very dangerous.

"Come, we must go back to the ballroom," says she gaily. "We have been here an unconscionable time. I am afraid my partner for this dance has been looking for me, and will scarcely forgive my treating him so badly. If I had only told him I *wouldn't* dance with him he might have got another partner and enjoyed himself."

"Better to have loved and lost," quotes Beauclerk in his airiest manner. It is *so* airy that it strikes Joyce unpleasantly. Surely after all—after——She pulls herself together angrily. Is she *always* to find fault with him? Must she have his whole nature altered to suit her taste?

"Ah, there is Dicky Browne," says she, glancing from where she is now standing at the door of the conservatory to where Mr. Browne may be seen leaning against a curtain with his lips curved in a truly benevolent smile.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Now the nights are all past over
Of our dreaming, dreams that hover
In a mist of fair false things:
Night's afloat on wide wan wings."

"Why, so it is! Our *own* Dicky, in the flesh and an admirable temper apparently," says Mr. Beauclerk. "Shall we come and interview him?"

They move forward and presently find themselves at Mr. Browne's elbow; he is, however, so far lost in his kindly ridicule of the poor silly revolving atoms before him, that it is not until Miss Kavanagh gives his arm a highly suggestive pinch that he learns that she is beside him.

"*Wough!*" says he, shouting out this unclassic if highly expressive word without the slightest regard for decency. "*What* fingers you've got! I really think you might reserve that kind of thing for Mr. Dysart. *He'd* like it."

This is a most infelicitous speech, and Miss Kavanagh might have resented it, but for the strange fact that Beauclerk, on hearing it, laughs heartily. Well, if *he* doesn't mind, it can't matter, but how silly Dicky can be! Mr. Beauclerk continues to laugh with much enjoyment.

"Try him!" says he to Miss Kavanagh, with the liveliest encouragement in his tone. If it occurs to her that, perhaps, lovers, as a rule, do not advise their sweethearts to play fast and loose with other men, she refuses to give heed to the warning. He is not like other men. He is not basely jealous. He knows her. He trusts her. He had hinted to her but just now, so very, very kindly that *she* was suspicious, that she must try to conquer that fault—if it is hers. And it is. There can be no

doubt of that. She had even distrusted *him*!

"Is that your advice?" asks Mr. Browne, regarding him with a rather piercing eye. "Capital, *under the circumstances*, but rather, eh?——Has it ever occurred to you that Dysart is capable of a good deal of feeling?"

"So few things occur to me, I'm ashamed to say," says Beauclerk, genially. "I take the present moment. It is all-sufficing, so far as I'm concerned. Well; and so you tell me Dysart has feeling?"

"Yes; I shouldn't advise Miss Kavanagh to play pranks with him," says Dicky, with a pretentiously rueful glance at the arm she has just pinched so very delicately.

"You're a poor soldier!" says she, with a little scornful uptilting of her chin. "You wrong Mr. Dysart if you think he would feel so slight an injury. What! A mere touch from *me*!"

"Your touch is deadlier than you know, perhaps," says Mr. Browne, lightly.

"What a slander!" says Miss Kavanagh, who, in spite of herself, is growing a little conscious.

"Yes; isn't it?" says Beauclerk, to whom she has appealed. "As for me——" He breaks off suddenly and fastens his gaze severely on the other side of the room. "By Jove! I had forgotten! There is my partner for this dance looking daggers at me. Dear Miss Kavanagh, you will excuse me, won't you? Shall I take you to your chaperone, or will you let Browne have the remainder of this waltz?"

"I'll look after Miss Kavanagh, if she will allow me," says Dicky, rather drily. "Will you?" with a quizzical glance at Joyce.

She makes a little affirmative sign to him, returns Beauclerk's parting bow, and, still with a heart as light as a feather, stands by Mr. Browne's side, watching in silence the form of Beauclerk as it moves here and there amongst the crowd. What a handsome man he is! How distinguished! How tall! How big! Every other man looks dwarfed beside him. Presently he disappears into an anteroom, and she turns to find Mr. Browne, for a wonder, as silent as herself, and evidently lost in thought.

"What are you thinking of?" asks she.

"Of you!"

"Nonsense! What were you doing just then when I spoke to you?"

"I have told you."

"No, you haven't. What *were* you doing?"

"*Hankering!*" says Mr. Browne, heavily.

"*Dicky!*" says she indignantly.

"Well; what? Do you suppose a fellow gets rid of a disease of that sort all in a minute? It generally lasts a good month, I can tell you. But come; that 'Beautiful Star' of yours, that 'shines in your heaven so bright,' has given you into my charge. What can I do for you?"

"Deliver me from the wrath of that man over there," says Miss Kavanagh, indicating Mr. Blake, who, with a thunderous brow, is making his way towards her. "The last was his. I forgot all about it. Take me away, Dicky; somewhere, anywhere; I know he's got a horrid temper, and he is going to say uncivil things. Where" (here she meanly tries to get behind Mr. Browne) "*shall* we go."

"Right through this door," says Mr. Browne, who, as a rule, is equal to all emergencies. He pushes her gently towards the conservatory she has just quitted, that has steps leading from it to the illuminated gardens below, and just barely gets her safely ensconced behind a respectable barricade of greenery before Mr. Blake arrives on the spot they have just vacated.

They have indeed the satisfaction of seeing him look vaguely round, murmur a gentle anathema or two, and then resign himself to the inevitable.

"He's gone!" says Miss Kavanagh, with a sigh of relief.

"To perdition!" says Mr. Browne in an awesome tone.

"I really wish you wouldn't, Dicky," says Joyce.

"Why not? You seem to think men's hearts are made of adamant! A moment ago you sneered at *mine*, and now——By Jove! Here's Baltimore—and alone, for a wonder."

"Well! *His* heart is adamant!" says she softly.

"Or hers—which?"

"Of course—manlike—you condemn our sex. That's why I'm glad I'm not a man."

"Why? Because, if you were, you would condemn your present sex?"

"*Certainly* not! Because I wouldn't be of an unfair, mean, ungenerous disposition for the world."

"Good old Jo!" says Mr. Browne, giving her a tender pat upon the back.

By this time Baltimore has reached them.

"Have you seen Lady Baltimore anywhere?" asks he.

"Not quite lately," says Dicky; "last tune I saw her she was dancing with Farnham."

"Oh—after that she went to the library," says Joyce quickly. "I fancy she may be there still, because she looked a little tired."

"Well, she had been dancing a good deal," says Dicky.

"Thanks. I dare say I'll find her," says Baltimore, with an air of indifference, hurrying on.

"I hope he will," says Joyce, looking after him.

"I hope so too—and in a favorable temper."

"You're a cynic, Dicky, under all that airy manner of yours," says Miss Kavanagh severely. "Come out to the gardens, the air may cool your brain, and reduce you to milder judgments."

"Of Lady Baltimore?"

"Yes."

"Truly I do seem to be sitting in judgment on her and her family."

"Her *family*! What has Bertie done?"

"Oh, there is more family than Bertie," says Mr. Browne. "She has a brother, hasn't she?"

Meantime Lord Baltimore, taking Joyce's hint, makes his way to the library, to find his wife there lying back in a huge arm-chair. She is looking a little pale. A little *ennuyée*; it is plain that she has sought this room—one too public to be in much request—with a view to getting away for a little while from the noise and heat of the ballroom.

"Not dancing?" says her husband, standing well away from her. She had sprung into a sitting posture the moment she saw him, an action that has angered Baltimore. His tone is uncivil; his remark, it must be confessed, superfluous. *Why* does she persist in treating him as a stranger? Surely, on whatever bad terms they may be, she need not feel it necessary to make herself uncomfortable on his appearance. She has evidently been enjoying that stolen lounge, and *now* ——

The lamplight is streaming full upon her face. A faint color has crept into it. The white velvet gown she is wearing is hardly whiter than her neck and arms, and her eyes are as bright as her diamonds; yet there is no feature in her face that could be called strictly handsome. This, Baltimore tells himself, staring at her as he is, in a sort of insolent defiance of the cold glance she has directed at him. No; there is no beauty about that face; distinctly bred, calm and pure, it might possibly be called charming by those who liked her, but nothing more. She is not half so handsome as—as—any amount of other women he knows, and yet——

It increases his anger towards her tenfold to know that in her secret soul she has the one face that to *him* is beautiful, and ever *will* be beautiful.

"You see," says she gently, and with an expressive gesture, "I longed for a moment's pause, so I came here. Do they want me?" She rises from her seat, looking very tall and graceful. If her face is not strictly lovely, there is, at all events, no lack of loveliness in her form.

"I can't answer for 'they,'" says Baltimore, "but"——he stops dead short here. If he *had* been going to say anything, the desire to carry out his intention dies upon the spot. "No, I am not aware that 'they' or anybody wants you particularly at this moment. Pray sit down again."

"I have had quite a long rest already."

"You look tired, however. *Are* you?"

"Not in the least."

"Give me this dance," then says he, half mockingly, yet with a terrible earnestness in his voice.

"Give it to *you*! Thank you. No."

"Fearful of contamination?" with a smiling sneer.

"Pray spare me your jibes," says she very coldly, her face whitening.

"Pray spare me your presence, you should rather say. Let us have the truth at all hazards. A saint like you should be careful."

To this she makes him no answer.

"What!" cries he, sardonically; "and will you miss this splendid opportunity of giving a sop to your Cerberus? Of conciliating your bugbear? your *bête noire*? your *fear of gossip*?"

"I fear nothing"—icily.

"You do, however. Forgive the contradiction," with a sarcastic inclination of the head. "But for this fear of yours you would have cast me off long ago, and bade me go to the devil as soon as—nay, the sooner the better. And indeed if it were not for the child——By the bye, do you forget I have a hold on *him*—a stronger than yours?"

"I *forget* nothing either," returns she as icily as before; but now a tremor, barely perceptible, but terrible in its intensity, shakes her voice.

"Hah! You need not tell me *that*. You are relentless as—well, 'Fate' comes in handy," with a reckless laugh. "Let us be conventional by all means, and it is a good old simile, well worn! You decline my proposal then? It is a sensible one, and should suit you. Dance with me to-night, when all the County is present, and Mother Grundy goes to bed with a sore heart. Scandal lies slain. All will cry aloud: '*There they go!* Fast friends in spite of all the lies we have heard about them.' Is it possible you can deliberately forego so great a chance of puzzling our neighbors?"

"I can."

"Why, where is your sense of humor? One trembles for it! To be able to deceive them all so deliriously; to send them home believing us on good terms, a veritable loving couple"—he breaks into a curious laugh.

"This is too much," says she, her face now like death. "You would insult me! Believe me, that not to spare myself all the gossip with which the whole world could hurt me would I endure your arm around my waist!"

His short-lived, most unmirthful mirth has died from him, he has laid a hand upon the table near him to steady himself.

"You are candid, on my soul," says he slowly.

She moves quickly towards the door, her velvet skirt sweeping over his feet as she goes by—the perfume of the violets lying in her bosom reaches him.

Hardly knowing his own meaning, he puts out his hand and catches her by her naked arm, just where the long glove ceases above the elbow.

"Isabel, give me this dance," says he a little wildly.

"*No!*"

She shakes herself free of him. A moment her eyes blaze into his. "No!" she says again, trembling from head to foot. Another moment, and the door has closed behind her.

CHAPTER XIV.

"The old, old pain of earth."

It is now close upon midnight—that midnight of the warmer months when day sets its light finger on the fringes of it. There is a sighing through the woods, a murmur from the everlasting sea, and though Diana still rides high in heaven with her handmaiden Venus by her side, yet in a little while her glory will be departed, and her one rival, the sun, will push her from her throne.

The gleaming lamps among the trees-are scarcely so bright as they were an hour ago, the faint sighing of the wind that heralds the morning is shaking them to and fro. A silly bird has waked, and is chirping in a foolish fashion among the rhododendrons, where, in a secluded path, Joyce and Dicky Browne are wandering somewhat aimlessly. Before them lies a turn in the path that leads presumably into the dark wood, darkest of all at this hour, and where presumably, too, no one has ventured, though one should never presume about hidden corners.

"I can't think what you see in him," says Mr. Browne, after a big pause. "I'd say nothing if his face wasn't so fat, but if I were you, that would condemn him in my eyes."

"I can't see that his face is fatter than yours," says Miss Kavanagh, with what she fondly believes perfect indifference.

"Neither is it," says Mr. Browne meekly, "but my dear girl, there lies the gist of my argument. You have condemned me. All my devotion has been scouted by you. I don't pretend to be the wreck still that once by your cruelty you made me, but——"

"Oh, that will do," says Joyce, unfeelingly. "As for Mr. Beauclerk, I don't know why you should imagine I see anything in him."

"Well, I confess I can't quite understand it myself. He couldn't hold a candle to—er—well, several other fellows I could name, myself not included, Miss Kavanagh, so that supercilious smile is

thrown away. He may be good to look at, there is certainly plenty of him on which to feast the eye, but to fall in love with——"

"What do you mean, Dicky? What are you speaking about—do you know? You," with a deadly desire to insult him, "must be in love yourself to—to maunder as you are doing?"

"I'm not," says Mr. Browne, "that's the queer part of it. I don't know what's the matter with me. Ever since you blighted me, I have lain fallow, as it were. I," dejectedly, "haven't been in love for quite a long, long time now. I miss it—I can't explain it. I can't be well, can I? I," anxiously, "I don't look well, do I?"

"I never saw you looking better," with unkind force.

"Ah!" sadly, "that's because you don't give your attention to me. It's my opinion that I'm fading away to the land o' the leal, like old What-you-may-call-'em."

"If that's the way he did it, it must have taken him some time. In fact, he must be still at it," says Miss Kavanagh, heartlessly.

By this time they had come to the end of the walk, and have turned the corner. Before them lies a small grass plot surrounded by evergreens, a cosy nook not to be suspected by any one until quite close upon it. It bursts upon the casual pedestrian, indeed, as a charming surprise. There is something warm, friendly, confidential about it—something safe. Beyond lies the gloomy wood, embedded in night, but here the moonbeams play. Some one with a thoughtful care for loving souls has placed in this excellent spot for flirtation a comfortable garden seat, just barely large enough for two, sternly indicative of being far too small far the leanest three.

Upon this delightful seat four eyes now concentrate themselves. As if by one consent, although unconsciously, Mr. Browne and his companion come to a dead stop. The unoffending seat holds them in thrall.

Upon it, evidently on the best of terms with each other, are two people. One is Miss Maliphant, the other Mr. Beauclerk. They are whispering "soft and low." Miss Maliphant is looking, perhaps, a little confused—for her—and the cause of the small confusion is transparent. Beauclerk's hand is tightly closed over hers, and even as Dicky and Miss Kavanagh gaze spellbound at them, he lifts the massive hand of the heiress and imprints a lingering kiss upon it.

"Come away," says Dicky, touching Joyce's arm. "Run for your life, but softly."

He and she have been standing in shadow, protected from the view of the other two by a crimson rhododendron. Joyce starts as he touches her, as one might who is roused from an ugly dream, and then follows him swiftly, but lightly, back to the path they had forsaken.

She is trembling in a nervous fashion, that angers herself cruelly, and something of her suppressed emotion becomes known to Mr. Browne. Perhaps, being a friend of hers, it angers him, too.

"What strange freaks moonbeams play," says he, with a truly delightful air of saying nothing in particular. "I could have sworn that just then I saw Beauclerk kissing Miss Maliphant's hand."

No answer. There is a little silence, fraught with what angry grief who can tell? Dicky, who is not all froth, and is capable of a liking here and there, is conscious of, and is sorry for, the nervous tremor that shakes the small hand he has drawn within his arm; but he is so far a philosopher that he tells himself it is but a little thing in her life; she can bear it; she will recover from it; "and in time forget that she had been ever ill," says this good-natured skeptic to himself.

Joyce, who has evidently been struggling with herself, and has now conquered her first feeling, turns to him.

"You should not condemn the moonbeams unheard," says she, bravely, with the ghost of a little smile. "The evidence of two impartial witnesses should count in their favor."

"But, my dear girl, consider," says Mr. Browne, mildly. "If it had been anyone else's hand! I could then accuse the moonbeams of a secondary offense, and say that their influence alone, which we all know has a maddening effect, had driven him to so bold a deed. But not madness itself could inspire me with a longing to kiss her hand."

"She is a very good girl, and I like her," says Joyce, with a suspicious vehemence.

"So do I; so much, indeed, that I should shrink from calling her a good girl. It is very damnatory, you know. You could hardly say anything more prejudicial. It at once precludes the idea of her having any such minor virtues as grace, beauty, wit, etc. Well, granted she is 'a good girl,' that doesn't give her pretty hands, does it? As a rule, I think that all good girls have gigantic points. I don't think I would care to kiss Miss Maliphant's hands, even if she would let me."

"She is a very honest, kind-hearted girl," says Miss Kavanagh a little heavily. It suggests itself to Mr. Browne that she has not been listening to him.

"And a very rich one."

"I never think about that when I am with her. I couldn't."

"Beauclerk could," says Mr. Browne, tersely.

There is another rather long silence, and Dicky is beginning to think he has gone a trifle too far, and that Miss Kavanagh will cut him to-morrow, when she speaks again. Her tone is composed, but icy enough to freeze him.

"It is a mistake," says she, "to discuss people towards whom one feels a natural antagonism. It leads, one, perhaps, to say more than one actually means. One is apt to grow unjust. I would never discuss Mr. Beauclerk if I were you. You don't like him."

"Well," says Mr. Browne, thoughtfully, "since you put it to me, I confess I think he is the most rubbishy person I ever met!"

After this sweeping opinion, conversation comes to a deadlock. It is not resumed. Reaching the stone steps leading to the conservatory, they ascend them in silence, and reach that perfumed retreat to find Dysart on the threshold.

"Oh, there you are!" cries he to Miss Kavanagh. "I thought you lost for good and all!" His face has lighted up. Perhaps he feels a sense of relief at finding her with Dicky, who is warranted harmless. He looks almost handsome, better than handsome! The very soul of honesty shines, in his kind eyes.

"Oh! it is hard to lose what nobody wants," says Joyce in a would-be playful tone, but something in the drawn, pained lines about her mouth belies her mirth. Dysart, after a swift examination of her face, takes her hand and draws it within his arm.

"The last was our dance," says he.

"Speak kindly of the dead," says Mr. Browne, as he beats a hasty retreat.

CHAPTER XV.

"Heigh ho! sing heigh ho! unto the green holly;
Most friendship is feigning, most loving is folly."

"Did you forget?" asks Dysart, looking at her.

"Forget?"

"That the last dance was mine?"

"Oh, was it? I'm so sorry. You must forgive me," with a feverish attempt at gayety, "I will try to make amends. You shall have this one instead, no matter to whom it may belong. Come. It is only just begun, I think."

"Never mind," says Dysart, gently. "We won't dance this, I think. It is cool and quiet here, and you are tired."

"Oh, so tired," returns she with a little sudden pathetic cry, so impulsive, so inexpressible that it goes to his heart.

"Joyce! what is it?" says he, quickly. "Here, come and sit down. No, I don't want an answer. It was an absurd question. You have overdone it a little, that is all."

"Yes, that is all!" She sinks heavily into the seat he has pointed out to her, and lets her head fall back against the cushions. "However, when you come to think of it, that means a great deal," says she, smiling languidly.

"There, don't talk," says he. "What is the good of having a friend if you can't be silent with him when it so pleases you. That," laughing, and arranging the cushions behind her head, "is one for you and two for myself. I, too, pine for a moment when even the meagre 'yes' and 'no' will not be required of me."

"Oh, no," shaking her head. "It is all for me and nothing for yourself!" she pauses, and putting out her hand lays it on his sleeve. "I think, Felix," says she, softly, "you are the kindest man I ever met."

"I told you you felt overdone," says he, laughing as if to hide the sudden emotion that is gleaming in his eyes. He presses the hand resting on his arm very gently, and then replaces it in her lap. To take advantage of any little kindness she may show him now, when it is plain that she is suffering from some mental excitement, grief or anger, or both, would seem base to him.

She has evidently accepted his offer of silence, and lying back in her soft couch stares with unseeing eyes at the bank of flowers before her. Behind her tall, fragrant shrubs rear themselves, and somewhere behind her, too, a tiny fountain is making musical tinklings. The faint, tender glow of a colored lamp gleams from the branches of a tropical tree close by, and round it pale, downy moths are flitting, the sound of their wings, as every now and then they approach too near the tempting glow and beat them against the Japanese shade, mingling with the silvery fall of the

scented water.

The atmosphere is warm, drowsy, a little melancholy. It seems to seize upon the two sitting within its seductive influence, and threatens to waft them from day dreams into dreams born of idle slumber. The rustle of a coming skirt, however, a low voice, a voice still lower whispering a reply, recalls them both to the fact that rest, complete and perfect, is impossible under the circumstances.

A little opening among the tall evergreens upon their right shows them Lord Baltimore once more, but this time not alone. Lady Swansdown is with him.

She is looking rather lovelier than usual, with that soft tinge of red upon her cheeks born of her last waltz, and her lips parted in a happy smile. The subdued lights of the many lamps falling on her satin gown rest there as if in love with its beauty. It is an old shade made new, a yellow that is almost white, and has yet a tinge of green in it. A curious shade, difficult, perhaps, to wear with good effect; but on Lady Swansdown it seems to reign alone as queen of all the toilets in the rooms to-night. She looks, indeed, like a perfect picture stepped down from its canvas, "a thing of beauty," a very vision of delight.

She seems, indeed, to Joyce watching her—Joyce who likes her—that she has grown beyond herself (or rather into her own real self) to-night. There is a touch of life, of passionate joy, of abandonment, of hope that has yet a sting in it, in all her air, that, though not understood of the girl, is still apparent.

The radiant smile that illumines her beautiful face as she glances up at Baltimore—who is bending over her in more lover-like fashion than should be—is still making all her face a lovely fire as she passes out of sight down the steps that lead to the lighted gardens—the steps that Joyce had but just now ascended.

The latter is still a little wrapt in wonder and admiration, and some other thought that is akin to trouble, when Dysart breaks in upon her fancies.

"I am sorry about that," says he, bluntly, indicating with a nod of his head the departing shadows of the two who have just passed out. There are no fancies about Dysart. Nothing vague.

"Yes; it is a pity," says Joyce, hurriedly.

"More than that, I think."

"Something ought to be done," nervously.

"Yes," flushing hotly; "I know—I know what you mean"—she had meant nothing—"but it is so difficult to know what to do, and—I am only a cousin."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of you. I wasn't, really," says she, a good deal shocked. "As you say, why should you speak, when——"

"There is Beauclerk," says Dysart, quickly, as if a little angry with somebody, but certainly not with her. "How can he stand by and see it?"

"Perhaps he doesn't see it," says she in a strange tone, her eyes on the marble flooring. It seems to herself that the words are forced from her. "Because—because he has——"

She brings her hands tightly together, so tightly that she reduces the feathers on the fan she is holding to their last gasp. Because she is now disappointed in him; because he has proved himself, perhaps, unstable, deceptive to the heart's core, is she to vilify, him? A thousand times no! That would be, indeed, to be base herself.

"Perhaps not," says Dysart, drily. In his secret heart this defence of his rival is detestable to him. Something in her whole manner when she came in from the garden had suggested to him the possibility that she had at last found him out. Dysart would have been puzzled to explain how Beauclerk was supposed to be "found out" or for what, but that he was liable to discovery at any moment on some count or counts unknown, was one of his Christian beliefs. "Perhaps not," says he. "And yet I cannot help thinking that a matter so open to all must be patent to him."

"But," anxiously, "is it so open?"

"I leave that to your own judgment," a little warmly. "You," with rather sharp question, "are a friend of Isabel's?"

"Yes, yes," quickly. "You know that. But——"

"But?" sternly.

"I like Lady Swansdown, too," says she, with some determination. "I find it hard to believe that she can—can——"

"Be false to her friend," supplements he. "Have you yet to learn that friendship ends where love begins?"

"You think——?"

"That she is in love with Baltimore."

"And he?"

"Oh!" contemptuously; "who shall gauge the depth of his heart? What can he mean?" he has risen and is now pacing angrily up and down the small space before her. "He used to be such a good fellow, and now——Is he dead to all sense of honor, of honesty?"

"He is a man," says Joyce, coldly.

"No. I deny that. Not a true man, surely."

"Is there a true man?" says she. "Is there any truth, any honesty to be found in the whole wide world?"

She too has risen now, and is standing with her large dark eyes fixed almost defiantly on his. There is something so strange, so wild, so unlike her usual joyous, happy self in this outburst, in her whole attitude, that Dysart regards her with an astonishment that is largely tinctured with fear.

"I don't know what is in your mind," says he, calmly; "something out of the common has occurred to disturb you so much, I can guess, but," looking at her earnestly, "whatever it maybe, I entreat you to beat it under. Conquer it; do not let it conquer you. There must be evil in the world, but never lose sight of the good; that must be there, just as surely. Truth, honor, honesty, are no fables; they are to be found everywhere. If not in this one, then in that. Do not lose faith in them."

"You think me evidently in a bad way," says she, smiling faintly. She has recovered herself in part, but though she tries to turn his earnest words into a jest, one can see that she is perilously near to tears.

"You mean that I am preaching to you," says he, smiling too. "Well, so I am. What right has a girl like you to disbelieve in anything? Why," laughing, "it can't be so very long ago since you believed in fairies, in pixies, and the fierce dragons of our childhood."

"I don't know that I am not a believer in them still," says she. "In the dragons, at all events. Evil seems to rule the world."

"Tut!" says he. "I have preached in vain."

"You would have me believe in good only," says she. "You assure me very positively that all the best virtues are still riding to and fro, redeeming the world, with lances couched and hearts on fire. But where to find them? In you?"

It is a very gentle smile she gives him as she says this.

"Yes: so far, at least, as you are concerned," says he, stoutly. "I shall be true and honest to you so long as my breath lives in my body. So much I can swear to."

"Well," says she, with a rather meagre attempt at light-heartedness, "you almost persuade me with that truculent manner of yours into believing in you at all events, or is it," a little sadly, "that the ways of others drive me to that belief? Well," with a sigh, "never mind how it is, you benefit by it, any way."

"I don't want to force your confidence," says Dysart; "but you have been made unhappy by somebody, have you not?"

"I have not been made happy," says she, her eyes on the ground. "I don't know why I tell you that. You asked a hard question."

"I know. I should have been silent, perhaps, and yet——"

At this moment the sound of approaching footsteps coming up the steps startles them.

"Joyce!" says he, "grant me one request."

"One! You rise to tragedy!" says she, as if a little amused in spite of the depression under which she is so evidently laboring. "Is it to be your last, your dying prayer?"

"I hope not. Nevertheless I would have it granted."

"You have only to speak," says she, with a slight gesture that is half mocking, half kindly.

"Come with me after luncheon, to-morrow, up to St. Bridget's Hill?"

"Is that all? And to throw such force into it. Yes, yes; I shall enjoy a long walk like that."

"It is not because of the walk that I ask you to go there with me," says Dysart, the innate honesty that distinguishes him compelling him to lay bare to her his secret meaning. "I have something to say to you. You will listen?"

"Why should I not?" returns she, a little pale. He might, perhaps, have said something further, but that now the footsteps sound close at hand. A glance towards the door that leads from the fragrant night into the still more perfumed air within reveals to them two figures.

Mr. Beauclerk and Miss Maliphant come leisurely forward. The blood receding to Joyce's heart leaves her cold and singularly calm.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight."

"Life, I know not what thou art."

"You two," cries Miss Maliphant pleasantly, in her loud, good-natured voice. She addresses them as though it has been borne in upon her by constant reminding that Joyce and Dysart are for the best of all reasons generally to be found together. There is something not only genial, but sympathetic in her tones, something that embarrasses Dysart, and angers Joyce to the last degree. "Well, I'm glad to have met you for one moment out of the hurly-burly," goes on the massive heiress to Joyce, with the friendliest of smiles. "I'm off at cock-crow, you know, and so mightn't have had the opportunity of saying good-bye to you, but for this fortunate meeting."

"To-morrow?" says Joyce, more with the manner of one who feels she must say something than from any desire to say it.

"Yes, and so early that I shall not have it in my power to bid farewell to any one. Unless, indeed," with a glance at Beauclerk, meant, perhaps, to be coquettish, but so elephantine in its proportions as to be almost anything in the world but that, "some of my friends may wish to see the sun rise."

"We shall miss you," says Joyce, gracefully, though with an effort.

"Just what I've been saying," breaks in Beauclerk at this juncture, who hitherto has been looking on, with an altogether delightful smile upon his handsome face. "We shall all miss Miss Maliphant. It is not often that one meets with an entirely genial companion. My sister is to be congratulated on securing such an acquisition, if only for a short time."

Joyce, lifting her eyes, stares straight at him. "For a short time!" What does that mean? If Miss Maliphant is to be Lady Baltimore's sister-in-law, she will undoubtedly secure her for a lifetime!

"Oh, you are too good," says Miss Maliphant, giving him a playful flick with her fan.

"Well, what would you have me say?" persists Beauclerk still lightly, with wonderful lightness, in fact, considering the weight of that playful tap upon his bent knuckles. "That we shall not be sorry? Would you have me lie, then? Fie, fie, Miss Maliphant! The truth, the truth, and nothing but the truth! At all risks and hazards!" here he almost imperceptibly sends flying a shaft from his eyes at Joyce, who receives it with a blank stare. "We shall, I assure you, be desolated when you go, specially Isabel."

This last pretty little speech strikes Dysart as being specially neat: This putting the onus of the regret on to Isabel's shoulders. All through, Beauclerk has been careful to express himself as one who is an appreciative friend of Miss Maliphant, but nothing more; yet so guarded are these expressions, and the looks that accompany them, that Miss Maliphant might be pardoned if she should read a warmer feeling in them.

A sensation of disgust darkens his brow.

"I must say you are all very nice to me," says the heiress complacently. Poor soul! No doubt, she believes in every bit of it, and a large course of kow-towing from the world has taught her the value of her pile. "However," with true Manchester grace, "there's no need for howling over it. We'll all meet again, I dare say, some time or other. For one thing, Lady Baltimore has asked me to come here again after Christmas; February, I dare say."

"So glad!" murmurs Joyce rather vaguely.

"So you see," said Miss Maliphant with ponderous gayety, "that we are all bound to put in a second good time together; you're coming, I know, Mr. Dysart, and Miss Kavanagh is always here, and Mr. Beauclerk "—with a languishing glance at that charming person, who returns it in the most open manner—"has promised me that he will be here to meet me."

"Well, if I can, you know," says he, now beaming at her.

"How's that?" says the heiress, turning promptly upon him. It is strange how undesirable the very richest heiress can be at times. "Why, it's only just this instant that you told me nothing would keep you away from the Court next spring. What d'ye mean?"

She brings him to book in a most uncompromising fashion; a fashion that betrays unmistakably her plebeian origin. Dysart, listening, admires her for it. Her rough and ready honesty seems to him preferable to the best bred shuffling in the world.

"Did I say all that?" says Beauclerk lightly, coloring a little, nevertheless, as he marks the fine smile that is curling Joyce's lips. "Why, then," gayly, "if I said it, I meant it. If I hesitated about indorsing my intentions publicly, it is because one is never sure of happiness beforehand; believe

me, Miss Maliphant," with a little bow-to her, but with a direct glance at Joyce, "every desire I have is centered in the hope that next spring may see me here again."

"Well, I expect we all have the same wish," says Miss Maliphant cheerfully, who has not caught that swift glance at Joyce. "I'm sure I hope that nothing will interfere with my coming here in February."

"It is agreed, then," says Beauclerk, with a delightfully comprehensive smile that seems to take in every one, even the plants and the dripping fountain and the little marble god in the corner, who is evidently listening with all his might. "We all meet here again early next year if the fates be propitious. You, Dysart, you pledge yourself to join our circle then?"

"I pledge myself," says Dysart, fixing a cold gaze on him. It is so cold, so distinctly hostile, that Beauclerk grows uncomfortable beneath it. When uncomfortable his natural bias leads him towards a display of bonhomie.

"Here we have before us a prospect to cheer the soul of any man," declares he, shifting his eyes from Dysart to Miss Maliphant.

"It cheers me certainly," responds that heavy maiden with alacrity. "I like to think we shall all meet again."

"Like the witches in Macbeth," says Joyce, indifferently.

"But not so malignantly, I hope," says the heiress brilliantly, who, like most worthy people, can never see beyond her own nose. "For my part I like old friends much better than new." She looks round for the appreciation that should attend this sound remark, and is gratified to find Dysart is smiling at her. Perhaps the core of that smile might not have been altogether to her taste—most cores are difficult of digestion. To her, to whom all things are new, where does the flavor of the old come in?

Beauclerk is looking at Joyce.

"I hope the prospect cheers you too," says he a little sharply, as if nettled by her determined silence and bent on making her declare herself. "You, I trust, will be here next February."

"Sure to be!" says she with an enigmatical smile. "Not a jot or tittle of your enjoyments will be lost to you in the coming year. Both your friends—Miss Maliphant and I—will be here to welcome you when you return."

Something in her manner, in the half-defiant light in her eyes, puzzles Beauclerk. What has happened to her since they last were together? Not more than an hour ago she had seemed—er—well. Inwardly he smiles complacently. But now. Could she? Is it possible? Was there a chance that——

"Miss Kavanagh," begins he, moving toward her. But she makes short work of his advance.

"I repent," says she, turning a lovely, smiling face on Dysart. "A while ago I said I was too tired to dance. I did myself injustice. That waltz—listen to it"—lifting up an eager finger—"would it not wake an anchorite from his ascetic dreams? Come. There is time.".

She has sprung to her feet—life is in every movement. She slips her arm into Dysart's. Not understanding—yet half understanding, moves with her—his heart on fire for her, his puzzlement rendering him miserable.

Beauclerk, with that doubt of what she really knows full upon him, is wiser. Without hesitation he offers his arm to Miss Maliphant; and, so swift is his desire to quit the scene, he passes Dysart and Joyce, the latter having paused for a moment to recover her fan.

"You see!" says Beauclerk, bending over the heiress, when a turn in the conservatory has hidden him from the view of those behind. "I told you!" He says nothing more. It is the veriest whisper, spoken with an assumption of merriment very well achieved. Yet, if she would have looked at him, she could have seen that his very lips are white. But as I have said, Miss Maliphant's mind has not been trained to the higher courses.

"Yes. One can see!" laughs she happily. "And it is charming, isn't it? To find two people thoroughly in love with each other now-a-days, is to believe in that mad old world of romance of which we read. They're very nice too, both of them. I do like Joyce. She's one in a thousand, and Mr. Dysart is just suited to her. They are both thorough! There's no nonsense about them. Now that you have pointed it out to me, I think I never saw two people so much in love with each other as they."

Providentially, she is looking away from him to where a quadrille is forming in the ballroom, so that the deadly look of hatred that adorns his handsome face is unknown to her.

Meantime, Joyce, with that convenient fan recovered, is looking with sad eyes at Dysart.

"Come; the music will soon cease," says she.

"Why do you speak to me like that?" cries he vehemently. "If you don't want to dance, why not say so to me? Why not trust me? Good heavens! if I were your bitterest enemy you could not treat me more distantly. And yet—I would die to make you happy."

"Don't!" says she in a little choking sort of way, turning her face from him. She struggles with herself for a moment, and then, still with her face averted, says meekly: "Thank you, then. If you don't mind, I should rather not dance any more to-night."

"Why didn't you say that at first?" says he, with a last remnant of reproach. "No; there shall be no more dancing to-night for either you or me. A word, Joyce!" turning eagerly toward her, "you won't forget your promise about that walk to-morrow?"

"No. No, indeed."

"Thank you!"

They are sitting very close together, and almost insensibly his hand seeks and finds hers. It was lying idle on her lap, and lifting it, he would have raised it to his lips, but with a sharp, violent action she wrests it from him, and, as a child might, hides it behind her.

"If you would have me believe in you——No, no, not that," says she, a little incoherently, her voice rendering her meaning with difficulty. Dysart, astonished, stands back from her, waiting for something more; but nothing comes, except two large tears, that steal heavily, painfully, down her cheeks.

She brushes them impatiently away.

"Forgive me," she says, somewhat brokenly. "To you, who are so good to me, I am unkind, while to those who are unkind to me I——" She is trying to rally. "It was a mere whim, believe me. I have always hated demonstrations of any sort, and why should you want to kiss my hand?"

"I shouldn't," says he. "If——" His eyes have fallen from her eyes to her lips.

"Never mind," says she; "I didn't understand, perhaps. But why can't you be content with things as they are?"

"Are you content with them?"

"I think so. I have been examining myself, and honestly I think so," says she a little feverishly.

"Well, I'm not," returns he with decision. "You must give me credit for a great private store of amiability, if you imagine that I am satisfied to take things as they now exist—between you and me!"

"You have your faults, you see, as well as another," says she with a frown. "You are persistent! And the worst of it is that you are generally right." She frowns again, but even while frowning glances sideways from under her long lashes with an expression hardly uncivil. "That is the worst crime in the calendar. Be wrong sometimes, an' you love me, it will gain you a world of friends."

"If it could gain me your love in return, I might risk it," says he boldly. "But that is hopeless I'm afraid," shaking his head. "I am too often in the wrong not to know that neither my many frailties nor my few virtues can ever purchase for me the only good thing on which my soul is set."

"I have told you of one fault, now hear another," says she capriciously. "You are too earnest! What," turning upon him passionately, as if a little ashamed of her treatment of him, "is the use of being earnest? Who cares? Who looks on, who gives one moment to the guessing of the meaning that lies beneath? To be in earnest in this life is merely to be mad. Pretend, laugh, jest, do anything, but be what you really are, and you will probably get through the world in a manner, if not satisfactory to yourself, at all events to '*les autres*.'"

"You preach a crusade against yourself," says he gently. "You preach against your own conscience. You are the least deceptive person I know. Were you to follow in the track you lay out for others, the cruelty of it would kill you.

> "To your own self be true,
> And——"

"Yes, yes; I know it all," says she, interrupting him with some irritation. "I wish you knew how—how unpleasant you can be. As I tell you, you are always right. That last dance—it is true—I didn't want to have anything to do with it; but for all that I didn't wish to be told so. I merely suggested it as a means of getting rid of——"

"Miss Maliphant," says Dysart, who is feeling a little sore. The disingenuousness of this remark is patent to her.

"No; Mr. Beauclerk," corrects she, coldly.

"Forgive me," says Dysart quickly, "I shouldn't have said that. Well," drawing a long breath, "we have got rid of them, and may I give you a word of advice? It is disinterested because it is to my own disadvantage. Go to your room—to your bed. You are tired, exhausted. Why wait to be more so. Say you will do as I suggest."

"You want to get rid of me," says she with a little weary smile.

"That is unworthy of an answer," gravely; "but if a 'yes' to it will help you to follow my advice, why, I will say it. Come," rising, "let me take you to the hall."

"You shall have your way," says she, rising too, and following him.

A side door leading to the anteroom on their left, and thus skirting the ballroom without entering it, brings them to the foot of the central staircase.

"Good-night," says Dysart in a low tone, retaining her hand for a moment. All round them is a crowd separated into twos and threes, so that it is impossible to say more than the mere commonplace.

"Good night," returns she in a soft tone. She has turned away from him, but something in the intense longing and melancholy of his eyes compels her to look back again. "Oh, you have been kind! I am not ungrateful," says she with sharp contrition.

"Joyce, Joyce! Let me be the grateful one," returns he. His voice is a mere whisper, but so fraught is it with passionate appeal that it rings in her brain for long hours afterward.

Her eyes fall beneath his. She moves silently away. What can she say to him?

It is with a sense of almost violent relief that she closes the door of her own room behind her, and knows herself to be at last alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

"And vain desires, and hopes dismayed,
And fears that cast the earth in shade,
My heart did fret."

Night is waning! Dies pater, Father of Day, is making rapid strides across the heavens, creating havoc as he goes. Diana faints! the stars grow pale, flinging, as they die, a last soft glimmer across the sky.

Now and again a first call from the birds startles the drowsy air. The wood dove's coo, melancholy sweet—the cheep-cheep of the robin—the hoarse cry of the sturdy crow.

"A faint dawn breaks on yonder sedge,
And broadens in that bed of weeds;
A bright disk shows its radiant edge,
All things bespeak the coming morn,
Yet still it lingers."

As Lady Swansdown and Baltimore descend the stone steps that lead to the gardens beneath, only the swift rush of the tremulous breeze that stirs the branches betrays to them the fact that a new life is at hand.

"You are cold?" says Baltimore, noticing the quick shiver that runs through her.

"No: not cold. It was mere nervousness."

"I shouldn't have thought you nervous."

"Or fanciful?" adds she. "You judged me rightly, and yet—coming all at once from the garish lights within into this cool sweet darkness here, makes one feel in spite of oneself."

"In spite! Would you never willingly feel?"

"Would you?" demands she very slowly.

"Not willingly, I confess. But I have been made to feel, as you know. And you?"

"Would you have a woman confess?" says she, half playfully. "That is taking an unfair advantage, is it not? See," pointing to a seat, "what a charming resting place! I will make one confession to you. I am tired."

"A meagre one! Beatrice," says he suddenly, "tell me this: are all women alike? Do none really feel? Is it all fancy—the mere idle emotion of a moment—the evanescent desire for sensation of one sort or another—of anger, love, grief, pain, that stirs you now and then? Are none of these things lasting with you, are they the mere strings on which you play from time to time, because the hours lie heavy on your hands? It seems to me——"

"It seems to me that you hardly know what you are saying," said Lady Swansdown quickly. "Do you think then that women do not feel, do not suffer as men never do? What wild thoughts torment your brain that you should put forward so senseless a question?—one that has been answered satisfactorily thousands of years ago. All the pain, the suffering of earth lies on the

woman's shoulders; it has been so from the beginning—it shall be so to the end. On being thrust forth from their Eden, which suffered most do you suppose, Adam or Eve?"

"It is an old story," says he gloomily, "and why should you, of all people, back it up? You—who ——"

"Better leave me out of the question."

"You!"

"I am outside your life, Baltimore," says she, laying her hand on the back of the seat beside her, and sinking into it. "Leave me there!"

"Would you bereave me of all things," says he, "even my friends? I thought—I believed, that you at least—understood me."

"Too well!" says she in a low tone. Her hands have met each other and are now clasped together in her lap in a grip that is almost hurtful. Great heavens! if he only knew—could he then probe, and wound, and tempt!

"If you do——" begins he—then stops short, and passing her, paces to and fro before her in the dying light of the moon. Lady Swansdown leaning back gazes at him with eyes too sad for tears—eyes "wild with all regret." Oh! if they two might but have met earlier. If this man—this man in all the world, had been given to her, as her allotment.

"Beatrice!" says he, stopping short before her, "were you ever in love?"

There is a dead silence. Lady Swansdown sinking still deeper into the arm of the chair, looks up at him with strange curious eyes. What does he mean? To her—to put such a question to her of all women! Is he deaf, blind, mad—or only cruel?

A sort of recklessness seizes upon her. Well, if he doesn't know, he shall know, though it be to the loss of her self-respect forever!

"Never," says she, leaning a little forward until the moonbeams gleam upon her snowy neck and arms. "Never—never—until——"

The pause is premeditated. It is eloquence itself! The light of heaven playing on her beautiful face betrays the passion of it—the rich pallor! One hand resting on the back of the seat taps upon the iron work, the other is now in Baltimore's possession.

"Until now——?" suggests he boldly. He is leaning over her. She shakes her head. But in this negative there is only affirmation.

His hand tightens more closely upon hers. The long slender fingers yield to his pressure—nay more—return it; they twine round his.

"If I thought——" begins he in a low, stammering tone—he moves nearer to her, nearer still. Does she move toward him? There is a second's hesitation on his part, and then, his lips meet hers!

It is but a momentary touch, a thing of an instant, but it includes a whole world of meaning. Lady Swansdown has sprung to her feet, and is looking at him with eyes that seem to burn through the mystic darkness. She is trembling in every limb. Her nostrils are dilated. Her haughty mouth is quivering, and there—are there honest, real tears in those mocking eyes?

Baltimore, too, has risen. His face is very white, very full of contrition. That he regrets his action toward her is unmistakable, but that there is a deeper contrition behind—a sense of self-loathing not to be appeased betrays itself in the anguish of his eyes. She had accused him of falsity, most falsely up to this, but now—now——His mind has wandered far away.

There is something so wild in his expression that Lady Swansdown loses sight of herself in the contemplation of it.

"What is it, Baltimore?" asks she, in a low, frightened tone. It rouses him.

"I have offended you beyond pardon," begins he, but more like one seeking for words to say than one afraid of using them. "I have angered you——"

"Do not mistake me," interrupts she quickly, almost fiercely. "I am not angry. I feel no anger—nothing—but that I am a traitor."

"And what am I?"

"Work out your own condemnation for yourself," says she, still with that feverish self-disdain upon her. "Don't ask me to help you. She was my friend, whatever she is now. She trusted me, believed in me. And after all——And you," turning passionately, "you are doubly a traitor, you are a husband."

"In name!" doggedly. He has quite recovered himself now. Whatever torture his secret soul may impress upon him in the future, no one but he shall know.

"It doesn't matter. You belong to her, and she to you."

"That is what she doesn't think," bitterly.

"There is one thing only to be said, Baltimore," says she, after a slight pause. "This must never occur again. I like you, you know that. I——" she breaks off abruptly, and suddenly gives way to a sort of mirthless laughter. "It is a farce!" she says. "Consider my feeling anything. And so virtuous a thing, too, as remorse! Well, as one lives, one learns. If I had seen the light for the first time in the middle of the dark ages, I should probably have ended my days as the prioress of a convent. As it is, I shouldn't wonder if I went in for hospital nursing presently. Pshaw!" angrily, "it is useless lamenting. Let me face the truth. I have acted abominably toward her so far, and the worst of it is"—with a candor that seems to scorch her—"I know if the chance be given me, I shall behave abominably toward her again. I shall leave to-morrow—the day after. One must invent a decent excuse."

"Pray don't leave on Lady Baltimore's account," says he slowly, "she would be the last to care about this. I am nothing to her."

"Is your wish father to that thought?" regarding him keenly.

"No. I assure you. The failing I mention is plain to all the world I should have thought."

"It is not plain to me," still watching him.

"Then learn it," says he. "If ever she loved me, which I now disbelieve (I would that I had let the doubt creep in earlier), it was in a past that now is irretrievably dead. I suppose I wearied her—I confess," with a meagre smile, "I once loved her with all my soul, and heart, and strength—or else she is incapable of knowing an honest affection."

"That is not true," says Lady Swansdown, some generous impulse forcing the words unwillingly through her white lips. "She can love! you must see that for yourself. The child is proof of it."

"Some women are like that," says he gloomily. "They can open wide their hearts to their children, yet close it against the fathers of them. Isabel's whole life is given up to her child: she regards it as hers entirely; she allows me no share in him. Not," eagerly, "that I grudge him one inch the affection she gives him. He has a father worthless enough. Let his mother make it up to him."

"Yet he loves the father best," says Lady Swansdown quickly.

"I hope not," with a suspicion of violence.

"He does, believe me. One can see it. That saintly mother of his has not half the attraction for him that you have. Why, look you, it is the way of the world, why dispute it? Well, well," her triumphant voice deepening to a weary whisper. "When one thinks of it all, she is not too happy." She draws her hand in a little bewildered way across her white brow.

"You don't understand her," says Baltimore frigidly. "She lives in a world of her own. No one would dare penetrate it. Even I—her husband, as you call me in mockery—am outside it. I don't believe she ever cared for me. If she had, do you think she would have given a thought to that infamous story?"

"About Madame Istray?"

"Yes. You, too, heard of it then?"

"Who hasn't heard. Violet Walden was not the one to spare you." She pauses and looks at him, with all her heart in her eyes. "Was there no truth in that story?" asks she at last, her words coming with a little rush.

"None. I swear it! You believe me!" He has come nearer to her and taken her hand in the extremity of this desire to be believed in by somebody.

"I believe you," says she, gently. Her voice is so low that he can catch the words only; the grief and misery in them is unknown to him. Mercifully, too, the moon has gone behind a cloud, a tender preparation for an abdication presently, so that he cannot see the two heartbroken tears that steal slowly down her cheeks.

"That is more than Isabel does," says he, with a laugh that has something of despair in it.

"You tell me, then," says Lady Swansdown, "that you never saw Mme. Istray after your marriage?"

"Never, willingly."

"Oh, willingly!"

"Don't misjudge me. Hear the whole story then—if you must," cries he passionately—"though if you do, you will be the first to hear it. I am tired of being thought a liar!"

"Go on," says she, in a low shocked tone. His singular vehemence has compelled her to understand how severe have been his sufferings. If ever she had doubted the truth of the old story that has wrecked the happiness of his married life she doubts no longer.

"I tell you, you will be the first to hear it," says he, advancing toward her. "Sit down there," pressing her into the garden seat. "I can see you are looking overdone, even by this light. Well——" drawing a long breath and stepping back from her—"I never opened my lips upon this subject except once before. That was to Isabel. And she"—he pauses—"she would not listen. She

believed, then, all things base of me. She has so believed ever since."

"She must be a fool!" says Lady Swansdown impetuously, "she could not——"

"She did, however. She," coldly, "even believed that I could lie to her!"

His face has become ashen; his eyes, fixed upon the ground, seemed to grow there with the intensity of his regard. His breath seems to come with difficulty through his lips.

"Well," says he at last, with a long sigh, "it's all over! The one merciful thing belonging to our life is that there must come, sooner or later, an end to everything. The worst grief has its termination. She has been unjust to me. But you," he lifts his haggard face, "you, perhaps, will grant me a kindlier hearing."

"Tell it all to me, if it will make you happier," says she, very gently. Her heart is bleeding for him. Oh, if she might only comfort him in some way! If—if that other fails him, why should not she, with the passion of love that lies in her bosom, restore him to the warmth, the sweetness of life. That kiss, half developed as it only was, already begins to bear fatal fruit. Unconsciously she permits herself a license in her thoughts of Baltimore hitherto strenuously suppressed.

"There is absurdly little to tell. At that time we lived almost entirely at our place in Hampshire, and as there were business matters connected with the outlying farms found there, that had been grossly neglected during my grandfather's time, I was compelled to run up to town, almost daily. As a rule I returned by the evening train, in time for dinner, but once or twice I was so far delayed that it was out of my power to do it. I laugh at myself now," he looks very far from laughter as he says it, "but I assure you the occasions on which I was compulsorily kept away from my home were——" He pauses, "oh, well, there is no use in being more tragic than one need be. They were, at least, a trouble to me."

"Naturally," says she, coldly.

"I loved her, you see," says Baltimore, in a strange jerky sort of way, as if ashamed of that old sentiment. "She——"

"I quite understand. I have heard all about it once or twice," says Lady Swansdown, with a kind of slow haste, if such a contradiction may be allowed. That he has forgotten her is evident. That she has forgotten nothing is more evident still.

"Well, one day, one of the many days during which I went up to town, after a long afternoon with Goodman and Smale, in the course of which they had told me they would probably require me to call at their office to meet one of the most influential tenants at nine the next morning, I met, on leaving their office, Marchmont—Marchmont of the Tenth, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"He and a couple of other fellows belonging to his regiment were going down to Richmond to dine. Would I come? It was dull in town, toward the close of the season, and I was glad of any invitation that promised a change of programme—anything that would take me away from a dull evening at my club. I made no inquiries; I accepted the invitation, got down in time for dinner, and found Mme. Istray was one of the guests. I——"

He hesitates.

"Go on."

"You are a woman of the world, Beatrice; you will let me confess to you that there had been old passages between me and Mme. Istray—well, I swear to you I had never so much as thought of her since my marriage—nay, since my engagement to Isabel. From that hour my life had been clear as a sheet of blank paper. I had forgotten her; I verily believe she had forgotten me, too. At that dinner I don't think she exchanged a dozen words with me. On my soul," pushing back his hair with a slow, troubled gesture from his brow, "this is the truth."

"And yet——"

"And yet," interrupting her with now a touch of vehement excitement, "a garbled, a most cursedly false account of that dinner was given her. It came round to her ears. She listened to it—believed in it—condemned without a hearing. She, who has sworn, not only at the altar, but to me alone, that she loved me."

"She wronged you terribly," says Lady Swansdown in a low tone.

"Thank you," cried he, a passion of gratitude in his tone. "To be believed in by someone so thoroughly as you believe in me, is to know happiness indeed. Whatever happens, I can count on you as my friend."

"Your friend, always," says she, in a very low voice—a voice somewhat broken. "Come," she says, rising suddenly and walking toward the distant lights in the house.

He accompanies her silently.

Very suddenly she turns to him, and lays her hand upon his arm.

"Be my friend," says she, with a quick access of terrible emotion.

Entreaty and despair mingle in her tone.

"Forever!" returns he, fervently, tightening his grasp on her hand.

"Well," sighing, "it hardly matters. We shall not meet again for a long, long time."

"How is that? Isabel, the last time she condescended to speak to me of her own accord," with an unpleasant laugh, "told me that she had asked you to come here again next February, and that you had accepted the invitation. She, indeed, made quite a point of it."

"Ah! that was a long time ago."

"Weeks do not make a long time."

"Some weeks hold more than years. Yes, you are right; she made quite a point about my coming. Well, she is always very civil."

"She has always perfect manners. She is, as you say, very civil."

"She is proud," coldly.

"You will come?"

"I think not. By that time you will in all probability have made it up with her."

"The very essence of improbability."

"While I—shall not have made it up with my husband."

"One seems quite as possible as the other."

"Oh, no. Isabel is a good woman. You would do well to go back to her. Swansdown is as bad a man as I know, and that," with a mirthless laugh, "is saying a great deal. I should gain nothing by a reconciliation with him. For one thing, an important matter, I have a great deal more money than he has, and, for another, there are no children." Her voice changes here; an indescribable alteration not only hardens, but desolates it. "I have been fortunate there," she says, "if in nothing else in my unsatisfactory life. There is no smallest bond between me and Swansdown. If I could be seriously glad of anything it would be of that. I have nothing belonging to him."

"His name."

"Oh, as for that—does it belong to him? Has he not forfeited a decent right to it a thousand times? No; there is nothing. If there had been a child he would have made a persecution of it—and so I am better off as it is. And yet, there are moments when I envy you that little child of yours. However——"

"Yet if Swansdown were to make an overture——"

"Do not go on. It is of all speculations the most useless. Do not pursue the subject of Swansdown, I entreat you. Let"—with bitter meaning—"'sleeping dogs lie.'"

Baltimore laughs shortly.

"That is severe," says he.

"It is how I feel toward him; the light in which I regard him. If," turning a face to his that is hardly recognizable, so pale it is with ill-suppressed loathing, "he were lying on his deathbed and sent for me, it would give me pleasure to refuse to go to him."

She takes her hand from his arm and motions him to ascend the steps leading into the conservatory.

"But you?" says he, surprised.

"Let me remain here a little while. I am tired. My head aches, I——"

"Let me stay with you."

"No," smiling faintly. "What I want is to be alone. To feel the silence. Go. Do not be uneasy about me. Believe me you will be kind if you do as I ask you."

"It is a command," says he slowly. And slowly, too, he turns away from her.

Seeing him so uncertain about leaving her, she steps abruptly into a dark side path, and finding a chair sinks into it.

The soft breaking of the dawn over the tree tops far away seems to add another pang to the anguish that is consuming her. She covers her face with her hands.

Oh! if it had all been different. Two lives sacrificed! nay, three! For surety Isabel cannot care for him. Oh! if it had been she, she herself—what is there she could not have forgiven him? Nay, she must have forgiven him, because life without him would have been insupportable. If only she might have loved him honorably. If only she might ever love him—successfully—dishonorably!

The thought seems to sting her. Involuntarily she throws up her head and courts the chill winds of dawn that sweep with a cool touch her burning forehead.

She had called her proud. Would she herself, then, be less proud? That Isabel dreads her, half scorns her of late, is well known to her, and yet, with a very passion of pride, would dare her to prove it. She, Isabel, has gone even so far as to ask her rival to visit her again in the early part of the coming year to meet her present friends. So far that pride had carried her. But pride—was pride love? If she herself loved Baltimore, would she, even for pride's sake, entreat the woman he singled out for his attentions to spend another long visit in her country house? And if Isabel does not honestly love him, why then—is he not lawful prey for one who can, who does not love him?

One—who loves him. But he—whom does he love?

Torn by some last terrible thought she starts to her feet, and, as though inaction has become impossible to her, draws her white silken wrap around her, and sweeps rapidly out of all view of the waning Chinese lamps into the gray obscurity of the coming day that lies in the far gardens.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Song have thy day, and take thy fill of light
Before the night be fallen across thy way;
Sing while he may, man hath no long delight."

"What a delicious day!" says Joyce, stopping short on the hill to take a look round her. It is the next day, and indeed far into it. Luncheon is a thing of the past, and both she and Dysart know that it will take them all their time to reach St. Bridget's Hill and be back again for afternoon tea. They had started on their expedition in defiance of many bribes held out to them. For one thing, there was to be a reception at the Court at five; many of those who had danced through last night having been asked to come over late in the afternoon of to-day to talk over the dance itself and the little etceteras belonging to it.

The young members of the Monkton family had been specially invited, too, as a sort of make up to Bertie, the little son of the house, who had been somewhat aggrieved at being sent to bed without his share of the festivities on hand. He had retired to his little cot, indeed, with his arms stuffed full of crackers, but how could crackers and cakes and sweets console any one for the loss of being out at an ungodly hour and seeing a real live dance! The one thing that finally helped him to endure his hard lot was a promise on his mother's part that Tommy and Mabel Monkton should come down next day and revel with him among the glorious ruins of the supper table. The little Monktons had not come, however, when Joyce left for her walk.

"Going out?" Lady Swansdown had said to her, meeting her in the hall, fully equipped for her excursion. "But why, my dear girl? We expect those amusing Burkes in an hour or so, and the Delaneys, and——"

"Yes, why go?" repeats Beauclerk, who has just come up. His manner is friendly in the extreme, yet a very careful observer might notice a strain about it, a determination to be friendly that rather spoils the effect. Her manner toward him last night after his interview with Miss Maliphant in the garden and her growing coldness ever since, has somewhat disconcerted, him mentally. Could she have heard, or seen, or been told of anything? There might, of course, have been a little *contretemps* of some sort. People, as a rule, are so beastly treacherous! "You will make us wretched if you desert us," says he with *empressement*. As he speaks he goes up to her and lets his eyes as well as his lips implore her. Miss Maliphant had left by the early train, so that he is quite unattached, and able to employ his whole battery of fascinations on the subjugation of this refractory person.

"I am sorry. Don't be more wretched than you can help!" says Joyce, with a smile wonderfully unconcerned. "After a dance I want to walk to clear my brain, and Mr. Dysart has been good enough to say he will accompany me."

"Is he accompanying you?" says Beauclerk, with an unpardonable supercilious glance around him as if in search of the absent Dysart.

"You mustn't think him a laggard at his post," says Miss Kavanagh, still smiling, but now in a little provoking way that seems to jest at his pretended suspicion of Dysart's constancy and dissolve it into the thinnest of thin air. "He was here just now, but I sent him to loose the dogs. I like to have them with me, and Lady Baltimore is pleased when they get a run."

"Isabel is always so sympathetic," says he, with a quite new and delightful rush of sympathy toward Isabel. "I suppose," glancing at Joyce keenly, "you would not care for an additional escort? The dogs—and Dysart—will be sufficient?"

"Mr. Dysart and the dogs will be," says she. "Ah! Here he comes," as Dysart appears at the open doorway, a little pack of terriers at his heels. "What a time you've been!" cries she, moving quickly to him. "I thought you would never come. Good-bye, Lady Swansdown; good-bye," glancing casually at Beauclerk. "Keep one teapot for us if you can!"

She trips lightly up the avenue at Dysart's side, leaving Beauclerk in a rather curious frame of mind.

"Yes, she has heard something!" That is his first thought. How to counteract the probable influence of that "something" is the second. A little dwelling upon causes and effects shows him the way. For an effect there is often an antidote!

"Delicious indeed!" says Dysart, in answer to her remark. His answer is, however, a little *distrait*. His determination of last night to bring her here, and compel her to listen to the honest promptings of his heart is still strong within him.

They have now ascended the hill, and, standing on its summit, can look down on the wild deep sea beneath them that lies, to all possible seeming, as calm and passive at their feet as might a thing inanimate.

Yet within its depths what terrible—what mournful tragedies lie! And, as if in contrast, what ecstatic joys! To one it speaks like death itself—to another:

"The bridegroom sea
Is toying with the shore, his wedded bride,
And in the fullness of his marriage joy
He decorates her tawny brow with shells,
Retires a pace to see how fair she looks,
Then, proud, runs up to kiss her."

"Shall we sit here?" says Dysart, indicating a soft mound of grass that overlooks the bay. "You must be tired after last night's dancing."

"I *am* tired," says she, sinking upon the soft cushion that Nature has provided with a little sigh of satisfaction.

"Perhaps I should not have asked—have extracted—a promise from you to come here," says Dysart, with contrition in his tone. "I should have remembered you would be overdone, and that a long walk like this——"

"Would be the very thing to restore me to a proper state of health," she interrupts him, with the prettiest smile. "No, don't pretend you are sorry you brought me here. You know it is the sheerest hypocrisy on your part. You are glad, that you brought me here, I hope, and I"—deliberately—"am glad that you did."

"Do you mean that?" says Dysart, gravely. He had not seated himself beside her, and is now looking down her from a goodly height. "Do you know why I brought you?"

"To bring me back again as fresh as a daisy," suggests she, with a laugh that is spoiled in its birth by a glance from him.

"No, I did not think of you at all. I thought only of myself," says Dysart, speaking a little quickly now. "Call that selfish if you will—and yet——"

He stops short, and comes closer to her. "To think in that way was to think of you too. Joyce, there is at all events one thing you do know—that I love you."

Miss Kavanagh nods her head silently.

"There is one thing, too, that I know," says Dysart now with a little tremble in his voice, "that you do not love me!"

She is silent.

"You are honest," says he, after a pause. "Still"—looking at her—"if there wasn't hope one would know. Though the present is empty for me, I cannot help dwelling on the thought that the future may contain—something!"

"The future is so untranslatable," says she, with a little evasion.

"Tell me this at least," says Dysart, very earnestly, bending over her with the air of one determined to sift his chances to the last grain, "you like me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Better than Courtenay, for example?" with a fleeting smile that fails to disguise the real anxiety he is enduring.

"What an absurd question!"

"Than Dicky Brown?"

"Yes."

But here she lifts her head and gazes at him in a startled way that speaks of quick suspicion. There is something of entreaty, too, in her dark eyes, a desire that he will go no further.

But Dysart deliberately disregards it.

"Than Beauclerk?" asks he in a clear, almost cruel tone.

A horrible red rushes up to dye her pretty cheeks, in spite of all her efforts to subdue it. Great tears of shame and confusion suffuse her eyes. One little reproachful glance she casts at him, and then:

"Of course," says she, almost vehemently, if a little faintly, her eyes sinking to the ground.

Dysart stands before her as if stricken into stone. Then the knowledge that he has hurt her pierces him with a terrible certainty, overcomes all other thoughts, and drives him to repentance.

"I shouldn't have asked you that," says he bluntly.

"No, no!" says she, acquiescing quickly, "and yet," raising an eager, lovely face to his, "I hardly know anything about—about myself. Sometimes I think I like him, sometimes——" She stops abruptly and looks at him with a pained and frightened gaze. "Do you despise me for betraying myself like this?"

"No—I want to hear all about it."

"Ah! That is what I want to hear myself. But who is to tell me? Nature won't. Sometimes I hate him. Last night——"

"Yes, I know. You hated him last night. I don't wish to know why. I am quite satisfied in that you did so."

"But shall I hate him to-morrow? Oh, yes, I think so—I hope so," cries she suddenly. "I am tired of it all. He is not a real person, not one possible to class. He is false—naturally treacherous, and yet ——"

She breaks off again very abruptly, and turns to Dysart as if for help.

"Let us forget him," she says, and then in a little frightened way, "Oh, I wish I could be sure I could forget him!"

"Why can't you?" says Dysart, in his downright way. "It means only a strong effort after all. If you feel honestly," with an earnest glance at her, "like that toward him, you must be mad to give him even a corner in your heart."

"That is it," says she, "there the puzzle begins. I don't know if he ever has a corner in my heart. He attracts me, but attraction is not affection, and the heart holds only love and hatred. Indifference is nothing."

"You can get rid of him finally," says Dysart, boldly, "by giving yourself to me. That will kill all ——"

All he may be going to say is killed on his lips at this moment by two little wild shrieks of joy that sound right behind his head. Both he and Joyce turn abruptly in its direction—he with a sense of angry astonishment, she with a fell knowledge of its meaning. It is, indeed, no surprise to her when Tommy and Mabel appear suddenly from behind the rock just close to them, that hides the path in part, and precipitates themselves into her arms.

"We saw you, we saw you!" gasps Tommy, breathless from his run up the hill: "we saw you far away down there on the road, and we told Bridgie" (the maid) "that we'd run up, and she said 'cut along,' so here we are."

"You are, indeed," says Dysart, with feeling.

"We knew you'd be glad to see us," goes on Tommy to Joyce in the beautiful roar he always adopts when excited; "you haven't been home for years, and Bridgie says that's because you are going to be married to——"

"Get up, Tommy, you are too heavy, and, besides, I want to kiss Mabel," says Tommy's aunt with prodigious haste and a hot cheek.

"But mammy says you're a silly Billy," says Mabel in her shrill treble, "an' that——"

"Mammy is a shockingly rude person," says Mr. Dysart, hurrying to break into the dangerous confidence, no matter at what cost, even at the expense of the adored mammy. His remark is taken very badly.

"She's not," says Tommy, glowering at him. "Father says she's an angel, and he knows. I heard him say it, and angels are never rude!"

"'Twas after he made her cry about something," says Mabel, lifting her little flower-like face to Dysart's in a miniature imitation of her brother's indignation. "She was boo-booing like anything, and then father got sorry—oh!—dreadful sorry—and he said she was an angel, and she said——"

"Oh, Mabel!" says Joyce, weakly, "you know you oughtn't to say such——"

"Well, 'twas your fault, 'twas all about you," says Tommy, defiantly. "Why don't you come home? Father says you ought to come, and mammy says she doesn't know which of 'em it'll be; and

father says it won't be any of them, and—what's it all about?" turning a frankly inquisitive little face up to hers. "They wouldn't tell us, and we want to know which of 'em it will be."

"Yes, an' is it jints?" demands Mabel, who probably means giants, and not cold meats.

"I don't know what she means," says Miss Kavanagh, coldly.

"I say, you two," says Mr. Dysart, brilliantly, "wouldn't you like to run a race? Bridget must be tired of waiting for you down there at the end of the hill, and——"

"She isn't waiting, she's talking to Mickey Daly," says Tommy.

"Oh, I see. Well, look here. I bet you, Tommy, strong as you look, Mabel can outrun you down the hill."

"She! she!" cries Tommy, indignantly; "I could beat her in a minute."

"You can't," cries Mabel in turn. "Nurse says I'm twice the child that you are."

"Your legs are as short as a pin," roars Tommy; "you couldn't run."

"I can. I can. I can," says Mabel, on the verge of a violent flood of tears.

"Well, we'll see," says Mr. Dysart, who now begins to think he has thrown himself away on a silly Hussar regiment, when he ought to have taken rank as a distinguished diplomat. "Come, I'll start you both down the hill, and whichever reaches Bridget first wins the day."

Instantly both children spring to the front of the path.

"You're standing before me, Tommy."

"No, I'm not."

"You're cheating—you are!"

"Cheat yourself! Mr. Dysart, ain't I all right?"

"I think you should give her a start; she's the girl, you know," says Dysart. "There now, go. That's very good. Five yards, Tommy, is a small allowance for a little thing like Mabel. Steady now, you two! One—Good gracious, they're off," says he, turning to Miss Kavanagh with a sigh of relief mingled with amusement. "They had no idea of waiting for more than one signal. I hope they will meet this Bridget, and get back to their mother."

"They are not going to her just now. They are going on to the Court to spend the afternoon with Bertie," says Joyce; "Barbara told me so last night. Dear things! How sweet they looked!"

"They are the prettiest children I know," says Dysart—a little absent perhaps. He falls into silence for a moment or two, and then suddenly looks at her. He advances a step.

CHAPTER XIX.

> "A continual battle goes on in a child's mind between what it knows and what it comprehends."

"Well?" says he.

He advances even nearer, and dropping on a stone close to her, takes possession of one of her hands.

"As you can't make up your mind to him; and, as you say, you like me, say something more."

"More?"

"Yes. A great deal more. Take the next move. Say—boldly—that you will marry me!"

Joyce grows a little pale. She had certainly been prepared for this speech, had been preparing herself for it all the long weary wakeful night, yet now that she hears it, it seems as strange, as terrible, as though it had never suggested itself to her in its vaguest form.

"Why should I say that?" says she at last, stammering a little, and feeling somewhat disingenuous. She had known, yet now she is trying to pretend that she did not know.

"Because I ask you. You see I put the poorest reason at first, and because you say I am not hateful to you, and because——"

"Well?"

"Because, when a man's last chance of happiness lies in the balance, he will throw his very soul into the weighing of it—and knowing this, you may have pity on me."

As though pressed down by some insupportable weight, the girl rises and makes a little curious gesture as if to free herself from it. Her face, still pale, betrays an inward struggle. After all, why cannot she give herself to him? Why can't she love him? He loves her; love, as some poor fool says, begets love.

And he is honest. Yes, honest! A pang shoots through her breast. That, when all is told, is the principal thing. He is not uncertain—untrustworthy—double-faced, as *some* men are. Again that cruel pain contracts her heart. To be able to believe in a person, to be able to trust implicitly in each lightest word, to read the real meaning in every sentence, to see the truth shining in the clear eyes, this is to know peace and happiness; and yet—

"You know all," says she, looking up at him, her eyes compressed, her brow frowning; "I am uncertain of myself, nothing seems sure to me, but if you wish it——"

"Wish it!" clasping her hands closer.

"There is this to be said, then. I will promise to answer you this day twelve-month."

"Twelve months," says he, with consternation; his grasp on her hands loosens.

"If the prospect frightens or displeases you, there is nothing more to be said," rejoins she coldly. It is she who is calm and composed, he is nervous and anxious.

"But a whole year!"

"That is nothing," says she, releasing her hands, with a little determined show of strength, from his. "It is for you to decide. I don't care!"

Perhaps she hardly grasps the cruelty that lies in this half-impatient speech, until she sees Dysart's face flush painfully.

"You need not have said that," says he. "I know it. I am nothing to you really." He pauses, and then says again in a low tone, "Nothing."

"Oh, you mustn't feel so much!" cries she, as if tortured. "It is folly to feel at all in this world. What's the good of it. And to feel about me, I am not worth it. If you would only bear that in mind, it might help you."

"If I bore that in mind I should not want to make you my wife!" returns he steadily, gravely. "Think as you will yourself, you do not shake my faith in you. Well," with a deep breath, "I accept your terms. For a year I shall feel myself bound to you (though that is a farce, for I shall always be bound to you, soul and body) while you shall hold yourself free, and try to——"

"No, no. We must both be equal—both free, while I—" she stops short, coloring warmly, and laughing, "what is it I am to try to do?"

"To love me!" replies he, with infinite sadness in look and tone.

"Yes," says Joyce slowly, and then again meditatively, "yes." She lifts her eyes presently and regards him strangely. "And if all my trying should not succeed? If I never learn to love you?"

"Why, then it is all over. This hope of mine is at an end," say he, so calmly, yet with such deep melancholy, such sad foreboding, that her heart is touched.

"Oh! it is a hope of mine too," says she quickly. "If it were not would I listen to you to-day? But you must not be so downhearted; let the worst come to the worst, you will be as well off as you are at this instant."

He shakes his head.

"Does hope count for nothing, then?"

"You would compel me to love you," says she, growing the more vexed as she grows the more sorry for him. "Would you have me marry you even if I did not love you?" Her soft eyes have filled with tears, there is a suspicion of reproach in her voice.

"No. I suppose not."

He half turns away from her. At this moment a sense of despair falls on him. She will never care for him, never, never. This proposed probation is but a mournful farce, a sorry clinging to a hope that is built on sand. When in the future she marries, as so surely she will, he will not be her husband. Why not give in at once? Why fight with the impossible? Why not break all links (frail as they are sweet), and let her go her way, and he his, while yet there is time? To falter is to court destruction.

Then all at once a passionate reaction sets in. Joyce, looking at him, sees the light of battle, the warmth of love the unconquerable, spring into his eyes. No, he will not cave in! He will resist to the last! dispute every inch of the ground, and if finally only defeat is to crown his efforts still—— And why should defeat be his? Be it Beauclerk or another, whoever declares himself his rival shall find him a formidable enemy to overcome.

"Joyce," says he quickly, turning to her and grasping her hands, "give me my chance. Give me those twelve months; give me your thoughts now and then while they last. I brought you here to-

day to say all this knowing we should be alone, and without——"

"Tommy?" says she, with a little laugh.

"Oh, well! You must confess I got rid of him," says he, smiling too, and glad in his heart to find her so cheerful. "I think if you look into it, that my stratagem, the inciting him to the overcoming of his sister in that race, was the work of a diplomatist of the first water. I quite felt that——"

A war whoop behind him dissolves his self-gratulations into nothing. Here comes Tommy the valiant, triumphant, puffed beyond all description with pride and want of breath.

"I beat her, I beat her," shrieks he, with the last note left in his tuneful pipe. He staggers the last yard or two and falls into Joyce's arms, that are opened wide to receive him. Who shall say he is not a happy interlude? Evidently Joyce regards him as such.

"I came back to tell you," says Tommy, recovering himself a little. "I knew," with the fearless confidence of childhood, "that you'd be longing to know if I beat her, and I did. She's down there how with Bridgie," pointing to the valley beneath, "and she's mad with me because I didn't let her win."

"You ought to go back to her," says Dysart, "she'll be madder if you don't."

"She won't. She's picking daisies now."

"But Bridget will want you."

"No," shaking his lovely little head. "Bridgie said: 'ye may go, sir, an' ye needn't be in a hurry back, me an' Mickey Daily have a lot to say about me mother's daughter.'"

It would be impossible to describe the accuracy with which Tommy describes Bridget's tone and manner.

"Oh! I daresay," says Mr. Dysart. "Me mother's daughter must be a truly enthralling person."

"I think Tommy ought to be educated for the stage," says Joyce in a little whisper.

"He'll certainly make his mark wherever he goes," says Dysart, laughing. "Tommy," after a careful examination of Monkton, Junior's, seraphic countenance, "don't you think you ought to take your sister on to the Court?"

"So I will," says Tommy, "in a minute or two." He has climbed into Joyce's lap, and is now sitting on her with his arms round her neck. To make love to a young woman and to induce her to marry you with a barnacle of this sort hanging round her suggests difficulties. Mr. Dysart waits. "All things come to those who wait," says a wily old proverb. But Dysart proves this proverb a swindle.

"Now, Tommy," says he, "the two minutes are up."

"I don't care," says Tommy. "I'm tired, and Bridgie said I needn't hurry."

"The charms of Mr. Mickey Daly are no doubt great," says Dysart, mildly, "yet I think Bridget must by this time be aware that she wasn't sent out by your mother to tattle to him, but to take you and your sister to play with Bertie. Here, Tommy," decisively, "get off your aunt's lap and run away."

"But why?" demands Tommy, aggressively. "What harm am I doing?"

"You are tiring your aunt, for one thing."

"I'm not! She likes to have me here," defiantly. "I ride a 'cock horse' every night when she's at home, don't I, Joyce? I wish you'd go away," wrathfully, "because then Joyce would come home and play with us again. 'Tis you," glaring at him with deep-seated anger in his eyes, "who are keeping her here!"

"Oh, no; you are wrong there," says Dysart with a sad smile. "I could not keep her anywhere, she would not stay with me. But really, Tommy, you know you ought to go on to the Court. Poor little Bertie is looking out for you eagerly. See," plunging his hand into his pocket, "here is half a crown for you to spend on lollipops. I'll give it to you if you'll go back to Bridget."

Tommy's eyes brighten. But as quickly the charming blue in them darkens again. There is no tuck shop between this and the Court.

"'Tisn't any good," says he mournfully, "the shop's away down there," pointing vaguely backward on the journey he has come.

"You look strong in wind and limb; there is no reason to believe that the morrow's sun may not dawn on you," says Mr. Dysart. "And then think, Tommy, think what a joy you will be to old Molly Brien."

"Molly gives me four bull's-eyes for a penny," says Tommy reflectively. "That's two to Mabel and two to me, because mammy says baby mustn't have any for fear she'd choke. If there's four for a penny, how many is there for this?" holding out the half crown that lies upon his little brown shapely palm.

"That's a sum," says Mr. Dysart. "Tommy, you're a cruel boy;" and having struggled with it for a moment, he says "one hundred and twenty."

"No!" says Tommy in a voice faint with hopeful unbelief. "Joyce, 'tisn't true, is it?"

"Quite true," says Joyce. "Just fancy, Tommy, one hundred and twenty bull's-eyes, all in one day!"

There is such a genuine support of his desire to get rid of Tommy in her tone that Dysart's heart rises within him.

"Tie it into my hankercher," says Tommy, without another second's hesitation. "Tie it tight, or it'll slip out and I'll lose it. Good-bye, and thank you, Mr. Dysart," thrusting a hot little fist into his. "I'll keep some of the hundred and twenty ones for you and Joyce."

He rushes away down the hill, eager to tell his grand news to Mabel, and presently Joyce and Dysart are alone again.

"You see you were not so clever a diplomatist as you thought yourself," says Joyce, smiling faintly; "Tommy came back."

"Tommy and I have one desire in common; we both want to be with you."

"Could you be bought off like Tommy?" says she, half playfully. "Oh, no! Half a crown would not be good enough."

"Would all the riches the world contains be good enough?" says he in a voice very low, but full of emotion. "You know it would not. But you, Joyce—twelve months is a long time. You may see others—if not Beauclerk—others—and——"

"Money would not tempt me," says the girl slowly. "If money were your rival, you would indeed be safe. You ought to know that."

"Still—Joyce——" He stops suddenly. "May I think of you as Joyce? I have called you so once or twice, but——"

"You may always call me so," says she gently, if indifferently. "All my friends call me so, and you—are my friend, surely!"

The very sweetness of her manner, cold as ice as it is, drives him to desperation.

"Not your friend—your lover!" says he with sudden passion. "Joyce, think of all that I have said—all you nave promised. A small matter to you perhaps—the whole world to me. You will wait for me for twelve months. You will try to love me. You——"

"Yes, but there is something more to be said," cries the girl, springing to her feet as if in violent protest, and confronting him with a curious look—set—determined—a little frightened perhaps.

CHAPTER XX.

"'I thought love had been a joyous thing,' quoth my uncle Toby.'"

"He hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue is the clapper.
For what his heart thinks his tongue speaks."

"More?" says Dysart startled by her expression, and puzzled as well.

"Yes!" hurriedly. "This!" The very nervousness that is consuming her throws fire into her eyes and speech. "During all these long twelve months I shall be free. Quite free. You forgot to put that in! You must remember that! If—if I should, after all this thinking, decide on not having anything to do with you—you," vehemently, "will have no right to reproach me. Remember," says she going up to him and laying her hand upon his arm while the blood receding from her face leaves her very white; "remember should such a thing occur—and it is very likely," slowly, "I warn you of that—you are not to consider yourself wronged or aggrieved in any way."

"Why should you talk to me in this way?" begins he, aggrieved now at all events.

"You must recollect," feverishly, "that I have made you no promise. Not one. I refuse even to look upon this matter as a serious thing. I tell you honestly," her dark eyes gleaming with nervous excitement, "I don't believe I ever shall so look at it. After all," pausing, "you will do well if you now put an end to this farce between us; and tell me to take myself and my dull life out of yours forever."

"I shall never tell you that," in a low tone.

"Well, well," impatiently; "I have warned you. It will not be my fault if——O! it is foolish of you!" she blurts out suddenly. "I have told you I don't understand myself: and still you waste yourself—you throw yourself away. In the end you will be disappointed in me, if not in one way, then in

another. It hurts me to think of that. There is time still; let us be friends—friends——" Her hands are tightly clasped, she looks at him with a world of entreaty in her beautiful eyes. "Friends, Felix!" breathes she softly.

"Let things rest as they are, I beseech you," says he, taking her hand and holding it in a tight grasp. "The future—who can ever say what that great void will bring us. I will trust to it; and if only loss and sorrow be my portion, still——As for friendship, Joyce; whatever happens I shall be your friend and lover."

"Well—you quite know," says the girl, almost sullenly.

"Quite. And I accept the risk. Do not be angry with me, my beloved." He lifts the hand he holds and presses it to his lips, wondering always at the coldness of it. "You are free, Joyce; you desire it so, and I desire it, too. I would not hamper you in any way."

"I should not be able to endure it, if—afterward—I thought you were reproaching me," says she, with a little weary smile.

"Be happy about that," says he: "I shall never reproach you." He is silent for a moment; her last speech has filled him with thoughts that presently grow into extremely happy ones: unless—unless she liked him—cared for him, in some decided, if vague manner, would his future misery be of so much importance to her? Oh! surely not! A small flood of joy flows over him. A radiant smile parts his lips. The light of a coming triumph that shall gird and glorify his whole life illumines his eyes.

She regarding him grows suddenly uneasy.

"You—you fully understand," says she, drawing back from him.

"Oh, you have made me do that," says he, but his radiant smile still lingers.

"Then why," mistrustfully, "do you look so happy?" She draws even further away from him. It is plain she resents that happiness.

"Is there not reason?" says he. "Have you not let me speak, and having spoken, do you not still let me linger near you? It is more than I dared hope for! Therefore, poor as is my chance, I rejoice now. Do not forbid me. I may have no reason to rejoice in the future. Let me, then, have my day."

"It grows very late," says Miss Kavanagh abruptly. "Let us go home."

Silently they turn and descend the hill. Halfway down he pauses and looks backward.

"Whatever comes of it," says he, "I shall always love this spot. Though, if the year's end leave me desolate, I hope I shall never see it again."

"It is unlucky to rejoice too soon," says she, in a low whisper.

"Oh! don't say that word 'Rejoice.' How it reminds me of you. It ought to belong to you. It does. You should have been called 'Rejoice' instead of 'Joyce'; they have cut off half your name. To see you is to feel new life within one's veins."

"Ah! I said you didn't know me," returns she sadly.

Meantime the hours have flown; evening is descending. It is all very well for those who, traveling up and down romantic hills, can find engrossing matters for conversation in their idle imaginings of love, or their earnest belief therein, but to the ordinary ones of the earth, mundane comforts are still of some worth.

Tea, the all powerful, is now holding high revelry in the library at the Court. Round the cosy tables, growing genial beneath the steam of the many old Queen Anne "pots," the guests are sitting singly or in groups.

"What delicious little cakes!" says Lady Swansdown, taking up a smoking morsel of cooked butter and flour from the glowing tripod beside her.

"You like them?" says Lady Baltimore in her slow, earnest way. "So does Joyce. She thinks they are the nicest cakes in the world. By the by, where is Joyce?"

"She went out for a walk at twenty minutes after two," says Beauclerk. He has pulled out his watch and is steadily consulting it.

"And it is now twenty minutes after five," says Lady Swansdown, maliciously, who detests Beauclerk and who has read his relations with Joyce as clear as a book. "How she must have enjoyed herself!"

"Yes; but where?" says Lady Baltimore anxiously. Joyce has been left in her charge, and, apart from that, she likes the girl well enough, to be uneasy about her when occasion arises.

"With whom would be a more appropriate question," says Dicky Browne, who, as usual, is just where he ought not to be.

"Oh, I know where she is," cries a little, shrill voice from the background. It comes from Tommy, and from that part of the room where Tommy and Mabel and little Bertie are having a game behind the window curtains. Blocks, dolls, kitchens, farm yards, ninepins—all have been given to them as a means of keeping them quiet. One thing only has been forgotten: the fact that the human voice divine is more attractive to them, more replete with delightful mystery, fuller of enthralling possibilities than all the toys that ever yet were made.

"Thomas, are you fully alive to the responsibilities to which you pledge yourself?" demands Mr. Browne severely.

"What?" says Tommy.

"Do you pledge yourself to declare where Miss Kavanagh is now?"

"Is it Joyce?" says Tommy, coming forward and standing undaunted in his knickerbockers and an immaculate collar that defies suspicion.

"Yes—Joyce," says Mr. Browne, who never can hold his tongue.

"Well, I know." Tommy pauses, and an unearthly silence falls on the assembled company. Half the county is present, and as Tommy, in the character of *reconteur*, is widely known and deservedly dreaded, expectation spreads itself among his audience.

Lady Baltimore moves uneasily, and for once Dicky Browne feels as if he should like to sink into his boot.

"She's up on the top of the hill with Mr. Dysart," says Tommy, and no more. Lady Baltimore sighs with relief, and Mr. Browne feels now as if he should like to give Tommy something.

"How do you know?" asks Beauclerk, as though he finds it impossible to repress the question.

"Because I saw her there," says Tommy, "when Mabel and me was coming here. I like Mr. Dysart, don't you?" addressing Beauclerk specially. "He is a very kind sort of man. He gave me half a crown."

"For what, Tommy?" asks Baltimore, idly, to whom Tommy is an unfailing joy.

"To go away and leave him alone with Joyce," says Tommy, with awful distinctness.

Tableau!

Lady Baltimore lets her spoon fall into her saucer, making a little quick clatter. Everybody tries to think of something to say; nobody succeeds.

Mr. Browne, who is evidently choking, is mercifully delivered by beneficent nature from a sudden death. He gives way to a loud and sonorous sneeze.

"Oh, Dicky! How funny you do sneeze," says Lady Swansdown. It is a safety valve. Everybody at once affects to agree with her, and universal laughter makes the room ring.

"Tommy, I think it is time for you and Mabel to go home," says Lady Baltimore. "I promised your mother to send you back early. Give her my love, and tell her I am so sorry she couldn't come to me to-day, but I suppose last night's fatigue was too much for her."

"'Twasn't that," says Tommy; "'twas because cook——"

"Yes, yes; of course. I know," says Lady Baltimore, hurriedly, afraid of further revelations. "Now, say good-bye, and, Bertie, you can go as far as the first gate with them."

The children make their adieus, Tommy reserving Dicky Browne for a last fond embrace.

"Good-bye, old man! So-long!"

"What's that?" says Tommy, appealing to Beauclerk for information.

"What's what?" says Beauclerk, who isn't in his usual amiable mood.

"What's the meaning of that thing Dicky said to me?"

"'So-long?' Oh that's Browne's charming way of saying good-bye."

"Oh!" says Tommy, thoughtfully. He runs it through his busy brain, and brings it out at the other end satisfactorily translated. "I know," says he: "Go long! That's what he meant! But I think," indignantly, "he needn't be rude, anyway."

The children have hardly gone when Joyce and Dysart enter the room.

"I hope I'm not dreadfully late," cries Joyce, carelessly, taking off her cap, and giving her head a little light shake, as if to make her pretty soft hair fall into its usual charming order. "I have no idea what the time is."

"Broken your watch, Dysart?" says Beauclerk, in a rather nasty tone.

"Come and sit here, dearest, and have your tea," says Lady Baltimore, making room on the lounge beside her for Joyce, who has grown a little red.

"It is so warm here," says she, nervously, that one remark of Beauclerk's having, somehow, disconcerted her. "If—if I might——"

"No, no; you mustn't go upstairs for a little while," says Lady Baltimore, with kindly decision. "But you may go into the conservatory if you like," pointing to an open door off the library, that leads into a bower of sweets. "It is cooler there."

"Far cooler," says Beauclerk, who has followed Joyce with a sort of determination in his genial air. "Let me take you there, Miss Kavanagh."

It is impossible to refuse. Joyce, coldly, almost disdainfully and with her head held higher than usual, skirts the groups that line the walls on the western side of the room and disappears with him into the conservatory.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Who dares think one thing and another tell,
My heart detests him as the gates of hell."

"A little foolish going for that walk, wasn't it?" says he, leading her to a low cushioned chair over which a gay magnolia bends its white blossoms. His manner is innocence itself; ignorance itself would perhaps better express it. He has decided on ignoring everything; though a shrewd guess that she saw something of his passages with Miss Maliphant last night has now become almost a certainty. "I thought you seemed rather played out last night—fatigued—done to death. I assure you I noticed it. I could hardly," with deep and affectionate concern, "fail to notice anything that affected you."

"You are very good!" says Miss Kavanagh icily. Mr. Beauclerk lets a full minute go by, and then——

"What have I done to merit that tone from you?" asks he, not angrily; only sorrowfully. He has turned his handsome face full on hers, and is regarding her with proud, reproachful eyes. "It is idle to deny," says he, with some emotion, half of which, to do him justice, is real, "that you are changed to me; something has happened to alter the feelings of—of—friendship—that I dared to hope you entertained for me. I had hoped still more, Joyce—but——What has happened?" demands he suddenly, with all the righteous strength of one who, free from guilt, resents accusation of it.

"Have I accused you?" says she, coldly.

"Yes, a thousand times, yes. Do you think your voice alone can condemn? Your eyes are even crueller judges."

"Well I am sorry," says she, faintly smiling. "My eyes must be deceivers then. I bear you no malice, believe me."

"So be it," says he, with an assumption of relief that is very well done. "After all, I have worried myself, I daresay, very unnecessarily. Let us talk of something else, Miss Maliphant, for example," with a glance at her, and a pleasant smile. "Nice girl eh? I miss her."

"She went early this morning, did she?" says Joyce, scarcely knowing what to say. Her lips feel a little dry; an agonized certainty that she is slowly growing crimson beneath his steady gaze brings the tears to her eyes.

"Too early. I quite hoped to be up to see her off, but sleep had made its own of me and I failed to wake. Such a good, genuine girl! Universal favorite, don't you think? Very honest, and very," breaking into an apparently irrepressible laugh, "ugly! Ah! well now," with smiling self condemnation, "that's really a little too bad; isn't it?"

"A great deal too bad," says Joyce, gravely. "I shouldn't speak of her if I were you."

"But why, my dear girl?" with arched brows and a little gesture of his handsome hands. "I allow her everything but beauty, and surely it would be hypocrisy to mention that in the same breath with her."

"It isn't fair—it isn't sincere," says the girl almost passionately. "Do you think I am ignorant of everything, that I did not see you with her last night in the garden? Oh!" with a touch of scorn that is yet full of pain, "you should not. You should not, indeed!"

In an instant he grows confused. Something in the lovely horror of her eyes undoes him. Only for an instant—after that he turns the momentary confusion to good account.

"Ah! you did see her, then, poor girl!" says he. "Well, I'm sorry about that for her sake."

"Why for her sake?" still regarding him with that charming disdain. "For your own, perhaps, but

why for hers?"

Beauclerk pauses: then rising suddenly, stands before her. Grief and gentle indignation sit upon his massive brow. He looks the very incarnation of injured rectitude.

"Do you know, Joyce, you have always been ready to condemn, to misjudge me," says he in a low, hurt tone. "I have often noticed it, yet have failed to understand why it is. I was right, you see, when I told myself last night and this morning that you were harboring unkindly thoughts toward me. You have not been open with me, you have been willfully secretive, and, believe me, that is a mistake. Candor, complete and perfect, is the only great virtue that will steer one clear through all the shoals and rocks of life. Be honest, above board, and, I can assure you, you will never regret it. You accused me just now of insincerity. Have you been sincere?"

There is a dead pause. He allows it to last long enough to make it dramatic, and to convince himself he has impressed her, and then, with a very perceptible increase of dignified pain in his voice, he goes on.

"I feel I ought not to explain under the circumstances, but as it is to you"—heavy emphasis, and a second affected silence. "You have heard, perhaps, of Miss Maliphant's cousin in India?"

"No," says Joyce, after racking her brain in vain for some memory of the cousin question. And, indeed, it would have been nothing short of a miracle if she could have remembered anything about that apocryphal person.

"You will understand that I speak to you in the strictest confidence," says Beauclerk, earnestly: "I wouldn't for anything you could offer me, that it should get back to that poor girl's ears that I had been discussing her and the most sacred feelings of her heart. Well, there is a cousin, and she—you may have noticed that she and I were great friends?"

"Yes," says Joyce, whose heart is beating now to suffocation. Oh! has she wronged him? Does she still wrong him? Is this vile, suspicious feeling within her one to be encouraged? Is all this story of his, this simple explanation—false—false?

"I was, indeed, a sort of confidant of hers. Poor dear girl! it was a relief to her to talk to somebody."

"There were others."

"But none here who knew him."

"You knew him then? Is his name Maliphant, too?" asks Joyce, ashamed of her cross-examination, yet driven to it by some power beyond her control.

"You mustn't ask me that," says Beauclerk playfully. "There are some things I must keep even from you. Though you see I go very far to satisfy your unjust suspicions of me. You can, however, guess a good deal; you—saw her crying?"

"She was not crying," says Joyce slowly, a little puzzled. Miss Maliphant had seemed at the moment in question well pleased.

"No! Not when you saw her? Ah! that must have been later then," with a sigh, "you see now I am betraying more than I should. However, I can depend upon your silence. It will be a small secret between you and me."

"And Miss Maliphant," says Joyce, coldly. "As for me, what is the secret?"

"You haven't understood? Not really? Well, between you and me and the wall," with delightful gaiety, "I think she gives a thought or two to that cousin. I fancy," whispering, "she is even in—eh? you know."

"I don't," says Joyce slowly, who is now longing to believe in him, and yet is held steadily backward by some strong feeling.

"I believe she is in love with him," says Beauclerk, still in a mysterious whisper. "But it is a sore subject," with an expressive frown. "Not best pleased when it is mentioned to her. Mauvais sujet, you understand. But girls are often foolish in that way. Better say nothing about it."

"I shall say nothing, of course," says Joyce. "Why should I? It is nothing to me, though I am sorry for her."

Yet as she says this, a doubt arises in her mind as to whether she need be sorry. Is there a cousin in India? Could that big, jolly, lively girl, who had come into the conservatory with Beauclerk last night, with the light of triumph in her eyes, be the victim of an unhappy love affair? Should she write and ask her if there is a cousin in India? Oh, no, no! She could not do that! How horrible, how hateful to distrust him like this! What a detestable mind must be hers. And besides, why dwell so much upon it. Why not accept him as a pleasing acquaintance. One with whom to pass a pleasant hour now and then. Why ever again regard him as a possible lover!

A little shudder runs through her. At this moment it seems to her that she could never really have so regarded him. And yet only last night——

And now. What is it? Does she still doubt? Will that strange, curious, tormenting feeling that once she felt for him return no more. Is it gone forever? Oh! that it might be so!

CHAPTER XXII.

"So over violent, or over civil!"
"A man so various."

"Dull looking day," says Dicky Browne, looking up from his broiled kidney to glare indignantly through the window at the gray sky.

"It can't be always May," says Beauclerk cheerfully, whose point it is to take ever a lenient view of things. Even to heaven itself he is kind, and holds out a helping hand.

"I expect it is we ourselves who are dull," says Lady Baltimore, looking round the breakfast table, where now many vacant seats make the edges bare. Yesterday morning Miss Maliphant left. To-day the Clontarfs, and one or two strange men from the barracks in the next town. Desertion indeed seems to be the order of the day. "We grow very small," says she. "How I miss people when they go away."

"Do you mean that as a liberal bribe for the getting rid of the rest of us," says Dicky, who is now devoting himself to the hot scones. "If so, let me tell you it isn't good enough. I shall stay here until you choose to cross the channel. I don't want to be missed."

"That will be next week," says Lady Baltimore. "I do beseech all here present not to forsake me until then."

"I must deny your prayer," says Lady Swansdown. "These tiresome lawyers of mine say they must see me on Thursday at the latest."

"I shall meet you in town at Christmas, however," says Lady Baltimore, making the remark a question.

"I hardly think so. I have promised the Barings to join them in Italy about then."

"Well, here then in February."

Lady Swansdown smiles at her hostess, but makes no audible reply.

"I suppose we ought to do something to-day," says Lady Baltimore presently, in a listless tone. It is plain to everybody, however, that in reality she wants to do nothing. "Suggest something, Dicky."

"Skittles," says that youth, without hesitation. Very properly, however, no one takes any notice of him.

"I was thinking that if we went to 'Connor's Cross,' it would be a nice drive," says Lady Baltimore, still struggling with her duties as a hostess. "What do you say, Beatrice?"

"I pray you excuse me," says Lady Swansdown. "As I leave to-morrow, I must give the afternoon to the answering of several letters, and to other things besides."

"Connor's Cross," says Joyce, idly. "I've so often heard of it. Yet, oddly enough, I have never seen it; it is always the way, isn't it, whenever one lives very close to some celebrated spot."

"Celebrated or not, it is at least lovely," says Lady Baltimore. "You really ought to see it."

"I'll drive you there this afternoon, Miss Kavanagh," says Beauclerk, in his friendly way, that in public has never a tincture of tenderness about it. "We might start after luncheon. It is only about ten miles off. Eh?" to Baltimore.

"Ten," briefly.

"I am right then," equably; "we might easily do it in a little over an hour."

"Hour and a half with best horse in the stables. Bad road," says Baltimore.

"Even so we shall get there and back in excellent time," says Beauclerk, deaf to his brother-in-law's gruffness. "Will you come, Miss Kavanagh?"

"I should like it," says Joyce, in a hesitating sort of way; "but——"

"Then why not go, dear?" says Lady Baltimore kindly. "The Morroghs of Creaghstown live not half a mile from it, and they will give you tea if you feel tired; Norman is a very good whip, and will be sure to have you back here in proper time."

Dysart lifting his head looks full at Joyce.

"At that rate——" says she, smiling at Beauclerk.

"It is settled then," says Beauclerk pleasantly. "Thank you ever so much for helping me to get rid of my afternoon in so delightful a fashion."

"It is going to rain. It will be a wet evening," says Dysart abruptly.

"Oh, my dear fellow! You can hardly be called a weather prophet," says Beauclerk banteringly. "You ought to know that a settled gray sky like that seldom means rain."

No more is said about it then, and no mention is made of it at luncheon. At half-past two precisely, however, a dog cart comes round to the hall door. Joyce running lightly down stairs, habited for a drive, meets Dysart at the foot of the staircase.

"Do not go," says he abruptly.

"Not go—now," with a glance at her costume.

"I didn't believe you would go," says he vehemently. "I didn't believe it possible—or I should have spoken sooner. Nevertheless, at this last moment, I entreat you to give it up."

"Impossible," says she curtly, annoyed by his tone, which is perhaps, unconsciously, a little dictatorial.

"You refuse me?"

"It is not the question. I have said I would go. I see no reason for not going. I decline to make myself foolish in the eyes of everybody by drawing back at the last moment."

"You have forgotten everything then."

"I don't know," coldly, "that there is anything to remember."

"Oh!" bitterly, "not so far as I am concerned. I count for nothing. I allow that. But he—I fancied you had at least read him."

"I think, perhaps, there was nothing to read," says she, lowering her eyes.

"If you can think that, it is useless my saying anything further."

He moves to one side as if to let her pass, but she hesitates. Perhaps she would have said something to soften her decision—but—a rare thing with him, he loses his temper. Seeing her standing there before him, so sweet, so lovely, so indifferent, as he tells himself, his despair overcomes him.

"I have a voice in this matter," says he, frowning heavily. "I forbid you to go with that fellow."

A sharp change crosses Miss Kavanagh's face. All the sudden softness dies out of it. She stoops leisurely, and disengaging the end of the black lace round her throat from an envious banister that would have detained her, without further glance or word for Dysart, she goes up the hall and through the open doorway. Beauclerk, who has been waiting for her outside, comes forward. A little spring seats her in the cart. Beauclerk jumps in beside her. Another moment sees them out of sight.

The vagrant sun, that all day long had been coming and going in fitful fashion, has suddenly sunk behind the thunderous gray cloud that, rising from the sea, now spreads itself o'er hill and vale. The light has died out of the sky; dull muttering sounds come rumbling down from the distant mountains. The vast expanse of barren bog upon the left has become almost obscure. Here and there a glint of its watery wastes may be seen, but indistinctly, giving the eye a mournful impression of "lands forlorn."

A strange hot quiet seems to have fallen upon the trembling earth.

> "We often see, against some storm.
> A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
> The bold wind speechless, and the orb below
> Is hushed as death."

Just now that "boding silence reigns." A sense of fear falls on Joyce, she scarcely knows why, as her companion, with a quick lash of the whip, urges the horse up the steep hill. They are still several miles from their destination, and, though it is only four o'clock, it is no longer day. The heavens are black as ink, the trees are shivering in expectant misery.

"What is it?" says Joyce, and even as she asks the question it is answered. The storm is upon them in all its fury. All at once, without an instant's warning, a violent downpour of rain comes from the bursting clouds, threatening to deluge them.

"We are in for it," says Beauclerk in a sharp, short tone, so unlike his usual dulcet accents that even now, in her sudden discomfort, it startles her. The rain is descending in torrents, a wild wind has arisen. The light has faded, and now the day resembles nothing so much as the dull beginning of a winter's night.

"Have you any idea where we are?" asks Beauclerk presently.

"None. You know I told you I had never been here before. But you—you must have some

knowledge of it."

"How should I? These detestable Irish isolations are as yet unknown paths to me."

"But I thought you said—you gave me the impression that you knew Connor's Cross."

"I regret it if I did," shortly. The rain is running down his neck by this time, leaving a cold, drenched collar to add zest to his rising ill temper. "I had heard of Connor's Cross. I never saw it. I devoutly hope," with a snarl, "I never shall."

"I don't think you are likely to," says Joyce, whose own temper is beginning to be ruffled.

"Well, this is a sell," says Beauclerk. He is buttoning up a heavy ulster round his handsome form. He is very particular about the fastening of the last button—that one that goes under the chin—and having satisfactorily accomplished it, and found, by a careful moving backward and forward of his head, that it is comfortably adjusted, it occurs to him to see if his companion is weather-proof.

"Got wraps enough?" asks he. "No, by Jove! Here, put on this," dragging a warm cloak of her own from under the seat and offering it to her with all the air of one making a gift. "What is it? Coat—cloak—ulster? One never knows what women's clothes are meant for."

"To cover them," says Joyce calmly.

"Well, put it on. By Jove, how it pours! All right now?" having carelessly flung it round her, without regard for where her arms ought to go through the sleeves. "Think you can manage the rest by yourself? So beastly difficult to do anything in a storm like this, with this brute tugging at the reins and the rain running up one's sleeve."

"I can manage it very well myself, thank you," says Joyce, giving up the finding of the sleeves as a bad job; after a futile effort to discover their whereabouts she buttons the cloak across her chest and sits beside him, silent but shivering. A little swift, wandering thought of Dysart makes her feel even colder. If he had been there! Would she be thus roughly entreated? Nay, rather would she not have been a mark for tenderest care, a precious charge entrusted to his keeping. A thing beloved and therefore to be cherished.

"Look there," says she, suddenly lifting her head and pointing a little to the right. "Surely, even through this denseness, I see lights. Is it a village?"

"Yes—a village, I should say," grimly. "A hamlet rather. Would you," ungraciously, "suggest our seeking shelter there?"

"I think it must be the village called 'Falling,'" says she, too pleased at her discovery to care about his gruffness, "and if so, the owner of the inn there was an old servant of my father's. She often comes over to see Barbara and the children, and though I have never come here to see her, I know she lives somewhere in this part of the world. A good creature she is. The kindest of women."

"An inn," says Beauclerk, deaf to the virtues of the old servant, the innkeeper, but altogether alive to the fact that she keeps an inn. "What a blessed oasis in our wilderness! And it can't be more than half a mile away. Why," recovering his usual delightful manner, "we shall find ourselves housed in no time. I do hope, my dear girl, you are comfortable! Wrapped up to the chin, eh? Quite right—quite right. After all, the poor driver has the worst of it. He must face the elements, whatever happens. Now you, with your dear little chin so cosily hidden from the wind and rain, and with hardly a suspicion of the blast I am fighting, make a charming picture—really charming! Ah, you girls! you have the best of it beyond doubt! And why not? It is the law of nature—weak woman and strong man! You know those exquisite lines——"

"Can't that horse go faster?" said Miss Kavanagh, breaking in on this little speech in a rather ruthless manner. "Lapped in luxury, as you evidently believe me, I still assure you I should gladly exchange my present condition for a good wholesome kitchen fire."

"Always practical. Your charm—one of them," says Mr. Beauclerk. But he takes the hint, nevertheless, and presently they draw up before a small, dingy place of shelter.

Not a man is to be seen. The village, a collection of fifty houses, when all is told, is swept and garnished. A few geese are stalking up the street, uttering creaking noises. Some ducks are swimming in a glad astonishment down the muddy streams running by the edges of the curbstones. Such a delicious wealth of filthy water has not been seen in Falling for the past three dry months.

"The deserted village with a vengeance," says Beauclerk. He has risen in his seat and placed his whip in the stand with a view of descending and arousing the inhabitants of this Sleepy Hollow, when a shock head is thrust out of the inn ("hotel," rather, as is painted on a huge sign over the door) and being instantly withdrawn again with a muttered "Och-a-yea," is followed by a shriek for:

"Mrs. Connolly—Mrs. Connolly, ma'am! Sure, 'tis yourself that's wanted! Come down, I tell ye! There's ginthry at the door, an' the rain peltin' on em like the divil. Come down, I'm tellin' ye! Or fegs they'll go on to Paddy Sheehan's, an' thin where'll ye be? Och, murdher! Where are ye, at all, at all? 'Tis ruined ye'll be intirely wid the stayin' of ye!"

"Arrah, hould yer whisht, y'omadhaun o' the world," says another voice, and in a second a big, buxom, jolly, hearty-looking woman appears on the threshold, peering a little suspiciously through the gathering gloom at the dog cart outside. First she catches sight of the crest and coronet, and a gleam of pleased intelligence brightens her face. Then, lifting her eyes, she meets those of Joyce, and the sudden pleasure gives way to actual and honest joy.

"It is Mrs. Connolly," says Joyce, in a voice that is supposed to accompany a smile, but has in reality something of tears in it.

Mrs. Connolly, regardless of the pelting rain and her best cap, takes a step forward.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"All is not golde that outward shewith bright."

"I love everything that's old—old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine."

"An' is it you, Miss Joyce? Glory be! What a day to be out! 'Tis drenched y'are, intirely! Oh! come in, me dear—come in, me darlin'! Here, Mikey, Paddy, Jerry!—come here, ivery mother's son o' ye, an' take Mr. Beauclerk's horse from him. Oh! by the laws!—but y'are soaked! Arrah, what misfortune dhrove y'out to-day, of all days, Miss Joyce? Was there niver a man to tell ye that 'twould be a peltin' storm before nightfall?"

There had been one. How earnestly Miss Kavanagh now wishes she had listened to his warning.

"It looked so fine two hours ago," says she, clambering down from the dog cart with such misguided help from the ardent Mrs. Connolly as almost lands her with the ducks in the muddy stream below.

"Och! there's no more depindince to be placed upon the weather than there is upon a man. However, 'tis welcome y'are, any way. Your father's daughter is dear to me—yes, come this way—up these stairs. 'Tis Anne Connolly is proud to be enthertainin' one o' yer blood inside her door."

"Oh! I'm so glad I found you," says Joyce, turning when she has reached Mrs. Connolly's bedroom to imprint upon that buxom widow's cheek a warm kiss. "It was a long way here—long, and so cold and wet."

"An' where were ye goin' at all, if I may ax?" says Mrs. Connolly, taking off the girl's dripping outer garments.

"To see Connor's Cross——"

"Faith, 'twas little ye had to do! A musty ould tomb like that, wid nothin but broken stones around it. Wouldn't the brand-new graveyard below there do ye? Musha! but 'tis quare the ginthry is! Och! me dear, 'tis wet y'are; there isn't a dhry stitch on ye."

"I don't think I'm wet once my coats are off," says Joyce; and indeed, when those invaluable wraps are removed; it is proved beyond doubt—even Mrs. Connolly's doubt, which is strong—that her gown is quite dry.

"You see, it was such a sudden rain," says Joyce, "and fortunately we saw the lights in this village almost immediately after it began."

"Fegs, too suddint to be pleasant," says Mrs. Connolly. "'Twas well the early darkness made us light up so quickly, or ye might have missed us, not knowin' yer road. An' how's all wid ye, me dear—Miss Barbara, an' the masther, an' the darling childher? I've a Brammy cock and a hen that I'm thinkin' of takin' down to Masther Tommy this two weeks, but the ould mare is mighty quare on her legs o' late. Are ye all well?"

"Quite well, thank you, Mrs. Connolly."

"Wisha—God keep ye so."

"And how are all of you? When did you hear from America?"

"Last month thin—divil a less; an' the greatest news of all! A letther from Johnny—me eldest boy—wid a five-pound note in it, an' a picther of the girl he's goin' to marry. I declare to ye when that letther came I just fell into a chair an' tuk to laughin' an' cryin' till that ounchal of a girl in the kitchen began to bate me on the back, thinkin' I was bad in a fit. To think, me dear, of little Johnneen I used to nurse on me knee thinkin' of takin' a partner. An' a sthrappin' fine girl too, fegs, wid cheeks like turnips. But there, now, I'll show her to ye by-and-by. She's a raal beauty if them porthraits be thrue, but there's a lot o' lies comes from over the wather. An' what'll ye be takin' now, Miss Joyce dear?"—with a return to her hospitable mood—"a dhrop o' hot punch, now? Whiskey is the finest thing out for givin' the good-bye to the cowld."

"Oh, no, thank you, Mrs. Connolly"—hastily—"if I might have a cup of tea, I——"

"Arrah, bad cess to that tay! What's the good of it at all at all to a frozen stomach? Cowld pison, I calls it. Well, there! Have it yer own way! An' come along down wid me, now, an' give yerself to the enthertainin' of Misther Beauclerk, whilst I wet the pot. Glory! what a man he is!—the size o' the house! A fine man, in airnest. Tell me now," with a shrewd glance at Joyce, "is there anything betwixt you and him?"

"Nothing!" says Joyce, surprised even herself by the amount of vehement denial she throws into this word.

"Oh, well, there's others! An' Mr. Dysart would be more to my fancy. There's a nate man, if ye like, be me fegs!" with a second half sly, wholly kindly, glance at the girl. "If 'twas he, now, I'd give ye me blessin' wid a heart and a half. An' indeed, now, Miss Joyce, 'tis time ye were thinkin' o' settlin'."

"Well, I'm not thinking of it this time," says Joyce, laughing, though a little catch in her throat warns her she is not far from tears. Perhaps Mrs. Connolly hears that little catch, too, for she instantly changes her tactics.

"Faith, an' 'tis right y'are, me dear. There's a deal o' trouble in marriage, an' 'tis too young y'are intirely to undertake the likes of it," says she, veering round with a scandalous disregard for appearances. "My, what hair ye have, Miss Joyce! 'Tis improved, it is; even since last I saw ye. I'm a great admirer of a good head o' hair."

"I wonder when will the rain be over?" asks Joyce, wistfully gazing through the small window at the threatening heavens.

"If it's my opinion y'are askin'," says Mrs. Connolly, "I'd say not till to-morrow morning."

"Oh! Mrs. Connolly!" turning a distressed face to that good creature.

"Well, me dear, what can I say but what I think?" flinging out her ample arms in self-justification. "Would ye have me lie to ye? Why, a sky like that always——"

Here a loud crash of thunder almost shakes the small inn to its foundations.

"The heavens be good to us!" says Mrs. Connolly, crossing herself devoutly. "Did ye iver hear the like o' that?"

"But—it can't last—it is impossible," says Joyce, vehemently. "Is there no covered car in the town? Couldn't a man be persuaded to drive me home if I promised him to——"

"If ye promised him a king's ransom ye couldn't get a covered car to-night," says Mrs. Connolly. "There's only one in the place, an' that belongs to Mike Murphy, an' 'tis off now miles beyant Skibbereen, attindin' the funeral o' Father John Maguire. 'Twon't be home till to-morrow any way, an'-faix, I wouldn't wondher if it wasn't here then, for every mother's son at that wake will be as dhrunk as fiddlers to-night. Father John, ye know, me dear, was greatly respected."

"Are you sure there isn't another car?"

"Quite positive. But why need ye be so unaisy, Miss Joyce, dear? Sure, 'tis safe an' sure y'are wid me."

"But what will they think at home and at the Court?" says Joyce, faltering.

"Arrah! what can they think, miss, but that the rain was altogether too mastherful for ye? Ye know, me dear, we can't (even the best of us) conthrol the illimints!" This incontrovertible fact Mrs. Connolly gives forth with a truly noble air of resignation. "Come down now, and let me get ye that palthry cup o' tay y'are cravin' for."

She leads Joyce downstairs and into a snug little parlor with a roaring fire that is not altogether unacceptable this dreary evening. The smell of stale tobacco smoke that pervades it is a drawback, but, if you think of it, we can't have everything in this world.

Perhaps Joyce has more than she wants. It occurs to her, as Beauclerk turns round from the solitary window, that she could well have dispensed with his society. That lurking distrust of him she had known vaguely, but kept under during all their acquaintance, has taken a permanent place in her mind during her drive with him this afternoon.

"Oh! here you are. Beastly, smoky hole!" he says, taking no notice of Mrs. Connolly, who is doing her best curtsey in the doorway.

"I think it looks very comfortable," says Joyce, with a gracious smile at her hostess, and a certain sore feeling at her heart. Once again her thoughts fly to Dysart. Would that have been his first remark when she appeared after so severe a wetting?

"'Tis just what I've been sayin' to Miss Kavanagh, sir," says Mrs. Connolly, with unabated good humor. "The heavens above is always too much for us. We can't turn off the wather up there as we can the cock in the kitchen sink. Still, there's compinsations always, glory be! An' what will ye plaze have wid yer tay, Miss?" turning to Joyce with great respect in look and tone. In spite of all her familiarity with her upstairs, she now, with a looker-on, proceeds to treat "her young lady" as though she were a stranger and of blood royal.

"Anything you have, Mrs. Connolly," says Joyce; "only don't be long!" There is undoubted entreaty in the request. Mrs. Connolly, glancing at her, concludes it is not so much a desire for what will be brought, as for the bringer that animates the speaker.

"Give me five minutes, Miss, an' I'll be back again," says she pleasantly. Leaving the room, she stands in the passage outside for a moment, and solemnly moves her kindly head from side to side. It takes her but a little time to make up her shrewd Irish mind on several points.

"While this worthy person is getting you your tea I think I'll take a look at the weather from the outside," says Mr. Beauclerk, turning to Joyce. It is evident he is eager to avoid a tête-à-tête, but this does not occur to her.

"Yes—do—do," says she, nevertheless with such a liberal encouragement as puzzles him. Women are kittle cattle, however, he tells himself; better not to question their motives too closely or you will find yourself in queer street. He gets to the door with a cheerful assumption of going to study the heavens that conceals his desire for a cigar and a brandy and soda, but on the threshold Joyce speaks again.

"Is there no chance—would it not be possible to get home?" says she, in a tone that trembles with nervous longing.

"I'm afraid not. I'm just going to see. It is impossible weather for you to be out in."

"But you——? It is clearing a little, isn't it?" with a despairing glance out of the window. "If you could manage to get back and tell them that——"

She is made thoroughly ashamed of her selfishness a moment later.

"But my dear girl, consider! Why should I tempt a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs by driving ten or twelve miles through this unrelenting torrent? We are very well out of it here. This Mrs.—er—Connor—Connolly seems a very respectable person, and is known to you. I shall tell her to make you as comfortable as her 'limited liabilities,'" with quite a laugh at his own wit, "will allow."

"Pray tell her nothing. Do not give yourself so much trouble," says Joyce calmly. "She will do the best she can for me without the intervention of any one."

"As you will, au revoir!" says he, waving her a graceful farewell for the moment.

He is not entirely happy in his mind, as he crosses the tiny hall and makes his way first to the bar and afterward to the open doorway. Like a cat, he hates rain! To drive back through this turmoil of wind and wet for twelve long miles to the Court is more than his pleasure-loving nature can bear to look upon. Yet to remain has its drawbacks, too.

If Miss Maliphant, for example, were to hear of this escapade there might be trouble there. He has not as yet finally made up his mind to give inclination the go by and surrender himself to sordid considerations, but there can be no doubt that the sordid things of this life have, with some natures, a charm hardly to be rivaled successfully by mere beauty.

The heiress is attractive in one sense; Joyce equally so in another. Miss Maliphant's charms are golden—are not Joyce's more golden still? And yet, to give up Miss Maliphant—to break with her finally—to throw away deliberately a good £10,000 a year!

He lights his cigar with an untrembling hand, and, having found it satisfactory, permits his mind to continue its investigations.

Ten thousand pounds a year! A great help to a man; yet he is glad at this moment that he is free to accept or reject it. Nothing definite has been said to the heiress—nothing definite to Joyce either. It strikes him at this moment, as he stands in the dingy doorway of the inn and stares out at the descending rain, that he has shown distinct cleverness in the way in which he has manoeuvred these two girls, without either of them feeling the least suspicion of the other. Last night Joyce had been on the point of a discovery, but he had smoothed away all that. Evidently he was born to be a successful diplomatist, and if that appointment he has been looking for ever comes his way, he will be able to show the world a thing or two.

How charming that little girl in there can look! And never more so than when she allows her temper to overcome her. She had been angry just now. Yes. But he can read between the lines; angry—naturally that he has not come to the point—declared himself—proposed as the saying is. Well, puffing complacently at his cigar, she must wait—she must wait—if the appointment comes off, if Sir Alexander stands to him, she has a very good chance, but if that falls through, why then ——

And it won't do to encourage her too much, by Jove! If Miss Maliphant were to hear of this evening's adventure, she is headstrong, stolid enough, to mark out a line for herself and fling him aside without waiting for judge or jury. Much as it might cost her, she would not hesitate to break all ties with him, and any that existed were very slight. He, himself, had kept them so. Perhaps, after all, he had better order the trap round, leave Miss Kavanagh here, and——

And yet to go out in that rain; to feel it beating against his face for two or three intolerable hours. Was anything, even £10,000 a year, worth that? He would be a drowned rat by the time he reached the Court.

And, after all, couldn't it be arranged without all this bother? He might easily explain it all away to Miss Maliphant, even should some kind friend tell her of it. That was his role. He had quite a talent for explaining away. But he must also make Joyce thoroughly understand. She was a sensible girl. A word to her would be sufficient. Just a word to show that marriage at present was out of the question. Nothing unpleasant; nothing finite; but just some little thing to waken her to the true state of the case. Girls, as a rule, were sentimental, and would expect much of an adventure such as this. But Joyce was proud—he liked that in her. There would be no trouble; she would quite understand.

"Tea is just comin' up, sorr!" says a rough voice behind him. "The misthress tould me to tell ye so!"

The red-headed Abigail who attends on Mrs. Connolly beckons him, with a grimy forefinger, to the repast within. He accepts the invitation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

> "It is the mynd that maketh good or ill,
> That maketh wretch or happy, rich or poore."

As he enters the inn parlor he finds Joyce sitting by the fire, listening to Mrs. Connolly, who, armed with a large tray, is advancing up the room toward the table. Nobody but the "misthress" herself is allowed to wait upon "the young lady."

"An' I hope, Miss Joyce, 'twill be to your liking. An' sorry I am, sir," with a courteous recognition of Beauclerk's entrance, "that 'tis only one poor fowl I can give ye. But thim commercial thravellers are the divil. They'd lave nothing behind 'em if they could help it. Still, Miss," with a loving smile at Joyce, "I do think ye'll like the ham. 'Tis me own curing, an' I brought ye just a taste o' this year's honey; ye'd always a sweet tooth from the time ye were born."

"I could hardly have had a tooth before that," says Joyce, laughing. "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Connolly; it is a lovely tea, and it is very good of you to take all this trouble."

"Who'd be welcome to any trouble if 'twasn't yerself, Miss?" says Mrs. Connolly, bowing and retreating toward the door.

A movement on the part of Joyce checks her. The girl has made an impulsive step as if to follow her, and now, seeing Mrs. Connolly stop short, holds out to her one hand.

"But, Mrs. Connolly," says she, trying to speak naturally, and succeeding very well, so far as careless ears are in question, but the "misthress" marks the false note, "you will stay and pour out tea for us; you will?"

There is an extreme treaty in her tone; the stronger in that it has to be suppressed. Mrs. Connolly, halting midway between the table and the door with the tray in her hands, hears it, and a sudden light comes, not only into her eyes, but her mind.

"Why, if you wish it, Miss," says she directly. She lays down the tray, standing it up against the wall, and coming back to the table lifts the teapot and begins to fill the cups.

"Ye take sugar, sir?" asks she of Beauclerk, who is a little puzzled, but not altogether displeased at the turn affairs have taken. After all, as he has told himself a thousand times, Joyce is a clever girl. She is determined not to betray the anxiety for his society that beyond question she is feeling. And this prudence on her part will relieve him of many small embarrassments. Truly, she is a girl not to be found every day.

He is accordingly most gracious to Mrs. Connolly; praises her ham, extols her tea, says wonderful things about the chicken.

When tea is at an end, he rises gracefully, and expresses his desire to smoke one more cigar and have a last look at the weather.

"You will be able to put us up?" says he.

"Oh yes, sir, sure."

He smiles beautifully, and with a benevolent request to Joyce to take care of herself in his absence, leaves the room.

"He's a dale o' talk," says Mrs. Connolly, the moment his back is turned. She is now sure that Joyce has some private grudge against him, or at all events is not what she herself would call "partial to him."

"Yes," says Joyce. "He is very conversational. How it rains, still."

"Yes, it does," says Mrs. Connolly, comfortably. She is not at all put out by the girl's reserved

manner, having lived among the "ginthry" for many years, and being well up to their "quare ways." A thought, however, that had been formulating in her mind for a long time past—ever since, indeed, she found her young lady could not return home until morning—now compels her to give the conversation a fresh turn.

"I've got to apologize to ye, Miss, but since ye must stay the night wid me, I'm bound to tell ye I have no room for ye but a little one leadin' out o' me own."

"Are you so very full, then, Mrs. Connolly? I'm glad to hear that for your sake."

"Full to the chin, me dear. Thim commercials always dhrop down upon one just whin laste wanted."

"Then I suppose I ought to be thankful that you can give me a room at all," says Joyce, laughing. "I'm afraid I shall be a great trouble to you."

"Ne'er a scrap in life, me dear. 'Tis proud I am to be of any sarvice to ye. An' perhaps 'twill make ye aisier in yer mind to know as your undher my protection, and that no gossip can come nigh ye."

The good woman means well, but she has flown rather above Joyce's head, or rather under her feet.

"I'm delighted to be with you," says Miss Kavanagh, with a pretty smile. "But as for protection—well, the Land Leaguers round here are not so bad as that one should fear for one's life in a quiet village like this."

"There's worse than Land Leaguers," says Mrs. Connolly. "There's thim who talk."

"Talk—of what?" asks Joyce, a little vaguely.

"Well now, me dear, sure ye haven't lived so long widout knowin' there's cruel people in the world," says Mrs. Connolly, anxiously. "An' the fact o' you goin' out dhrivin' wid Mr. Beauclerk, an' stayin' out the night wid him, might give rise to the talk I'm fightin' agin. Don't be angry wid me now, Miss Joyce, an' don't fret, but 'tis as well to prepare ye."

Joyce's heart, as she listens, seems to die within her. A kind of sick feeling renders her speechless; she had never thought of that—of—of the idea of impropriety being suggested as part of this most unlucky escapade. Mrs. Connolly, noting the girl's white face, feels as though she ought to have cut her tongue out, rather than have spoken, yet she had done all for the best.

"Miss Joyce, don't think about it," says she, hurriedly. "I'm sorry I said a word, but—An', afther all, I am right, me dear. 'Tis betther for ye when evil tongues are waggin' to have a raal friend like me to yer back to say the needful word. Ye'll sleep wid me to-night, an' I'll take ye back to her ladyship in the morning, an' never leave ye till I see ye in safe hands once more. If ye liked him," pointing to the door through which Beauclerk had gone, "I'd say nothing, for thin all would come right enough. But as it is, I'll take it on meself to be the nurse to ye now that I was when ye were a little creature creeping along the floor."

Joyce smiles at her, but rather faintly. A sense of terror is oppressing her. Lady Baltimore, what will she think? And Freddy and Barbara! They will all be angry with her! Oh! more than angry—they will think she has done something that other girls would not have done. How is she to face them again? The entire party at the Court seems to spread itself before her. Lady Swansdown and Lord Baltimore, they will laugh about it; and the others will laugh and whisper, and——

Felix—Felix Dysart. What will he think? What is he thinking now? To follow out this thought is intolerable to her; she rises abruptly.

"What o'clock is it, Mrs. Connolly?" says she in a hard, strained voice. "I am tired, I should like to go to bed now."

"Just eight, Miss. An' if you are tired there's nothing like the bed. Ye will like to say good-night to Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Oh, no, no!" with frowning sharpness. Then recovering herself. "I need not disturb him. You will tell him that I was chilled—tired."

"I'll tell him all that he ought to know," says Mrs. Connolly. "Come, Miss Joyce, everything, is ready for ye. An' a lie down and a good sleep will be the makin' of ye before morning."

Joyce, to her surprise, is led through a very well-appointed chamber, evidently unused, to a smaller but scarcely less carefully arranged apartment beyond. The first is so plainly a room not in daily use, that she turns involuntarily to her companion.

"Is this your room, Mrs. Connolly?"

"For the night, me dear," says that excellent woman mysteriously.

"You have changed your room to suit me. You mean something," says the girl, growing crimson, and feeling as if her heart were going to burst. "What is it?"

"No, no, Miss! No, indeed!" confusedly. "But, Miss Joyce, I'll say this, that 'tis eight year now since Misther Monkton came here, an' many's the good turn he's done me since he's been me

lord's agint. An' that's nothing at all, Miss, to the gratitude I bear toward yer poor father, the ould head o' the house. An' d'ye think when occasion comes I wouldn't stand up an' do the best I could for one o' yer blood? Fegs, I'll take care that it won't be in the power of any one to say a word agin you."

"Against me?"

"You're young, Miss. But there's people ould enough to have sinse an' charity as haven't it. I can see ye couldn't get home to-night through that rain, though I'm not sayin'"—a little spitefully—"but that he might have managed it. Still, faith, 'twas bad thravellin' for man or baste," with a view to softening down her real opinion of Beauclerk's behavior. How can she condemn him safely? Is he not my lady's own brother? Is not my lord the owner of the very ground on which the inn is built, of the farm a mile away, where her cows are chewing the cud by this time in peace and safety?

"You have changed your room to oblige me," says Joyce, still with that strange, miserable look in her eyes.

"Don't think about that, Miss Joyce, now. An' don't fret yerself about anything else, ayther; sure ye can remimber that I'm to yer back always."

She bridles, and draws up her ample figure to its fullest height. Indeed, looking at her, it might suggest itself to any reasonable being that even the forlornest damsel with any such noble support might well defy the world.

But Joyce is not to be so easily consoled. What is support to her? Who can console a torn heart? The day has been too eventful! It has overcome her courage. Not only has she lost faith in her own power to face the angry authorities at home, she has lost faith, too, in one to whom, against her judgment, she had given more of her thoughts than was wise. The fact that she had recovered from that folly does not render the memory of the recovery less painful. The awakening from a troubled dream is full of anguish.

Rising from a sleepless bed, she goes down next morning to find Mrs. Connolly standing on the lowest step of the stairs, as if awaiting her, booted and spurred for the journey.

"I tould him to order the thrap early, me dear, for I knew ye'd be anxious," says the kind woman, squeezing her hand. "An' now," with an anxious glance at her, "I hope ye ate yer breakfast. I guessed ye'd like it in yer room, so I sint it up to ye. Well—come on, dear. Mr. Beauclerk is outside waitin'. I explained it all to him. Said ye were tired, ye know, an' eager to get back. And so all's ready an' the horse impatient."

In spite of the storm yesterday, that seemed to shake earth and heaven, to-day is beautiful. Soft glistening steams are rising from every hill and bog and valley, as the hot sun's rays beat upon them. The world seems wrapped in one vast vaporous mist, most lovely to behold. All the woodland flowers are holding up their heads again, after their past smiting from the cruel rain; the trees are swaying to and fro in the fresh morning breeze, thousands of glittering drops brightening the air, as they swing themselves from side to side. All things speak of a new birth, a resurrection, a joyful waking from a terrifying past. The grass looks greener for its bath, all dust is laid quite low, the very lichens on the walls as they drive past them look washed and glorified.

The sun is flooding the sky with gorgeous light; there are "sweete smels al arownd." The birds in the woods on either side of the roadway are singing high carols in praise of this glorious day. All nature seems joyous. Joyce alone is silent, unappreciative, unhappy.

The nearer she gets to the Court the more perturbed she grows in mind. How will they receive her there? Barbara had said that Lady Baltimore would not be likely to encourage an attachment between her and Beauclerk, and now, though the attachment is impossible, what will she think of this unfortunate adventure? She is so depressed that speech seems impossible to her, and to all Mr. Beauclerk's sallies she scarcely returns an answer.

His sallies are many. Never has he appeared in gayer spirits. The fact that the girl beside him is in unmistakably low spirits has either escaped him, or he has decided on taking no notice of it. Last night, over that final cigar, he had made up his mind that it would be wise to say to her some little thing that would unmistakably awaken her to the fact that there was nothing between him and her of any serious importance. Now, having covered half the distance that lies between them and the Court, he feels will be a good time to say that little thing. She is too distrait to please him. She is evidently brooding over something. If she thinks——Better crush all such hopes at once.

"I wonder what they are thinking about us at home?" he says presently, with quite a cheerful laugh, suggestive of amusement.

No answer.

"I daresay," with a second edition of the laugh, full now of a wider amusement, as though the comical fancy that has caught hold of him has grown to completion, "I shouldn't wonder, indeed, if they were thinking we had eloped." This graceful speech he makes with the easiest air in the world.

"They may be thinking you have eloped, certainly," says Miss Kavanagh calmly. "One's own

people, as a rule, know one very thoroughly, and are quite alive to one's little failings; but that they should think it of me is quite out of the question."

"Well, after all, I daresay you are right. I don't suppose it lies in the possibilities. They could hardly think it of me either," says Beauclerk, with a careless yawn, so extraordinarily careless indeed as to be worthy of note. "I'm too poor for amusement of that kind."

"One couldn't be too poor for that kind of amusement, surely. Romance and history have both taught us that it is only the impecunious who ever indulge in that folly."

"I am not so learned as you are, but——Well, I'm an 'impecunious one,' in all conscience. I couldn't carry it out. I only wish," tenderly, "I could."

"With whom?" icily. As she asks the question she turns deliberately and looks him steadily in the eyes. Something in her regard disconcerts him, and compels him to think that the following up of the "little thing" is likely to prove difficult.

"How can you ask me?" demands he with an assumption of reproachful fondness that is rather overdone.

"I do, nevertheless."

"With you, then—if I must put it in words," says he, lowering his tone to the softest whisper. It is an eminently lover-like whisper; it is a distinctly careful one, too. It is quite impossible for Mrs. Connolly, sitting behind, to hear it, however carefully she may be attending.

"It is well you cannot put your fortune to the touch," says Joyce quietly; "if you could, disappointment alone would await you."

"You mean——?" ask he, somewhat sharply.

"That were it possible for me to commit such a vulgarity as to run away with any one, you, certainly, would not be that one. You are the very last man on earth I should choose for so mistaken an adventure. Let me also add," says she, turning upon him with flashing eyes, though still her voice is determinately low and calm, "that you forget yourself strangely when you talk in this fashion to me." The scorn and indignation in her charming face is so apparent that it is now impossible to ignore it. Being thus compelled to acknowledge it he grows angry. Beauclerk angry is not nice.

"To do myself justice, I seldom do that!" says he, with a rather nasty laugh. "To forget myself is not part of my calculations. I can generally remember No. One."

"You will remember me, too, if you please, so long as I am with you," says Joyce, with a grave and very gentle dignity, but with a certain determination that makes itself felt. Beauclerk, conscious of being somewhat cowed, is bully enough to make one more thrust.

"After all, Dysart was right," says he. "He prophesied there would be rain. He advised you not to undertake our ill-starred journey of—yesterday." There is distinct and very malicious meaning in the emphasis he throws into the last word.

"I begin to think Mr. Dysart is always right," says Joyce, bravely, though her heart has begun to beat furiously. That terrible fear of what they will say to her when she gets back—of their anger—their courteous anger—their condemnation—has been suddenly presented to her again and her courage dies within her. Dysart, what will he say? It strikes even herself as strange that his view of her conduct is the one that most disturbs her.

"Only, beginning to think it? Why, I always understood Dysart was immaculate—the 'couldn't err' sort of person one reads of but never sees. You have been slow, surely, to gauge his merits. I confess I have been even slower. I haven't gauged them yet. But then—Dysart and I were never much in sympathy with each other."

"No. One can understand that," says she.

"One can, naturally," with the utmost self-complaisance. "I confess, indeed," with a sudden slight burst of vindictiveness, "that I never liked Dysart; idiotic sort of fool in my estimation, self-opinionated like all fools, and deucedly impertinent in that silent way of his. I believe," with a contemptuous laugh, "he has given it as his opinion that there is very little to like in me either."

"Has he? We were saying just now he is always right," says Miss Kavanagh, absently, and in a tone so low that Beauclerk may be excused for scarcely believing his ears.

"Eh?" says he. But there is no answer, and presently both fall into a silent mood—Joyce because conversation is terrible to her, and he because anger is consuming him.

He had kept up a lively converse all through the earlier part of their drive, ignoring the depression that only too plainly was crushing upon his companion, with a view to putting an end to sentimentality of any sort. Her discomfort, her unhappiness, was as nothing to him—he thought only of himself. Few men, under the circumstances, would have so acted, for most men, in spite of all the old maids who so generously abuse them, are chivalrous and have kindly hearts; and indeed it is only a melancholy specimen here and there who will fail to feel pity for a woman in distress. Beauclerk is a "melancholy specimen."

CHAPTER XXV.

> "Man, false man, smiling, destructive man."
>
> "Who breathes, must suffer, and who thinks, most mourn;
> And he alone is bless'd who ne'er was born."

"Oh! my dear girl, is it you at last?" cries Lady Baltimore, running out into the hall as Joyce enters it. "We have been so frightened! Such a storm, and Baltimore says that mare you had is very uncertain. Where did you get shelter?"

The very warmth and kindliness of her welcome, the utter absence of disapproval in it of any sort, so unnerves Joyce that she can make no reply; can only cling to her kindly hostess, and hide her face on her shoulder.

"Is that you, Mrs. Connolly?" says Lady Baltimore, smiling at mine hostess of the Baltimore Arms, over the girl's shoulder.

"Yes, my lady," with a curtsey so low that one wonders how she ever comes up again. "I made so bould, my lady, as to bring ye home Miss Joyce myself. I know Misther Beauclerk to be a good support in himself, but I thought it would be a raisonable thing to give her the company of one of her own women folk besides."

"Quite right. Quite," says Lady Baltimore.

"Oh! she has been so kind to me," says Joyce, raising now a pale face to turn a glance of gratitude on Mrs. Connolly.

"Why, indeed, my lady, I wish I might ha' bin able to do more for her; an' I'm sorry to say I'd to put her up in a small, most inconvenient room, just inside o' me own."

"How was that?" asks Lady Baltimore, kindly. "The inn so full then?"

"Fegs 'twas that was the matther wid it," says Mrs. Connolly, with a beaming smile. "Crammed from cellar to garret."

"Ah! the wet night, I suppose."

"Just so, my lady," composedly, and with another deep curtsey.

Lady Baltimore having given Mrs. Connolly into the care of the housekeeper, who is an old friend of hers, leads Joyce upstairs.

"You are not angry with me?" says Joyce, turning on the threshold of her room.

"With you, my dear child? No, indeed. With Norman, very! He should have turned back the moment he saw the first symptom of a storm. A short wetting would have done neither of you any harm."

"There was no warning; the storm was on us almost immediately, and we were then very close to Falling."

"Then, having placed you once safely in Mrs. Connolly's care, he should have returned himself, at all hazards."

"It rained very hard," says Joyce in a cold, clear tone. Her eyes are on the ground. She is compelling herself to be strictly just to Beauclerk, but the effort is too much for her. She fails to do it naturally, and so gives a false impression to her listener. Lady Baltimore casts a quick glance at her.

"Rain, what is rain?" says she.

"There was storm, too, a violent storm; you must have felt it here."

"No storm should have prevented his return. He should have thought only of you."

A little bitter smile curls the girl's lips: it seems a farce to suggest that he should have thought of her. He! Now with her eyes effectually opened, a certain scorn of herself, in that he should have been able so easily to close them, takes possession of her. Is his sister blind still to his defects, that she expects so much from him; has she not read him rightly yet? Has she yet to learn that he will never consider any one, where his own interests, comforts, position, clash with theirs?

"You look distressed, tired. I believe you are fretting about this," says Lady Baltimore, with a little kindly bantering laugh. "Don't be a silly child. Nobody has said or thought anything that has not been kindly of you. Did you sleep last night? No. I can see you didn't. There, lie down, and get a little rest before luncheon. I shall send you up a glass of champagne and a biscuit; don't refuse it."

She pulls down the blinds, and goes softly out of the room to her boudoir, where she finds Beauclerk awaiting her.

He is lounging comfortably on a satin fauteuil, looking the very *beau ideal* of pleasant, careless life. He makes his sister a present of a beaming smile as she enters.

"Ah! good morning, Isabel. I am afraid we gave you rather a fright; but you see it couldn't be helped. What an evening and night it turned out! By Jove! I thought the water works above were turned on for good at last and for ever. We felt like the Babes in the Wood—abandoned, lost. Poor, dear Miss Kavanagh! I felt so sorry for her! You have seen her, I hope," his face has now taken the correct lines of decorous concern. "She is not over fatigued?"

"She looks tired! depressed!" says Lady Baltimore, regarding him seriously. "I wish, Norman, you had come home last evening."

"What! and bring Miss Kavanagh through all that storm!"

"No, you could have left her at Falling. I wish you had come home."

"Why?" with an amused laugh. "Are you afraid I have compromised myself?"

"I was not thinking of you. I am more afraid," with a touch of cold displeasure, "of your having compromised Miss Kavanagh. There are such things as gossips in this curious world. You should have left Joyce in Mrs. Connolly's safe keeping, and come straight back here."

"To be laid up with rheumatism during the whole of the coming winter! Oh! most unnatural sister, what is it you would have desired of me?"

"You showed her great attention all this summer," says Lady Baltimore.

"I hope I showed a proper attention to all your guests."

"You were very specially attentive to her."

"To Miss Kavanagh, do you mean?" with a puzzled air. "Ah! well, yes. Perhaps I did give more of my time to her and to Miss Maliphant than to the others."

"Ah! Miss Maliphant! one can understand that," says his sister, with an intonation that is not entirely complimentary.

"Can one? Here is one who can't, at all events. I confess I tried very hard to bring myself to the point there, but I failed. Nature was too strong for me. Good girl, you know, but—er—awful!"

"We were not discussing Miss Maliphant, we were talking of Joyce," icily.

"Ah, true!" as if just awakening to a delightful fact. "And a far more charming subject for discussion, it must be allowed. Well, and what of Joyce—you call her Joyce?"

"Be human, Norman!" says Lady Baltimore, with a sudden suspicion of fire in her tone. "Forget to pose once in a way. And this time it is important. Let me hear the truth from you. She seems unhappy, uncertain, nervous. I like her. There is something real, genuine, about her. I would gladly think, that——Do you know," she leans towards him, "I have sometimes thought you were in love with her."

"Have you? Do you know, so have I," with a frankness very admirable. "She is one of the most agreeable girls of my acquaintance. There is something very special about her. I'm not surprised that both you and I fell into a conclusion of that sort."

"Am I to understand by that——?"

"Just one thing. I am too poor to marry."

"With that knowledge in your mind, you should not have acted towards her as you did yesterday. It was a mistake, believe me. You should have come home alone, or else brought her back as your promised wife."

"Ah! what a delightful vista you open up before me, but what an unkind one, too," says Mr. Beauclerk, with a little reproachful uplifting of his hands and brows. "Have you no bowels of compassion? You know how the charms of domestic life have always attracted me. And to be able to enjoy them with such an admirable companion as Miss Kavanagh! Are you soulless, utterly without mercy, Isabel, that you open up to me a glorious vision such as that merely to taunt and disappoint me?"

"I am neither Joyce nor Miss Maliphant," says Lady Baltimore, with ill-suppressed contempt. "I wish you would try to remember that, Norman; it would spare time and trouble. You speak of Joyce as if she were the woman you love, and yet—would you subject the woman you love to unkind comment? If you cared you would not have treated her as——"

"Ah, if I did care for her," interrupts he.

"Well, don't you?" sternly.

She has risen, and is looking down at him from the full height of her tall, slender figure, that now looks taller than usual.

"Oh, immensely!" declares Mr. Beauclerk, airily. "My dear girl, you can't have studied me not to know that; as I have told you, I think her charming. Quite out of the common—quite."

"That will do," shortly.

"You condemn me," says he, in an aggrieved tone that has got something of amused surprise in it. "Yet you know—you of all others—how poor a devil I am! So poor, that I do not even permit the idea of marriage in my head."

"Perhaps, however, you have permitted it to enter into hers!" says Lady Baltimore.

"Oh, my dear Isabel!" with a light laugh and a protesting glance. "Do you think she would thank you for that suggestion?"

"You should think. You should think," says Lady Baltimore, with some agitation. "She is a very young girl. She has lived entirely in the country. She knows nothing—nothing," throwing out her hand. "She is not awake to all the intriguing, lying, falsity," with a rush of bitter disgust, "that belongs to the bigger world beyond—the terrible world outside her own quiet one here."

"She is quiet here, isn't she?" says Beauclerk, with admirable appreciation. "Pity to take her out of it. Eh? And yet, so far as I can see, that is the cruel task you would impose on me."

"Norman," says his sister, turning suddenly and for the first time directly toward him.

"Well, my dear. What?" throwing one leg negligently over the other. "It really comes to this, doesn't it? That you want me to marry a certain somebody, and that I think I cannot afford to marry her. Then it lies in the proverbial nutshell."

"The man who cannot afford to marry should not afford himself the pleasures of flirtations," says Lady Baltimore, with decision.

"No? Is that your final opinion? Good heavens! Isabel, what a brow! What a terrible glance! If," smiling, "you favor Baltimore with this style of thing whenever you disapprove of his smallest action I don't wonder he jibs so often at the matrimonial collar. You advised me to think just now; think yourself, my good Isabel, now and then, and probably you will find life easier."

He is still smiling delightfully. He flings out this cruel gibe indeed in the most careless manner possible.

"Ah! forget me," says she in a manner as careless as his own. If she has quivered beneath that thrust of his, at all events she has had strength enough to suppress all signs of it. "Think—not of her—I daresay she will outlive it—but of yourself."

"What would you have me do then?" demands he, rising here and confronting her. There is a good deal of venom in his handsome face, but Lady Baltimore braves it.

"I would have you act as an honorable man," says she, in a clear, if icy tone.

"You go pretty far, Isabel, very far, even for a sister," says he presently, his face now white with rage. "A moment ago I gave you some sound advice. I give you more now. Attend to your own affairs, which by all account require looking after, and let mine alone."

He is evidently furious. His sister makes a little gesture towards the door.

"Your taking it like this does not mend matters," she says calmly, "it only makes them, if possible, worse. Leave me!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AT SIXES AND SEVENS."

> Pol.—"What do you read, my lord?"
>
> Ham.—"Words, words, words."

She sighs heavily, as the door closes on her brother. A sense of weakness, of powerlessness oppresses her. She has fought so long, and for what? Is there nothing to be gained; no truth to be defended anywhere, no standard of right and wrong. Are all men—all—base, selfish, cowardly, dishonorable? Her whole being seems aflame with the indignation that is consuming her, when a knock sounds at the door. There is only one person in the house who knocks at her boudoir door. To every one, servants, guests, child, it is a free land; to her husband alone it is forbidden ground.

"Come in," says she, in a cold, reluctant tone.

"I know I shall be terribly in your way," says Baltimore, entering, "but I must beg you to give me

five minutes. I hear Beauclerk has returned, and that you have seen him. What kept him?"

Now Lady Baltimore—who a moment ago had condemned her brother heartily to his face—feels, as her husband addresses her, a perverse desire to openly contradict all that her honest judgment had led her to say to Beauclerk. That sense of indignation that was burning so hotly in her breast as Baltimore knocked at her door still stirs within her, but now its fire is directed against this latest comer. Who is he, that he should dare to question the honor of any man; and that there is annoyance and condemnation now in Baltimore's eyes is not to be denied.

"The weather," returns she shortly.

"By your tone I judge you deem that an adequate excuse for keeping Miss Kavanagh from her home for half a day and a night."

"There was a terrible storm," says. Lady Baltimore calmly; "the worst we have had for months."

"If it had been ten times as bad he should, in my opinion, have come home."

The words seem a mere repetition to Lady Baltimore. She had, indeed, used them to Beauclerk herself, or some such, a few minutes ago. Yet she seems to repudiate all sympathy with them now.

"On such a night as that? I hardly see why. Joyce was with an old friend. Mrs. Connolly was once a servant of her father's, and he——"

"Should have left her with the old friend and come home."

Again her own argument, and again perversity drives her to take the opposite side—the side against her conscience.

"Society must be in a very bad state if a man must perforce encounter thunder, rain, lightning; in fact, a chance of death from cold and exposure, all because he dare not spend one night beneath the roof of a respectable woman like Mrs. Connolly, with a girl friend, without bringing down on him the censures of his entire world."

"You can, it appears, be a most eloquent advocate for the supposed follies of any one but your husband. Nevertheless, I must persist in my opinion that it was, to put it very charitably indeed, inconsiderate of your brother to study his own comfort at the expense of his—girl friend. I believe that is your way of putting it, isn't it?"

"Yes," immovably. She has so far given way to movement, however, that she has taken up a feather fan lying near, and now so holds it between her and Baltimore that he cannot distinctly see her face.

"As for the world you speak of—it will not judge him as leniently as you do. It can talk. No one," bitterly, "is as good a witness of that as I am."

"But seldom," coldly, "without reason."

"And no one is a better witness of that than you are! That is what you would say, isn't it? Put down that fan, can't you?" with a touch of savage impatience. "Are you ashamed to carry out your argument with me face to face?"

"Ashamed!" Lady Baltimore has sprung suddenly to her feet, and sent the fan with a little crash to the ground. "Oh! shame on you to mention such a word."

"Am I to be forever your one scapegoat? Now take another one, I beseech you," says Baltimore with that old, queer, devilish mockery on his face that was never seen there until gossiping tongues divided him from his wife. "Here is your brother, actually thrown to you, as it were. Surely he will be a proof that I am not the only vile one among all the herd. If nothing else, acknowledge him selfish. A man who thought more of a dry coat than a young, a very young, girl's reputation. Is that nothing? Oh! consider, I beseech you!" his bantering manner, in which there is so much misery that it should have reached her but does not, grows stronger every instant "Even a big chill from the heavens above would not have killed him, whereas we all know how a little breath from the world below can kill many a——"

"Oh I you can talk, talk, talk," says she, that late unusual burst of passion showing some hot embers still. "But can words alter facts?" She pauses; a sudden chill seems to enwrap her. As if horrified by her late descent into passion she gathers herself together, and defies him once again with a cold look. "Why say anything more about it?" she says. "We do not agree."

"On this subject, at least, we should," says he hotly. "I think your brother should not have left us in ignorance of Miss Kavanagh's safety for so many hours. And you," with a sneer, "who are such a martinet for propriety, should certainly be prepared to acknowledge that he should not have so regulated his conduct as to make her a subject for unkind comment to the County. Badly," looking at her deliberately, "as you think of me, I should not have done it."

"No?" says she. It is a cruel—an unmistakable insulting monosyllable. And, bearing no other word with it—is the more detestable to the hearer.

"No," says he loudly. "Sneer as you will—my conscience is at rest there, so I can defy your suspicions."

"Ah! there!" says she.

"My dear creature," says he, "we all know there is but one villain in the world, and you are the proud possessor of him—as a husband. Permit me to observe, however, that a man of your code of honor, and of mine for the matter of that—but I forget that honor and I have no cousinship in your estimation—would have chosen to be wet to the skin rather than imperil the fair name of the girl he loved."

"Has he told you he loved her?"

"Not in so many words."

"Then from what do you argue?"

"My dear, I have told you that you are too much for me in argument! I, a simple on-looker, have judged merely from an every-day observance of little unobtrusive facts. If your brother is not in love with Miss Kavanagh, I think he ought to be. I speak ignorantly, I allow. I am not, like you, a deep student of human nature. If, too, he did not feel it his duty to bring her home last night, or else to leave her at Falling and return here himself, I fail to sympathize with him. I should not have so failed her."

"Oh but you!" says his wife, with a little contemptuous smile. "You who are such a paragon of virtue. It would not be expected of you that you should make such a mistake!"

She has sent forth her dart impulsively, sharply, out of the overflowing fullness of her angry heart—and when too late, when it has sped past recall—perhaps repents the speeding!

Such repentances, when felt too late, bring vices in their train; the desire for good, when chilled, turns to evil. The mind, never idle, if debarred from the best, leans inevitably toward the worst. Angry with herself, her very soul embittered within her, Lady Baltimore feels more and more a sense of passionate wrong against the man who had wooed and won her, and sown the seeds of gnawing distrust within her bosom.

Baltimore's face has whitened. His brow contracts.

"What a devilish unforgiving thing is a good woman," says he, with a reckless laugh. "That's a compliment, my lady—take it as you will. What! are your sneers to outlast life itself? Is that old supposed sin of mine never to be condoned? Why—say it was a real thing, instead of being the myth it is. Even so, a woman all prayers, all holiness, such as you are, might manage to pardon it!"

Lady Baltimore, rising, walks deliberately toward the door. It is her, usual method of putting an end to all discussions of this sort between them—of terminating any allusions to what she believes to be his unfaithful past—that past that has wrecked her life.

As a rule, Baltimore makes no attempt to prolong the argument. He has always let her go, with a sneering word, perhaps, or a muttered exclamation; but to-day he follows her, and stepping between her and the door, bars her departure.

"By heavens! you shall hear me," says he, his face dark with anger. "I will not submit any longer, in silence, to your insolent treatment of me. You condemn me, but I tell you it is I who should condemn. Do you think I believe in your present attitude toward me? Pretend as you will, even to yourself, in your soul it is impossible that you should give credence to that old story, false as it is old. No! you cling to it to mask the feet you have tired of me."

"Let me pass."

"Not until you have heard me!" With a light, but determined grasp of her arm, he presses her back into the chair she has just quitted.

"That story was a lie, I tell you. Before our marriage, I confess, there were some things—not creditable—to which I plead guilty, but——"

"Oh! be silent!" cries she, putting up her hand impulsively to check him. There is open disgust and horror on her pale, severe face.

"Before, before our marriage," persists he passionately.

"What! do you think there is no temptation—no sin—no falling away from the stern path of virtue in this life? Are you so mad or so ignorant as to believe that every man you meet could show a perfectly clean record of——"

"I cannot—I will not listen," interposes she, springing to her feet, white and indignant.

"There is nothing to hear. I am not going to pollute your ears," says he, with a curl of his lip. "Pray be reassured. What I only wish to say is that if you condemn me for a few past sins you should condemn also half your acquaintances. That, however, you do not do. For me alone, for your husband, you reserve all your resentment."

"What are the others to me?"

"What am I to you, for the matter of that?" with a bitter laugh, "if they are nothing I am less than nothing. You deliberately flung me aside all because——Why, look here!" moving toward her in

uncontrollable agitation, "say I had sinned above the Galileans—say that lie was true—say I had out-Heroded Herod in evil courses, still am I past the pale of forgiveness? Saint as you are, have you no pity for me? In all your histories of love and peace and perfection is there never a case of a poor devil of a sinner like me being taken back into grace—absolved—pardoned?"

"To rave like this is useless. There is no good to be got from it. You know what I think, what I believe. You deceived—wronged——Let me go, Cecil!"

"Before—before," repeats he, obstinately. "What that woman told you since, I swear to you, was a most damned lie."

"I refuse to go into it again."

She is deadly pale now. Her bloodless lips almost refuse to let the words go through them.

"You mean by that, that in spite of my oath you still cling to your belief that I am lying to you?"

His face is livid. There is something almost dangerous about it, but Lady Baltimore has come of too old and good a race to be frightened into submission. Raising one small, slender hand, she lays it upon his breast, and, with a little haughty upturning of her shapely head, pushes him from her.

"I have told you I refuse to go into it," says she, with superb self-control. "How long do you intend to keep me here? When may I be allowed to leave the room?"

There is distinct defiance in the clear glance she casts at him.

Baltimore draws a long breath, and then bursts into a strange laugh.

"Why, when you will," says he, shrugging his shoulders. He makes a graceful motion of his hand toward the door. "Shall I open it for you? But a word still let me say—if you are not in too great a hurry! Christianity, now, my fair saint, so far as ever I could hear or read, has been made up of mercy. Now, you are merciless! Would you mind letting me know how you reconcile one——"

"You perversely mistake me—I am no saint. I do not"—coldly—"profess to be one. I am no such earnest seeker after righteousness as you maliciously represent me. All I desire is honesty of purpose, and a decent sense of honor—honor that makes decency. That is all. For the rest, I am only a poor woman who loved once, and was—how many times deceived? That probably I shall never know."

Her sad, sad eyes, looking at him, grow suddenly full of tears.

"Isabel! My meeting with that woman—that time"—vehemently—"in town was accidental! I——It was the merest chance——"

"Don't!" says she, raising her hand, with such a painful repression of her voice as to render it almost a whisper; "I have told you it is useless. I have heard too much to believe anything now. I shall never, I think," very sadly, "believe in any one again. You have murdered faith in me. Tell this tale of yours to some one else—some one willing to believe—to"—with a terrible touch of scorn—"Lady Swansdown, for example."

"Why do you bring her into the discussion?" asks he, turning quickly to her. Has she heard anything? That scene in the garden that now seems to fill him with self-contempt. What a *bêtise* it was! And what did it amount to? Nothing! Lady Swansdown, he is honestly convinced, cares as little for him as he for her. And at this moment it is borne in upon him that he would give the embraces of a thousand such as she for one kind glance from the woman before him.

"I merely mentioned her as a possible person who might listen to you," with a slight lifting of her shoulders. "A mere idle suggestion. You will pardon me saying that this has been an idle discussion altogether. You began by denouncing my brother to me, and now——"

"You have ended by denouncing your husband to me! As idle a beginning as an end, surely. Still, to go back to Beauclerk. I persist in saying he has behaved scandalously in this affair. He has imperilled that poor child's good name."

"You can imperil names, too!" says she, turning almost fiercely on him.

"Lady Swansdown again, I suppose," says he, with a bored uplifting of his brows. "The old grievance is not sufficient, then; you must have a new one. I am afraid I must disappoint you. Lady Swansdown, I assure you, cares nothing at all for me, and I care just the same amount for her."

"Since when?"

"Since the world began—if you want a long date!"

"What a liar you are, Baltimore!" says his wife, turning to him with a sudden breaking out of all the pent-up passion within her. Involuntarily her hands clench themselves. She is pale no longer. A swift, hot flush has dyed her cheeks. Like an outraged, insulted queen, she holds him a moment with her eyes, then sweeps out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'Since thou art not as these are, go thy ways;
Thou hast no part in all my nights and days.
Lie still—sleep on—be glad. As such things be
Thou couldst not watch with me."

Luncheon has gone off very pleasantly. Joyce, persuaded by Lady Baltimore, had gone down to it, feeling a little shy, and conscious of a growing headache. But everybody had been charming to her, and Baltimore, in especial, had been very careful in his manner of treating her, saying little nice things to her, and insisting on her sitting next to him, a seat hitherto Lady Swansdown's own.

The latter had taken this so perfectly, that one might be pardoned for thinking it had been arranged beforehand between her and her host. At all events Lady Swansdown was very sympathetic, and indeed everybody seemed bent on treating her as a heroine of the highest order.

Joyce herself felt dull—nerveless. Words did not seem to come easily to her. She was tired, she thought, and of course she was, having spent a sleepless night. One little matter gave her cause for thankfulness. Dysart was absent from luncheon. He had gone on a long walking expedition, Lady Baltimore said, that would prevent his returning home until dinner hour—until quite 8 o'clock. Joyce told herself she was glad of this—though why she did not tell herself. At all events the news left her very silent.

But her silence was not noticed. It could not be, indeed, so great and so animated was the flow of Beauclerk's eloquence. Without addressing anybody in particular, he seemed to address everybody. He kept the whole table alive. He treated yesterday's adventure as a tremendously amusing affair, and invited everyone to look upon it as he did. He insisted on describing Miss Kavanagh and himself in the same light as he had described them earlier to his sister, as the modern Babes in the Wood, Mrs. Connolly being the Robin. He made several of the people who had dropped in to luncheon roar with laughter over his description of that excellent inn keeper. Her sayings—her appearance—her stern notions of morality that induced her to bring them home, "personally conducted"—the size of her waist—and her heart—and many other things. He was extremely funny. The fact that his sister smiled only when she felt she must to avoid comment, and that his host refused to smile at all, and that Miss Kavanagh was evidently on thorns all the time did not for an instant damp his overflowing spirits.

It is now seven, o'clock; Miss Kavanagh, on her way upstairs to dress for dinner, suddenly remembering that there is a book in the library, left by her early in the afternoon on the central table, turns aside to fetch it.

She forgets, however, what she has come for when, having entered the room, she sees Dysart standing before the fire, staring apparently at nothing. To her chagrin, she is conscious that the unmistakable start she had made on seeing him is known to him.

"I didn't know you had returned," says she awkwardly, yet made a courageous effort to appear as natural as usual.

"No? I knew you had returned," says he slowly.

"It is very late to say good-morning," says she with a poor little attempt at a laugh, but still advancing toward him and holding out her hand.

"Too late!" replied he, ignoring the hand. Joyce, as if struck by some cruel blow, draws back a step or two.

"You are not tired, I hope?" asks Dysart courteously.

"Oh, no." She feels stifled; choked. A desire to get to the door, and escape—lose sight of him forever—is the one strong longing that possesses her; but to move requires strength, and she feels that her limbs are trembling beneath her.

"It was a long drive, however. And the storm was severe. I fear you must have suffered in some way."

"I have not suffered," says she, in a dull, emotionless way. Indeed, she hardly knows what she says, a repetition of his own words seems the easiest thing to bar, so she adopts it.

"No?"

There is a considerable pause, and then——

"No! It is true! It is I only who have suffered," says Dysart with an uncontrollable abandonment to the misery that is destroying him. "I alone."

"You mean something," says Joyce. It is by a terrible effort that she speaks. She feels thoroughly unnerved—unstrung. Conscious that the nervous shaking of her hands will betray her, she clasps them behind her tightly. "You meant something just now when you refused to take my hand. But what? What?"

"You said it was too late," replies he. "And I—agreed with you."

"That was not it!" says she feverishly. "There was more—much more! Tell me"—passionately—"what you meant. Why would you not touch me? What am I to understand——"

"That from henceforth you are free from the persecution of my love," says Dysart deliberately. "I was mad ever to hope that you could care for me—still—I did hope. That has been my undoing. But now——"

"Well?" demands she faintly. Her whole being seems stunned. Something of all this she had anticipated, but the reality is far worse than any anticipation had been. She had seen him in her thoughts, angry, indignant, miserable, but that he should thus coldly set her aside—bid her an everlasting adieu—be able to make up his mind deliberately to forget her—this—had never occurred to her as being even probable.

"Now you are to understand that the idiotic farce played between us two the day before yesterday is at an end? The curtain is down. It is over. It was a failure—neither you, nor I, nor the public will ever hear of it again."

"Is this—because I did not come home last evening in the rain and storm?" Some small spark of courage has come back to her now. She lifts her head and looks at him.

"Oh! be honest with me here, in our last hour together," cries he vehemently. "You have cheated me all through—be true to yourself for once. Why pretend it is my fault that we part? Yesterday I implored you not to go for that drive with him, and yet—you went. What was I—or my love for you in comparison with a few hours' drive with that lying scoundrel?"

"It was only the drive I thought of," says she piteously. "I—there was nothing else, indeed. And you; if"—raising her hand to her throat as if suffocating—"if you had not spoken so roughly—so——"

"Pshaw!" says Dysart, turning from her as if disgusted. To him, in his present furious mood, her grief, her fear, her shrinkings, are all so many movements in the game of coquette, at which she is a past mistress. "Will you think me a fool to the end?" says he. "See here," turning his angry eyes to hers. "I don't care what you say, I know you now. Too late, indeed—but still I know you! To the very core of your heart you are one mass of deceit."

A little spasm crosses her face. She leans back heavily against the table behind her. "Oh, no, no," she says in a voice so low as to be almost unheard.

"You will deny, of course," says he mercilessly. "You would even have me believe that you regret the past—but you, and such as you never regret. Man is your prey! So many scalps to your belt is all you think about. Why," with an accent of passion, "what am I to you? Just the filling up of so many hours' amusement—no more! Do you think all my eloquence would have any chance against one of his cursed words? I might kneel at your feet from morning until night, and still I should be to you a thing of naught in comparison with him."

She holds out her hands to him in a little dumb fashion. Her tongue seems frozen. But he repulses this last attempt at reconciliation.

"It is no good. None! I have no belief in you left, so you can no longer cajole me. I know that I am nothing to you. Nothing! If," drawing a deep breath through his closed teeth, "if a thousand years were to go by I should still be nothing to you if he were near. I give it up. The battle was too strong for me. I am defeated, lost, ruined."

"You have so arranged it," says she in a low tone, singularly clear. The violence of his agitation had subdued hers, and rendered her comparatively calm.

"You must permit me to contradict you. The arrangement is all your own."

"Was it so great a crime to stay last night at Falling?" "There is no crime anywhere. That you should have made a decision between two men is not a crime."

"No! I acknowledge I made a decision—but——"

"When did you make it?"

"Last evening—and though you——"

"Oh! no excuses," says he with a frown. "Do you think I desire them?"

He hesitates for a minute or so, and now turns to her abruptly. "Are you engaged to him finally?"

"No."

"No!" In accents suggestive of surprise so intense as to almost enlarge into disbelief. "You refused him then?"

"No," says she again. Her heart seems to die within her. Oh, the sense of shame that overpowers her. A sudden wild, terrible hatred of Beauclerk takes her into possession. Why, why, had he not given her the choice of saying yes, instead of no, to that last searching question?

"You mean—that he——" He stops dead short as if not knowing how to proceed. Then, suddenly, his wrath breaks forth. "And for that scoundrel, that fellow without a heart, you have sacrificed the best of you—your own heart! For him, whose word is as light as his oath, you have flung behind you a love that would have surrounded you to your dying day. Good heavens! What are women made of? But——" He sobers himself at once, as if smitten by some sharp remembrance, and, pale with shame and remorse, looks at her. "Of course," says he, "it is only one heartbroken, as I am, who would have dared thus to address you. And it is plain to me now that there are reasons why he should not have spoken before this. For one thing, you were alone with him; for another, you are tired, exhausted. No doubt to-morrow he——"

"How dare you?" says she in a voice that startles him, a very low voice, but vibrating with outraged pride. "How dare you thus insult me? You seem to think—to think—that because—last night—he and I were kept from our home by the storm——" She pauses; that old, first odd sensation of choking now again oppresses her. She lays her hand upon the back of a chair near her, and presses heavily upon it. "You think I have disgraced myself," says she, the words coming in a little gasp from her parched lips. "That is why you speak of things being at an end between us. Oh——"

"You wrong me there," says the young man, who has grown ghastly. "Whatever I may have said, I ——"

"You meant it!" says she. She draws herself up to the full height of her young, slender figure, and, turning abruptly, moves toward the door. As she reaches it, she looks back at him. "You are a coward!" she says, in a low, distinct tone alive with scorn. "A coward!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I have seen the desire of mine eyes,
The beginning of love,
The season of kisses and sighs,
And the end thereof."

Miss Kavanagh put in no appearance at dinner. "A chill," whispered Lady Baltimore to everybody, in her kindly, sympathetic way, caught during that miserable drive yesterday. She hoped it would be nothing, but thought it better to induce Joyce to remain quiet in her own room for the rest of the evening, safe from draughts and the dangers attendant on the baring of her neck and arms. She told her small story beautifully, but omitted to add that Joyce had refused to come downstairs, and that she had seemed so wretchedly low-spirited that at last her hostess had ceased to urge her.

She had, however, spent a good deal of time arguing with her on another subject—the girl's fixed determination to go home—"to go back to Barbara"—next day. Lady Baltimore had striven very diligently to turn her from this purpose, but all to no avail. She had even gone so far as to point out to Joyce that the fact of her thus leaving the Court before the expiration of her visit might suggest itself to some people in a very unpleasant light. They might say she had come to the end of her welcome there—been given her congé, in fact—on account of that luckless adventure with her hostess' brother.

Joyce was deaf to all such open hints. She remained obstinately determined not to stay a moment longer there than could be helped. Was it because of Norman she was going? No; she shook her head with such a look of contemptuous indifference that Lady Baltimore found it impossible to doubt her, and felt her heart thereby lightened. Was it Felix?

Miss Kavanagh had evidently resented that question at first, but finally had broken into a passionate fit of tears, and when Lady Baltimore placed her arms round her had not repulsed her.

"But, dear Joyce, he himself is leaving to-morrow."

"Oh, let me go home. Do not ask me to stay. I am more unhappy than I can tell you," said the girl brokenly.

"You have had a quarrel with him?"

Joyce bowed her head in a little quick, impatient way.

"It is Felix then, Joyce; not Norman? Let me say I am glad—for your sake; though that is a hard thing for a sister to say of her brother. But Norman is selfish. It is his worst fault, perhaps, but a bad one. As for this little misunderstanding with Felix, it will not last. He loves you, dearest, most honestly. You will make up this tiny——"

"Never!" said Joyce, interrupting her and releasing herself from her embrace. Her young face looked hard and unforgiving, and Lady Baltimore, with a sigh, decided on saying no more just then. So she went downstairs and told her little tale about Joyce's indisposition, and was believed by nobody. They all said they were sorry, as in duty bound, and perhaps they were, taking their own view of her absence; but dinner went off extremely well, nevertheless, and was considered quite a success.

Dysart was present, and was apparently in very high spirits; so high, indeed, that at odd moments his hostess, knowing a good deal, stared at him. He, who was usually so silent a member, to-night outshone even the versatile Beauclerk in the lightness and persistency of his conversation.

This sudden burst of animation lasted him throughout the evening, carrying him triumphantly across the hour and a half of drawing-room small talk, and even lasting till the more careless hours in the smoking-room have come to an end, and one by one the men have yawned themselves off to bed.

Then it died. So entirely, so forlornly as to prove it had been only a mere passing and enforced exhilaration after all. They were all gone: there was no need now to keep up the miserable farce—to seek to prevent their coupling her name with his, and therefore discovering the secret of her sad seclusion.

As Dysart found himself almost the last man in the room, he too rose, reluctantly, as though unwilling to give himself up to the solitary musings that he knew lay before him; the self-upbraidings, the vague remorse, the terrible dread lest he had been too severe, that he knows will be his all through the silent darkness. For what have sleep and he to do with each other to-night?

He bade his host good-night and, with a pretense of going upstairs, turned aside into the deserted library, and, choosing a book, flung himself into a chair, determined, if possible, to read his brain into a state of coma.

Twelve o'clock has struck, slowly, painfully, as if the old timekeeper is sleepy, too, and is nodding over his work. And now one—as slowly, truly, but with the startling brevity that prevents one's dwelling on its drowsy note. Dysart, with a tired groan, flings down his book, and, rising to his feet, stretches his arms above his head in an utter abandonment to sleepless fatigue that is even more mental than bodily. Once the subject of that book had been of an enthralling interest to him. To-night it bores him. He has found himself unequal to the solving of the abstruse arguments it contains. One thought seems to have dulled all others. He is leaving to-morrow! He is leaving her to-morrow! Oh! surely it is more than that curt pronoun can contain. He is leaving, in a few short hours, his life, his hope, his one small chance of heaven upon earth. How much she had been to him, how strong his hoping even against hope had been, he never knew till now, when all is swept out of his path forever.

The increasing stillness of the house seems to weigh upon him, rendering even gloomier his melancholy thoughts. How intolerably quiet the night is, not even a breath of wind is playing in the trees outside. On such a night as this ghosts might walk and demons work their will. There is something ghastly in this unnatural cessation of all sound, all movement.

"What a strange power," says Emerson, "there is in silence." An old idea, yet always new. Who is there who has not been affected by it—has not known that curious, senseless dread of spirits present from some unknown world that very young children often feel? "Fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake," says Job in one of his most dismal moments; and now to Dysart this strange, unaccountable chill feeling comes. Insensibly, born of the hour and the silence only, and with no smallest dread of things intangible.

The small clock on the mantel-piece sends forth a tiny chime, so delicate that in broad daylight, with broader views in the listeners, it might have gone unheard. Now it strikes upon the motionless air as loudly as though it were the crack of doom. Poor little clock! struggling to be acknowledged for twelve long years of nights and days, now is your revenge—the fruition of all your small ambitious desires.

Dysart starts violently at the sound of it. It is of importance, this little clock. It has wakened him to real life again. He has taken a step toward the door and the bed, the very idea of which up to this has been treated by him with ignominy, when—a sound in the hall outside stays him.

An unmistakable step, but so light as to suggest the idea of burglars. Dysart's spirits rise. The melancholy of a moment since deserts him. He looks round for the poker—that national, universal mode of defence when our castles are invaded by the "masked man."

He has not time, however, to reach it before the handle of the door is slowly turned—before the door is as slowly opened, and——

"What is this?"

For a second Dysart's heart seems to stop beating. He can only gaze spellbound at this figure, clad all in white, that walks deliberately into the room, and seemingly directly toward him. It is Joyce! Joyce!

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Sleep; and if life was bitter to thee, pardon,
If sweet, give thanks; thou hast no more to live;
And to give thanks is good, and to forgive."

Is she dead or still living? Dysart, calmed now, indeed, gazes at her with a heart contracted. Great heaven! how like death she looks, and yet—he knows she is still in the flesh. How strangely her eyes gleam. A dull gleam and so passionless. Her brown hair—not altogether fallen down her back, but loosened from its hairpins, and hanging in a soft heavy knot behind her head—gives an additional pallor to her already too white face. The open eyes are looking straight before them, unseeing. Her step is slow, mechanical, unearthly. It is only indeed when she lays the candle she holds upon the edge of the table, the extreme edge, that he knows she is asleep, and walking in a dreamland that to waking mortals is inaccessible.

Silently, and always with that methodical step, she moves toward the fireplace, and still a little further, until she stands on that eventful spot where he had given up all claim to her, and thrown her back upon herself. There is the very square on the carpet where she stood some hours ago. There she stands now. To her right is the chair on which she had leaned in great bitterness of spirit, trying to evoke help and strength from the dead oak. Now, in her dreams, as if remembering that past scene, she puts out her hands a little vaguely, a little blindly, and, the chair not being where in her vision she believes it to be, she gropes vaguely for it in a troubled fashion, the little trembling hands moving nervously from side to side. It is a very, sad sight, the sadder for, the mournful change that crosses the face of the sleeping girl. The lips take a melancholy curve: the long lashes droop over the sightless eyes, a long, sad sigh escapes her.

Dysart, his heart beating wildly, makes a movement toward her. Whether the sound of his impetuous footstep disturbs her dream, or whether the coming of her fingers in sudden contact with the edge of the table does it, who can tell; she starts and wakens.

At first she stands as if not understanding, and then, with a terrified expression in her now sentient eyes, looks hurriedly around her. Her eyes meet Dysart's.

"Don't be frightened," begins he quickly.

"How did I come here?" interrupts she, in a voice panic-stricken. "I was upstairs; I remember nothing. It was only a moment since that I——Was I asleep?"

She gives a hasty furtive glance at the pretty loose white garment that enfolds her.

"I suppose so," says Dysart. "You must have had some disturbing dream, and it drove you down here. It is nothing. Many people walk in their sleep."

"But I never. Oh! what is it?" says she, as if appealing to him to explain herself to herself. "Was," faintly flushing, "any one else here? Did any one see me?"

"No one. They are in bed; all asleep."

"And you?" doubtfully.

"I couldn't sleep," returns he slowly, gazing fixedly at her.

"I must go," says she feverishly. She moves rapidly toward the door; her one thought seems to be to get back to her own room. She looks ill, unstrung, frightened. This new phase in her has alarmed her. What if, for the future, she cannot even depend upon herself?—cannot know where her mind will carry her when deadly sleep has fallen upon her? It is a hateful thought. And to bring her here. Where he was. What power has he over her? Oh! the sense of relief in thinking that she will be at home to-morrow—safe with Barbara.

Her hand is on the door. She is going.

"Joyce," says Dysart suddenly, sharply. All his soul is in his voice. So keenly it rings, that involuntarily she turns to him. Great agony must make itself felt, and to Dysart, seeing her on the point of leaving him forever, it seems as though his life is being torn from him. In truth she is his life, the entire happiness of it—if she goes through that door unforgiving, she will carry with her all that makes it bearable.

She is looking at him. Her eyes are brilliant with nervous excitement; her face pale. Her very lips have lost their color.

"Yes?" says she interrogatively, impatiently.

"I am going away to-morrow—I shall not——"

"Yes, yes—I know. I am going, too."

"I shall not see you again?"

"I hope not—I think not."

She makes another step forward. Opening the door with a little light touch, she places one hand before the candle and peers timidly into the dark hall outside.

"Don't let that be your last word to me," says the young man, passionately. "Joyce, hear me! There must be some excuse for me."

"Excuse?" says she, looking back at him over her shoulder, her lovely face full of curious wonder.

"Yes—yes! I was mad! I didn't mean a word I said—I swear it! I——Joyce, forgive me!"

The words, though whispered, burst from him with a despairing vehemence. He would have caught her hand but that she lifts her eyes to his—such eyes!

There is a little pause, and then:

"Oh, no! Never—never!" says she.

Her tone is very low and clear—not angry, not even hasty or reproachful. Only very sad and certain. It kills all hope.

She goes quickly through the open doorway, closing it behind her. The faint, ghostly sound of her footfalls can be heard as she crosses the hall. After a moment even this light sound ceases. She is indeed gone! It is all over!

With a kind of desire to hide herself, Joyce has crept into her bed, sore at heart, angry, miserable. No hope that sleep will again visit her has led her to this step, and, indeed, would sleep be desirable? What a treacherous part it had played when last it fell on her!

How grieved he looked—how white! He was evidently most honestly sorry for all the unkind things he had said to her. Not that he had said many, indeed, only—he had looked them. And she, she had been very hard—oh! too hard. However, there was an end to it. To-morrow would place more miles between them, in every way, than would ever be recrossed. He would not come here again until he had forgotten her—married, probably. They would not meet. There should have been comfort in that certainty, but, alas! when she sought for it, it eluded her—it was not there.

In spite of the trick Somnus had just played her, she would now gladly have courted him again, if only to escape from ever growing regret. But though she turns from side to side in a vain endeavor to secure him, that cruel god persistently denies her, and with mournful memories and tired eyes, she lies, watching, waiting for the tender breaking of the dawn upon the purple hills.

Slowly, slowly comes up the sun. Coldly, and with a tremulous lingering, the light shines on land and sea. Then sounds the bursting chants of birds, the rush of streams, the gentle sighings of the winds through herb and foliage.

Joyce, thankful for the blessed daylight, flings the clothes aside, and with languid step, and eyes, sad always, but grown weary, too, with sleeplessness and thoughts unkind, moves lightly to the window.

Throwing wide the casement, she lets the cool morning air flow in.

A new day has arisen. What will it bring her? What can it bring, save disappointment only and a vain regret? Oh! why must she, of all people, be thus unblessed upon this blessed morn? Never has the sun seemed brighter—the whole earth a greater glow of glory.

> "Welcome, the lord of light and lamp of day:
> Welcome, fosterer of tender herbis green;
> Welcome, quickener of flourish'd flowers' sheen.
> Welcome depainter of the bloomit meads;
> Welcome, the life of everything that spreads!"

Yet to Joyce welcome to the rising sun seems impossible. What is the good of day when hope is dead? In another hour or two she must rise, go downstairs, talk, laugh, and appear interested in all that is being said—and with a heart at variance with joy—a poor heart, heavy as lead.

A kind of despairing rage against her crooked fortune moves her. Why has she been thus unlucky? Why at first should a foolish, vagrant feeling have led her to think so strongly of one unworthy and now hateful to her as to prejudice her in the mind of the one really worthy. What madness possessed her? Surely she is the most unfortunate girl alive? A sense of injustice bring the tears into her eyes, and blots out the slowly widening landscape from her view.

> "How happy some o'er other some can be!"

Her thoughts run to Barbara and Monkton. They are happy in spite of many frowns from fortune. They are poor—as society counts poverty—but the want of money is not a cardinal evil. They love each other; and the children are things to be loved as well—darling children! well grown, and strong, and healthy, though terrible little Turks at times—God bless them! Oh! that she could count herself as blessed as Barbara, whose greatest trouble is to deny herself this and that, to be

able to pay for the other thing. No! to be poor is not to be unhappy. "Our happiness in this world," says a writer, "depends on the affections we are able to inspire." Truly she—Joyce—has not been successful in her quest. For if he had loved her, would he ever have doubted her? "Perfect love," says the oldest, grandest testimony of all, "casteth out fear." And he had feared. Sitting here in the dawning daylight, the tears ran softly down her cheeks.

It is a strange thing, but true, that never once during this whole night's dreary vigil do her thoughts once turn to Beauclerk.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Oh, there's stony a leaf in Atholl wood,
And mony a bird in its breast,
And mony a pain may the heart sustain
Ere it sab itsel' to rest."

Barbara meets her on the threshold and draws her with loving arms into the dining-room.

"I knew you would be here at this hour. Lady Baltimore wrote me word about it. And I have sent the chicks away to play in the garden, as I thought you would like to have a comfortable chat just at first."

"Lady Baltimore wrote?"

"Yes, dear. Just to say you were distressed about that unfortunate affair—that drive, you know—and that you felt you wanted to come back to me. I was glad you wanted that, darling."

"You are not angry with me, Barbara?" asks the girl, loosening her sister's arms the better to see her face.

"Angry! No, how could I be angry?" says Mrs. Monkton, the more vehemently in that she knows she *had* been very angry just at first. "It was the merest chance. It might have happened to anybody. One can't control storms!"

"No—that's what Mrs. Connolly said, only she called it 'the ilimints,'" says Joyce, with quite a little ghost of a smile.

"Well, now you are home again, and it's all behind you. And there is really nothing in it. And you must not think so much about it," says Barbara, fondling her hand. "Lady Baltimore said you were too unhappy about it."

"Did she say that? What else did she say?" asks the girl, regarding her sister with searching, eyes. What had Lady Baltimore told her? That impulsive admission to the latter last night had been troubling Joyce ever since, and now to have to lay bare her heart again, to acknowledge her seeming fickleness, to receive Barbara's congratulation on it, only to declare that this second lover has, too, been placed by Fate outside her life, seems too bitter to her. Oh, no—she cannot tell Barbara.

"Why nothing," says Mrs. Monkton, who is now busying herself removing the girl's hat and furs. "What was there to tell, after all?" She is plainly determined to treat the matter lightly.

"Oh—there is a good deal," says Joyce, bitterly. "Why don't you tell me," turning suddenly upon her sister, "that you knew how it would be all along? That you distrusted that Mr. Beauclerk from the very first, and that Felix Dysart was always worth a thousand of him?" There is something that is almost defiant in her manner.

"Because, for one thing, I very seldom call him Felix," says Mrs. Monkton, with a smile, alluding to the last accusation. "And because, too, I can't bear the 'I told you so' persons.—You mustn't class me with them, Joyce, whatever you do."

"I shan't be able to do much more, at all events," says Joyce presently. "That's one comfort, not only for myself but for my family. I expect I have excelled myself this time. Well," with a dull little laugh, "it will have to last, so——"

"Joyce," says her sister, quickly, "tell me one small thing. Mr. Beauclerk—he——"

"Yes?" stonily, as Barbara goes on a rock.

"You—you are not engaged to him?"

Joyce breaks into an angry laugh.

"That is what you all ask," says she. "There is no variety; none. No, no, no; I am engaged to nobody. Nobody wants me, and I——'I care for nobody, not I, for nobody cares for me.' Mark the heavy emphasis on the 'for,' I beg you, Barbara!"

She breaks entirely from her sister's hold and springs to her feet.

"You are tired," says Mrs. Monkton, anxiously, rising too.

"Why don't you say what you really mean?" says Joyce, turning almost fiercely to her. "Why pretend you think I am fatigued when you honestly think I am miserable, because Mr. Beauclerk has not asked me to marry him. No! I don't care what you think. I am miserable! And though I were to tell you over and over again it was not because of him, you would not believe me, so I will say nothing."

"Here is Freddy," says Mrs. Monkton, nervously, who has just seen her husband's head pass the window. He enters the room almost as she speaks.

"Well, Joyce, back again," says he, affectionately. He kisses the girl warmly. "Horrid drive you must have had through that storm."

"You, too, blame the storm, then, and not me," says Joyce, with a smile. "Everybody doesn't take your view of it. It appears I should have returned, in all that rain and wind and——"

"Pshaw! Never listen to extremists," says Mr. Monkton, sinking lazily into a chair. "They will land you on all sorts of barren coasts if you give ear to them. For my part I never could see why two people of opposite sexes, if overcome by nature's artillery, should not spend a night under a wayside inn without calling down upon them the social artillery of gossip. There is only one thing in the whole affair," says Mr. Monkton, seriously, "that has given me a moment's uneasiness."

"And that?" says Joyce, nervously.

"Is how I can possibly be second to both of them. Dysart, I confess, has my sympathies, but if Beauclerk were to appear first upon the field and implore my assistance I feel I should have a delicacy about refusing him."

"Freddy," says his wife, reprovingly.

"Oh, as for that," says Joyce, with a frown, "I do think men are the most troublesome things on earth." She burst out presently. "When one isn't loving them, one is hating them."

"How many of them at a time?" asks her brother-in-law with deep interest. "Not more than two, Joyce, please. I couldn't grasp any more. My intellect is of a very limited order."

"So is mine, I think," says Joyce, with a tired little sigh.

Monkton, although determined to treat the matter lightly, looks very sorry for her. Evidently she is out of joint with the whole world at present.

"How did Lady Baltimore take it?" asks he, with all the careless air of one asking a question on some unimportant subject.

"She was angry with Mr. Beauclerk for not leaving me at the inn, and coming home himself."

"Unsisterly woman!"

"She was quite right, after all," says Mrs. Monkton, who had defended Beauclerk herself, but cannot bear to hear another take his part.

"And, Dysart—how did he take it?" asks Monkton, smiling.

"I don't see how he should take it, anyway," says Joyce, coldly.

"Not even with soda water?" says her brother-in-law. "Of course, it would be too much to expect him to take it neat. You broke it gently to him I hope."

"Ah, you don't understand Mr. Dysart," says the girl, rising abruptly. "I did not understand him until yesterday."

"Is he so very abstruse?"

"He is very insolent," says Miss Kavanagh, with a sudden touch of fire, that makes her sister look at her with some uneasiness.

"I see," says Mr. Monkton, slowly. He still, unfortunately, looks amused. "One never does know anybody until he or she gives way to a towering passion. So he gave you a right good scolding for being caught in the rain with Beauclerk. A little unreasonable, surely; but lovers never yet were famous for their common sense. That little ingredient was forgotten in their composition. And so he gave you a lecture?"

"Well, he is not likely to do it again," says she slowly.

"No? Then it is more than likely that I shall be the one to be scolded presently. He won't be able to content himself with silence. He will want to air his grievances, to revenge them on some one, and if you refuse to see him, I shall be that one. There is really only one small remark to be made about this whole matter," says Mr. Monkton, with a rueful smile, "and it remains for me to make it. If you will encourage two suitors at the same time, my good child, the least you may expect is trouble. You are bound to look out for 'breakers ahead,' but (and this is the remark) it is very hard lines for a fourth and most innocent person to have those suitors dropped straight on him

without a second's notice. I'm not a born warrior; the brunt of the battle is a sort of gayety that I confess myself unsuited for. I haven't been educated up to it. I——"

"There will be no battle," says Joyce, in a strange tone, "because there will be no combatants. For a battle there must be something to fight for, and here there is nothing. You are all wrong, Freddy. You will find out that after awhile. I have a headache, Barbara. I think," raising her lovely but pained eyes to her sister, "I should like to go into the garden for a little bit. The air there is always so sweet."

"Go, darling," says Barbara, whose own eyes have filled with tears. "Oh, Freddy," turning reproachfully to her husband as the door closes on Joyce, "how could you so have taken her? You must have seen how unhappy she was. And all about that horrid Beauclerk."

Monkton stares at her.

"So that is how you read it," says he at last.

"There is no difficulty about the reading. Could it be in larger print?"

"Large enough, certainly, as to the unhappiness, but for 'Beauclerk' I should advise the printer to insert Dysart.'"

"Dysart? Felix?"

"Unless, indeed, you could suggest a third."

"Nonsense!" says Mrs. Monkton, contemptuously. "She has never cared for poor Felix. How I wish she had. He is worth a thousand of the other; but girls are so perverse."

"They are. That is just my point," says her husband. "Joyce is so perverse that she won't allow herself to see that it is Dysart she preferred. However, there is one comfort, she is paying for her perversity."

"Freddy," says his wife, after a long pause, "do you really think that?"

"What? That girls are perverse?"

"No, no! That she likes Felix best?"

"That is indeed my fixed belief."

"Oh, Freddy!" cries his wife, throwing herself into his arms. "How beautiful of you, I've always wanted to think that, but never could until now—now that——"

"My clear judgment has been brought to bear upon it. Quite right, my dear, always regard your husband as a sort of demi-god, who——"

"Pouf!" says she. "Do you think I was born without a grain of sense? But really, Freddy——Oh! if it might be! Poor, poor darling! how sad she looked. If they have had a serious quarrel over her drive with that detestable Beauclerk—why—I——" Here she bursts into tears, and with her face buried on Monkton's waistcoat, makes little wild dabs at the air with a right hand that is only to be appeased by having Monkton's handkerchief thrust into it.

"What a baby you are!" says he, giving her a loving little shake. "I declare, you were well named. The swift transitions from the tremendous 'Barbara' to the inconsequent 'Baby' takes but an instant, and exactly expresses you. A moment ago you were bent on withering me: now, I am going to wither you."

"Oh, no! don't," says she, half laughing, half crying. "And besides, it is you who are inconsequent. You never keep to one point for a second."

"Why should I?" says he, "when it is such a disagreeable one. There let us give up for the day. We can write 'To be continued' after it, and begin a fresh chapter to-morrow."

Meantime, Joyce, making her way to the garden with a hope of finding there, at all events, silence, and opportunity for thought, seats herself upon a garden chair, and gives herself up a willing prey to melancholy. She had desired to struggle against this evil, but it had conquered her, and tears rising beneath her lids are falling on her cheeks, when two small creatures emerging from the summer house on her left catch sight of her.

They had been preparing for a rush, a real Redshank, painted and feathered, descent upon her, when something in her sorrowful attitude becomes known to them.

Fun dies within their kind little hearts. Their Joyce has come home to them—that is a matter for joy, but their Joyce has come home unhappy—that is a matter for grief. Step by step, hand in hand, they approach her, and even at the very last, with their little breasts overflowing with the delight of getting her back, it is with a very gentle precipitation that they throw themselves upon her.

And it never occurs to them, either, to trouble her for an explanation; no probing questions issue from their lips. She is sorry, that is all. It is enough for their sympathies. Too much.

Joyce herself is hardly aware of the advent of the little comforters, until two small arms steal around her neck, and she finds Mabel's face pressed close against her own.

"Let me kiss her, too," says Tommy, trying to push his sister away, and resenting openly the fact of her having secured the first attempt at consolation.

"You mustn't tease her, she's sorry. She's very sorry about something," says Mabel, turning up Joyce's face with her pink palm. "Aren't you, Joyce? There's droppies in your eyes?"

"A little, darling," says Joyce, brokenly.

"Then I'll be sorry with you," says the child, with all childhood's divine intuition that to sorrow alone is to know a double sorrow. She hugs Joyce more closely with her tender arms, and Joyce, after a battle with her braver self, gives way, and breaks into bitter tears.

"There now! you've made her cry right out! You're a naughty girl," says Tommy, to his sister in a raging tone, meant to hide the fact that he too, himself is on the point of giving way; in fact, another moment sees him dissolved in tears.

"Never mind, Joycie. Never mind. We love you!" sobs he, getting up on the back of the seat behind her, and making a very excellent attempt at strangulation.

"Do you? There doesn't seem to be any one else, then, but you!" says poor Joyce, dropping Mabel into her lap, and Tommy more to the front, and clasping them both to her with a little convulsive movement.

Perhaps the good cry she has on top of those two loving little heads does her more good than anything else could possibly have done.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"A bitter and perplexed 'What shall I do?'
Is worse to man than worse necessity."

Three months have come and gone, and winter is upon us. It is close on Christmastide indeed. All the trees lie bare and desolate, the leaves have fallen from them, and their sweet denizens, the birds, flown or dead.

Evening has fallen. The children are in the nursery, having a last romp before bed hour. Their usual happy hunting ground for that final fling is the drawing-room, but finding the atmosphere there, to-night, distinctly cloudy, they had beaten a simultaneous retreat to Bridget and the battered old toys upstairs. Children, like rats, dislike discomfort.

Mrs. Monkton, sitting before the fire, that keeps up a continuous sound as musical as the rippling of a small stream, is leaning back in her chair, her pretty forehead puckered into a thousand doubts. Joyce, near her, is as silent as she is; while Mr. Monkton, after a vain pretence at being absorbed in the morning paper (diligently digested at 11 this morning), flings it impatiently on the floor.

"What's the good of your looking like that, Barbara? If you were compelled to accept this invitation from my mother, I could see some reason for your dismal glances, but when you know I am as far from wishing you to accept it as you are yourself, why should——?"

"Ah! but are you?" says his wife with a swift, dissatisfied glance at him. The dissatisfaction is a good deal directed toward herself.

"If you could make her sure of that," says Joyce, softly. "I have tried to explain it to her, but——"

"I suppose I am unreasonable," says Barbara, rising, with a little laugh that has a good deal of grief in it. "I suppose I ought to believe," turning to her husband, "that you are dying for me to refuse this invitation from the people who have covered me with insult for eight years, when I know well that you are dying for me to accept it."

"Oh! if you know that," says Monkton rather feebly, it must be confessed. This fatally late desire on the part of his people to become acquainted with his wife and children has taken hold of him, has lived with him through the day, not for anything he personally could possibly gain by it, but because of a deep desire he has that they, his father and mother, should see and know his wife, and learn to admire her and love her.

"Of course I know it," says Barbara, almost fiercely. "Do you think I have lived with you all these years and cannot read your heart? Don't think I blame you, Freddy. If the cases were reversed I should feel just like you. I should go to any lengths to be at one with my own people."

"I don't want to go to even the shortest length," says Mr. Monkton. As if a little nettled he takes up the dull old local paper again and begins a third severe examination of it. But Mrs. Monkton,

feeling that she cannot survive another silence, lays her hand upon it and captures it.

"Let us talk about it, Freddy," says she.

"It will only make you more unhappy."

"Oh, no. I think not. It will do her good," says Joyce, anxiously.

"Where is the letter? I hardly saw it. Who is asked?" demands Barbara feverishly.

"Nobody in particular, except you. My father has expressed a wish that we should occupy that house of his in Harley street for the winter months, and my mother puts in, accidentally as it were, that she would like to see the children. But you are the one specially alluded to."

"They are too kind!" says Barbara rather unkindly to herself.

"I quite see it in your light. It is an absolute impertinence," says Monkton, with a suppressed sigh. "I allow all that. In fact, I am with you, Barbara, all through: why keep me thinking about it? Put it out of your head. It requires nothing more than a polite refusal."

"I shall hate to make it polite," says Barbara. And then, recurring to her first and sure knowledge of his secret desires, "you want to go to them?"

"I shall never go without you," returns he gravely.

"Ah! that is almost a challenge," says she, flushing.

"Barbara! perhaps he is right," says Joyce, gently; as she speaks she gets up from the fire and makes her way to the door, and from that to her own room.

"Will you go without me?" says Barbara, when she has gone, looking at her husband with large, earnest eyes.

"Never. You say you know me thoroughly, Barbara; why then ask that question?"

"Well, you will never go then," says she, "for I—I will never enter those people's doors. I couldn't, Freddy. It would kill me!" She has kept up her defiant attitude so successfully and for so long that Mr. Monkton is now electrified when she suddenly bursts into tears and throws herself into his arms.

"You think me a beast!" says she, clinging to him.

"You are tired; you are bothered. Give it up, darling," says he, patting her on the back, the most approved modern plan of reducing people to a stale of common sense.

"But you do think it, don't you?"

"No. Barbara. There now, be a good sensible girl, and try to realize that I don't want you to accept this invitation, and that I am going to write to my mother in the morning to say it is impossible for us to leave home just now—as—as—eh?"

"Oh, anything will do."

"As baby is not very well? That's the usual polite thing, eh?"

"Oh! no, don't say that," says Mrs. Monkton in a little, frightened tone. "It—it's unlucky! It might —I'm not a bit superstitious, Freddy, but it might affect baby in some way—do him some harm."

"Very well, we'll tell another lie," says Mr. Monkton cheerfully. "We'll say you've got the neuralgia badly, and that the doctor says it would be as much as your life Is worth to cross the Channel at this time of year."

"That will do very well," says Mrs. Monkton readily.

"But—I'm not a bit superstitious," says he solemnly. "But it might affect you in some way, do you some harm, and—"

"If you are going to make a jest of it, Freddy——"

"It is you who have made the jest. Well; never mind, I accept the responsibility, and will create even another taradiddle. If I say we are disinclined to leave home just now, will that do?"

"Yes," says she, after a second's struggle with her better self, in which it comes off the loser.

"That's settled, then," says Mr. Monkton. "Peace with honor is assured. Let us forget that unfortunate letter, and all the appurtenances thereof."

"Yes: do let us, Freddy," says she, as if with all her heart.

But the morning convinces Monkton that the question of the letter still remains unsettled. Barbara, for one thing, has come down to breakfast gowned in her very best morning frock, one reserved for those rare occasions when people drop in over night and sleep with them. She has, indeed, all the festive appearance of a person who expects to be called away at a second's notice

into a very vertex of dissipation.

Joyce, who is quite as impressed as Monkton with her appearance, gazes at her with a furtive amazement, and both she and Monkton wait in a sort of studied silence to know the meaning of it. They aren't given long to possess their souls in patience.

"Freddy, I don't think Mabel ought to have any more jam," says Mrs. Monkton, presently, "or Tommy either." She looks at the children as she speaks, and sighs softly. "It will cost a great deal," says she.

"The jam!" says her husband. "Well, really, at the rate they are consuming it—I——"

"Oh, no. The railway—the boat—the fare—the whole journey," says she.

"The journey?" says Joyce.

"Why, to England, to take them over there to see their grandmother," says Mrs. Monkton calmly.

"But, Barbara——"

"Well, dear?"

"I thought——"

"Barbara! I really consider that question decided," says her husband, not severely, however. Is the dearest wish of his heart to be accomplished at last? "I thought you had finally made up your mind to refuse my mother's invitation?"

"I shall not refuse it," says she, slowly, "whatever you may do."

"I?"

"You said you didn't want to go," says his wife severely. "But I have been thinking it over, and ——" Her tone has changed, and a slight touch of pink has come into her pretty cheeks. "After all, Freddy, why should I be the one to keep you from your people?"

"You aren't keeping me. Don't go on that."

"Well, then, will you go by yourself and see them?"

"Certainly not."

"Not even if I give you the children to take over?".

"Not even then."

"You see," says she, with a sort of sad triumph, "I am keeping you from them. What I mean is, that if you had never met me you would now be friends with them."

"I'd a great deal rather be friends with you," says he struggling wildly but firmly with a mutton chop that has been done to death by a bad cook.

"I know that," in a low and troubled tone, "but I know, too, that there is always unhappiness where one is on bad terms with one's father and mother."

"My dear girl, I can't say what bee you have got in your bonnet now, but I beg you to believe, I am perfectly happy at this present moment, in spite of this confounded chop that has been done to a chip. 'God sends meat, the devil sends cooks.' That's not a prayer, Tommy, you needn't commit it to memory."

"But there's 'God' and the 'devil' in it," says Tommy, skeptically: "that always means prayers."

"Not this time. And you can't pray to both; your mother has taught you that; you should teach her something in return. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"She knows everything," says Tommy, dejectedly. It is quite plain to his hearers that he regrets his mother's universal knowledge—that he would have dearly liked to give her a lesson or two.

"Not everything," says his father. "For example, she cannot understand that I am the happiest man in the world; she imagines I should be better off if she was somebody else's wife and somebody else's mother."

"Whose mother?" demands Tommy, his eyes growing round.

"Ah, that's just it. You must ask her. She has evidently some *arrière pensée*."

"Freddy," says his wife in a low tone.

"Well! What am I to think? You see," to Tommy, who is now deeply interested, "if she wasn't your mother, she'd be somebody else's."

"No, she wouldn't," breaks in Tommy, indignantly. "I wouldn't let her, I'd hold on to her. I—" with his mouth full of strawberry jam, yet striving nobly to overcome his difficulties of expression, "I'd beat her!"

"You shouldn't usurp my privileges," says his father, mildly.

"Barbara!" says Joyce, at this moment. "If you have decided on going to London, I think you have decided wisely; and it may not be such an expense after all. You and Freddy can manage the two eldest children very well on the journey, and I can look after baby until you return. Or else take nurse, and leave baby entirely to me."

Mrs. Monkton makes a quick movement.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"And I go to brave a world I hate,
And woo it o'er and o'er;
And tempt a wave and try a fate
Upon a stranger shore."

"I shall take the three children and you, too, or I shall not go at all," says she, addressing her sister with an air of decision.

"If you have really made up your mind about it," says Mr. Monkton, "I agree with you. The house in Harley street is big enough for a regiment, and my mother says the servants will be in it on our arrival, if we accept the invitation. Joyce will be a great comfort to us, and a help on the journey over, the children are so fond of her."

Joyce turns her face to her brother-in-law and smiles in a little pleased way. She has been so grave of late that they welcome a smile from her now at any time, and even court k. The pretty lips, erstwhile so prone to laughter, are now too serious by far. When, therefore, Monkton or his wife go out of their way to gain a pleased glance from her and succeed, both feel as if they had achieved a victory.

"Why have they offered us a separate establishment? Was there no room for us in their own house?" asks Mrs. Monkton presently.

"I dare say they thought we should be happier, so—in a place of our own."

"Well, I dare say we shall." She pauses for a moment. "Why are they in town now—at this time of year? Why are they not in their country house?"

"Ah! that is a last thorn in their flesh," says Monkton, with a quick sigh. "They have had to let the old place to pay my brother's debts. He is always a trouble to them. This last letter points to greater trouble still."

"And in their trouble they have turned to you—to the little grandchildren," says Joyce, softly. "One can understand it."

"Oh, yes. Oh, you should have told me," says Barbara, flushing as if with pain. "I am the hardest person alive, I think. You think it?" looking directly at her husband.

"I think only one thing of you," says Mr. Monkton, rising from the breakfast table with a slight laugh. "It is what I have always thought, that you are the dearest and loveliest thing on earth." The bantering air he throws into this speech does not entirely deprive it of the truthful tenderness that formed it. "There," says he, "that ought to take the gloom off the brow of any well-regulated woman, coming as it does from an eight-year-old husband."

"Oh, you must be older than that," says she, at which they all laugh together.

"You are wise to go, Barbara," says Joyce, now in a livelier way, as if that last quick, unexpected feeling of amusement has roused her to a sharper sense of life. "If once they see you!—No, you mustn't put up your shoulder like that—I tell you, if once they looked at you, they would feel the measure of their folly."

"I shall end by fancying myself," says Mrs. Monkton, impatiently, "and then you will all have fresh work cut out for you; the bringing of me back to my proper senses. Well," with a sigh, "as I have to see them, I wish——"

"What?"

"That I could be a heartier believer in your and Joyce's flattery, or else, that they, your people, were not so prejudiced against me. It will be an ordeal."

"When you are about it wish them a few grains of common sense," says her husband wrathfully. "Just fancy the folly of an impertinence that condemned a fellow being on no evidence whatsoever; neither eye nor ear were brought in as witnesses."

"Oh, well," says she, considerably mollified by his defamation of his people, "I dare say they are not so much to be blamed after all. And," with a little, quick laugh at her sister, "as Joyce says, my beauties are still unknown to them; they will be delighted when they see me."

"They will, indeed," returns Joyce stolidly. "And so you are really going to take me with you. Oh, I am glad. I haven't spent any of my money this winter, Barbara; I have some, therefore, and I have always wanted to see London."

"It will be a change for the children, too," says Barbara, with a troubled sigh. "I suppose," to her husband, "they will think them very countrified."

"Who?"

"Your mother—"

"What do you think of them?"

"Oh, that has got nothing to do with it."

"Everything rather. You are analyzing them. You are exalting an old woman who has been unkind to you at the expense of the children who love you!"

"Ah, she analyzes them because she too loves them," says Joyce. "It is easy to pick faults in those who have a real hold upon our hearts. For the rest—it doesn't concern us how the world regards them."

"It sounds as if it ought to read the other way round," says Monkton.

"No, no. To love is to see faults, not to be blind to them. The old reading is wrong," says Joyce.

"You are unfair, Freddy," declares his wife with dignity; "I would not decry the children. I am only a little nervous as to their reception. When I know that your father and mother are prepared to receive them as my children, I know they will get but little mercy at their hands."

"That speech isn't like you," says Monkton, "but it is impossible to blame you for it."

"They are the dearest children in the world," says Joyce. "Don't think of them. They must succeed. Let them alone to fight their own battles."

"You may certainly depend upon Tommy," says his father. "For any emergency that calls for fists and heels, where battle, murder and sudden death are to be looked for, Tommy will be all there."

"Oh! I do hope he will be good," says his mother, half amused, but plainly half terrified as well.

Two weeks later sees them settled in town, in the Harley street house, that seems enormous and unfriendly to Mrs. Monkton, but delightful to Joyce and the children, who wander from room to room and, under her guidance, pretend to find bears and lions and bogies in every corner.

The meeting between Barbara and Lady Monkton had not been satisfactory. There had been very little said on either side, but the chill that lay on the whole interview had never thawed for a moment.

Barbara had been stiff and cold, if entirely polite, but not at all the Barbara to whom her husband had been up to this accustomed. He did not blame her for the change of front under the circumstances, but he could hardly fail to regret it, and it puzzled him a great deal to know how she did it.

He was dreadfully sorry about it secretly, and would have given very much more than the whole thing was worth to let his father and mother see his wife as she really is—the true Barbara.

Lady Monkton had been stiff, too; unpardonably so—as it was certainly her place to make amends—to soften and smooth down the preliminary embarrassment. But then she had never been framed for suavity of any sort; and an old aunt of Monkton's, a sister of hers, had been present during the interview, and had helped considerably to keep up the frigidity of the atmosphere.

She was not a bad old woman at heart, this aunt. She had indeed from time to time given up all her own small patrimony to help her sister to get the eldest son out of his many disreputable difficulties. She had done this, partly for the sake of the good old family names on both sides, and partly because the younger George Monkton was very dear to her.

From his early boyhood the scapegrace of the family had been her admiration, and still remained so, in imagination. For years she had not seen him, and perhaps this (that she considered a grievance) was a kindness vouchsafed to her by Providence. Had she seen the pretty boy of twenty years ago as he now is she would not have recognized him. The change from the merry, blue-eyed, daring lad of the past to the bloated, blear-eyed, reckless-looking man of to-day would have been a shock too cruel for her to bear. But this she was not allowed to realize, and so remained true to her belief in him, as she remembered him.

In spite of her many good qualities, she was, nevertheless, a dreadful woman; the more dreadful to the ordinary visitor because of the false front she wore, and the flashing purchased teeth that shone in her upper jaw. She lived entirely with Sir George and Lady Monkton, having indeed given them every penny that would have enabled her to live elsewhere. Perhaps of all the many spites they owed their elder son, the fact that his iniquities had inflicted upon them his maternal aunt for the rest of her natural days, was the one that rankled keenest.

She disliked Frederic, not only intensely, but with an openness that had its disadvantages—not for any greater reason than that he had behaved himself so far in his journey through life more creditably than his brother. She had always made a point against him of his undutiful marriage, and never failed, to add fuel to the fire of his father's and mother's resentment about it, whenever that fire seemed to burn low.

Altogether, she was by no means an amiable old lady, and, being very hideous into the bargain, was not much run after by society generally. She wasn't of the least consequence in any way, being not only old but very poor; yet people dreaded her, and would slip away round doors and corners to avoid her tongue. She succeeded, in spite of all drawbacks, in making herself felt; and it was only one or two impervious beings, such is Dicky Browne for example (who knew the Monktons well, and was indeed distantly connected with them through his mother), who could endure her manners with any attempt at equanimity.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Strength wanting judgment and policy to rule overturneth itself."

It was quite impossible, of course, that a first visit to Lady Monkton should be a last from Barbara. Lady Monkton had called on her the very day after her arrival in town, but Barbara had been out then. On the occasion of the latter's return visit the old woman had explained that going out was a trial to her, and Barbara, in spite of her unconquerable dislike to her, had felt it to be her duty to go and see her now and then. The children, too, had been a great resource. Sir George, especially, had taken to Tommy, who was quite unabashed by the grandeur of the stately, if faded, old rooms in the Belgravian mansion, but was full of curiosity, and spent his visits to his grandfather cross-examining him about divers matters—questionable and otherwise—that tickled the old man and kept him laughing.

It had struck Barbara that Sir George had left off laughing for some time. He looked haggard—uneasy—miserably expectant. She liked him better than she liked Lady Monkton, and, though reserved with both, relaxed more to him than to her mother-in-law. For one thing, Sir George had been unmistakably appreciative of her beauty, and her soft voice and pretty manners. He liked them all. Lady Monkton had probably noticed them quite as keenly, but they had not pleased her. They were indeed an offence. They had placed her in the wrong. As for old Miss L'Estrange, the aunt, she regarded the young wife from the first with a dislike she took no pains to conceal.

This afternoon, one of many that Barbara has given up to duty, finds her as usual in Lady Monkton's drawing room listening to her mother-in-law's comments on this and that, and trying to keep up her temper, for Frederic's sake, when the old lady finds fault with her management of the children.

The latter (that is, Tommy and Mabel) have been sent to the pantomime by Sir George, and Barbara with her husband have dropped in towards the close of the day to see Lady Monkton, with a view to recovering the children there, and taking them home with them, Sir George having expressed a wish to see the little ones after the play, and hear Tommy's criticisms on it, which he promised himself would be lively. He had already a great belief in the powers of Tommy's descriptions.

In the meantime the children have not returned, and conversation, it must be confessed, languishes. Miss L'Estrange, who is present in a cap of enormous dimensions and a temper calculated to make life hideous to her neighbors, scarcely helps to render more bearable the dullness of everything. Sir George in a corner is buttonholing Frederic and saddening him with last accounts of the Scapegrace.

Barbara has come to her final pretty speech—silence seems imminent—when suddenly Lady Monkton flings into it a bombshell that explodes, and carries away with it all fear of commonplace dullness at all events.

"You have a sister, I believe," says she to Barbara in a tone she fondly but erroneously imagines gracious.

"Yes," says Barbara, softly but curtly. The fact that Joyce's existence has never hitherto been alluded to by Lady Monkton renders her manner even colder than usual, which is saying everything.

"She lives with you?"

"Yes," says Barbara again.

Lady Monkton, as if a little put out by the determined taciturnity of her manner, moves forward on her seat, and pulls the lace lappets of her dove-gray cap more over to the front impatiently. Long, soft lappets they are, falling from a gem of a little cap, made of priceless lace, and with a beautiful old face beneath to frame. A face like an old miniature; and as stern as most of them,

but charming for all that and perfect in every line.

"Makes herself useful, no doubt," growls Miss L'Estrange from the opposite lounge, her evil old countenance glowing with the desire to offend. "That's why one harbors one's poor relations—to get something out of them."

This is a double-barrelled explosion. One barrel for the detested wife of the good Frederic, one for the sister she has befriended—to that sister's cost.

"True," says Lady Monkton, with an uncivil little upward glance at Barbara. For once—because it suits her—she has accepted her sister's argument, and determined to take no heed of her scarcely veiled insult. "She helps you, no doubt. Is useful with the children, I hope. Moneyless girls should remember that they are born into the world to work, not to idle."

"I am afraid she is not as much help to me as you evidently think necessary," says Barbara smiling, but not pleasantly. "She is very seldom at home; in the summer at all events." It is abominable to her to think that these hateful old people should regard Joyce, her pretty Joyce, as a mere servant, a sisterly maid-of-all-work.

"And if not with you—where then?" asks Lady Monkton, indifferently, and as if more with a desire to keep up the dying conversation than from any acute thirst for knowledge.

"She stays a good deal with Lady Baltimore," says Barbara, feeling weary, and rather disgusted.

"Ah! indeed! Sort of companion—a governess, I suppose?"

A long pause. Mrs. Monkton's dark eyes grow dangerously bright, and a quick color springs into her cheeks.

"No!" begins she, in a low but indignant tone, and then suppresses herself. She can't, she mustn't quarrel with Freddy's people! "My sister is neither companion nor governess to Lady Baltimore," says she icily. "She is only her friend."

"Friend?" repeats the old lady, as if not quite understanding.

"A great friend," repeats Barbara calmly. Lady Monkton's astonishment is even more insulting than her first question. But Barbara has made up her mind to bear all things.

"There are friends and friends," puts in Miss L'Estrange with her most offensive air.

A very embarrassing silence falls on this, Barbara would say nothing more, an inborn sense of dignity forbidding her. But this does not prevent a very natural desire on her part to look at her husband, not so much to claim his support as to know if he has heard.

One glance assures her that he has. A pause in the conversation with his father has enabled him to hear everything. Barbara has just time to note that his brow is black and his lips ominously compressed before she sees him advance toward his mother.

"You seem to, be very singularly ignorant of my wife's status in society——" he is beginning is a rather terrible tone, when Barbara, with a little graceful gesture, checks him. She puts out her hand and smiles up at him, a wonderful smile under the circumstances.

"Ah! that is just it," she says, sweetly, but with determination. "She is ignorant where we are concerned—Joyce and I. If she had only spared time to ask a little question or two! But as it is ——" The whole speech is purposely vague, but full of contemptuous rebuke, delicately veiled. "It is nothing, I assure you, Freddy. Your mother is not to be blamed. She has not understood. That is all."

"I fail even now to understand," says the old lady, with a somewhat tremulous attempt at self-assertion.

"So do I," says the antique upon the lounge near her, bristling with a wrath so warm that it has unsettled the noble structure on her head, and placed it in quite an artful situation, right over her left ear. "I see nothing to create wrath in the mind of any one, in the idea of a young—er——" She comes to a dead pause; she had plainly been going to say young person—but Frederic's glare had been too much for her. It has frightened her into good behavior, and she changes the obnoxious word into one more complaisant.

"A young what?" demands he imperiously, freezing his aunt with a stony stare.

"Young girl!" returns she, toning down a little, but still betraying malevolence of a very advanced order in her voice and expression. "I see nothing derogatory in the idea of a young girl devoid of fortune taking a——"

Again she would have said something insulting. The word "situation" is on her lips; but the venom in her is suppressed a second time by her nephew.

"Go on," says he, sternly.

"Taking a—er—position in a nice family," says she, almost spitting out the words like a bad old cat.

"She has a position in a very nice family," says Monkton readily. "In mine! As companion, friend,

playfellow, in fact anything you like of the light order of servitude. We all serve, my dear aunt, though that idea doesn't seem to have come home to you. We must all be in bondage to each other in this world—the only real freedom is to be gained in the world to come. You have never thought of that? Well, think of it now. To be kind, to be sympathetic, to be even Commonly civil to people is to fulfil the law's demands."

"You go too far; she is old, Freddy," Barbara has scarcely time to whisper, when the door is thrown open, and Dicky Browne, followed by Felix Dysart, enters the room.

It is a relief to everybody. Lady Monkton rises to receive them with a smile: Miss L'Estrange looks into the teapot. Plainly she can still see some tea leaves there. Rising, she inclines the little silver kettle over them, and creates a second deluge. She has again made tea. May she be forgiven!

"Going to give us some tea, Miss L'Estrange?" says Dicky, bearing down upon her with a beaming face. She has given him some before this. "One can always depend upon you for a good cup. Ah, thanks. Dysart, I can recommend this. Have a cup; do."

"No, thank you," says Dysart, who has secured a seat next to Barbara, and is regarding her anxiously, while replying to her questions of surprise at seeing him in town at this time of year. She is surprised too, and a little shocked to see him look so ill.

Dicky is still holding a brilliant conversation with Miss L'Estrange, who, to him, is a joy for ever.

"Didn't expect to see me here again so soon, eh?" says he, with a cheerful smile.

"There you are wrong," returns that spinster, in the hoarse croak that distinguishes her. "The fact that you were here yesterday and couldn't reasonably be supposed to come again for a week, made it at once a certainty that you would turn up immediately. The unexpected is what always happens where you are concerned."

"One of my many charms," says Mr. Browne gayly, hiding his untasted cup by a skillful movement behind the sugar bowl. "Variety, you know, is ever charming. I'm a various person, therefore I'm charming."

"Are you?" says Miss L'Estrange, grimly.

"Can you look at me and doubt it?" demands Mr. Browne, deep reproach in his eyes.

"I can," returns Miss L'Estrange, presenting an uncompromising front. "I can also suggest to you that those lumps of sugar are meant to put in the cups with the tea, not to be consumed wholesale. Sugar, plain, is ruinous to the stomach and disastrous to the teeth."

"True, true," says Mr. Browne, absently, "and both mine are so pretty."

Miss L'Estrange rises to her feet and confronts him with a stony glare.

"Both what?" demands she.

"Eh? Why, both of them," persists Mr. Browne.

"I think, Richard, that the sooner you return to your hotel, or whatever low haunt you have chosen as your present abode, the better it will be for all present."

"Why so?" demands Mr. Browne, indignantly. "What have I done now?"

"You know very well, sir," says Miss L'estrange. "Your language is disgraceful. You take an opportunity of turning an innocent remark of mine, a kindly warning, into a ribald——"

"Good heavens!" says he, uplifting brows and hands. "I never yet knew it was ribaldry to talk about one's teeth."

"You were not talking about your teeth," says Miss L'Estrange sternly. "You said distinctly 'both of them.'"

"Just so," says Dicky. "I've only got two."

"Is that the truth, Richard?" with increasing majesty.

"Honest Injun," says Mr. Browne, unabashed. "And they are out of sight. All you can see have been purchased, and I assure you, dear Miss L'Estrange," with anxious earnestness, "paid for. One guinea the entire set; a single tooth, two-and-six. Who'd be without 'em?"

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it," says Miss L'Estrange reseating herself and regarding him still with manifest distrust. "To lose one's teeth so early in life speaks badly for one's moral conduct. Anyhow, I shan't allow you to destroy your guinea's worth. I shall remove temptation from your path."

Lifting the sugar bowl she removes it to her right side, thus laying bare the fact that Mr. Browne's cup of tea is still full to the brim.

It is the last stroke.

"Drink your tea," says she to the stricken Dicky in a tone that admits of no delay. He drinks it.

Meantime, Barbara has been very kind to Felix Dysart, answering his roundabout questions that always have Joyce as their central meaning. One leading remark of his is to the effect that he is covered with astonishment to find her and Monkton in London. Is he surprised. Well, no doubt, yes. Joyce is in town, too, but she has not come out with her to-day. Have they been to the theatre? Very often; Joyce, especially, is quite devoted to it. Do they go much to the picture galleries? Well, to one or two. There is so much to be done, and the children are rather exigeant, and demand all the afternoon. But she had heard Joyce say that she was going to-morrow to Doré's Gallery. She thought Tommy ought to be shown something more improving than clowns and wild animals and toy shops.

Mr. Dysart, at this point, said he thought Miss Kavanagh was more reflective than one taking a careless view of her might believe.

Barbara laughed.

"Do you take the reflective view?" says she.

"Do you recommend me to take the careless one?" demands he, now looking fully at her. There is a good deal of meaning in his question, but Barbara declines to recognize it. She feels she has gone far enough in that little betrayal about Doré's Gallery. She refuses to take another step; she is already, indeed, a little frightened by what she has done If Joyce should hear of it—oh——And yet how could she refrain from giving that small push to so deserving a cause?

"No, no; I recommend nothing," says she, still laughing. "Where are you staying?"

"With my cousins, the Seaton Dysarts. They had to come up to town about a tooth, or a headache, or neuralgia, or something; we shall never quite know what, as it has disappeared, whatever it is. Give me London smoke as a perfect cure for most ailments. It is astonishing what remarkable recoveries it can boast. Vera and her husband are like a couple of children. Even the pantomime isn't too much for them."

"That reminds me the children ought to be here by this time," says Mrs. Monkton, drawing out her watch. "They went to the afternoon performance. I really think," anxiously, "they are very late——"

She has hardly spoken when a sound of little running feet up the stairs outside sets her maternal fears at rest. Nearer and nearer they sound; they stop, there is a distant scuffle, the door is thrown violently open, and Tommy and Mabel literally fall into the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Then seemed to me this world far less in size,
Likewise it seemed to me less wicked far;
Like points in heaven I saw the stars arise,
And longed for wings that I might catch a star."

Least said, soonest mended! Tommy is on his feet again in no time, and has picked up Mabel before you could say Jack Robinson, and once again, nothing daunted by their ignominious entry, they rush up the room and precipitate themselves upon their mother. This pious act being performed, Tommy sees fit to show some small attention to the other people present.

"Thomas," says Mr. Browne, when he has shaken hands with him, "if you wait much longer without declaring yourself you will infallibly burst, and that is always a rude thing to do in a friend's drawing-room. Speak, Thomas, or die—you are evidently full of information!"

"Well, I won't tell you!" says Tommy, naturally indignant at this address. He throws a resentful look at him over his shoulder while making his way to his grandfather. There is a queer sort of sympathy—understanding—what you will—between the child and the stern old man.

"Come here," says Sir George, drawing Tommy to him. "Well, and did you enjoy yourself? Was it all your fancy painted it?"

Sir George has sunk into a chair with all the heaviness of an old man, and the boy has crept between his knees and is looking up at him with his beautiful little face all aglow.

"Oh! 'twas lovely!" says he. "'Twas splendid! There was lights all over the house. 'Twas like night—only 'twasn't night, and that was grand! And there were heaps of people. A whole town was there. And there were——Grandpa! why did they have lamps there when it was daytime?"

"Because they have no windows in a theatre," says Sir George, patting the little hot, fat hand that is lying on his arm, with a strange sensation of pleasure in the touch of it.

"No windows?" with big eyes opened wide.

"Not one."

"Then why have we windows?" asks Tommy, with an involuntary glance round him. "Why are there windows anywhere? It's ever so much nicer without them. Why can't we have lamps always, like the theatre people?"

"Why, indeed?" says Mr. Browne, sympathetically. "Sir George, I hope you will take your grandson's advice to heart, and block up all these absurd windows, and let a proper ray of light descend upon us from the honest burner. Who cares for strikes? Not I!"

"Well, Tommy, we'll think about it," says Sir George. "And now go on. You saw——"

"Bluebeard!" says Tommy, almost roaring in the excitement of his delight. "A big Bluebeard, and he was just like the pictures of him at home, with his toes curled up and a red towel round his head and a blue night-gown and a smiter in his hand."

"A cimeter, Tommy?" suggests his mother, gently.

"Eh?" says Tommy. "Well, it's all the same," says he, after a pause, replete with deep research and with a truly noble impartiality.

"It is, indeed!" says Mr. Browne, open encouragement in his eye. "And so you saw Mr. Bluebeard! And did he see you?"

"Oh! he saw me!" cries Mabel, in a little whimpering' tone. "He looked straight into the little house where we were, and I saw his eye—his horrid eye!" shaking her small head vigorously—"and it ran right into mine, and he began to walk up to me, and I——"

She stops, her pretty red lips quivering, her blue eyes full of tears.

"Oh, Mabel was so frightened!" says Tommy, the Bold. "She stuck her nose into nurse's fur cape and roared!"

"I didn't!" says Mabel promptly.

"You did!" says Tommy, indignant at being contradicted, "and she said it would never be worth a farthing ever after, and——Well, any way, you know, Mabel, you didn't like the heads."

"Oh, no; I didn't—I hated them! They were all hanging to one side; and there was nasty blood, and they looked as if they was going to waggle," concludes Mabel, with a terrified sob, burying her own head in her mother's lap.

"Oh! she is too young," says Barbara, nervously clasping her little woman close to her in a quiet, undemonstrative way, but so as to make the child herself feel the protection of her arms.

"Too young for so dismal a sight," says Dysart, stooping over and patting Mabel's sunny curls with a kindly touch. He is very fond of children, as are all men, good and bad.

"I should not have let her go," says Mrs. Monkton, with self-reproach. "Such exhibitions are painful for young minds, however harmless."

"When she is older——" begins Dysart, still caressing the little head.

"Yes, yes—she is too young—far too young," says Mrs. Monkton, giving the child a second imperceptible hug.

"One is never too young to learn the miseries of the world," says Miss L'Estrange, in her most terrible tone. "Why should a child be pampered and petted, and shielded from all thoughts of harm and wrong, as though they never existed? It is false treatment. It is a wilful deceiving of the growing mind. One day they must wake to all the horrors of the world. They should therefore be prepared for it, steadily, sternly, unyieldingly!"

"What a grand—what a strong nature!" says Mr. Browne, uplifting his hands in admiration. "You would, then, advocate the cause of the pantomime?" says he, knowing well that the very name of theatre stinks in the nostrils of Miss L'Estrange.

"Far be it from me!" says she, with a violent shake of her head. "May all such disreputable performances come to a bad end, and a speedy one, is my devout prayer. But," with a vicious glance at Barbara, "I would condemn the parents who would bring their children up in a dark ignorance of the woes and vices of the world in which they must pass their lives. I think, as Mabel has been permitted to look at the pernicious exhibition of this afternoon, she should also be encouraged to look with calmness upon it, if only to teach her what to expect from life."

"Good heavens!" says Mr. Browne, in a voice of horror. "Is that what she has to expect? Rows of decapitated heads! Have you had private information, Miss L'Estrange? Is a rehearsal of the French Revolution to be performed in London? Do you really believe the poor child is doomed to behold your head carried past the windows on a pike? Was there meaning in the artless prattle of our Thomas just now when he condemned windows as a social nuisance, or——"

"I suppose you think you are amusing!" interrupts the spinster, malignantly. It is plain that she objects to the idea of her head being on a pike. "At all events, if you must jest on serious subjects, I desire you, Richard, to leave me out of your silly maunderings."

"Your will is my law," says Dicky, rising. "I leave you!"

He makes a tragic, retreat, and finding an empty chair near Monkton takes possession of it.

"I must protest against your opinion," says Dysart, addressing Miss L'Estrange with a smile. "Children should be regarded as something better than mere lumps of clay to be experimentalized upon!"

"Oh, yes," says Barbara, regarding the spinster gently but with ill-concealed aversion. "You cannot expect any one to agree with you there. I, for one, could not."

"I don't know that I ever asked you to," says Miss L'Estrange with such open impertinence that Barbara flushes up to the roots of her hair.

Silence falls on the room, except for a light conversation being carried on between Dicky and Monkton, both of whom have heard nothing. Lady Monkton looks uncomfortable. Sir George hastens to the rescue.

"Surely you haven't told us everything, Tommy?" says he giving his grandson a pull toward him. "Besides Mr. Bluebeard, what else was there?"

"Lots of things," says Tommy, vaguely, coming back from an eager attention to Miss L'Estrange's evil suggestion to a fresh remembrance of his past delights. "There was a band and it shouted. Nurse said it took the roof off her head, but I looked, and her bonnet didn't stir. And there was the harlequin, he was beautiful. He shined like anything. He was all over scales, like a trout."

"A queer fish," says his grandfather.

"He jumped about and beat things with a little stick he had. And he danced, and there was a window and he sprang right through it, and he came up again and wasn't a bit hurt, not a bit. Oh! he was lovely, grandpapa, and so was his concubine——"

"His what?" says Sir George.

"His concubine. His sweetheart. That was her name," says Tommy confidently.

There is a ghastly silence. Lady Monkton's pale old cheeks color faintly. Miss L'Estrange glares. As for Barbara, she feels the world has at last come to an end. They will be angry with the boy. Her mission to London will have failed—that vague hope of a reconciliation through the children that she had yet scarcely allowed to herself.

Need it be said that Mr. Browne has succumbed to secret but disgraceful mirth. A good three-quarters of a full-sized handkerchief is already in his mouth—a little more of the cambric and "death through suffocation" will adorn the columns of the *Times* in the morning. Sir George, too, what is the matter with him? He is speechless—from indignation one must hope.

"What ails you, grandpa?" demands Tommy, after a full minute's strict examination of him.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," says Sir George, choking; "it is only—that I'm glad you have so thoroughly enjoyed yourself and your harlequin, and—ha, ha, ha, your Columbine. Columbine, now mind. And here's this for you, Tommy, because you are such a good boy."

He opens the little grandson's hand and presses into the pink palm of it a sovereign.

"Thank you," says Tommy, in the polite regulation tone he has been taught, without a glance at his gift—a touch of etiquette he has been taught, too. Then the curious eyes of childhood wander to the palm, and, seeing the unexpected pretty gold thing lying there, he colors up to the tips of his ears with surprise and pleasure. Then sudden compunction seizes on the kindly little heart. The world is strange to him. He knows but one or two here and there. His father is poor. A sovereign—that is, a gold piece—would be rare with him, why not rare with another? Though filled with admiration and gratitude for the giver of so big a gift, the child's heart commands him not to accept it.

"Oh, it is too much," says he, throwing his arms round Sir George's neck and trying to press the sovereign back into his hand. "A shilling I'd like, but that's such a lot of shillings, and maybe you'd be wanting it." This is all whispered in the softest, tenderest way.

"No, no, my boy," says Sir George, whispering back, and glad that he must whisper. His voice, even so, sounds a little queer to himself. How often he might have gladdened this child with a present, a small one, and until now——"Keep it," says he; he has passed his hand round the little head and is pressing it against his breast.

"May I? Really?" says Tommy, emancipating his head with a little jerk, and looking at Sir George with searching eyes.

"You may indeed!"

"God bless you!" says Tommy, solemnly.

It is a startling remark to Sir George, but not so to Tommy. It is exactly what nurse had said to her daughter the day before she left Ireland with Tommy and Mabel in charge, when her daughter had brought her the half of her wages. Therefore it must be correct. To supplement this blessing Tommy flings his arms around Sir George's neck and gives him a resounding kiss. Nurse had done that, too, to her daughter.

"God bless you too, my dear," says Sir George, if not quite as solemnly, with considerably more tenderness. Tommy's mother, catching the words and the tone, cheers up. All is not lost yet! The situation is saved. Tommy has won the day. The inconsequent Tommy of all people! Insult to herself she had endured, but to have the children disliked would have been more than she could bear; bur Tommy, apparently, is not disliked—by the old man at all events. That fact will be sweet to Freddy. After all, who could resist Tommy? Tears rise to the mother's eyes. Darling boy! Where is his like upon the whole wide earth? Nowhere.

She is disturbed in her reverie by the fact that the originator of it is running toward her with one little closed fist outstretched. How he runs! His fat calves come twinkling across the carpet.

"See, mammy, what I've got. Grandpa gave it to me. Isn't he nice? Now I'll buy a watch like pappy's."

"You have made him very happy," says Barbara, smiling at Sir George over her boy's head. She rises as she speaks, and goes to where Lady Monkton is sitting to bid her good-bye.

"I hope you will come soon again," says Lady Monkton, not cordially, but as if compelled to it; "and I hope, too," pausing as if to gather herself together, "that when you do come you will bring your sister with you. It will give me—us—pleasure to see her." There is such a dearth of pleasure in the tone of the invitation that Barbara feels her wrath rising within her.

"I thank you," she manages to say very calmly, not committing herself, either way, and presently finds herself in the street with her husband and her children. They had declined Lady Monkton's offer of the brougham to take them home.

"It was a bad time," says Monkton while waiting at a crossing for a cab to come to them. "But you must try and not mind them. If the fact that I am always with you counts for anything, it may help you to endure it."

"What help could be like it?" says she, tightening her hand on his arm.

"That old woman, my aunt. She offended you, but you must remember that she offends everybody. You thought her abominable?"

"Oh no. I only thought her vulgar," says Mrs. Monkton. It is the one revenge she permits herself. Monkton breaks into an irresistible laugh.

"It isn't perfect; it couldn't be unless she heard you," says he. The cab has come up now, and he puts in the children and then his wife, finally himself.

"Tommy crowns all!" says he with a retrospective smile.

"Eh?" says Tommy, who has the ears of a Midas.

"Your father says you are a social success, and so does your mother," says Barbara, smiling at the child's puzzled face, and then giving him a loving little embrace.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Why should two hearts in one breast lie
 And yet not lodge together?
Oh, love! where is thy sympathy
 If thus our breasts you sever?"

"Well, did you like the gallery?" asks Mrs. Monkton, throwing aside her book to greet Joyce as she returns from Doré's. It is next day, and Barbara had let the girl go to see the pictures without telling her of her meeting with Felix the evening before; she had been afraid to say anything about him lest that guilty secret of hers might transpire—that deliberate betrayal of Joyce's intended visit to Bond street on the morrow. If Joyce had heard that, she would, in all probability, have deferred her going there for ever—and—it was such a chance. Mrs. Monkton, who, in her time, had said so many hard words about match makers, as most women have, and who would have scorned to be classed with them, had promoted and desired this meeting of Felix and Joyce with all the energy and enthusiasm of which she was capable But that Joyce should suspect her of the truth is a fear that terrifies her.

"Very much. So did Tommy. He is very graphic in his remarks," says Joyce, sinking listlessly into a chair, and taking off her hat. She looks vexed and preoccupied. "I think he gave several very original ideas on the subjects of the pictures to those around. They seemed impressed. You know how far above the foolish feeling, *mauvaise honte*, he is; his voice 'like a silver clarion rung.' Excelsior was outdone. Everybody turned and looked at him with——"

"I hope he wasn't noisy," says Mrs. Monkton, nervously.

"With admiration, I was going to say, but you wouldn't let me finish my sentence. Oh, yes, he was

quite a success. One old gentleman wanted to know if he would accept the part of art critic on his paper. It was very exciting." She leans back in her chair, the troubled look on her face growing intensified. She seems glad to be silent, and with downcast eyes plays with the gloves lying in her lap.

"Something has happened, Joyce," says her sister, going over to her.

"Something is happening always," returned Joyce, with a rather impatient smile.

"Yes, but to you just now."

"You are sure to make me tell you sooner or later," says Miss Kavanagh, "and even if I didn't, Tommy would. I met Mr. Dysart at that gallery to-day."

"Felix?" says Mrs. Monkton, feeling herself an abominable hypocrite; yet afraid to confess the truth. Something in the girl's whole attitude forbids a confession, at this moment at all events.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"He was glad to see you, darling?" very tenderly.

"Was he? I don't know. He looked very ill. He said he had had a bad cough. He is coming to see you."

"You were kind to him, Joyce?"

"I didn't personally insult him, if you mean that."

"Oh, no, I don't mean that, you know what I mean. He was ill, unhappy; you did not make him more unhappy?"

"It is always for him!" cries the girl, with jealous anger. "Is there never to be a thought for me? Am I nothing to you? Am I never unhappy? Why don't you ask if he was kind to me?"

"Was he ever unkind?"

"Well, you can forget! He said dreadful things to me—dreadful. I am not likely to forget them if you are. After all, they did not hurt you."

"Joyce!"

"Yes, I know—I know everything you would say. I am ungrateful, abominable, but——He was unkind to me! He said what no girl would ever forgive, and yet you have not one angry word for him."

"Never mind all that," says Mrs. Monkton, soothingly. "Tell me what you did to-day—what you said."

"As little as possible," defiantly. "I tell you I don't want ever to see him again, or hear of him; I think I hate him. And he looked dying." She stops here, as if finding a difficulty about saying another word. She coughs nervously; then, recovering herself, and as if determined to assert herself anew and show how real is the coldness that she has declared—"Yes, dying, I think," she says, stubbornly.

"Oh, I don't think he looked as bad as that!" says Barbara, hastily, unthinkingly filled with grief, not only at this summary dismissal of poor Felix from our earthly sphere, but for her sister's unhappiness, which is as plain to her as though no little comedy had been performed for the concealment of it.

"You don't!" repeats Joyce, lifting her head and directing a piercing glance at her. "You! What do you know about him?"

"Why—you just said——" stammers Mrs. Monkton, and then breaks down ignominiously.

"You knew he was in town," says Joyce, advancing to her, and looking down on her with clasped-hands and a pale face. "Barbara, speak. You knew he was here, and never told me; you," with a sudden, fresh burst of inspiration, "sent him to that place to-day to meet me."

"Oh, no, dearest. No, indeed. He himself can tell you. It was only that he——"

"Asked where I was going to, at such and such an hour, and you told him." She is still standing over poor Mrs. Monkton in an attitude that might almost be termed menacing.

"I didn't. I assure you, Joyce, you are taking it all quite wrongly. It was only——"

"Oh! only—only," says the girl, contemptuously. "Do you think I can't read between the lines? I am sure you believe you are sticking to the honest truth, Barbara, but still——Well," bitterly, "I don't think he profited much by the information you gave him. Your deception has given him small satisfaction."

"I don't think you should speak to me like that," says Mrs. Monkton, in a voice that trembles

perceptibly.

"I don't care what I say," cries Joyce, with a sudden burst of passion. "You betray me; he betrays me; all the world seem arrayed against me. And what have I done to anybody?" She throws out her hands protestingly.

"Joyce, darling, if you would only listen."

"Listen! I am always listening, it seems to me. To him, to you, to every one. I am tired of being silent; I must speak now. I trusted you, Barbara, and you have been bad to me. Do you want to force him to make love to me, that you tell him on the very first opportunity where to find me, and in a place where I am without you, or any one to——"

"Will you try to understand?" says Mrs. Monkton, with a light stamp of her foot, her patience going as her grief increases. "He cross-examined me as to where you were, and would be, and I—I told him. I wasn't going to make a mystery of it, or you, was I? I told him that you were going to the Doré Gallery to-day with Tommy. How could I know he would go there to meet you? He never said he was going. You are unjust, Joyce, both to him and to me."

"Do you mean to tell me that for all that you didn't know he would be at that place to-day?" turning flashing eyes upon her sister.

"How could I know? Unless a person says a thing right out, how is one to be sure what he is going to do?"

"Oh! that is unlike you. It is unworthy of you," says Joyce, turning from her scornfully. "You did know. And it is not," turning back again and confronting the now thoroughly frightened Barbara with a glance full of pathos, "it is not that—your insincerity that hurt me so much, it is——"

"I didn't mean to be insincere; you are very cruel—you do not measure your words."

"You will tell me next that you meant it all for the best," with a bitter smile. "That is the usual formula, isn't it? Well, never mind; perhaps you did. What I object to is you didn't tell me. That I was kept designedly in the dark both by him and you. Am I," with sudden fire, "a child or a fool, that you should seek to guide me so blindly? Well," drawing a long breath, "I won't keep you in the dark. When I left the gallery, and your protégé, I met—Mr. Beauclerk!"

Mrs. Monkton, stunned by this intelligence, remains silent for a full minute. It is death to her hopes. If she has met that man again, it is impossible to know how things have gone. His fatal influence—her unfortunate infatuation for him—all will be ruinous to poor Felix's hopes.

"You spoke to him?" asks she at last, in an emotionless tone.

"Yes."

"Was Felix with you?"

"When?"

"When you met that odious man?"

"Mr. Beauclerk? No; I dismissed Mr. Dysart as soon as ever I could."

"No doubt. And Mr. Beauclerk, did you dismiss him as promptly."

"Certainly not. There was no occasion."

"No inclination, either. You were kind to him at all events. It is only to the man who is honest and sincere that you are deliberately uncivil."

"I hope I was uncivil to neither of them."

"There is no use giving yourself that air with me, Joyce. You are angry with me; but why? Only because I am anxious for your happiness. Oh! that hateful man, how I detest him! He has made you unhappy once—he will certainly make you unhappy again."

"I don't think so," says Joyce, taking up her hat and furs with the evident intention of leaving the room, and thus putting an end to the discussion.

"You will never think so until it is too late. You haven't the strength of mind to throw him over, once and for all, and give your thoughts to one who is really worthy of you. On the contrary, you spend your time comparing him favorably with the good and faithful Felix."

"You should put that down. It will do for his tombstone," says Miss Kavanagh, with a rather uncertain little laugh.

"At all events, it would not do for Mr. Beauclerk's tombstone—though I wish it would—and that I could put it there at once."

"I shall tell Freddy to read the commandments to you," says Joyce, with a dreary attempt at mirth—"you have forgotten your duty to your neighbor."

"It is all true, however. You can't deny it, Joyce. You are deliberately—willfully—throwing away the good for the bad. I can't bear to see it. I can't look on in silence and see you thus miserably destroying your life. How can you be so blind, darling?" appealing to her with hands, and voice,

and eyes. "Such determined folly would be strange in any one; stranger far in a girl like you, whose sense has always been above suspicion."

"Did it ever occur to you," asks Joyce, in a slightly bantering tone, that but ill conceals the nervousness that is consuming her, "that you might be taking a wrong view of the situation? That I was not so blind after all. That I—What was it you said? that I spent my nights and days comparing the merits of Mr. Beauclerk with those of your friend, Felix Dysart—to your friend's discomfiture? Now, suppose that I did thus waste my time, and gave my veto in favor of Mr. Dysart? How would it be then? It might be so, you know, for all that he, or you, or any one could say."

"It is not so light a matter that you should trifle with it," says Mrs. Monkton, with a faint suspicion of severity in her soft voice.

"No, of course not. You are right." Miss Kavanagh moves towards the door. "After all, Barbara," looking back at her, "that applies to most things in this sad old world. What matter under heaven can we poor mortals dare to trifle with? Not one, I think. All bear within them the seeds of grief or joy. Sacred seeds, both carrying in their bosoms the germs of eternity. Even when this life is gone from us we still face weal or woe."

"Still—we need not make our own woe," says Barbara, who is a sturdy enemy to all pessimistic thoughts. "Wait a moment, Joyce." She hurries after her and lays her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Will you come with me next Wednesday to see Lady Monkton?"

"Lady Monkton! Why I thought——"

"Yes, I know. I would not take you there before, because she had not expressly asked to see you. But to-day she made a—she sent you a formal message—at all events she said she hoped I would bring you when I came again."

"Is that all of it?" asks Joyce, gazing at her sister with a curious smile, that is troubled, but has still some growing sense of amusement in it. "What an involved statement! Surely you have forgotten something. That Mr. Dysart was standing near you, for example, and will probably find that it is absolutely imperative that he should call on Lady Monkton next Wednesday, too. Don't set your heart on that, Barbara. I think, after my interview with him to-day, he will not want to see Lady Monkton next Wednesday."

"I know nothing about whether he is to be there or not," says Barbara steadily. "But as Sir George likes to see the children very often, I thought of taking them there on that day. It is Lady Monkton's day. And Dicky Browne, at all events, will be there, and I dare say a good many of your old friends. Do say you will come."

"I hate old friends!" says the girl fractiously. "I don't believe I have any. I don't believe anybody has. I——"

She pauses as the door is thrown open, and Tommy comes prancing into the room accompanied by his father.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Children know very little; but their capacity of comprehension is great."

"I've just been interviewing Tommy on the subject of the pictures," says Mr. Monkton. "So far as I can make out he disapproves of Doré."

"Oh! Tommy! and all such beautiful pictures out of the Bible," says his mother.

"I did like them," says Tommy. "Only some of them were queer. I wanted to know about them, but nobody would tell me—and——"

"Why, Tommy, I explained them all to you," says Joyce, reproachfully.

"You did in the first two little rooms and in the big room afterward, where the velvet seats were. They," looking at his father and raising his voice to an indignant note, "wouldn't let me run round on the top of them!"

"Good heavens!" says Mr. Monkton. "Can that be true? Truly this country is going to the dogs."

"Where do the dogs live?" asks Tommy, "What dogs? Why does the country want to go to them?"

"It doesn't want to go," explains his father. "But it will have to go, and the dogs will punish them for not letting you reduce its velvet seats to powder. Never mind, go on with your story; so that unnatural aunt of yours wouldn't tell you about the pictures, eh?"

"She did in the beginning, and when we got into the big room too, a little while. She told me about the great large one at the end, 'Christ and the Historian,' though I couldn't see the

Historian anywhere, and——"

"She herself must be a most successful one," says Mr. Monkton, sotto voce.

"And then we came to the Innocents, and I perfectly hated that," says Tommy. "'Twas frightful! Everybody was as large as that," stretching out his arms and puffing out his cheeks, "and the babies were all so fat and so horrid. And then Felix came, and Joyce had to talk to him, so I didn't know any more."

"I think you forget," says Joyce. "There was that picture with lions in it. Mr. Dysart himself explained that to you."

"Oh, that one!" says Tommy, as if dimly remembering, "the circus one! The one with the round house. I didn't like that either."

"It is rather ghastly for a child," says his mother.

"That's not the one with the gas," puts in Tommy. "The one with the gas is just close to it, and has got Pilate's wife in it. She's very nice."

"But why didn't you like the other?" asks his father. "I think it one of the best there."

"Well, I don't," says Tommy, evidently grieved at having to differ from his father; but filled with a virtuous determination to stick to the truth through thick and thin.

"No?"

"'Tis unfair," says Tommy.

"That has been allowed for centuries," says his father.

"Then why don't they change it?"

"Change what?" asks Mr. Monkton, feeling a little puzzled. "How can one change now the detestable cruelties—or the abominable habits of the dark ages?"

"But why were they dark?" asks Tommy. "Mammy says they had gas then."

"I didn't mean that, I——" his mother is beginning, but Monkton stops her with a despairing gesture.

"Don't," says he. "It would take a good hour by the slowest clock. Let him believe there was electric light then if he chooses."

"Well, but why can't they change it?" persists Tommy, who is evidently full of the picture in question.

"I have told you."

"But the painter man could change it."

"I am afraid not, Tommy. He is dead."

"Why didn't he do it before he died then? Why didn't somebody show him what to do?"

"I don't fancy he wanted any hints. And besides, he had to be true to his ideal. It was a terrible time. They did really throw the Christians to the lions, you know."

"Of course I know that," says Tommy with a superior air. "But why didn't they cast another one?"

"Eh?" says Mr. Monkton.

"That's why it's unfair!" says Tommy. "There is one poor lion there, and he hasn't got any Christian! Why didn't Mr. Dory give him one?"

Tableau!

"Barbara!" says Mr. Monkton faintly, after a long pause. "Is there any brandy in the house?"

But Barbara is looking horrified.

"It is shocking," she says. "Why should he take such a twisted view of it. He has always been a kind-hearted child; and now——"

"Well. He has been kind-hearted to the lions," says Mr. Monkton. "No one can deny that."

"Oh! if you persist in encouraging him. Freddy!" says his wife with tears in her eyes.

"Believe me, Barbara," breaks in Joyce at this moment, "it is a mistake to be soft-hearted in this world." There is something bright but uncomfortable in the steady gaze she directs at her sister. "One should be hard, if one means to live comfortably."

"Will you take me soon again to see pictures?" asks Tommy, running to Joyce and scrambling upon the seat she is occupying. "Do!"

"But if you dislike them so much."

"Only some. And other places may be funnier. What day will you take me?"

"I don't think I shall again make an arrangement beforehand," says Joyce, rising, and placing Tommy on the ground very gently. "Some morning just before we start, you and I, we will make our plans."

She does not look at Barbara this time, but her tone is eloquent.

Barbara looks at her, however, with eyes full of reproach.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Love is its own great loveliness always,
  And takes new beauties from the touch of time;
Its bough owns no December and no May,
  But bears its blossoms into winter's clime."

"I have often thought what a melancholy world this would be without children."

"Oh, Felix—is it you!" says Mrs. Monkton in a dismayed tone. Her hansom is at the door and, arrayed in her best bib and tucker, she is hurrying through the hall when Dysart, who has just come, presents himself. He was just coming in, in fact, as she was going out.

"Don't mind me," says he; "there is always to-morrow."

"Oh, yes,—but——"

"And Miss Kavanagh?"

"It is to recover her I am going out this afternoon." It is the next day, so soon after her rupture with Joyce, that she is afraid to even hint at further complications. A strong desire to let him know that he might wait and try his fortune once again on her return with Joyce is oppressing her mind, but she puts it firmly behind her, or thinks she does. "She is lunching at the Brabazons'," she says; "old friends of ours. I promised to lunch there, too, so as to be able to bring Joyce home again."

"She will be back, then."

"In an hour and a half at latest," says Mrs. Monkton, who after all is not strong enough to be quite genuine to her better judgments. "But," with a start and a fresh determination to be cruel in the cause of right, "that would be much too long for you to wait for us."

"I shouldn't think it long," says he.

Mrs. Monkton smiles suddenly at him. How charming—how satisfactory he is. Could any lover be more devoted!

"Well, it would be for all that," says she. "But"—hesitating in a last vain effort to dismiss, and then losing herself—, "suppose you do not abandon your visit altogether; that you go away, now, and get your lunch at your club—I feel," contritely, "how inhospitable I am—and then come back again here about four o'clock. She—I—will have returned by that time."

"An excellent plan," says he, his face lighting up. Then it clouds again. "If she knows I am to be here?"

"Ah! that is a difficulty," says Mrs. Monkton, her own pretty face showing signs of distress. "But anyhow, risk it."

"I would rather she knew, however," says he steadily. The idea of entrapping her into a meeting with him is abhorrent to him. He had had enough of that at the Doré Gallery; though he had been innocent of any intentional deception there.

"I will tell her then," says Mrs. Monkton; "and in the meantime go and get your——"

At this moment the door on the right is thrown open, and Tommy, with a warhoop, descends upon them, followed by Mabel.

"Oh! it's Felix!" cries he joyfully. "Will you stay with us, Felix? We've no one to have dinner with us to-day. Because mammy is going away, and Joyce is gone, and pappy is nowhere; and nurse isn't a bit of good—she only says, 'Take care you don't choke yourselves, me dearies!'" He imitates nurse to the life. "And dinner will be here in a minute. Mary says she's just going to bring it upstairs."

"Oh, do—do stay with us," supplements little Mabel, thrusting her small hand imploringly into his. It is plain that he is in high favor with the children, however out of it with a certain other member of the family—and feeling grateful to them, Dysart hesitates to say the "No" that is on his lips.

How hard it is to refuse the entreaties of these little clinging fingers—these eager, lovely, upturned faces!

"If I may——?" says he at last, addressing Mrs. Monkton, and thereby giving in.

"Oh! as for that! You know you may," says she. "But you will perfectly hate it. It is too bad to allow you to accept their invitation. You will be bored to death, and you will detest the boiled mutton. There is only that and—rice, I think. I won't even be sure of the rice. It may be tapioca—and that is worse still."

"It's rice," says Tommy, who is great friends with the cook, and knows till her secrets.

"That decides the question," says Felix gravely. "Every one knows that I adore rice. It is my one weakness."

At this, Mrs. Monkton gives way to an irrepressible laugh, and he, catching the meaning of it, laughs, too.

"You are wrong, however," says he; "that other is my one strength. I could not live without it. Well, Tommy, I accept your invitation. I shall stay and lunch—dine with you." In truth, it seems sweet in his eyes to remain in the house that she (Joyce) occupies; it will be easier to wait, to hope for her return there than elsewhere.

"Your blood be on your own head," says Barbara, solemnly. "If, however, it goes too far, I warn you there are remedies. When it occurs to you that life is no longer worth living, go to the library; you will find there a revolver. It is three hundred years old, I'm told, and it is hung very high on the wall to keep it out of Freddy's reach. Blow your brains out with it—if you can."

"You're awfully good, awfully thoughtful," says Mr. Dysart, "but I don't think, when the final catastrophe arrives, it will be suicide. If I must murder somebody, it will certainly not be myself; it will be either the children or the mutton."

Mrs. Monkton laughs, then turns a serious eye on Tommy.

"Now, Tommy," says she, addressing him with a gravity that should have overwhelmed him, "I am going away from you for an hour or so, and Mr. Dysart has kindly accepted your invitation to lunch with him. I do hope," with increasing impressiveness, "you will be good."

"I hope so, too," returns Tommy, genially.

There is an astonished pause, confined to the elders only, and then, Mr. Dysart, unable to restrain himself any longer, bursts but laughing.

"Could anything be more candid?" says he; "more full of trust in himself, and yet with a certain modesty withal! There! you can go, Mrs. Monkton, with a clear conscience. I am not afraid to give myself up to the open-handed dealing of your son." Then his tone changes—he follows her quickly as she turns from him to the children to bid them good-bye.

"Miss Kavanagh," says he, "is she well—happy?"

"She is well," says Barbara, stopping to look back at him with her hand on Mabel's shoulder—there is reservation in her answer.

"Had she any idea that I would call to-day?" This question is absolutely forced from him.

"How should she? Even I—did I know it? Certainly I thought you would come some day, and soon, and she may have thought so, too, but—you should have told me. You called too soon. Impatience is a vice," says Mrs. Monkton, shaking her head in a very kindly fashion, however.

"I suppose when she knows—when," with a rather sad smile, "you tell her—I am to be here on her return this afternoon she will not come with you."

"Oh, yes, she will. I think so—I am sure of it. But you must understand, Felix, that she is very peculiar, difficult is what they call it now-a-days. And," pausing and glancing at him, "she is angry, too, about something that happened before you left last autumn. I hardly know what; I have imagined only, and," rapidly, "don't let us go into it, but you will know that there was something."

"Something, yes," says he.

"Well, a trifle, probably. I have said she is difficult. But you failed somewhere, and she is slow to pardon—where——"

"Where! What does that mean?" demands the young man, a great spring of hope taking life within his eyes.

"Ah, that hardly matters. But she is not forgiving. She is the very dearest girl I know, but that is one of her faults."

"She has no faults," says he, doggedly. And then: "Well, she knows I am to be here this afternoon?"

"Yes. I told her."

"I am glad of that. If she returns with you from the Brabazons," with a quick but heavy sigh, "there will be no hope in that."

"Don't be too hard," says Mrs. Monkton, who in truth is feeling a little frightened. To come back without Joyce, and encounter an irate young man, with Freddy goodness knows where—"She may have other engagements," she says. She waves him an airy adieu as she makes this cruel suggestion, and with a kiss more hurried than usual to the children, and a good deal of nervousness in her whole manner, runs down the steps to her hansom and disappears.

Felix, thus abandoned, yields himself to the enemy. He gives his right hand to Freddy and his left to Mabel, and lets them lead him captive into the dining-room.

"I expect dinner is cold," says Tommy cheerfully, seating himself without more ado, and watching the nurse, who is always in attendance at this meal, as she raises the cover from the boiled leg of mutton.

"Oh! no, not yet," says Mr. Dysart, quite as cheerfully, raising the carving knife and fork.

Something, however, ominous in the silence, that has fallen on both children makes itself felt, and without being able exactly to realize it he suspends operation for a moment to look at them.

He finds four eyes staring in his direction with astonishment, generously mingled with pious horror shining in their clear depths.

"Eh?" says he, involuntarily.

"Aren't you going to say it?" asks Mabel, in a severe tone.

"Say what?" says he.

"Grace," returns Tommy with distinct disapprobation.

"Oh—er—yes, of course. How could I have forgotten it?" says Dysart spasmodically, laying down the carvers at once, and preparing to distinguish himself. He succeeds admirably.

The children are leaning on the table cloth in devout expectation, that has something, however, sinister about it. Nurse is looking on, also expectant. Mr. Dysart makes a wild struggle with his memory, but all to no effect. The beginning of various prayers come with malignant readiness to his mind, the ends of several psalms, the middles of a verse or two, but the graces shamelessly desert him in his hour of need.

Good gracious! What is the usual one, the one they use at home—the—er? He becomes miserably conscious that Tommy's left eye is cocked sideways, and is regarding him with fatal understanding. In a state of desperation he bends forward as low as he well can, wondering vaguely where on earth is his hat, and mumbles something into his plate, that might be a bit of a prayer, but certainly it is not a grace. Perhaps it is a last cry for help.

"What's that?" demands Tommy promptly.

"I didn't hear one word of it," says Mabel with indignation.

Mr. Dysart is too stricken to be able to frame a reply.

"I don't believe you know one," continues Tommy, still fixing him with an uncompromising eye. "I don't believe you were saying anything. Do you, nurse?"

"Oh, fie, now, Master Tommy, and I heard your ma telling you you were to be good."

"Well, so I am good. 'Tis he isn't good. He won't say his prayers. Do you know one?" turning again to Dysart, who is covered with confusion. What the deuce did he stay here for? Why didn't he go to his club? He could have been back in plenty of time. If that confounded grinning woman of a nurse would only go away, it wouldn't be so bad; but——

"Never mind," says Mabel, with calm resignation. "I'll say one for you."

"No, you shan't," cries Tommy; "it's my turn."

"No, it isn't."

"It is, Mabel. You said it yesterday. And you know you said 'relieve' instead of 'received,' and mother laughed, and——"

"I don't care. It is Mr. Dysart's turn to-day, and he'll give his to me; won't you, Mr. Dysart?"

"You're a greedy thing," cries Tommy, wrathfully, "and you shan't say it. I'll tell Mr. Dysart what you did this morning if you do."

"I don't care," with disgraceful callousness. "I will say it."

"Then, I'll say it, too," says Tommy, with sudden inspiration born of a determination to die rather than give in, and instantly four fat hands are joined in pairs, and two seraphic countenances are upraised, and two shrill voices at screaming-pitch are giving thanks for the boiled mutton, at a racing speed, that censorious people might probably connect with a desire on the part of each to be first in at the finish.

Manfully they fight it out to the bitter end, without a break or a comma, and with defiant eyes glaring at each other across the table. There is a good deal of the grace; it is quite a long one when usually said, and yet very little grace in it to-day, when all is told.

"You may go now, nurse," says Mabel, presently, when the mutton had been removed and nurse had placed the rice and jam on the table. "Mr. Dysart will attend to us." It is impossible to describe the grown-up air with which this command is given. It is so like Mrs. Monkton's own voice and manner that Felix, with a start, turns his eyes on the author of it, and nurse, with an ill-suppressed smile, leaves the room.

"That's what mammy always says when-there's only her and me and Tommy," explains Mabel, confidentially. Then. "You," with a doubtful glance, "you will attend to us, won't you?"

"I'll do my best," says Felix, in a depressed tone, whose spirits are growing low. After all, there was safety in nurse!

"I think I'll come up and sit nearer to you," says Tommy, affably.

He gets down from his chair and pushes it, creaking hideously, up to Mr. Dysart's elbow—right under it, in fact.

"So will I," says Mabel, fired with joy at the prospect of getting away from her proper place, and eating her rice in a forbidden spot.

"But," begins Felix, vaguely, "do you think your mother would——"

"We always do it when we are alone with mammy," says Tommy.

"She says it keeps us warm to get under her wing when the weather is cold," says Mabel, lifting a lovely little face to his and bringing her chair down on the top of his toe. "She says it keeps her warm, too. Are you warm now?" anxiously.

"Yes, yes—burning!" says Mr. Dysart, whose toe is not unconscious of a corn.

"Ah! I knew you'd like it," says. Tommy. "Now go on; give us our rice—a little rice and a lot of jam."

"Is that what your mother does, too?" asks Mr. Dysart, meanly it must be confessed, but his toe is very bad still. The silence that follows his question and the look of the two downcast little faces is, however, punishment enough.

"Well, so be it," says he. "But even if we do finish the jam—I'm awfully fond of it myself—we must promise faithfully not to be disagreeable about it; not to be ill, that is——"

"Ill! We're never ill," says Tommy, valiantly, whereupon they make an end of the jam in no time.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

> "'Tis said the rose is Love's own flower,
> Its blush so bright—its thorns so many."

There is no mistake in the joy with which Felix parts from his companions after luncheon. He breathes afresh as he sees them tearing up the staircase to get ready for their afternoon walk, nurse puffing and panting behind them.

The drawing-room seems a bower of repose after the turmoil of the late feast, and besides, it cannot be long now before she—they—return. That is if they—she—return at all! He has, indeed, ample time given him to imagine this last horrible possibility as not only a probability, but a certainty, before the sound of coming footsteps up the stairs and the frou-frou of pretty frocks tells him his doubts were harmless. Involuntarily he rises from his chair and straightens himself, out of the rather forlorn position into which he has fallen, and fixes his eyes immovably upon the door. Are there two of them?

That is beyond doubt. It is only mad people who chatter to themselves, and certainly Mrs. Monkton is not mad.

Barbara has indeed raised her voice a little more than ordinary, and has addressed Joyce by her name on her hurried way up the staircase and across the cushioned recess outside the door. Now she throws open the door and enters, radiant, if a little nervous.

"Here we are," she says, very pleasantly, and with all the put-on manner of one who has made up her mind to be extremely joyous under distinct difficulties. "You are still here, then, and alone. They didn't murder you. Joyce and I had our misgivings all along. Ah, I forgot, you haven't seen Joyce until now."

"How d'ye do?" says Miss Kavanagh, holding out her hand to him, with a calm as perfect as her

smile.

"I do hope they were good," goes on Mrs. Monkton, her nervousness rather increasing.

"You know I have always said they were the best children in the world."

"Ah! said, said," repeats Mrs. Monkton, who now seems grateful for the chance of saying anything. What is the meaning of Joyce's sudden amiability—and is it amiability, or——

"It is true one can say almost anything," says Joyce, quite pleasantly. She nods her head prettily at Dysart. "There is no law to prevent them. Barbara thinks you are not sincere. She is not fair to you. You always do mean what you say, don't you?"

But for the smile that accompanies these words Dysart would have felt his doom sealed. But could she mean a stab so cruel, so direct, and still look kind?

"Oh! he is always sincere," says Barbara, quickly; "only people say things about one's children, you know, that——" She stops.

"They are the dearest children. You are a bad mother; you wrong them," says Joyce, laughing lightly, plainly at the idea of Barbara's affection for her children being impugned. "She told me," turning her lovely eyes full on Dysart, with no special expression in them whatever, "that I should find only your remains after spending an hour with them." Her smile was brilliant.

"She was wrong, you see, I am still here," says Felix, hardly knowing what he says in his desire to read her face, which is strictly impassive.

"Yes, still here," says Miss Kavanagh, smiling, always, and apparently meaning nothing at all; yet to Felix, watching her, there seems to be something treacherous in her manner.

"Still here?" Had she hoped he would be gone? Was that the cause of her delay? Had she purposely put off coming home to give him time to grow tired and go away? And yet she is looking at him with a smile!

"I am afraid you had a bad luncheon and a bad time generally," says Mrs. Monkton, quickly, who seemed hurried in every way. "But we came home as soon as ever we could. Didn't we, Joyce?" Her appeal to her sister is suggestive of fear as to the answer, but she need not have been nervous about that.

"We flew!" declares Miss Kavanagh, with delightful zeal. "We thought we should never get here soon enough. Didn't we, Barbara?" There is the very barest, faintest imitation of her sister's voice in this last question; a subtle touch of mockery, so slight, so evanescent as to leave one doubtful as to its ever having existed.

"Yes, yes, indeed," says Barbara, coloring.

"We flew so fast indeed that I am sure you are thoroughly fatigued," says Miss Kavanagh, addressing her. "Why don't you run away now, and take off your bonnet and lay down for an hour or so?"

"But," begins Barbara, and then stops short. What does it all mean? this new departure of her sister's puzzles her. To so deliberately ask for a *tête-a-tête* with Felix! To what end? The girl's manner, so bright, filled with such a glittering geniality—so unlike the usual listlessness that has characterized it for so long—both confuses and alarms her. Why is she so amiable now? There has been a little difficulty about getting her back at all, quite enough to make Mrs. Monkton shiver for Dysart's reception by her, and here, now, half an hour later, she is beaming upon him and being more than ordinarily civil. What is she going to do?

"Oh! no 'buts,'" says Joyce gaily. "You know you said your head was aching, and Mr. Dysart will excuse you. He will not be so badly off even without you. He will have me!" She turns a full glance on Felix as she says this, and looks at him with lustrous eyes and white teeth showing through her parted lips. The *soupçon* of mockery in her whole air, of which all through he has been faintly but uncomfortably aware, has deepened. "I shall take care he is not dull."

"But," says Barbara, again, rather helplessly.

"No, no. You must rest yourself. Remember we are going to that 'at home,' at the Thesigers' to-night, and I would not miss it for anything. Don't dwell with such sad looks on Mr. Dysart, I have promised to look after him. You will let me take care of you for a little while, Mr. Dysart, will you not?" turning another brilliant smile upon Felix, who responds to it very gravely.

He is regarding her with a searching air. How is it with her? Some old words recur to him:

> "There is treachery, O Ahaziah!"

Why does she look at him like that? He mistrusts her present attitude. Even that aggressive mood of hers at the Doré gallery on that last day when they met was preferable to this agreeable but detestable indifference.

"It is always a pleasure to be with you," says he steadily, perhaps a little doggedly.

"There! you see!" says Joyce, with a pretty little nod at her sister.

"Well, I shall take half an hour's rest," says Mrs. Monkton, reluctantly, who is, in truth, feeling as fresh as a daisy, but who is afraid to stay. "But I shall be back for tea." She gives a little kindly glance to Felix, and, with a heart filled with forebodings, leaves the room.

"What a glorious day it has been!" says Joyce, continuing the conversation with Dysart in that new manner of hers, quite as if Barbara's going was a matter of small importance, and the fact that she has left them for the first time for all these months alone together of less importance still.

She is standing on the hearthrug, and is slowly taking the pins out of her bonnet. She seems utterly unconcerned. He might be the veriest stranger, or else the oldest, the most uninteresting friend in the world.

She has taken out all the pins now, and has thrown her bonnet on to the lounge nearest to her, and is standing before the glass in the overmantel patting and pushing into order the soft locks that lie upon her forehead.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"Ah, were she pitiful as she is fair."
"Life's a varied, bright illusion,
Joy and sorrow—light and shade."

"It was almost warm," says she, turning round to him. She seems to be talking all the time, so vivid is her face, so intense her vitality. "I was so glad to see the Brabazons again. You know them, don't you? Kit looked perfect. So lovely, so good in every way—voice, face, manners. I felt I envied her. It would be delightful to feel that every one must be admiring one, as she does." She glances at him, and he leans a little toward her. "No, no, not a compliment, please. I know I am as much behind Kit as the moon is behind the sun."

"I wasn't going to pay you a compliment," says he, slowly.

"No?" she laughs. It was unlike her to have made that remark, and just as unlike her to have taken his rather discourteous reply so good-naturedly.

"It was a charming visit," she goes on, not in haste, but idly as it were, and as if words are easy to her. "I quite enjoyed it. Barbara didn't. I think she wanted to get home—she is always thinking of the babies—or——Well, I did. I am not ungrateful. I take the goods the gods provide, and find honest pleasure in them. I do not think, indeed, I laughed so much for quite a century as to-day with Kit."

"She is sympathetic," says Felix, with the smallest thought of the person in question in his mind.

"More than that, surely. Though that is a hymn of praise in itself. After all it is a relief to meet Irish people when one has spent a week or two in stolid England. You agree with me?"

"I am English," returns he.

"Oh! Of course! How rude of me! I didn't mean it, however. I had entirely forgotten, our acquaintance having been confined entirely to Irish soil until this luckless moment. You do forgive me?"

She is leaning a little forward and looking at him with a careless expression.

"No," returns he briefly.

"Well, you should," says she, taking no notice of his cold rejoinder, and treating it, indeed, as if it is of no moment. If there was a deeper meaning in his refusal to grant her absolution she declines to acknowledge it. "Still, even that *bêtise* of mine need not prevent you from seeing some truth in my argument. We have our charms, we Irish, eh?"

"Your charm?"

"Well, mine, if you like, as a type, and"—recklessly and with a shrug of her shoulders—"if you wish to be personal."

She has gone a little too far.

"I think I have acknowledged that," says he, coldly. He rises abruptly and goes over to where she is standing on the hearthrug—shading her face from the fire with a huge Japanese fan. "Have I ever denied your charm?" His tone has been growing in intensity, and now becomes stern. "Why do you talk to me like this? What is the meaning of it all—your altered manner—everything? Why did you grant me this interview?"

"Perhaps because"—still with that radiant smile, bright and cold as early frost—"like that little soapy boy, I thought you would 'not be happy till you got it.'"

She laughs lightly. The laugh is the outcome of the smile, and its close imitation. It is perfectly successful, but on the surface only. There is no heart in it.

"You think I arranged it?"

"Oh, no; how could I? You have just said I arranged it." She shuts up her fan with a little click. "You want to say something, don't you?" says she, "well, say it!"

"You give me permission, then?" asks he, gravely, despair knocking at his heart.

"Why not—would I have you unhappy always?" Her tone is jesting throughout.

"You think," taking the hand that holds the fan and restraining its motion for a moment, "that if I do speak I shall be happier?"

"Ah! that is beyond me," says she. "And yet—yes; to get a thing over is to get rid of fatigue. I have argued it all out for myself, and have come to the conclusion——"

"For yourself!"

"Well, for you too," a little impatiently. "After all, it is you who want to speak. Silence, to me, is golden. But it occurred to me in the silent watches of the night," with another, now rather forced, little laugh, "that if you once said to me all you had to say, you would be contented, and go away and not trouble me any more."

"I can do that now, without saying anything," says he slowly. He has dropped her hand; he is evidently deeply wounded.

"Can you?"

Her eyes are resting relentlessly on his. Is there magic in them? Her mouth has taken a strange expression.

"I might have known how it would be," says Dysart, throwing up his head. "You will not forgive! It was but a moment—a few words, idle, hardly-considered, and——"

"Oh, yes, considered," says she slowly.

"They were unmeant!" persists he, fiercely. "I defy you to think otherwise. One great mistake—a second's madness—and you have ordained that it shall wreck my whole life! You!—That evening in the library at the court. I had not thought of——"

"Ah!" she interrupts him, even more by her gesture—which betrays the first touch of passion she has shown—than by her voice, that is still mocking. "I knew you would have to say it!"

"You know me, indeed!" says he, with an enforced calmness that leaves him very white. "My whole heart and soul lies bare to you, to ruin it as you will. It is the merest waste of time, I know; but still I have felt all along that I must tell you again that I love you, though I fully understand I shall receive nothing in return but scorn and contempt. Still, to be able even to say it is a relief to me."

"And what is it to me?" asks the girl, as pale now as he is. "Is it a relief—a comfort to me to have to listen to you?"

She clenches her hands involuntarily. The fan falls with a little crash to the ground.

"No." He is silent a moment, "No—it is unfair—unjust! You shall not be made uncomfortable again. It is the last time.... I shall not trouble you again in this way. I don't say we shall never meet again. You"—pausing and looking at her—"you do not desire that?"

"Oh, no," coldly, politely.

"If you do, say so at once," with a rather peremptory ring in his tone.

"I should," calmly.

"I am glad of that. As my cousin is a great friend of mine, and as I shall get a fortnight's leave soon, I shall probably run over to Ireland, and spend it with her. After all"—bitterly—"why should I suppose it would be disagreeable to you?"

"It was quite a natural idea," says she, immovably.

"However," says he, steadily, "you need not be afraid that, even if we do meet, I shall ever annoy you in this way again——"

"Oh, I am never afraid," says she, with that terrible smile that seems to freeze him.

"Well, good-bye," holding out his hand. He is quite as composed as she is now, and is even able to return her smile in kind.

"So soon? But Barbara will be down to tea in a few minutes. You will surely wait for her?"

"I think not."

"But really do! I am going to see after the children, and give them some chocolate I bought for them."

"It will probably make them ill," says he, smiling still. "No, thank you. I must go now, indeed. You will make my excuses to Mrs. Monkton, please. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," says she, laying her hand in his for a second. She has grown suddenly very cold, shivering: it seems almost as if an icy blast from some open portal has been blown in upon her. He is still looking at her. There is something wild—strange—in his expression.

"You cannot realize it, but I can," says he, unsteadily. "It is good-bye forever, so far as life for me is concerned."

He has turned away from her. He is gone. The sharp closing of the door wakens her to the fact that she is alone. Mechanically, quite calmly, she looks around the empty room. There is a little Persian chair cover over there all awry. She rearranges it with a critical eye to its proper appearance, and afterward pushes a small chair into its place. She pats a cushion or two, and, finally taking up her bonnet and the pins she had laid upon the chimney-piece, goes up to her own room.

Once there——

With a rush the whole thing comes back to her. The entire meaning of it—what she has done. That word—forever. The bonnet has fallen from her fingers. Sinking upon her knees beside the bed, she buries her face out of sight. Presently her slender frame is torn by those cruel, yet merciful sobs!

CHAPTER XL.

"The sense of death is most in apprehension."

"Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure."

It is destined to be a day of grief! Monkton who had been out all the morning, having gone to see the old people, a usual habit of his, had not returned to dinner—a very unusual habit with him. It had occurred, however, once or twice, that he had stayed to dine with them on such occasions, as when Sir George had had a troublesome letter from his elder son, and had looked to the younger to give him some comfort—some of his time to help him to bear it, by talking it all over. Barbara, therefore, while dressing for Mrs. Thesiger's "At Home," had scarcely felt anxiety, and, indeed, it is only now when she has come down to the drawing-room to find Joyce awaiting her, also in gala garb, so far as a gown goes, that a suspicion of coming trouble takes possession of her.

"He is late, isn't he?" she says, looking at Joyce with something nervous in her expression. "What can have kept him? I know he wanted to meet the General, and now——What can it be?"

"His mother, probably," says Joyce, indifferently. "From your description of her, I should say she must be a most thoroughly uncomfortable old person."

"Yes. Not pleasant, certainly. A little of her, as George Ingram used to say, goes a long way. But still——And these Thesiger people are friends of his, and——"

"You are working yourself up into a thorough belief in the sensational street accident," says Joyce, who has seated herself well out of the glare of the chandelier. "You want to be tragic. It is a mistake, believe me."

Something in the bitterness of the girl's tone strikes on her sister's ear. Joyce had not come down to dinner, had pleaded a headache as an excuse for her non-appearance, and Mrs. Monkton and Tommy (she could not bear to dine alone) had devoured that meal *à deux*. Tommy had certainly been anything but dull company.

"Has anything happened, Joyce?" asks her sister quickly. She has had her suspicions, of course, but they were of the vaguest order.

Joyce laughs.

"I told you your nerves were out of order," says she. "What should happen? Are you still dwelling on the running over business? I assure you you wrong Freddy. He can take care of himself at a crossing as well as another man, and better. Even a hansom, I am convinced, could do no harm to Freddy."

"I wasn't thinking of him," says Barbara, a little reproachfully, perhaps. "I——"

"No. Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Here he is," cries she suddenly, springing to her feet as the sound of Monkton's footsteps ascending the stairs can now be distinctly heard. "I hope you will explain yourself to him." She laughs again, and disappears through the doorway that leads to the second hall outside, as Monkton enters.

"How late you are, Freddy," says his wife, the reproach in her voice heightened because of the

anxiety she had been enduring. "I thought you would never——What is it? What has happened? Freddy! there is bad news."

"Yes, very bad," says Monkton, sinking into a chair.

"Your brother——" breathlessly. Of late, she has always known that trouble is to be expected from him.

"He is dead," says Monkton in a low tone.

Barbara, flinging her opera cloak aside, comes quickly to him. She leans over him and slips her arms round his neck.

"Dead!" says she in an awestruck tone.

"Yes. Killed himself! Shot himself! the telegram came this morning when I was with them. I could not come home sooner; it was impossible to leave them."

"Oh, Freddy, I am sorry you left them even now; a line to me would have done. Oh, what a horrible thing, and to die like that."

"Yes." He presses one of her hands, and then, rising, begins to move hurriedly up and down the room. "It was misfortune upon misfortune," he says presently. "When I went over there this morning they had just received a letter filled with——"

"From him!"

"Yes. That is what seemed to make it so much worse later on. Life in the morning, death in the afternoon!" His voice grows choked. "And such a letter as it was, filled with nothing but a most scandalous account of his——Oh!"——he breaks off suddenly as if shocked. "Oh, he is dead, poor fellow."

"Don't take it like that," says Barbara, following him and clinging to him. "You know you could not be unkind. There were debts then?"

"Debts! It is difficult to explain just now, my head is aching so; and those poor old people? Well, it means ruin for them, Barbara. Of course his debts must be paid, his honor kept intact, for the sake of the old name, but—they will let all the houses, the two in town, this one, and their own, and—and the old place down in Warwickshire, the home, all must go out of their hands."

"Oh, Freddy, surely—surely there must be some way——"

"Not one. I spoke about breaking the entail. You know I—his death, poor fellow. I——"

"Yes, yes, dear."

"But they wouldn't hear of it. My mother was very angry, even in her grief, when I proposed it. They hope that by strict retrenchment, the property will be itself again; and they spoke about Tommy. They said it would be unjust to him——"

"And to you," quickly. She would not have him ignored any longer.

"Oh, as for me, I'm not a boy, you know. Tommy is safe to inherit as life goes."

"Well, so are you," said she, with a sharp pang at her heart.

"Yes, of course. I am only making out a case. I think it was kind of them to remember Tommy's claim in the midst of their own grief."

"It was, indeed," says she remorsefully. "Oh, it was. But if they give up everything where will they go?"

"They talk of taking a cottage—a small house somewhere. They want to give up everything to pay his infamous——There!" sharply, "I am forgetting again! But to see them makes one forget everything else." He begins his walk up and down the room again, as if inaction is impossible to him. "My mother, who has been accustomed to a certain luxury all her life, to be now, at the very close of it, condemned to——It would break your heart to see her. And she will let nothing be said of him."

"Oh, no."

"Still, there should be justice. I can't help feeling that. Her blameless life, and his——and she is the one to suffer."

"It is so often so," says his wife in a low tone. "It is an old story, dearest, but I know that when the old stories come home to us individually they always sound so terribly new. But what do they mean by a small house?" asks she presently in a distressed tone.

"Well, I suppose a small house," said he, with just a passing gleam of his old jesting manner. "You know my mother cannot bear the country, so I think the cottage idea will fall through."

"Freddy," says his wife suddenly. "She can't go into a small house, a London small house. It is out of the question. Could they not come and live with us?"

She is suggesting a martyrdom for herself, yet she does it unflinchingly.

"What! My aunt and all?" asks he, regarding her earnestly.

"Oh, of course, of course, poor old thing," says she, unable this time, however, to hide the quaver that desolates her voice.

"No," says her husband with a suspicion of vehemence. He takes her suddenly in his arms and kisses her. "Because two or three people are unhappy is no reason why a fourth should be made so, and I don't want your life spoiled, so far as I can prevent it. I suppose you have guessed that I must go over to Nice—where he is—my father could not possibly go alone in his present state."

"When, must you go?"

"To-morrow. As for you——"

"If we could go home," says she uncertainly.

"That is what I would suggest, but how will you manage without me? The children are so troublesome when taken out of their usual beat, and their nurse—I often wonder which would require the most looking after, they or she? It occurred to me to ask Dysart to see you across."

"He is so kind, such a friend," says Mrs. Monkton. "But——"

She might have said more, but at this instant Joyce appears in the doorway.

"We shall be late," cries she, "and Freddy not even dressed, why——Oh, has anything really happened?"

"Yes, yes," says Barbara hurriedly—a few words explains all. "We must go home to-morrow, you see; and Freddy thinks that Felix would look after us until we reached Kensington or North Wall."

"Felix—Mr. Dysart?" The girl's face had grown pale during the recital of the suicide, but now it looks ghastly. "Why should he come?" cries she in a ringing tone, that has actual fear in it. "Do you suppose that we two cannot manage the children between us? Oh, nonsense, Barbara; why Tommy is as sensible as he can be, and if nurse does prove incapable, and a prey to seasickness, well—I can take baby, and you can look after Mabel. It will be all right! We are not going to America, really. Freddy, please say you will not trouble Mr. Dysart about this matter."

"Yes, I really think we shall not require him," says Barbara. Something in the glittering brightness of her sister's eye warns her to give in at once, and indeed she has been unconsciously a little half-hearted about having Felix or any stranger as a travelling companion. "There, run away, Joyce, and go to your bed, darling; you look very tired. I must still arrange some few things with Freddy."

"What is the matter with her?" asks Monkton, when Joyce has gone away. "She looks as if she had been crying, and her manner is so excitable."

"She has been strange all day, almost repellant. Felix called—and—I don't know what happened; she insisted upon my leaving her alone with him; but I am afraid there was a scene of some sort. I know she had been crying, because her eyes were so red, but she would say nothing, and I was afraid to ask her."

"Better not. I hope she is not still thinking of that fellow Beauclerk. However——" he stops short and sighs heavily.

"You must not think of her now," says Barbara quickly; "your own trouble is enough for you. Were your brother's affairs so very bad that they necessitate the giving up of everything?"

"It has been going on for years. My father has had to economize, to cut down everything. You know the old place was let to a Mr.—Mr.—I quite forget the name now," pressing his hand to his brow; "a Manchester man, at all events, but we always hoped my father would have been able to take it back from him next year, but now——"

"But you say they think in time that the property will——"

"They think so. I don't. But it would be a pity to undeceive them. I am afraid, Barbara," with a sad look at her, "you made a bad match. Even when the chance comes in your way to rise out of poverty, it proves a thoroughly useless one."

"It isn't like you to talk like that," says she quickly. "There, you are overwrought, and no wonder, too. Come upstairs and let us see what you will want for your journey." Her tone had grown purposely brisk; surely, on an occasion such as this she is a wife, a companion in a thousand. "There must be many things to be considered, both for you and for me. And the thing is, to take nothing unnecessary. Those foreign places, I hear, are so——"

"It hardly matters what I take," says he wearily.

"Well, it matters what I take," says she briskly. "Come and give me a help, Freddy. You know how I hate to have servants standing over me. Other people stand over their servants, but they are poor rich people. I like to see how the clothes are packed." She is speaking not quite truthfully. Few people like to be spared trouble so much as she does, but it seems good in her eyes now to rouse him from the melancholy that is fast growing on him. "Come," she says, tucking her arm into his.

CHAPTER XLI.

"It is not to-morrow; ah, were it to-day!
There are two that I know that would be gay.
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!
Ah I parting wounds so bitterly!"

It is six weeks later, "spring has come up this way," and all the earth is glad with a fresh birth.

"Tantarara! the joyous Book of Spring
  Lies open, writ in blossoms; not a bird
  Of evil augury is seen or heard!
Come now, like Pan's old crew we'll dance and sing,
Or Oberon's, for hill and valley ring
  To March's bugle horn—earth's blood is stirred."

March has indeed come; boisterous, wild, terrible, in many ways, but lovely in others. There is a freshness in the air that rouses glad thoughts within the breast, vague thoughts, sweet, as undefinable, and that yet mean life. The whole land seems to have sprung up from a long slumber, and to be looking with wide happy eyes upon the fresh marvels Nature is preparing for it. Rather naked she stands as yet, rubbing her sleepy lids, having just cast from her her coat of snow, and feeling somewhat bare in the frail garment of bursting leaves and timid grass growths, that as yet is all she can find wherein to hide her charms; but half clothed as she is, she is still beautiful.

Everything seems full of eager triumph. Hills, trees, valleys, lawns, and bursting streams, all are overflowing with a wild enjoyment. All the dull, dingy drapery in which winter had shrouded them has now been cast aside, and the resplendent furniture with which each spring delights to deck her home stands revealed.

All these past dead months her house has lain desolate, enfolded in death's cerements, but now uprising in her vigorous youth, she flings aside the dull coverings, and lets the sweet, brilliant hues that lie beneath, shine forth in all their beauty to meet the eye of day.

Earth and sky are in bridal array, and from the rich recesses of the woods, and from each shrub and branch the soft glad pæans of the mating birds sound like a wedding chant.

Monkton had come back from that sad journey to Nice some weeks ago. He had had very little to tell on his return, and that of the saddest. It had all been only too true about those iniquitous debts, and the old people were in great distress. The two town houses should be let at once, and the old place in Warwickshire—the home, as he called it—well! there was no hope now that it would ever be redeemed from the hands of the Manchester people who held it; and Sir George had been so sure that this spring he would have been in a position to get back his own, and have the old place once more in his possession. It was all very sad.

"There is no hope now. He will have to let the place to Barton for the next ten years," said Monkton to his wife when he got home. Barton was the Manchester man. "He is still holding off about doing it, but he knows it must be done, and at all events the reality won't be a bit worse than the thinking about it. Poor old Governor! You wouldn't know him, Barbara. He has gone to skin and bone, and such a frightened sort of look in his eyes."

"Oh! poor, poor old man!" cried Barbara, who could forget everything in the way of past unkindness where her sympathies were enlisted.

Toward the end of February the guests had begun to arrive at the Court. Lady Baltimore had returned there during January with her little son, but Baltimore had not put in an appearance for some weeks later. A good many new people unknown to the Monktons had arrived there with others whom they did know, and after awhile Dicky Browne had come and Miss Maliphant and the Brabazons and some others with whom Joyce was on friendly terms, but even though Lady Baltimore had made rather a point of the girls being with her, Joyce had gone to her but sparingly, and always in fear and trembling. It was so impossible to know who might not have arrived last night, or was going to arrive this night!

Besides, Barbara and Freddy were so saddened, so upset by the late death and its consequences, that it seemed unkind even to pretend to enjoy oneself. Joyce grasped at this excuse to say "no" very often to Lady Baltimore's kindly longings to have her with her. That, up to this, neither Dysart nor Beauclerk had come to the Court, had been a comfort to her; but that they might come at any moment kept her watchful and uneasy. Indeed, only yesterday she had heard from Lady Baltimore that both were expected during the ensuing week.

That news leaves her rather unstrung and nervous to-day. After luncheon, having successfully eluded Tommy, the lynx-eyed, she decides upon going for a long walk, with a view to working off the depression to which she has become prey. This is how she happens to be out of the way when

the letter comes for Barbara that changes altogether the tenor of their lives.

The afternoon post brings it. The delicious spring day has worn itself almost to a close when Monkton, entering his wife's room, where she is busy at a sewing machine altering a frock for Mabel, drops a letter over her shoulder into her lap.

"What a queer looking letter," says she, staring in amazement at the big official blue envelope.

"Ah—ha, I thought it would make you shiver," says he, lounging over to the fire, and nestling his back comfortably against the mantle-piece. "What have you been up to I should like to know. No wonder you are turning a lively purple."

"But what can it be?" says she.

"That's just it," says he teazingly. "I hope they aren't going to arrest you, that's all. Five years' penal servitude is not a thing to hanker after."

Mrs. Monkton, however, is not listening to this tirade. She has broken open the envelope and is now scanning hurriedly the contents of the important-looking document within. There is a pause —a lengthened one. Presently Barbara rises from her seat, mechanically, as it were, always with her eyes fixed on the letter in her hand. She has grown a little pale—a little puzzled frown is contracting her forehead.

"Freddy!" says she in a rather strange tone.

"What?" says he quickly. "No more bad news I hope."

"Oh, no! Oh, yes! I can't quite make it out—but—I'm afraid my poor uncle is dead."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes, yes. My father's brother. I think I told you about him. He went abroad years ago, and we—Joyce and I, believed him dead a long time ago, long before I married you even—but now——Come here and read it. It is worded so oddly that it puzzles me."

"Let me see it," says Monkton.

He sinks into an easy-chair, and drags her down on to his knee, the better to see over her shoulder. Thus satisfactorily arranged, he begins to read rapidly the letter she holds up before his eyes.

"Yes, dead indeed," says he sotto voce. "Go on, turn over; you mustn't fret about that, you know. Barbara—er—er—" reading. "What's this? By Jove!"

"What?" says his wife anxiously. "What is the meaning of this horrid letter, Freddy?"

"There are a few people who might not call it horrid," says Monkton, placing his arm round her and rising from the chair. He is looking very grave. "Even though it brings you news of your poor uncle's death, still it brings you too the information that you are heiress to about a quarter of a million!"

"What!" says Barbara faintly. And then, "Oh no. Oh! nonsense! there must be some mistake!"

"Well, it sounds like it at all events. 'Sad occurrence,' h'm—h'm——" reading. "'Co-heiresses. Very considerable fortune.'" He looks to the signature of the letter. "Hodgson & Fair. Very respectable firm! My father has had dealings with them. They say your uncle died in Sydney, and has left behind him an immense sum of money. Half a million, in fact, to which you and Joyce are co-heiresses."

"There must be a mistake," repeats Barbara, in a low tone. "It seems too like a fairy tale."

"It does. And yet, lawyers like Hodgson & Fair are not likely to be led into a cul-de-sac. If——" he pauses, and looks earnestly at his wife. "If it does prove true, Barbara, you will be a very rich woman."

"And you will be rich with me," she says, quickly, in an agitated tone. "But, but——"

"Yes; it does seem difficult to believe," interrupts he, slowly. "What a letter!" His eyes fall on it again, and she, drawing close to him, reads it once more, carefully.

"I think there is truth in it," says she, at last. "It sounds more like being all right, more reasonable, when read a second time. Freddy——"

She steps a little bit away from him, and rests her beautiful eyes full on his.

"Have you thought," says she, slowly, "that if there is truth in this story, how much we shall be able to do for your father and mother!"

Monkton starts as if stung. For them. To do anything for them. For the two who had so wantonly offended and insulted her during all her married life: Is her first thought to be for them?

"Yes, yes," says she, eagerly. "We shall be able to help them out of all their difficulties. Oh! I didn't say much to you, but in their grief, their troubles have gone to my very heart. I couldn't bear to think of their being obliged to give up their houses, their comforts, and in their old age, too! Now we shall be able to smooth matters for them!"

CHAPTER XLII.

"It's we two, it's we two, it's we two for aye,
All the world and we two, and Heaven be our stay,
Like a laverock in the lift, sing, O bonny bride!
All the world was Adam once, with Eve by his side."

The light in her eyes is angelic. She has laid her hands upon both her husband's arms, as if expecting him to take her into them, as he always does only too gladly on the smallest provocation. Just now, however, he fails her, for the moment only, however.

"Barbara," says he, in a choked voice: he holds her from him, examining her face critically. His thoughts are painful, yet proud—proud beyond telling. His examination does not last long: there is nothing but good to be read in that fair, sweet, lovable face. He gathers her to him with a force that is almost hurtful.

"Are you a woman at all, or just an angel?" says he, with a deep sigh.

"What is it, Freddy?"

"After all they have done to you. Their insults, coldness, abominable conduct, to think that your first thought should be for them. Why, look here, Barbara," vehemently, "they are not worthy that you should——"

"Tut!" interrupts she, lightly, yet with a little sob in her throat. His praise is so sweet to her. "You overrate me. Is it for them I would do it or for you? There, take all the thought for yourself. And, besides, are not you and I one, and shall not your people be my people? Come, if you think of it, there is no such great merit after all."

"You forget——"

"No; not a word against them. I won't listen," thrusting her fingers into her ears. "It is all over and done with long ago. And it is our turn now, and let us do things decently and in order, and create no heart-burnings."

"But when I think——"

"If thinking makes you look like that, don't think."

"But I must. I must remember how they scorned and slighted you. It never seems to have come home to me so vividly as now—now when you seem to have forgotten it. Oh, Barbara!" He presses back her head and looks long and tenderly into her eyes. "I was not mistaken, indeed, when I gave you my heart. Surely you are one among ten thousand."

"Silly boy," says she, with a little tremulous laugh, glad to her very soul's centre, however, because of his words. "What is there to praise me for? Have I not warned you that I am purely selfish? What is there I would not do for very love of you? Come, Freddy," shaking herself loose from him, and laughing now with honest delight. "Let us be reasonable. Oh! poor old uncle, it seems hateful to rejoice thus over his death, but his memory is really only a shadow after all, and I suppose he meant to make us happy by his gift, eh, Freddy?"

"Yes, how well he remembered during all these years. He could have formed no other ties."

"None, naturally." Short pause. "There is that black mare of Mike Donovan's, Freddy, that you so fancied. You can buy it now."

Monkton laughs involuntarily. Something of the child has always lingered about Barbara.

"And I should like to get a black velvet gown," says she, her face brightening, "and to buy Joyce a ——Oh! but Joyce will be rich herself."

"Yes. I'm really afraid you will be done out of the joy of overloading Joyce with gifts. She'll be able to give you something. That will be a change, at all events. As for the velvet gown, if this," touching the letter, "bears any meaning, I should think you need not confine yourself to one velvet gown."

"And there's Tommy," says she quickly, her thoughts running so fast that she scarcely hears him. "You have always said you wanted to put him in the army. Now you can do it."

"Yes," says Monkton, with sudden interest. "I should like that. But you—you shrank from the thought, didn't you?"

"Well, he might have to go to India," says she, nervously.

"And what of that?"

"Oh, nothing—that is, nothing really—only there are lions and tigers there, Freddy; aren't there, now?"

"One or two," says Mr. Monkton, "if we are to believe travelers' tales. But they are all proverbially false. I don't believe in lions at all myself. I'm sure they are myths. Well, let him go into the navy, then. Lions and tigers don't as a rule inhabit the great deep."

"Oh, no; but sharks do," says she, with a visible shudder. "No, no, on the whole I had rather trust him to the beasts of the field. He could run away from them, but you can't run in the sea."

"True," says Mr. Monkton, with exemplary gravity. "I couldn't, at all events."

Monkton had to run across to London about the extraordinary legacy left to his wife and Joyce. But further investigation proved the story true. The money was, indeed, there, and they were the only heirs. From being distinctly poor they rose to the height of a very respectable income, and Monkton being in town, where the old Monktons still were, also was commanded by his wife to go to them and pay off their largest liabilities—debts contracted by the dead son, and to so arrange that they should not be at the necessity of leaving themselves houseless.

The Manchester people who had taken the old place in Warwickshire were now informed that they could not have it beyond the term agreed on; but about this the old people had something to say, too. They would not take back the family place. They had but one son now, and the sooner he went to live there the better. Lady Monkton, completely, broken down and melted by Barbara's generosity, went so far as to send her a long letter, telling her it would be the dearest wish of her and Sir George's hearts that she should preside as mistress over the beautiful old homestead, and that it would give them great happiness to imagine, the children—the grandchildren—running riot through the big wainscoted rooms. Barbara was not to wait for her—Lady Monkton's—death to take up her position as head of the house. She was to go to Warwickshire at once, the moment those detestable Manchester people were out of it; and Lady Monkton, if Barbara would be so good as to make her welcome, would like to come to her for three months every year, to see the children, and her son, and her daughter! The last was the crowning touch. For the rest, Barbara was not to hesitate about accepting the Warwickshire place, as Lady Monkton and Sir George were devoted to town life, and never felt quite well when away from smoky London.

This last was true. As a fact, the old people were thoroughly imbued with the desire for the turmoil of city life, and the three months of country Lady Monkton had stipulated for were quite as much as they desired of rustic felicity.

Barbara accepted the gift of the old home. Eventually, of course, it would be hers, but she knew the old people meant the present giving of it as a sort of return for her liberality—for the generosity that had enabled them to once more lift their heads among their equals.

The great news meanwhile had spread like wildfire through the Irish country where the Frederic Monktons lived. Lady Baltimore was unfeignedly glad about it, and came down at once to embrace Barbara, and say all sorts of delightful things about it. The excitement of the whole affair seemed to dissipate all the sadness and depression that had followed on the death of the elder son, and nothing now was talked of but the great good luck that had fallen into the paths of Barbara and Joyce. The poor old uncle had been considered dead for so many years previously, and was indeed such a dim memory to his nieces, that it would have been the purest affectation to pretend to feel any deep grief for his demise.

Perhaps what grieved Barbara most of all, though she said very little about it, was the idea of having to leave the old house in which they were now living. It did not not cheer her to think of the place in Warwickshire, which, of course, was beautiful, and full of possibilities.

This foolish old Irish home—rich in discomforts—was home. It seemed hard to abandon it. It was not a palatial mansion, certainly; it was even dismal in many ways, but it contained more love in its little space than many a noble mansion could boast. It seemed cruel—ungrateful—to cast it behind her, once it was possible to mount a few steps on the rungs of the worldly ladder.

How happy they had all been here together, in this foolish old house, that every severe storm seemed to threaten with final dissolution. It gave her many a secret pang to think that she must part from it for ever before another year should dawn.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Looks the heart alone discover,
    If the tongue its thoughts can tell,
'Tis in vain you play the lover,
    You have never felt the spell."

Joyce, who had been dreading, with a silent but terrible fear, her first meeting with Dysart, had found it no such great matter after all when they were at last face to face. Dysart had met her as coolly, with apparently as little concern as though no former passages had ever taken place between them.

His manner was perfectly calm, and as devoid of feeling as any one could desire, and it was open to her comprehension that he avoided her whenever he possibly could. She told herself this was all she could, or did, desire; yet, nevertheless, she writhed beneath the certainty of it.

Beauclerk had not arrived until a week later than Dysart; until, indeed, the news of the marvelous fortune that had come to her was well authenticated, and then had been all that could possibly be expected of him. His manner was perfect. He sat still And gazed with delightfully friendly eyes into Miss Maliphant's pleased countenance, and anon skipped across room or lawn to whisper beautiful nothings to Miss Kavanagh. The latter's change of fortune did not, apparently, seem to affect him in the least. After all, even now she was not as good a *parti* as Miss Maliphant, where money was concerned, but then there were other things. Whatever his outward manner might lead one to suspect, beyond doubt he thought a great deal at this time, and finally came to a conclusion.

Joyce's fortune had helped her in many ways. It had helped many of the poor around her, too; but it did even more than that. It helped Mr. Beauclerk to make up his mind with regard to his matrimonial prospects.

Sitting in his chambers in town with Lady Baltimore's letter before him that told him of the change in Joyce's fortune—of the fortune that had changed her, in fact, from a pretty penniless girl to a pretty rich one, he told himself that, after all, she had certainly been the girl for him since the commencement of their acquaintance.

She was charming—not a whit more now than then. He would not belie his own taste so far as so admit that she was more desirable in any way now, in her prosperity, than when first he saw her, and paid her the immense compliment of admiring her.

He permitted himself to grow a little enthusiastic, however, to say out loud to himself, as it were, all that he had hardly allowed himself to think up to this. She was, beyond question, the most charming girl in the world! Such grace—such finish! A girl worthy of the love of the best of men—presumably himself!

He had always loved her—always! He had never felt so sure of that delightful fact as now. He had had a kind of knowledge, even when afraid to give ear to it, that she was the wife best suited to him to be found anywhere. She understood him! They were thoroughly *en rapport* with each other. Their marriage would be a success in the deepest, sincerest meaning of that word.

He leant luxuriously among the cushions of his chair, lit a fragrant cigarette, and ran his mind backward over many things. Well! Perhaps so! But yet if he had refrained from proposing to her until now—now when fate smiles upon her—it was simply because he dreaded dragging her into a marriage where she could not have had all those little best things of life that so peerless a creature had every right to demand.

Yes! it was for her sake alone he had hesitated. He feels sure of that now. He has thoroughly persuaded himself the purity of the motives that kept him tongue tied when honor called aloud to him for speech. He feels himself so exalted that he metaphorically pats himself upon the back and tells himself he is a righteous being—a very Brutus where honor is concerned; any other man might have hurried that exquisite creature into a squalid marriage for the mere sake of gratifying an overpowering affection, but he had been above all that! He had considered her! The man's duty is ever to protect the woman! He had protected her—even from herself; for that she would have been only too willing to link her sweet fate with his at any price-was patent to all the world. Few people have felt as virtuous as Mr. Beauclerk as he comes to the end of this thread of his imaginings.

Well! he will make it up to her! He smiles benignly through the smoke that rises round his nose. She shall never have reason to remember that he had not fallen on his knees to her—as a less considerate man might have done—when he was without the means to make her life as bright as it should be.

The most eager of lovers must live, and eating is the first move toward that conclusion. Yet if he had given way to selfish desires they would scarcely, he and she, have had sufficient bread (of any delectable kind) to fill their mouths. But now all would be different. She, clever girl! had supplied the blank; she had squared the difficulty. Having provided the wherewithal to keep body and soul together in a nice, respectable, fashionable, modern sort of way, her constancy shall certainly be rewarded. He will go straight down to the Court, and declare to her the sentiments that have been warming his breast (silently!) all these past months. What a dear girl she is, and so fond of him! That in itself is an extra charm in her very delightful character. And those fortunate thousands! Quite a quarter of a million, isn't it? Well, of course, no use saying they won't come in handy—no use being hypocritical over it—horrid thing a hypocrite!—well, those thousands naturally have their charm, too.

He rose, flung his cigarette aside (it was finished as far as careful enjoyment would permit), and

rang for his servant to pack his portmanteaux. He was going to the Court by the morning train.

Now that he is here, however, he restrains the ardor, that no doubt is consuming him, with altogether admirable patience, and waits for the chance that may permit him to lay his valuable affections at Joyce's feet. A dinner to be followed by an impromptu dance at the Court suggests itself as a very fitting opportunity. He grasps it. Yes, to-morrow evening will be an excellent and artistic opening for a thing of this sort. All through luncheon, even while conversing with Joyce and Miss Maliphant on various outside topics, his versatile mind is arranging a picturesque spot in the garden enclosures wherein to make Joyce a happy woman!

Lady Swansdown, glancing across the table at him, laughs lightly. Always disliking him, she has still been able to read him very clearly, and his determination to now propose to Joyce amuses her nearly as much as it annoys her. Frivolous to the last degree as she is, an honest regard for Joyce has taken hold within her breast. Lord Baltimore, too, is disturbed by his brother's present.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight."

Lady Swansdown is startled into a remembrance of the present by the entrance of somebody. After all Dicky, the troublesome, was right—this is no spot in which to sleep or dream. Turning her head with an indolent impatience to see who has come to disturb her, she meets Lady Baltimore's clear eyes.

Some sharp pang of remorse, of fear, perhaps, compels her to spring to her feet, and gaze at her hostess with an expression that is almost defiant. Dicky's words had so far taken effect that she now dreads and hates to meet the woman who once had been her stanch friend.

Lady Baltimore, unable to ignore the look in her rival's eyes, still advances toward her with unfaltering step. Perhaps a touch of disdain, of contempt, is perceptible in her own gaze, because Lady Swansdown, paling, moves toward her. She seems to have lost all self-control—she is trembling violently. It is a crisis.

"What is it?" says Lady Swansdown, harshly. "Why do you look at me like that? Has it come to a close between us, Isabel? Oh! if so"—vehemently—"it is better so."

"I don't think I understand you," says Lady Baltimore, who has grown very white. Her tone is haughty; she has drawn back a little as if to escape from contact with the other.

"Ah! That is so like you," says Lady Swansdown with a rather fierce little laugh. "You pretend, pretend, pretend, from morning till night. You intrench yourself behind your pride, and——"

"You know what you are doing, Beatrice," says Lady Baltimore, ignoring this outburst completely, and speaking in a calm, level tone, yet with a face like marble.

"Yes, and you know, too," says Lady Swansdown. Then, with an overwhelming vehemence: "Why don't you do something? Why don't you assert yourself?"

"I shall never assert myself," says Lady Baltimore slowly.

"You mean that whatever comes you will not interfere."

"That, exactly!" turning her eyes full on to the other's face with a terrible disdain. "I shall never interfere in this—or any other of his flirtations."

It is a sharp stab! Lady Swansdown winces visibly.

"What a woman you are!" cries she. "Have you ever thought of it, Isabel? You are unjust to him—unfair. You"—passionately—"treat him as though he were the dust beneath your feet, and yet you expect him to remain immaculate, for your sake—pure as any acolyte—a thing of ice——"

"No," coldly. "You mistake me. I know too much of him to expect perfection—nay, common decency from him. But you—it was you whom I hoped to find immaculate."

"You expected too much, then. One iceberg in your midst is enough, and that you have kindly suggested in your own person. Put me out of the discussion altogether."

"Ah I You have made that impossible! I cannot do that. I have known you too long, I have liked you too well. I have," with a swift, but terrible glance at her, "loved you!"

"Isabel!"

"No, no! Not a word. It is too late now."

"True," says Lady. Swansdown, bringing back the arms she had extended and letting them fall into a sudden, dull vehemence to her sides. Her agitation is uncontrolled. "That was so long ago that, no doubt, you have forgotten all about it. You," bitterly, "have forgotten a good deal."

"And you," says Lady Baltimore, very calmly, "what have you not forgotten—your self-respect," deliberately, "among other things."

"Take care; take care!" says Lady Swansdown in a low tone. She has turned furiously upon her.

"Why should I take care?" She throws up her small bead scornfully. "Have I said one word too much?"?

"Too much indeed," says Lady Swansdown distinctly, but faintly. She turns her head, but not her eyes in Isabel's direction. "I'm afraid you will have to endure for one day longer," she says in a low voice; "after that you shall bid me a farewell that shall last forever!"

"You have come to a wise decision," says Lady Baltimore, immovably.

There is something so contemptuous in her whole bearing that it maddens the other.

"How dare you speak to me like that," cries she with sudden violence not to be repressed. "You of all others! Do you think you are not in fault at all—that you stand blameless before the world?"

The blood has flamed into her pale cheeks, her eyes are on fire. She advances toward Lady Baltimore with such a passion of angry despair in look and tone, that involuntarily the latter retreats before her.

"Who shall blame me?" demands Lady Baltimore haughtily.

"I—I for one! Icicle that you are, how can you know what love means? You have no heart to feel, no longing to forgive. And what has he done to you? Nothing—nothing that any other woman would not gladly condone."

"You are a partisan," says Lady Baltimore coldly. "You would plead his cause, and to me! You are violent, but that does not put you in the right. What do you know of Baltimore that I do not know? By what right do you defend him?"

"There is such a thing as friendship!"

"Is there?" says the other with deep meaning. "Is there, Beatrice? Oh! think—think!" A little bitter smile curls the corners of her lips. "That you should advocate the cause of friendship to me," says she, her words falling with cruel scorn one by one slowly from her lips.

"You think me false," says Lady Swansdown. She is terribly agitated. "There was an old friendship between us—I know that—I feel it. You think me altogether false to it?"

"I think of you as little as I can help," says Isabel, contemptuously. "Why should I waste a thought on you?"

"True! Why indeed! One so capable of controlling her emotions as you are need never give way to superfluous or useless thoughts. Still, give one to Baltimore. It is our last conversation together, therefore bear with me—hear me. All his sins lie in the past. He——"

"You must be mad to talk to me like this," interrupts Isabel, flushing crimson. "Has he asked you to intercede for him? Could even he go so far as that? Is it a last insult? What are you to him that you thus adopt his cause. Answer me!" cries she imperiously; all her coldness, her stern determination to suppress herself, seems broken up.

"Nothing!" returns Lady Swansdown, becoming calmer as she notes the other's growing vehemence. "I never shall be anything. I have but one excuse for my interference"—She pauses.

"And that!"

"I love him!" steadily, but faintly. Her eyes have sought the ground.

"Ah!" says Lady Baltimore.

"It is true"—slowly. "It is equally true—that he—does not love me. Let me then speak. All his sins, believe me, lie behind him. That woman, that friend of yours who told you of his renewed acquaintance with Madame Istray, lied to you! There was no truth in what she said!"

"I can quite understand your not wishing to believe in that story," says Lady Baltimore with an undisguised sneer.

"Like all good women, you can take pleasure in inflicting a wound," says Lady Swansdown, controlling herself admirably. "But do not let your detestation of me blind you to the fact that my words contain truth. If you will listen I can——"

"Not a word," says Lady Baltimore, making a movement with her hands as if to efface the other. "I will have none of your confidences."

"It seems to me"—quickly—"you are determined not to believe."

"You are at liberty to think as you will."

"The time may come," says Lady Swansdown, "when you will regret you did not listen to me to-day."

"Is that a threat?"

"No; but I am going. There will be no further opportunity for you to hear me."

"You must pardon me if I say that I am glad of that," says Lady Baltimore, her lips very white. "I Could have borne little more. Do what you will—go where you will—with whom you will" (with deliberate insult), "but at least spare me a repetition of such a scene as this."

She turns, and with an indescribably haughty gesture leaves the room.

CHAPTER XLV.

"The name of the slough was Despond."

Dancing is going on in the small drawing-room. A few night broughams are still arriving, and young girls, accompanied by their brothers only, are making the room look lovely. It is quite an impromptu affair, quite informal. Dicky Browne, altogether in his element, is flitting from flower to flower, saying beautiful nothings to any of the girls who are kind enough or silly enough to waste a moment on so irreclaimable a butterfly.

He is not so entirely engrossed by his pleasing occupations, however, as to be lost to the more serious matters that are going on around him. He is specially struck by the fact that Lady Swansdown, who had been in charming spirits all through the afternoon, and afterward at dinner, is now dancing a great deal with Beauclerk, of all people, and making herself apparently very delightful to him. His own personal belief up to this had been that she detested Beauclerk, and now to see her smiling upon him and favoring him with waltz after waltz upsets Dicky's power of penetration to an almost fatal extent.

"I wonder what the deuce she's up to now," says he to himself, leaning against the wall behind him, and giving voice unconsciously to the thoughts within him.

"Eh?" says somebody at his ear.

He looks round hastily to find Miss Maliphant has come to anchor on his left, and that her eyes, too, are directed on Beauclerk, who with Lady Swansdown is standing at the lower end of the room.

"Eh, to you," says he brilliantly.

"I always rather fancied that Mr. Beauclerk and Lady Swansdown were antipathetic," says Miss Maliphant in her usual heavy, downright way.

"There was room for it," says Mr. Browne gloomily.

"For it?"

"Your fancy."

"Yes, so I think. Lady Swansdown has always seemed to me to be rather—raiher—eh?"

"Decidedly so," agrees Mr. Browne. "And as for Beauclerk, he is quite too dreadfully 'rather,' don't you think?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. He has often seemed to me a little light, but only on the surface."

"You've read him," says Mr. Browne with a confidential nod. "Light on the surface, but deep, deep as a draw well?"

"I don't think I mean what you do," says Miss Maliphant quickly. "However, we are not discussing Mr. Beauclerk, beyond the fact that we wonder to see him so genial with Lady Swansdown. They used to be thoroughly antagonistic, and now—why they seem quite good friends, don't they? Quite thick, eh?" with her usual graceful phraseology.

"Thick as thieves in Vallambrosa," says Mr. Browne with increasing gloom. Miss Maliphant turns to regard him doubtfully.

"Leaves?" suggests she.

"Thieves," persists he immovably.

"Oh! Ah! It's a joke perhaps," says she, the doubt growing. Mr. Browne fixes a stern eye upon her.

"Is thy servant a dog?" says he, and stalks indignantly away, leaving Miss Maliphant in the throes of uncertainty.

"Yet I'm sure it wasn't the right word," says she to herself with a wonderful frown of perplexity. "However, I may be wrong. I often am. And, after all, Spain we're told is full of 'em."

Whether "thieves" or "leaves" she doesn't explain, and presently her mind wanders entirely away from Mr. Browne's maundering to the subject that so much more nearly interests her. Beauclerk has not been quite so empressé in his manner to her to-night—not so altogether delightful. He has, indeed, it seems to her, shirked her society a good deal, and has not been so assiduous about the scribbling of his name upon her card as usual. And then this sudden friendship with Lady Swansdown—what does he mean by that? What does she mean?

If she had only known. If the answer to her latter question had been given to her, her mind would have grown easier, and the idea of Lady Swansdown in the form of a rival would have been laid at rest forever.

As a fact, Lady Swansdown hardly understands herself to-night. That scene with her hostess has upset her mentally and bodily, and created in her a wild desire to get away from herself and from Baltimore at any cost. Some idle freak has induced her to use Beauclerk (who is detestable to her) as a safeguard from both, and he, unsettled in his own mind, and eager to come to conclusions with Joyce and her fortune, has lent himself to the wiles of his whilom foe, and is permiting himself to be charmed by her fascinating, if vagrant, mood.

Perhaps in all her life Lady Swansdown has never looked so lovely as to-night. Excitement and mental disturbance have lent a dangerous brilliancy to her eyes, a touch of color to her cheek. There is something electric about her that touches those who gaze, on her, and warns herself that a crisis is at hand.

Up to this she has been able to elude all Baltimore's attempts at conversation—has refused all his demands for a dance, yet this same knowledge that the night will not go by without a denouement of some kind between her and him is terribly present to her. To-night! The last night she will ever see him, in all human probability! The exaltation that enables her to endure this thought is fraught with such agony that, brave and determined as she is, it is almost too much for her.

Yet she—Isabel—she should learn that that old friendship between them was no fable. To-night it would bear fruit. False, she believed her—well, she should see.

In a way, she clung to Beauclerk as a means of escaping Baltimore—throwing out a thousand wiles to charm him to her side, and succeeding. Three times she had given a smiling "No" to Lord Baltimore's demand for a dance, and, regardless of opinion, had flung herself into a wild and open flirtation with Beauclerk.

But it is growing toward midnight, and her strength is failing her. These people, will they never go, will she never be able to seek her own room, and solitude, and despair without calling down comment on her head, and giving Isabel—that cold woman—the chance of sneering at her weakness?

A sudden sense of the uselessness of it all has taken possession of her; her heart sinks. It is at this moment that Baltimore once more comes up to her.

"This dance?" says he. "It is half way through. You are not engaged, I suppose, as you are sitting down? May I have what remains of it?"

She makes a little gesture of acquiescence, and, rising, places her hand upon his arm.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"O life! thou art a galling load
Along a rough, a weary road,
To wretches such as I."

The crisis has come, she tells herself, with a rather grim smile. Well, better have it and get it over.

That there had been a violent scene between Baltimore and his wife after dinner had somehow become known to her, and the marks of it still betrayed themselves in the former's frowning brow and sombre eyes.

It had been more of a scene than usual. Lady Baltimore, generally so calm, had for once lost herself, and given way to a passion of indignation that had shaken her to her very heart's core. Though so apparently unmoved and almost insolent in her demeanor toward Lady Swansdown during their interview, she had been, nevertheless, cruelly wounded by it, and could not forgive

Baltimore in that he had been its cause.

As for him, he could not forgive her all she had said and looked. With a heart on fire he had sought Lady Swansdown, the one woman whom he knew understood and believed in him. It was a perilous moment, and Beatrice knew it. She knew, too, that angry despair was driving him into her arms, not honest affection. She was strong enough to face this and refused to deceive herself about it.

"I didn't think you and Beauclerk had anything in common," says Baltimore, seating himself beside her on the low lounge that is half hidden from the public gaze by the Indian curtains that fall at each side of it. He had made no pretence of finishing the dance. He had led the way and she had suffered herself to be led into the small anteroom that, half smothered in early spring flowers, lay off the dancing room.

"Ah! you see you have yet much to learn about me," says she, with an attempt at gayety—that fails, however.

"About you? No!" says he, almost defiantly. "Don't tell me I have deceived myself about you, Beatrice; you are all I have left to fall back upon now." His tone is reckless to the last degree.

"A forlorn pis-aller," she says, steadily, with a forced smile. "What is it, Cyril?" looking at him with sudden intentness. "Something has happened. What?"

"The old story," returns he, "and I am sick of it. I have thrown up my hand. I would have been faithful to her, Beatrice. I swear that, but she does not care for my devotion. And as for me, now——" He throws out his arms as if tired to death, and draws in his breath heavily.

"Now?" says she, leaning forward.

"Am I worth your acceptance?" says he, turning sharply to her. "I hardly dare to think it, and yet you have been kind to me, and your own lot is not altogether a happy one, and——"

He pauses.

"Do you hesitate?" asks she very bitterly, although her pale lips are smiling.

"Will you risk it all?" says he, sadly. "Will you come away with me? I feel I have no friend on earth but you. Will you take pity on me? I shall not stay here, whatever happens; I have striven against fate too long—it has overcome me. Another land—a different life—complete forgetfulness——"

"Do you know what you are saying?" asks Lady Swansdown, who has grown deadly white.

"Yes; I have thought it all out. It is for you now to decide. I have sometimes thought I was not entirely indifferent to you, and at all events we are friends in the best sense of the term. If you were a happy married woman, Beatrice, I should not speak to you like this, but as it is—in another land—if you will come with me—we——"

"Think, think!" says she, putting up her hand to stay him from further speech. "All this is said in a moment of angry excitement. You have called me your friend—and truly. I am so far in touch with you that I can see you are very unhappy. You have had—forgive me if I probe you—but you have had some—some words with your wife?"

"Final words! I hope—I think."

"I do not, however. All this will blow over, and—come Cyril, face it! Are you really prepared to deliberately break the last link that holds you to her?"

"There is no link. She has cut herself adrift long since. She will be glad to be rid of me."

"And you—will you be glad to be rid of her?"

"It will be better," says he, shortly.

"And—the boy!"

"Don't let us go into it," says he, a little wildly.

"Oh! but we must—we must," says she. "The boy—you will——?"

"I shall leave him to her. It is all she has. I am nothing to her. I cannot leave her desolate."

"How you consider her!" says she, in a choking voice. She could have burst into tears! "What a heart! and that woman to treat him so—whilst—oh! it is hard—hard!"

"I tell you," says she presently, "that you have not gone into this thing. To-morrow you will regret all that you have now said."

"If you refuse me—yes. It lies in your hands now. Are you going to refuse me?"

"Give me a moment," says she faintly. She has risen to her feet, and is so standing that he cannot watch her. Her whole soul is convulsed. Shall she? Shall she not? The scales are trembling.

That woman's face! How it rises before her now, pale, cold, contemptuous. With what an insolent air she had almost ordered her from her sight. And yet—and yet——

She can remember that disdainful face, kind and tender and loving! A face she had once delighted to dwell upon! And Isabel had been very good to her once—when others had not been kind, and when Swansdown, her natural protector, had been scandalously untrue to his trust. Isabel had loved her then; and now, how was she about to requite her? Was she to let her know her to be false—not only in thought but in reality! Could she live and see that pale face in imagination filled with scorn for the desecrated friendship that once had been a real bond between them?

Oh! A groan that is almost a sob breaks from her. The scale has gone down to one side. It is all over, hope and love and joy. Isabel has won.

She has been leaning against the arm of the lounge, now she once more sinks back upon the seat as though standing is impossible to her.

"Well?" says Baltimore, laying his hand gently upon hers. His touch seems to burn her, she flings his hand from her and shrinks back.

"You have decided," says he quickly. "You will not come with me?"

"Oh! no, no, no!" cries she. "It is impossible!" A little curious laugh breaks from her that is cruelly akin to a cry. "There is too much to remember," says she, suddenly.

"You think you would be wronging her," says Baltimore, reading her correctly. "I have told you you are at fault there. She would bless the chance that swept me out of her life. And as for me, I should have no regrets. You need not fear that."

"Ah, that is what I do fear," says she in a low tone.

"Well, you have decided," says he, after a pause. "After all why should I feel either disappointment or surprise? What is there about me that should tempt any woman to cast in her lot with mine?"

"Much!" says Lady Swansdown, deliberately. "But the one great essential is wanting—you have no love to give. It is all given." She leans toward him and regards him earnestly. "Do you really think you are in love with me? Shall I tell you who you are in love with?" She lets her soft cheek fall into her hand and looks up at him from under her long lashes.

"You can tell me what you will," says he, a little impatiently.

"Listen, then," says she, with a rather broken attempt at gayety, "you are in love with that good, charming, irritating, impossible, but most lovable person in the world—your own wife!"

"Pshaw!" says Baltimore, with an irritated gesture. "We will not discuss her, if you please."

"As you will. To discuss her or leave her name out of it altogether will not, however, alter matters."

"You have quite made up your mind," says he, presently, looking at her searchingly. "You will let me go alone into evil?"

"You will not go," returns she, trying to speak with conviction, but looking very anxious.

"I certainly shall. There is nothing else left for me to do. Life here is intolerable."

"There is one thing," says she, her voice trembling. "You might make it up with her."

"Do you think I haven't tried," says he, with a harsh laugh "I'm tired of making advances. I have done all that man can do. No, I shall not try again. My one regret in leaving England will be that I shall not see you again!"

"Don't!" says she, hoarsely.

"I believe on my soul," says he, hurriedly, "that you do care for me. That it is only because of her that you will not listen to me."

"You are right!" (in a low tone)—"I—" Her voice fails her, she presses her hands together. "I confess," says she, with terrible abandonment, "that I might have listened to you—had I not liked her so well."

"Better than me, apparently," says he, bitterly. "She has had the best of it all through."

"There we are quits, then," says she, quite as bitterly. "Because you like her better than me."

"If so—do you think I would speak to you as I have spoken?"

"Yes. I think that. A man is always more or less of a baby. Years of discretion he seldom reaches. You are angry with your wife, and would be revenged upon her, and your way to revenge yourself is to make a second woman hate you."

"A second?"

"I should probably hate you in six months," says she, with a touch of passion. "I am not sure that I do not hate you now."

Her nerve is fast failing her. If she had a doubt about it before, the certainty now that Baltimore's

feeling for her is merely friendship—the desire of a lonely man for some sympathetic companion—anything but love, has entered into her and crushed her. He would devote the rest of his life to her. She is sure of that—but always it would be a life filled with an unavailing regret. A horror of the whole situation has seized upon her. She will never be any more to him than a pleasant memory, while he to her must be an ever-growing pain. Oh! to be able to wrench herself free, to be able to forget him to blot him out of her mind forever.

"A second woman!" repeats he, as if struck by this thought to the exclusion of all others.

"Yes!"

"You think, then," gazing at her, "that she—hates me?"

Lady Swansdown breaks into a low but mirthless laugh. The most poignant anguish rings through it.

"She! she!" cries she, as if unable to control herself, and then stops suddenly placing her hand to her forehead. "Oh, no, she doesn't hate you," she says. "But how you betray yourself! Do you wonder I laugh? Did ever any man so give himself away? You have been declaring to me for months that she hates you, yet when I put it into words, or you think I do, it seems as though some fresh new evil had befallen you. Ah! give up this role of Don Juan, Baltimore. It doesn't suit you."

"I have had no desire to play the part," says he, with a frown.

"No? And yet you ask a woman for whom you scarcely bear a passing affection to run away with you, to defy public opinion for your sake, and so forth. You should advise her to count the world well lost for love—such love as yours! You pour every bit of the old rubbish into one's ears, and yet—" She stops abruptly. A very storm of anger and grief and despair is shaking her to her heart's core.

"Well?" says he, still frowning.

"What have you to offer me in exchange for all you ask me to give? A heart filled with thoughts of another! No more!—-"

"If you persist in thinking——"

"Why should I not think it? When I tell you there is danger of my hating you, as your wife might—perhaps—hate you—your first thought is for her! 'You think then that she hates me'?" (She imitates the anxiety of his tone with angry truthfulness.) "Not one word of horror at the thought that I might hate you six months hence."

"Perhaps I did not believe you would," says he, with some embarrassment.

"Ah! That is so like a man! You think, don't you, that you were made to be loved? There, go! Leave me!"

He would have spoken to her again, but she rejects the idea with such bitterness that he is necessarily silent. She has covered her face with her hands. Presently she is alone.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"But there are griefs, ay, griefs as deep;
    The friendship turned to hate.
And deeper still, and deeper still
    Repentance come too late, too late!"

Joyce, on the whole, had not enjoyed last night's dance at the Court. Barbara had been there, and she had gone home with her and Monkton after it, and on waking this morning a sense of unreality, of dissatisfaction, is all that comes to her. No pleasant flavor is on her mental palate; there is only a vague feeling of failure and a dislike to looking into things—to analyze matters as they stand.

Yet where the failure came in she would have found it difficult to explain even to herself. Everybody, so far as she was concerned, had behaved perfectly; that is, as she, if she had been compelled to say it out loud, would have desired them to behave. Mr. Beauclerk had been polite enough; not too polite; and Lady Baltimore had made a great deal of her, and Barbara had said she looked lovely, and Freddy had said something, oh! absurd of course, and not worth repeating, but still flattering; and those men from the barracks at Clonbree had been a perfect nuisance, they were so pressing with their horrid attentions, and so eager to get a dance. And Mr. Dysart——

Well? That fault could not be laid to his charge, therefore, of course, he was all that could be desired. He was circumspect to the last degree. He had not been pressing with his attentions; he

had, indeed, been so kind and nice that he had only asked her for one dance, and during the short quarter of an hour that that took to get through he had been so admirably conducted as to restrain his conversation to the most commonplace, and had not suggested that the conservatory was a capital place to get cool in between the dances.

The comb she was doing her hair with at the time caught in her hair as she came to this point, and she flung it angrily from her, and assured herself that the tears that had suddenly come into her eyes arose from the pain that that hateful instrument of torture had caused her.

Yes, Felix had taken the right course; he had at least learned that she could never be anything to him—could never—forgive him. It showed great dignity in him, great strength of mind. She had told him, at least given him to understand when in London, that he should forget her, and—he had forgotten. He had obeyed her. The comb must have hurt her again, and worse this time, because now the tears are running down her cheeks. How horrible it is to be unforgiving! People who don't forgive never go to heaven. There seems to be some sort of vicious consolation in this thought.

In truth, Dysart's behavior to her since his return has been all she had led him to understand it ought to be. He it so changed toward her in every way that sometimes she has wondered if he has forgotten all the strange, unhappy past, and is now entirely emancipated from the torture of love unrequited that once had been his.

It is a train of thought she has up to this shrank from pursuing, yet which, she being strong in certain ways, should have been pursued by her to the bitter end. One small fact, however, had rendered her doubtful. She could not fail to notice that whenever he and she are together in the morning room, ballroom, or at luncheon or dinner, or breakfast, though he will not approach or voluntarily address her unless she first makes an advance toward him, a rare occurrence; still, if she raises her eyes to his, anywhere, at any moment, it is to find his on her!

And what sad eyes! Searching, longing, despairing, angry, but always full of an indescribable tenderness.

Last night she had specially noticed this—but then last night he had specially held aloof from her. No, no! It was no use dwelling upon it. He would not forgive. That chapter in her life was closed. To attempt to open it again would be to court defeat.

Joyce, however, had not been the only one to whom last night had been a disappointment. Beauclerk's determination to propose to her—to put his fortune to the touch and to gain hers—failed. Either the fates were against him, or else she herself was in a willful mood. She had refused to leave the dancing room with him on any pretext whatever, unless to gain the coolness of the crowded hall outside, or the still more inhabited supper room.

He was not dismayed, however, and there was no need to do things precipitately. There was plenty of time. There could be no doubt about the fact that she preferred him to any of the other men of her acquaintance; he had discovered that she had refused Dysart not only once, but twice. This he had drawn out of Isabel by a mild and apparently meaningless but nevertheless incessant and abstruse cross-examination. Naturally! He could see at once the reason for that. No girl who had been once honored by his attentions could possibly give her heart to another. No girl ever yet refused an honest offer unless her mind was filled with the image of another fellow. Mr. Beauclerk found no difficulty about placing "the other fellow" in this case. Norman Beauclerk was his name! What woman in her senses would prefer that tiresome Dysart with his "downright honesty" business so gloomily developed, to him, Beauclerk? Answer? Not one.

Well, she shall be rewarded now, dear little girl! He will make her happy for life by laying his name and prospective fortune at her feet. To-day he will end his happy bachelor state and sacrifice himself on the altar of love.

Thus resolved, he walks up through the lands of the Court, through the valley filled with opening fronds of ferns, and through the spinney beyond that again, until he comes to where the Monktons live. The house seems very silent. Knocking at the door, the maid comes to tell him that Mr. and Mrs. Monkton and the children are out, but that Miss Kavanagh is within.

Happy circumstance! Surely the fates favor him. They always have, by the by—sure sign that he is deserving of good luck.

Thanks. Miss Kavanagh, then. His compliments, and hopes that she is not too fatigued to receive him.

The maid, having shown him into the drawing-room, retires with the message, and presently the sound of little high-heeled shoes crossing the hall tells him that Joyce is approaching. His heart beats high—not immoderately high. To be uncertain is to be none the less unnerved—but there is no uncertainty about his wooing. Still it pleases him to know that in spite of her fatigue she could not bring herself to deny herself to him.

"Ah! How good of you!" says he as she enters, meeting her with both hands outstretched. "I feared the visit was too early! A very *bêtise* on my part—but you are the soul of kindness always."

"Early!" says Joyce, with a little laugh. "Why you might have found me chasing the children round the garden three hours ago. Providentially," giving him one hand, the ordinary one, and ignoring his other, "their father and mother were bound to go to Tisdown this morning or I should have

been dead long before this."

"Ah!" says Beauclerk. And then with increasing tenderness. "So glad they were removed; it would have been too much for you, wouldn't it?"

"Yes—I dare say—on the whole, I believe I don't mind them," says Miss Kavanagh. "Well—and what about last night? It was delightful, wasn't it?" Secretly she sighs heavily, as she makes this most untruthful assertion.

"Ah! Was it?" asks he. "I did not find it so. How could I when you were so unkind to me?"

"I! Oh, no. Oh, surely not!" says she anxiously. There is no touch of the coquetry that might be about this answer had it been given to a man better liked. A slow soft color has crept into her cheeks, born of the knowledge that she had got out of several dances with him. But he, seeing it, gives it another, a more flattering meaning to his own self love.

"Can you deny it?" asks he, changing his seat so as to get nearer to her. "Joyce!" He leans toward her. "May I speak at last? Last night I was foiled in my purpose. It is difficult to say all that is in one's heart at a public affair of that kind, but now—now——"

Miss Kavanagh has sprung to her feet.

"No! Don't, don't!" she says earnestly. "I tell you—I beg you—I warn you——" She pauses, as if not knowing what else to say, and raises her pretty hands as if to enforce her words.

"Shy, delightfully shy!" says Beauclerk to himself. He goes quickly up to her with all the noble air of the conqueror, and seizing one of her trembling hands holds it in his own.

"Hear me!" he says with an amused toleration for her girlish *mauvaise honte*. "It is only such a little thing I have to say to you, but yet it means a great deal to me—and to you, I hope. I love you, Joyce. I have come here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

"I told you not to speak," says she. She has grown very white now. "I warned you! It is no use—no use, indeed."

"I have startled you," says Beauclerk, still disbelieving, yet somehow loosening the clasp on her hand. "You did not expect, perhaps, that I should have spoken to-day, and yet——"

"No. It was not that," says Miss Kavanagh, slowly. "I knew you would speak—I thought last night would have been the time, but I managed to avoid it then, and now——"

"Well?"

"I thought it better to get it over," says she, gently. She stops as if struck by something, and heavy tears rush to her eyes. Ah! she had told another very much the same as that. But she had not meant it then—and yet had been believed—and now, when she does mean it, she is not believed. Oh! if the cases might be reversed!

Beauclerk, however, mistakes the cause of the tears.

"It—get what over?" demands he, smiling.

"This misunderstanding."

"Ah, yes—that! I am afraid,"—he leans more closely toward her,—"I have often been afraid that you have not quite read me as I ought to be read."

"Oh, I have read you," says she, with a little gesture of her head, half confused, half mournful.

"But not rightly, perhaps. There have been moments when I fear you may have misjudged me ——"

"Not one," says she quickly. "Mr. Beauclerk, if I might implore you not to say another word——"

"Only one more," pleads he, coming up smiling as usual. "Just one, Joyce—let me say my last word; it may make all the difference in the world between you and me now. I love you—nay, hear me!"

She has risen, and he, rising too, takes possession of both her hands. "I have come here to-day to ask you to be my wife; you know that already—but you do not know how I have worshiped you all these dreary months, and how I have kept silent—for your sake."

"And for 'my sake' why do you speak now?" asks she. She has withdrawn her hands from his. "What have you to offer me now that you had not a year ago?"

After all, it is a great thing to be an accomplished liar. It sticks to Beauclerk now.

"Why! Haven't you heard?" asks he, lifting astonished brows.

"I have heard nothing!"

"Not of my coming appointment? At least"—modestly—"of my chance of it?"

"No. Nothing, nothing. And even if I had, it would make no difference. I beg you to understand once for all, Mr. Beauclerk, that I cannot listen to you."

"Not now, perhaps. I have been very sudden——"

"No, never, never."

"Are you telling me that you refuse me?" asks he, looking at her with a rather strange expression in his eyes.

"I am sorry you put it that way," returns she, faintly.

"I don't believe you know what you are doing," cries he, losing his self-control for once in his life. "You will regret this. For a moment of spite, of ill-temper, you——"

"Why should I be ill-tempered about anything that concerns you and me?" says she, very gently still. She has grown even whiter, however, and has lifted her head so that her large eyes are directed straight to his. Something in the calm severity of her look chills him.

"Ah! you know best!" says he, viciously. The game is up—is thoroughly played out. This he acknowledges to himself, and the knowledge does not help to sweeten his temper. It helps him, however, to direct a last shaft at her. Taking up his hat, he makes a movement to depart, and then looks back at her. His overweening vanity is still alive.

"When you do regret it," says he—"and I believe that will be soon—it will be too late. You had the goodness to give me a warning a few minutes ago—I give you one now."

"I shall not regret it," says she, coolly.

"Not even when Dysart has sailed for India, and then 'the girl he left behind him' is disconsolate?" asks he, with an insolent laugh. "Ha! that touches you!"

It had touched her. She looks like a living thing stricken suddenly into marble, as she stands gazing back at him, with her hands tightly clenched before her. India! To India! And she had never heard.

Extreme anger, however, fights with her grief, and, overcoming it, enables her to answer her adversary.

"I think you, too, will feel regret," says she, gravely, "when you look back upon your conduct to me to-day."

There is such gentleness, such dignity, in her rebuke, and her beautiful face is so full of a mute reproach, that all the good there is in Beauclerk rises to the surface. He flings his hat upon a table near, and himself at her feet.

"Forgive me!" cries he, in a stifled tone. "Have mercy on me, Joyce!—I love you—I swear it! Do not cast me adrift! All I have said or done I regret now! You said I should regret, and I do."

Something in his abasement disgusts the girl, instead of creating pity in her breast. She shakes herself free of him by a sharp and horrified movement.

"You must go home," she says calmly, yet with a frowning brow, "and you must not come here again. I told, you it was all useless, but you would not listen. No, no; not a word!" He has risen to his feet, and would have advanced toward her, but she waves him from her with a sort of troubled hatred in her face.

"You mean——" begins he, hoarsely.

"One thing—one thing only," feverishly—"that I hope I shall never see you again!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

> "When a man hath once forfeited the reputation of his sincerity he is set fast, and nothing will then serve his turn, neither truth nor falsehood."

When he is gone Joyce draws a deep breath. For a moment it seems to her that it is all over—a disagreeable task performed, and then suddenly a reaction sets in. The scene gone through has tried her more than she knows, and without warning now she finds she is crying bitterly.

How horrible it all had been. How detestable he had looked—not so much when offering her his hand (as for his heart—pah!) as when he had given way to his weak exhibition of feeling and had knelt at her feet, throwing himself on her mercy. She placed her hands over her eyes when she thought of that. Oh! she wished he hadn't done it!

She is still crying softly—not now for Beauclerk's behavior, but for certain past beliefs—when a knock at the door warns her that another visitor is coming. She has not had time or sufficient presence of mind to tell a servant that she is not at home, when Miss Maliphant is ushered in by the parlor maid.

"I thought I'd come down and have a chat with you about last night," she begins in her usual loud tones, and with an assumption of easiness that is belied by the keen and searching glance she directs at Joyce.

"I'm so glad," says Joyce, telling her little lie as bravely as she can, while trying to conceal her red eyelids from Miss Maliphant's astute gaze by pretending to rearrange a cushion that has fallen from one of the lounges.

"Are you?" says her visitor, drily. "Seems to me I've come at the wrong moment. Shall I go away?"

"Go! No," says Joyce, reddening, and frowning a little. "Why should you?"

"Well, you've been crying," says Miss Maliphant, in her terribly downright way. "I hate people when I've been crying; but then it makes me a fright, and it only makes you a little less pretty. I suppose I mustn't ask what it is all about?"

"If you did I don't believe I could tell you," says Joyce, laughing rather unsteadily. "I was merely thinking, and it is the simplest thing in the world to feel silly now and then."

"Thinking? Of Mr. Beauclerk?" asks Miss Maliphant, promptly, and without the slightest idea of hesitation. "I saw him leaving this as I came by the upper road! Was it he who made you cry?"

"Certainly not," says Joyce, indignantly.

"It looks like it, however," says the other, her masculine voice growing even sterner. "What was he saying to you?"

"I really do think——" Joyce is beginning, coldly, when Miss Maliphant stops her by an imperative gesture.

"Oh, I know. I know all about that," says she, contemptuously. "One shouldn't ask questions about other people's affairs; I've learned my manners, though I seldom make any use of my knowledge, I admit. After all, I see no reason why I shouldn't ask you that question. I want to know, and there is no one to tell me but you. Was he proposing to you, eh?"

"Why should you think that?" says Joyce, subdued by the masterful manner of the other, and by something honest and above board about her that is her chief characteristic. There is no suspicion, either, about her of her questions being prompted by mere idle curiosity. She has said she wanted to know, and there was meaning in her tone.

"Why shouldn't I?" says she now. "He came down here early this afternoon. He goes away in haste—and I find you in tears. Everything points one way."

"I don't see why it should point in that direction."

"Come, be open with me," says the heiress, brusquely, in an abrupt fashion that still fails to offend. "Did he propose to you?"

Joyce hesitates. She raises her head and looks at Miss Maliphant earnestly. What a good face she has, if plain. Too good to be made unhappy. After all, why not tell her the truth? It would be a warning. It was impossible to be blind to the fact that Miss Maliphant had been glad to receive the dishonest attentions paid to her every now and then by Beauclerk. Those attentions would probably be increased now, and would end but one way. He would get Miss Maliphant's money, and she—that good, kind-hearted girl—what would she get? It seems cruel to be silent, and yet to speak is difficult. Would it be fair or honorable to divulge his secret?

Would it be fair or honorable to let her imagine what is not true? He had been false to her—Joyce (she could not blind herself to the knowledge that with all his affected desire for her he would never have made her an offer of his hand but for her having come in for that money)—he would therefore be false to Miss Maliphant; he would marry her undoubtedly, but as a husband he would break her heart. Is she, for the sake of a word or two, to see her fall a prey to a mere passionless fortune-hunter? A thousand times no! Better inflict a little pain now rather than let this girl endure endless pain in the future.

With a shrinking at her heart, born of the fear that the word will be very bitter to her guest, she says, "Yes;" very distinctly.

"Ha!" says Miss Maliphant, and that is all. Joyce, regarding her anxiously, is as relieved as astonished to see no trace of grief or chagrin upon her face. There is no change at all, indeed, except she looks deeply reflective. Her mind seems to be traveling backward, picking up loose threads of memory, no doubt, and joining them together. A sense of intense comfort fills Joyce's soul. After all; the wound had not gone deep; she had been right to speak.

"He is not worth thinking about," says she, tremulously, *apropos* of nothing, as it seems.

"No?" says Miss Maliphant; "then what were you crying about?"

"I hardly know. I felt nervous—and once I did like him—not very much—but still I liked him—and he was a disappointment."

"Tell you what," says Miss Maliphant, "you've hit upon a big truth. He is not worth thinking about. Once, perhaps, I, too, liked him, and I was an idiot for my pains; but I shan't like him again in a hurry. I expect I've got to let him know that, one way or another. And as for you——"

"I tell you I never liked him much," says Joyce, with a touch of displeasure. "He was handsome, suave, agreeable—but——"

"He was, and is, a hypocrite!" interrupts Miss Maliphant, with truly beautiful conciseness. She has never learned to mince matters. "And, when all is told, perhaps nothing better than a fool! You are well out of it, in my opinion."

"I don't think I had much to do with it," says Joyce, unable to refrain from a smile. "I fancy my poor uncle was responsible for the honor done me to-day." Then a sort of vague feeling that she is being ungenerous distresses her. "Perhaps, after all, I misjudge him too far," she says.

"Could you?" with a bitter little laugh.

"I don't know," doubtfully. "One often forms an opinion of a person, and, though the groundwork of it may be just, still one is too inclined to build upon it and to rear stories upon it that get a little beyond the actual truth when the structure is completed."

"Oh! I think it is he who tells all the stories," said Miss Maliphant, who is singularly dull in little unnecessary ways, and has failed to follow Joyce in her upstairs flight. "In my opinion he's a liar; I was going to say '*pur et simple*,' but he is neither pure nor simple."

"A liar!" says Joyce, as if shocked. Some old thought recurs to her. She turns quickly to Miss Maliphant. The thought grows into words almost before she is aware of it. "Have you a cousin in India?" asks she.

"In India?" Miss Maliphant regards her with some surprise. Why this sudden absurd question in an interesting conversation about that "Judas"? I regret to say this is what Miss Maliphant has now decided upon naming Mr. Beauclerk when talking to herself.

"Yes, India."

"Not one. Plenty in Manchester and Birmingham, but not one in India."

Joyce leans back in her chair, and a strange laugh breaks from her. She gets up suddenly and goes to the other and leans over her, as though the better to see her.

"Oh, think—think," says she. "Not a cousin you loved? Dearly loved? A cousin for whom you were breaking your heart, who was not as steady as he ought to be, but who——"

"You must be going out of your mind," says Miss Maliphant, drawing back from her. "If you saw my Birmingham cousins, or even the Manchester ones, you wouldn't ask that question twice. They think of nothing but money, money, money, from morning till night, and are essentially shoppy. I don't mind saying it, you know. It is as good to give up, and acknowledge things—and certainly they——"

"Never mind them. It is the Indian cousin in whom I am interested," says Joyce, impatiently. "You are sure, sure that you haven't one out there? One whom Mr. Beauclerk knew about? And who was in love with you, and you with him. The cousin he told me of——"

"Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Yes—yes. The night of the ball at the Court, last autumn. I saw you with Mr. Beauclerk in the garden then, and he told me afterward you had been confiding in him about your cousin. The one in India. That you were going to be married to him. Oh! there must be truth—some truth in it. Do try to think!"

"If," says Miss Maliphant, slowly, "I were to think until I was black in the face, as black as any Indian of 'em all, I couldn't even by so severe a process conjure up a cousin in Hindostan! And so he told you that?"

"Yes," says Joyce faintly. She feels almost physically ill.

"He's positively unique," says Miss Maliphant, after a slight pause. "I told you just now that he was a liar, but I didn't throw sufficient enthusiasm into the assertion. He is a liar of distinction very far above his fellows! I suppose it would be superfluous now to ask if that night you speak of you were engaged to Mr. Dysart?"

"Oh, no," says Joyce quickly, as if struck. "There never has been, there never will be aught of that sort between me and Mr. Dysart Surely—Mr. Beauclerk did not——"

"Oh, yes, he did. He assured me—not in so many words (let me be perfectly just to him)—but he positively gave me to understand that you were going to marry Felix Dysart. There! Don't mind that," seeing the girl's pained face. "He was bound to say something, you know. Though it must be confessed the Indian cousin story was the more ingenious. Why didn't you tell me of that before?"

"Because he told it to me in the strictest confidence."

"Of course. Bound you on your honor not to speak of it, lest my feelings should be hurt. Really, do you know, I think he was almost clever enough to make one sorry he didn't succeed. Well, good-by." She rises abruptly, and, taking Joyce's hand, looks at her for a moment. "Felix Dysart has a good heart," says she, suddenly. As suddenly she kisses Joyce, and, crossing the room with a quick stride, leaves it.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"Shall we not laugh, shall we not weep?"

It is quite four o'clock, and therefore two hours later. Barbara has returned, and has learned the secret of Joyce's pale looks and sad eyes, and is now standing on the hearthrug looking as one might who has been suddenly wakened from a dream that had seemed only too real.

"And you mean to say—you really mean, Joyce, that you refused him?"

"Yes. I actually had that much common-sense," with a laugh that has something of bitterness in it.

"But I thought—I was sure——"

"I know you thought he was my ideal of all things admirable. And you thought wrong."

"But if not he——"

"Barbara!" says Joyce sharply. "Was it not enough that you should have made one mistake? Must you insist on making another?"

"Well, never mind," says Mrs. Monkton hastily. "I'm glad I made that one, at all events; and I'm only sorry you have felt it your duty to make your pretty eyes wet about it Good gracious!" looking put of the window, "who is coming now? Dicky Browne and Mr. Courtenay and those detestable Blakes. Tommy," turning sharply to her first-born. "If you and Mabel stay here you must be good. Do you hear now, good! You are not to ask a single question or touch a thing in the room, and you are to keep Mabel quiet. I am not going to have Mrs. Blake go home and say you are the worst behaved children she ever met in her life. You will stay, Joyce?" anxiously to her sister.

"Oh, I suppose so. I couldn't leave you to endure their tender mercies alone."

"That's a darling girl! You know I never can get on with that odious woman. Ah! how d'ye do, Mrs. Blake? How sweet of you to come after last night's fatigue."

"Well, I think a drive a capital thing after being up all night," says the new-comer, a fat, little, ill-natured woman, nestling herself into the cosiest chair in the room. "I hadn't quite meant to come here, but I met Mr. Browne and Mr. Courtenay, so I thought we might as well join forces, and storm you in good earnest. Mr. Browne has just been telling me that Lady Swansdown left the Court this morning. Got a telegram, she said, summoning her to Gloucestershire. Never do believe in these sudden telegrams myself. Stayed rather long in that anteroom with Lord Baltimore last night."

"Didn't know she had been in any anteroom," says Mrs. Monkton, coldly. "I daresay her mother-in-law is ill again. She has always been attentive to her."

"Not on terms with her son, you know; so Lady Swansdown hopes, by the attention you speak of, to come in for the old lady's private fortune. Very considerable fortune, I've heard."

"Who told you?" asks Mr. Browne, with a cruelly lively curiosity. "Lady Swansdown?"

"Oh, dear no!"

Pause! Dicky still looking expectant and Mrs. Blake uncomfortable. She is racking her brain to try and find some person who might have told her, but her brain fails her.

The pause threatens to be ghastly, when Tommy comes to the rescue.

He had been told off as we know to keep Mabel in a proper frame of mind, but being in a militant mood has resented the task appointed him. He has indeed so far given in to the powers that be that he has consented to accept a picture book, and to show it to Mabel, who is looking at it with him, lost in admiration of his remarkable powers of description. Each picture indeed, is graphically explained by Tommy at the top of his lungs, and in extreme bad humor.

He is lying on the rug, on his fat stomach, and is becoming quite a martinet.

"Look at this!" he is saying now. "Look! do you hear, or I won't stay and keep you good any longer. Here's a picture about a boat that's going to be drowned down in the sea in one minnit. The name on it is"—reading laboriously—"'All hands to the pump.' And" with considerable vicious enjoyment—"it isn't a bit of good for them, either. Here"—pointing to the picture again with a stout forefinger—"here they're 'all-handsing' at the pump. See?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want to," says Mabel, whimpering and hiding her eyes. "Oh, I don't like it; it's a horrid picture! What's that man doing there in the corner?" peeping through her fingers at a dead man in the foreground. "He is dead! I know he is!"

"Of course he is," says Tommy. "And"—valiantly—"I don't care a bit, I don't."

"Oh, but I do," says Mabel. "And there's a lot of water, isn't there?"

"There always is in the sea," says Tommy.

"They'll all be drowned, I know they will," says Mabel, pushing away the book. "Oh, I hate 'handsing'; turn over, Tommy, do! It's a nasty cruel, wicked picture!"

"Tommy, don't frighten Mabel," says his mother anxiously.

"I'm not frightening her. I'm only keeping her quiet," says Tommy defiantly.

"Hah-hah!" says Mr. Courtenay vacuously.

"How wonderfully unpleasant children can make themselves," says Mrs. Blake, making herself 'wonderfully unpleasant' on the spot. "Your little boy so reminds me of my Reginald. He pulls his sister's hair merely for the fun of hearing her squeal!"

"Tommy does not pull Mabel's hair," says Barbara a little stiffly. "Tommy, come here to Mr. Browne; he wants to speak to you."

"I want to know if you would like a cat?" says Mr. Browne, drawing Tommy to him.

"I don't want a cat like our cat," says Tommy, promptly. "Ours is so small, and her tail is too thin. Lady Baltimore has a nice cat, with a tail like mamma's furry for her neck."

"Well, that's the very sort of a cat I can get you if you wish."

"But is the cat as big as her tail?" asks Tommy, still careful not to commit himself.

"Well, perhaps not quite," says Mr. Browne gravely. "Must it be quite as big?"

"I hate small cats," says Tommy. "I want a big one! I want—" pausing to find a suitable simile, and happily remembering the kennel outside—"a regular setter of a cat!"

"Ah," says Mr. Browne, "I expect I shall have to telegraph to India for a tiger for you."

"A real live tiger?" asks Tommy, with distended eyes and a flutter of wild joy at his heart, the keener that some fear is mingled with it. "A tiger that eats people up?"

"A man-eater," says Mr. Browne, solemnly. "It would be the nearest approach I know to the animal you have described. As you won't have the cat that Lady Baltimore will give you, you must only try to put up with mine."

"Poor Lady Baltimore!" lisps Mrs. Blake. "What a great deal she has to endure."

"Oh, she's all right to-day," returns Mr. Browne, cheerfully. "Toothache any amount better this morning."

Mrs. Blake laughs in a little mincing way.

"How droll you are," says she. "Ah! if it were only toothache that was the matter But—" silence very effective, and a profound sigh.

"Toothache's good enough for me," says Dicky. "I should never dream of asking for more." He glances here at Joyce, and continues sotto voce, "You look as if you had it."

"No," returns she innocently. "Mine is neuralgia. A rather worse thing, after all."

"Yes. You can get the tooth out," says he.

"Have you heard," asks Mrs. Blake, "that Mr. Beauclerk is going to marry that hideous Miss Maliphant. Horrid Manchester person, don't you know! Can't think what Lady Baltimore sees in her"—with a giggle—"her want of beauty. Got rather too much of pretty women I should say."

"I'm really afraid," says Dicky, "that somebody has been hoaxing you this time, Mrs. Blake;" genially. "I happen to know for a fact that Miss Maliphant is not going to marry Beauclerk."

"Indeed!" snappishly. "Ah, well really he is to be congratulated, I think. Perhaps," with a sharp glance at Joyce, "I mistook the name of the young lady; I certainly heard he was going to be married."

"So am I,"' says Mr. Browne, "some time or other; we are all going to get married one day or another. One day, indeed, is as good as another. You have set us such a capital example that we're safe to follow it."

Mr. and Mrs. Blake being a notoriously unhappy couple, the latter grows rather red here; and Joyce gives Dicky a reproachful glance, which he returns with one of the wildest bewilderment. What can she mean?

"Mr. Dysart will be a distinct loss when he goes to India," continues Mrs. Blake quickly. "Won't be back for years, I hear, and leaving so soon, too. A disappointment, I'm told! Some obdurate fair one! Sort of chest affection, don't you know, ha-ha! India's place for that sort of thing. Knock it out of him in no time. Thought he looked rather down in the mouth last night. Not up to much lately, it has struck me. Seen much of him this time, Miss Kavanagh?"

"Yes. A good deal," says Joyce, who has, however, paled perceptibly.

"Thought him rather gone to seed, eh? Rather the worse for wear."

"I think him always very agreeable," says Joyce, icily.

A second most uncomfortable silence ensues. Barbara tries to get up a conversation with Mr. Courtenay, but that person, never brilliant at any time, seems now stricken with dumbness. Into this awkward abyss Mabel plunges this time. Evidently she has been dwelling secretly on Tommy's comments on their own cat, and is therefore full of thought about that interesting animal.

"Our cat is going to have chickens!" says she, with all the air of one who is imparting exciting intelligence.

This astounding piece of natural history is received with varied emotions by the listeners. Mr. Browne, however, is unfeignedly charmed with it, and grows as enthusiastic about it as even Mabel can desire.

"You don't say so! When? Where?" demands he with breathless eagerness.

"Don't know," says Mabel seriously. "Last time 'twas in nurse's best bonnet; but," raising her sweet face to his, "she says she'll be blowed if she has them there this time!"

"Mabel!" cries her mother, crimson with mortification.

"Yes?" asked Mabel, sweetly.

But it is too much for every one. Even Mrs. Blake gives way for once to honest mirth, and under cover of the laughter rises and takes her departure, rather glad of the excuse to get away. She carries off Mr. Courtenay.

Dicky having lingered a little while to see that Mabel isn't scolded, goes too; and Barbara, with a sense of relief, turns to Joyce.

"You look so awful tired," says she. "Why don't you go and lie down?"

"I thought, on the contrary, I should like to go out for a walk," says Joyce indifferently. "I confess my head is aching horribly. And that woman only made me worse."

"What a woman! I wonder she told so many lies. I wonder if——"

"If Mr. Dysart is going to India," supplies Joyce calmly. "Very likely. Why not. Most men in the army go to India."

"True," say Mrs. Monkton with a sigh. Then in a low tone: "I shall be sorry for him."

"Why? If he goes"—coldly—"it is by his own desire. I see nothing to be sorry about."

"Oh, I do," says Barbara. And then, "Well, go out, dearest. The air will do you good."

CHAPTER L.

"'Tis with our judgment as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

Lord Baltimore had not spoken in a mere fit or pique when he told Lady Swansdown of his fixed intention of putting a term to his present life. His last interview with his wife had quite decided him to throw up everything and seek forgetfulness in travel. Inclination had pointed toward such countries as Africa, or the northern parts of America, as, being a keen sportsman, he believed there he might find an occupation that would distract his mind from the thoughts that now jarred upon him incessantly.

His asking Lady Swansdown to accompany him therefore had been a sudden determination. To go on a lengthened shooting expedition by one's self is one thing, to go with a woman delicately nurtured is another. Of course, had she agreed to his proposal, all his plans must necessarily have been altered, and perhaps his second feeling, after her refusal to go with him, was one of unmistakable relief. His proposal to her at least had been born of pique!

The next morning found him, however, still strong in his desire for change. The desire was even so far stronger that he now burned to put it into execution; to get away to some fresh sphere of action, and deliberately set himself to obliterate from his memory all past ties and recollections.

There was, too, perhaps a touch of revenge that bordered upon pleasure as he thought of what his wife would say when she heard of his decision. She who shrank so delicately from gossip of all kinds could not fail to be distressed by news that must inevitably leave her and her private affairs open to public criticism. Though everybody was perpetually guessing about her domestic relations with her husband, no one as a matter of fact knew (except, indeed, two) quite the real

truth about them. This would effectually open the eyes of society, and proclaim to everybody that, though she had refused to demand a separation, still she had been obliged to accept it. This would touch her. If in no other way could he get at her proud spirit, here now he would triumph. She had been anxious to get rid of him in a respectable way, of course, but death as usual had declined to step in when most wanted, and now, well! She must accept her release, in however disreputable a guise it comes.

It is just at the moment when Mrs. Blake is holding forth on Lady Baltimore's affairs to Mrs. Monkton that Baltimore enters the smaller drawing-room, where he knows he will be sure to meet his wife at this hour.

It is far in the afternoon, still the spring sunshine is streaming through the windows. Lady Baltimore, in a heavy tea gown of pale green plush, is sitting by the fire reading a book, her little son upon the hearth rug beside her. The place is strewn with bricks, and the boy, as his father enters, looks up at him and calls to him eagerly to come and help him. At the sound of the child's quick, glad voice a pang contracts Baltimore's heart. The child——He had forgotten him.

"I can't make this castle," says Bertie, "and mother isn't a bit of good. Hers always fall down; come you and make me one."

"Not now," says Baltimore. "Not to-day. Run away to your nurse. I want to speak to your mother."

There is something abrupt and jerky in his manner—something strained, and with sufficient temper in it to make the child cease from entreaty. The very pain Baltimore, is feeling has made his manner harsher to the child. Yet, as the latter passes him obediently, he seizes the small figure in his arms and presses him convulsively to his breast. Then, putting him down, he points silently but peremptorily to the door.

"Well?" says Lady Baltimore. She has risen, startled by his abrupt entrance, his tone, and more than all, by that last brief but passionate burst of affection toward the child. "You, wish to speak to me—again?"

"There won't be many more opportunities," says he, grimly. "You may safely give me a few moments to-day. I bring you good news. I am going abroad. At once. Forever."

In spite of the self-control she has taught herself, Lady Baltimore's self-possession gives way. Her brain seems to reel. Instinctively she grasps hold of the back of a tall *prie-dieu* next to her.

"Hah! I thought so—I have touched her at last, through her pride," thinks Baltimore, watching her with a savage satisfaction, which, however, hurts him horribly. And after all he was wrong, too. He had touched her, indeed; but it was her heart, not her pride, he had wounded.

"Abroad?" echoes she, faintly.

"Yes; why not? I am sick of this sort of life. I have decided on flinging it up."

"Since when have you come to this decision?" asks she presently, having conquered her sudden weakness by a supreme effort.

"If you want day and date I'm afraid I shan't be able to supply you. It has been growing upon me for some time—the idea of it, I mean—and last night you brought it to perfection."

"I?"

"Have you already forgotten all the complimentary speeches you made me? They"—with a sardonic smile—"are so sweet to me that I shall keep them ripe in my memory until death overtakes me—and after it, I think! You told me, among many other wifely things—if my mind does not deceive me—that you wished me well out of your life, and Lady Swansdown with me."

"That is a direct and most malicious misapplication of my words," says she, emphatically.

"Is it? I confess that was my reading of them. I accepted that version, and thinking to do you a good turn, and relieve you of both your *bêtes noire* at once, I proposed to Lady Swansdown last night that she should accompany me upon my endless travels."

There is a long, long pause, during which Lady Baltimore's face seems to have grown into marble. She takes a step forward now. Through the stern pallor of her skin her large eyes seem to gleam like fire.

"How dare you!" she says in a voice very low but so intense that it rings through the room. "How dare you tell me of this! Are you lost to all shame? You and she to go—to go away together! It is only what I have been anticipating for months. I could see how it was with you. But that you should have the insolence to stand before me—" she grows almost magnificent in her wrath—"and declare your infamy aloud! Such a thought was beyond me. There was a time when I would have thought it beyond you!"

"Was there?" says he. He laughs aloud.

"There, there, there!" says she, with a rather wild sort of sigh. "Why should I waste a single emotion upon you. Let me take you calmly, casually. Come—come now." It is the saddest thing in the world to see how she treads down the passionate, most natural uprisings within her against the injustice of life: "Make me at least *au courant* with your movements, you and she will go—

where?"

"To the devil, you thought, didn't you?" says he. "Well, you will be disappointed as far as she is concerned. I maybe going. It appears she doesn't think it worth while to accompany me there or anywhere else."

"You mean that she refused to go with you?"

"In the very baldest language, I assure you. It left nothing to be desired, believe me, in the matter of lucidity. 'No,' she would not go with me. You see there is not only one, but two women in the world who regard me as being utterly without charm."

"I commiserate you!" says she, with a bitter sneer. "If, after all your attention to her, your friend has proved faithless, I——"

"Don't waste your pity," says he, interrupting her rather rudely. "On the whole, the decision of my 'friend,' as you call her, was rather a relief to me than otherwise. I felt it my duty to deprive you of her society"—with an unpleasant laugh—"and so I asked her to come with me. When she declined to accompany me she left me free to devote myself to sport."

"Ah! you refuse to be corrupted?" says she, contemptuously.

"Think what you will," says he, restraining himself with determination. "It doesn't matter in the least to me now. Your opinion I consider worthless, because prejudiced—as worthless as you consider me. I came here simply to tell you of my determination to go abroad."

"You have told me of that already. Lady Swansdown having failed you, may I ask"—with studied contempt—"who you are going to take with you now?"

"What do you mean?" says he, wheeling round to her. "What do you mean by that? By heavens!" laying his hands upon her shoulders, and looking with fierce eyes into her pale face. "A man might well kill you!"

"And why?" demands she, undauntedly. "You would have taken her—you have confessed so much—you had the coarse courage to put it into words. If not her, why"—with a shrug—"then another!"

"There! think as you will," says he, releasing her roughly. "Nothing I could say would convince or move you. And yet, I know it is no use, but I am determined I will leave nothing unsaid. I will give you no loop-hole. I asked her to go with me in a moment of irritation, of loneliness, if you will; it is hard for a man to be forever outside the pale of affection, and I thought—well, it is no matter what I thought. I was wrong it seems. As for caring for her, I care so little that I now feel actually glad she had the sense to refuse my senseless proposal. She would have bored me, I think, and I should undoubtedly have bored her. The proposition was made to her in a moment of folly."

"Oh, folly?" says she with a curious laugh.

"Well, give it any other name you like. And after all," in a low tone, "you are right. It was not the word. If I had said despair I should have been nearer the mark."

"There might even be another word," said she slowly.

"Even if there were," says he, "the occasion for it is of your making. You have thrown me; you must be prepared, therefore, to accept the consequences."

"You have prepared me for anything," says she calmly, but with bitter meaning.

"See here," says he furiously. "There may still be one thing left for you which I have not prepared. You have just asked me who I am going to take with me when I leave this place forever. Shall I answer you?"

Something in his manner terrifies her; she feels her face blanching. Words are denied her, but she makes a faint movement to assent with her hand. What is he going to say!

"What if I should decide, then, on taking my son with me?" says he violently. "Who is there to prevent me? Not you, or another. Thus I could cut all ties and put you out of my life at once and forever!"

He had certainly not calculated on the force of his words or his manner. It had been a mere angry suggestion. There was no crudity in Baltimore's nature. He had never once permitted himself to dwell upon the possibility of separating the boy from his mother. Such terrible revenge as that was beyond him, his whole nature would have revolted against it. He had spoken with passion, urged by her contempt into a desire to show her where his power lay, without any intention of actually using it. He meant perhaps to weaken her intolerable defiance, and show her where a hole in her armor lay. He was not prepared for the effect of his words.

An ashen shade has overspread her face; her expression has become ghostly. As though her limbs have suddenly given way under her, she falls against the mantel-piece and clings to it with trembling fingers. Her eyes, wild and anguished, seek his.

"The child!" gasps she in a voice of mortal terror. "The child! Not the child! Oh! Baltimore, you have taken all from me except that. Leave me my child!"

"Good heavens! Don't look at me like that," exclaims he, inexpressibly shocked—this sudden and complete abandonment of herself to her fear has horrified him. "I never meant it. I but suggested a possibility. The child shall stay with you. Do you hear me, Isabel! The child is yours! When I go, I go alone!"

There is a moment's silence, and then she bursts into tears. It is a sharp reaction, and it shakes her bodily and mentally. A wild return of her love for him—that first, sweet, and only love of her life, returns to her, born of intense gratitude. But sadly, slowly, it dies away again. It seems to her too late to dream of that again. Yet perhaps her tears have as much to do with that lost love as with her gratitude.

Slowly her color returns. She checks her sobs. She raises her head and looks at him still with her handkerchief pressed to her tremulous lips.

"It is a promise," says she.

"Yes. A promise."

"You will not change again—" nervously. "You——"

"Ah! doubt to the last," says he. "It is a promise from me to you, and of course the word of such a reprobate as you consider me can scarcely be of any avail."

"But you could not break this promise?" says she in a low voice, and with a long, long sigh.

"What trust you place in me!" said he, with an open sneer—"Well, so be it. I give you home and child. You give me——Not worth while going into the magnificence of your gifts, is it?"

"I gave you once a whole heart—an unbroken faith," says she.

"And took them back again! Child's play!" says he. "Child's promises. Well, if you will have it so, you have got a promise from me now, and I think you might say 'thank you' for it as the children do."

"I do thank you!" says she vehemently. "Does not my whole manner speak for me?" Once again her eyes filled with tears.

"So much love for the child," cries he in a stinging tone, "and not one thought for the father. Truly your professions of love were light as thistledown. There! you are not worth a thought yourself. Expend any affection you have upon your son, and forget me as soon as ever you can. It will not take you long, once I am out of your sight!"

He strides towards the door, and then looks back at her.

"You understand about my going?" he says; "that it is decided, I mean?"

"As you will," says she, her glance on the ground. There is such a total lack of emotion in her whole air that it might suggest itself to an acute student of human nature that she is doing her very utmost to suppress even the smallest sign of it. But, alas! Baltimore is not that student.

"Be just:" says he sternly. "It is as you will—not as I. It is you who are driving me into exile."

He has turned his back, and has his hand on the handle of the door in the act of opening it. At this instant she makes a move toward him, holding out her hands, but as suddenly suppresses herself. When he turns again to say a last word she is standing where he last saw her, pale and impassive as a statue.

"There will be some matters to arrange," says he, "before my going. I have telegraphed to Hansard" (his lawyer), "he will be down in the morning. There will be a few papers for you to sign to-morrow——"

"Papers?"

"My will and your maintenance whilst I am away; and matters that will concern the child's future."

"His future. That means——"

"That in all probability when I have started I shall never see his face again—or yours."

He opens the door abruptly, and is gone.

CHAPTER LI.

"While bloomed the magic flowers we scarcely knew
The gold was there. But now their petals strew
Life's pathway."
"And yet the flowers were fair,
Fed by youth's dew and love's enchanted air."

The cool evening air breathing on Joyce's flushed cheeks calms her as she sets out for the walk that Barbara had encouraged her to take.

It is an evening of great beauty. Earth, sea, and sky seem blended in one great soft mist, that rising from the ocean down below floats up to heaven, its heart a pale, vague pink.

The day is almost done, and already shadows are growing around trees and corners. There is something mystical and strange in the deep murmurs that come from the nestling woods, the sweet wild coo of the pigeons, the chirping of innumerable songsters, and now and then the dull hooting of some blinking owl. Through all, the sad tolling of a chapel bell away, away in the distance, where the tiny village hangs over the brow of the rocks that gird the sea.

"While yet the woods were hardly more than brown,
Filled with the stillness of the dying day,
The folds and farms, and faint-green pastures lay,
And bells chimed softly from the gray-walled town;
The dark fields with the corn and poppies sown,
The dull, delicious, dreamy forest way,
The hope of April for the soul of May—
On all of these night's wide, soft wings swept down."

Well, it isn't night yet, however. She can see to tread her way along the short young grasses down to a favorite nook of hers, where musical sounds of running streams may be heard, and the rustling of growing leaves make songs above one's head. Here and there she goes through brambly ways, where amorous arms from blackberry bushes strive to catch and hold her, and where star-eyed daisies and buttercups and delicate faint-hearted primroses peep out to laugh at her discomfiture.

But she escapes from all their snares and goes on her way, her heart so full of troublous fancies that their many wiles gain from her not so much as one passing thought.

The pretty, lovely May is just bursting into bloom; its pink blossoms here and its white blossoms there mingle gloriously, and the perfume of it fills the silent air.

Joyce picks a branch or two as she goes on her way, and thrusts them into the bosom of her gown.

And now she has reached the outskirts of the wood, where the river runs, crossed by a rustic bridge, on which she has ever loved to rest and dream, leaning rounded arms upon the wooden railings and seeing strange but sweet things in the bright, hurrying water beneath her eyes.

She has gained the bridge now, and leaning languidly upon its frail ramparts lets her gaze wander a-field. The little stream, full of conversation as ever, flows on unnoticed by her. Its charms seem dead. That belonged to the old life—the life she will never know again. It seems to her quite a long time since she felt young. And yet only a few short months have flown since she was young as the best of them—when even Tommy did not seem altogether despicable as a companion, and she had often been guilty of finding pleasure in running a race with him, and of covering him not only with confusion, but with armfuls of scented hay, when at last she had gained the victory over him, and had turned from the appointed goal to overwhelm the enemy with merry sarcasms.

Oh, yes, that was all over. All done! An end must come to everything, and to her light-heartedness an end had come very soon. Too soon, she was inclined to believe, in an excess of self, until she remembered that life was always to be taken seriously, and that she had deliberately trifled with it, seeking only the very heart of it—the gaiety, the carelessness, the ease.

Well, her punishment has come! She has learned that life is a failure after all. It takes some people a lifetime to discover that great fact; it has taken her quite a short time. Nothing is of much consequence. And yet——

She sighs and looks round her. Her eyes fall upon a distant bank of cloud overhanging a pretty farmstead, and throwing into bold relief the ricks of hay that stand at the western side of it. A huge, black crow standing on the top of this is napping his wings and calling loudly to his mate. Presently he spreads his wings, and, with a creaking of them like the noise of a sail in a light wind, disappears over her head. She has followed his movements with a sort of lazy curiosity, and now she knows that he will return in an hour or so with thousands of his brethren, darkening the heavens as they pass to their night lodgings in the tall elm trees.

It is good to be a bird. No care, no trouble. No pain! A short life and a merry one. Better than a long life and a sorry one. Yes, the world is all sorry.

She turns her eyes impatiently away from the fast vanishing crow; and now they fall upon a perfect wilderness of daffodils that are growing upon the edge of the bank a little way down. How beautiful they are. Their soft, delicate heads nod lazily this way and that way. They seem the very embodiment of graceful drowsiness. Some lines lately read recur to her, and awake within her memory;

"I wandered lonely as a cloud,
   That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
   A crowd of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze."

They seem so full of lazy joy, or unutterable rapture, that they belie her belief in the falseness of all things. There must surely be some good in a world that grows such charming things—things almost sentient. And the trees swaying about her head, and dropping their branches into the stream, is there no delight to be got out of them? The tenderness of this soft, sweet mood, in which perpetual twilight reigns, enters into her, and soothes the sad demon that is torturing her breast. Tears rise to her eyes; she leans still further over the parapet, and drawing the pink and white hawthorn blossoms from her bosom, drops them one by one into the hasty little river, and lets it bear them away upon its bosom to tiny bays unknown. Tears follow them, falling from her drooping lids. Can neither daffodils, nor birds, nor trees, give her some little of their joy to chase the sorrow from her heart?

Her soul seems to fling itself outward in an appeal to nature; and nature, that kind mother of us all, responds to the unspoken cry.

A step upon the bridge behind her! She starts into a more upright position and looks round her without much interest.

A dark figure is advancing toward her. Through the growing twilight it seems abnormally large and black, and Joyce stares at it anxiously. Not Freddy—not one of the laborers—they would be all clad in flannel jackets of a light color.

"Oh, is it you?" says Dysart, coming closer to her. He had, however, known it was she from the first moment his eyes rested upon her. No mist, no twilight could have deceived him, for—

Lovers' eyes are sharp to see
And lovers' ears in hearing."

"Yes," says she, advancing a little toward him and giving him her hand. A cold little hand, and reluctant.

"I was coming down to Mrs. Monkton with a message—a letter—from Lady Baltimore."

"This is a very long way round from the Court, isn't it?" says she.

"Yes. But I like this calm little corner. I have come often to it lately."

Miss Kavanagh lets her eyes wander to the stream down below. To this little spot of all places! Her favorite nook! Had he hoped to meet her there? Oh, no; impossible! And besides she had given it up for a long, long time until this evening. It seems weeks to her now since last she was here.

"You will find Barbara at home," says she gently.

"I don't suppose it is of very much consequence," says he, alluding to the message. He is looking at her, though her averted face leaves him little to study.

"You are cold," says he abruptly.

"Am I?" turning to him with a little smile. "I don't feel cold. I feel dull, perhaps, but nothing else."

And in truth if she had used the word "unhappy" instead of "dull" she would have been nearer the mark. The coming of Dysart thus suddenly into the midst of her mournful reverie has but served to accentuate the reality of it. A terrible sense of loneliness is oppressing her. All things have their place in this world, yet where is hers? Of what account is she to anyone? Barbara loves, her; yes, but not so well as Freddy and the children! Oh, to be first with someone!

"I find no spring, while spring is well-nigh blown;
   I find no nest, while nests are in the grove;
Woe's me for mine own heart that dwells alone—
   My heart that breaketh for a little love."

Christina Rosetti's mournful words seem to suit her. Involuntarily she lifts her heavy eyes, tired of the day's weeping, and looks at Dysart.

"You have been crying," says he abruptly.

CHAPTER LII.

"My love has sworn with sealing kiss
   With me to live—to die;

I have at last my nameless bliss—
As I love, loved am I."

There is a pause: it threatens to be an everlasting one, as Miss Kavanagh plainly doesn't know what to say. He can see this; what he cannot see is that she is afraid of her own voice. Those troublesome tears that all day have been so close to her seem closer than ever now.

"Beauclerk came down to see you to-day," says he presently. This remark is so unexpected that it steadies her.

"Yes," she says, calmly enough, but without raising the tell-tale eyes.

"You expected him?"

"No." Monosyllables alone seem possible to her. So great is her fear that she will give way and finally disgrace herself, that she forgets to resent the magisterial tone be has adopted.

"He asked you to marry him, however?" There is something almost threatening in his tone now, as if he is defying her to deny his assertion. It overwhelms her.

"Yes," she says again, and for the first time is struck by the wretched meagreness of her replies.

"Well?" says Dysart, roughly. But this time not even the desolate monosyllable rewards the keenness of his examination.

"Well?" says he again, going closer to her and resting his hand on the wooden rail against which she, too, was leaning. He is So close to her now that it is impossible to escape his scrutiny. "What am I to understand by that? Tell me how you have decided." Getting no answer to this either, he says, impatiently, "Tell me, Joyce."

"I refused him," says she at last in a low tone, and in a dull sort of way, as if the matter is one of indifference to her.

"Ah!" He draws a long breath. "It is true?" he says, laying his hand on hers as it lies on the top of the woodwork.

"Quite true."

"And yet—you have been crying?"

"You can see that," says she, petulantly. "You have taken pains to see and to tell me of it. Do you think it is a pleasant thing to be told? Most people," glancing angrily toward him—"everyone, I think—makes it a point now-a-days not to see when one has been making a fool of oneself; but you seem to take a delight in torturing me."

"Did it," says he bitterly, ignoring—perhaps not even hearing—her outburst. "Did it cost you so much to refuse him?"

"It cost me nothing!" with a sudden effort, and a flash from her beautiful eyes.

"Nothing?"

"I have said so! Nothing at all. It was mere nervousness, and because—it reminded me of other things."

"Did he see you cry?" asks Dysart, tightening unconsciously his grasp upon her hand.

"No. He was gone a long time, quite a long time, before it occurred to me that I should like to cry. I," with a frugal smile, "indulged myself very freely then, as you have seen."

Dysart draws a long breath of relief. It would have been intolerable to him that Beauclerk should have known of her tears. He would not have understood them. He would have taken possession of them, as it were. They would have merely helped to pamper his self-conceit and smooth down his ruffled pride. He would inevitably have placed such and such a construction on them, one entirely to his own glorification.

"I shall leave you now with a lighter heart," says Felix presently—"now that I know you are not going to marry that fellow."

"You are going, then?" says she, sharply, checking the monotonous little tattoo she has been playing on the bridge rail, as though suddenly smitten into stone. She had heard he was going, she had been told of it by several people, but somehow she had never believed it. It had never, come home to her until now.

"Yes. We are under orders for India. We sail in about a month. I shall have to leave here almost immediately."

"So soon?" says she, vaguely. She has begun that absurd tattoo again, but bridge, and restless little fingers, and sky and earth, and all things seem blotted out. He is going, really going, and for ever! How far is India away?

"It is always rather hurried at last. For my part I am glad I am going."

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Monkton will—at least I am sure she will—let me have a line now and then to let me know how you—how you are all getting on. I was going to ask her about it this evening. You think she will be good enough?"

"Barbara is always kind."

"I suppose"—he hesitates, and then goes on with an effort—"I suppose it would be too much to ask of you——"

"What?"

"That you would sometimes write me a letter—however short."

"I am a bad correspondent," says she, feeling as if she were choking.

"Ah! I see. I should not have asked, of course. Yes, you are right. It was absurd my hoping for it."

"When people choose to go away so far as that——" she is compelling herself to speak, but her voice sounds to herself a long way off.

"They must hope to be forgotten. 'Out of sight out of mind,' I know. It is such an old proverb. Well——You are cold," says he suddenly, noting the pallor of the girl's face. "Whatever you were before, you are certainly chilled to the bone now. You look it. Come, this is no time of year to be lingering out of doors without a coat or hat."

"I have this shawl," says she, pointing to the soft white, fleecy thing that covers her.

"I distrust it. Come."

"No," says she, faintly. "Go on; you give your message to Barbara. As for me, I shall be happier here."

"Where I am not," says he, with a bitter laugh. "I suppose I ought to be accustomed to that thought now, but such is my conceit that it seems ever a fresh shock to me. Well, for all that," persuadingly, "come in. The evening is very cold. I shan't like to go away, leaving you behind me suffering from a bad cough or something of that kind. We have been friends, Joyce," with a rather sorry smile. "For the sake of the old friendship, don't send me adrift with such an anxiety upon my mind."

"Would you really care?" says she.

"Ah! That is the humor of it," says he. "In spite of all I should still really care. Come." He makes an effort to unclasp the small, pretty fingers that are grasping the rails so rigidly. At first they seem to resist his gentle pressure, and then they give way to him. She turns suddenly.

"Felix,"—her voice is somewhat strained, somewhat harsh, not at all her own voice,—"do you still love me?"

"You know that," returns he, sadly. If he has felt any surprise at the question he has not shown it.

"No, no," says she, feverishly. "That you like me, that you are fond of me, perhaps, I can still believe. But is it the same with you that it used to be? Do you," with a little sob, "love me as well now as in those old days? Just the same! Not," going nearer to him, and laying her hand upon his breast, and raising agonized eyes of inquiry to his—"not one bit less?"

"I love you a thousand times more," says he, very quietly, but with such intensity that it enters into her very soul. "Why?" He has laid his own hand over the small nervous one lying on his breast, and his face has grown very white.

"Because I love you too!"

She stops short here, and begins to tremble violently. With a little shamed, heartbroken gesture she tears her hand out of his and covers her face from his sight.

"Say that again!" says he, hoarsely. He waits a moment, but when no word comes from her he deliberately drags away the sheltering hands and compels her to look at him.

"Say it!" says he, in a tone that is now almost a command.

"Oh! it is true—true!" cries she, vehemently. "I love you; I have loved you a long time, I think, but I didn't know it. Oh, Felix! Dear, dear Felix, forgive me!"

"Forgive you!" says he, brokenly.

"Ah! yes. And don't leave me. If you go away from me I shall die. There has been so much of it—a little more—and——" She breaks down.

"My beloved!" says he in a faint, quick way. He is holding her to him now with all his might. She can feel the quick pulsations of his heart. Suddenly she slips her soft arms around his neck, and now with her head pressed against his shoulder, bursts into a storm of tears. It is a last shower.

They are both silent for a long time, and then he, raising one of her hands, presses the palm against his lips. Looking up at him, she smiles, uncertainly but happily, a very rainbow of a smile, born of sunshine, and, raindrops gone, it seems to beautify her lips. But Felix, while acknowledging its charm, cannot smile back at her. It is all too strange, too new. He is afraid to believe. As yet there is something terrible to him in this happiness that has fallen into his life.

"You mean it?" he asks, bending over her. "If to-morrow I were to wake and find all this an idle dream, how would it be with me then? Say you mean it!"

"Am I not here?" says she, tremulously, making a slight but eloquent pressure on one of the arms that are round her. He bends his face to hers, and as he feels that first glad eager kiss returned—he knows!

CHAPTER LIII.

"True love's the gift which God has given
To man alone beneath the heaven:

It is the secret sympathy,
The silver link, the silken tie,
Which heart to heart and mind to mind
In body and in soul can bind."

Of course Barbara is delighted. She proves charming as a confidante. Nothing can exceed the depth of her sympathy.

When Joyce and Felix came in together in the darkening twilight, entering the house in a burglarious fashion through the dining-room window, it so happens that Barbara is there, and is at once struck by a sense of guilt that seems to surround and envelop them. They had not, indeed, anticipated meeting Barbara in that room of all others, and are rather taken aback when they come face to face with her.

"I assure you we have not come after the spoons," says Felix, in a would-be careless tone that could not have deceived an infant, and with a laugh, so frightfully careless that it would have terrified the life out of you.

"You certainly don't look like it," says Mrs. Monkton, whose heart has begun to beat high with hope. She hardly knows whether it is better to fall upon their necks forthwith and declare she knows all about it, or else to pretend ignorance. She decides upon the latter as being the easier; after all they mightn't like the neck process. Most people have a fancy for telling their own tales, to have them told for one is annoying. "You haven't the requisite murderous expression," she says, unable to resist a touch of satire. "You look rather frightened you two. What have you been doing?" She is too good natured not to give them an opening for their confession.

"Not much, and yet a great deal," says Felix. He has advanced a little, while Joyce, on the contrary, has meanly receded farther into the background. She has rather the appearance, indeed, of one who, if the wall could have been induced to give way, would gladly have followed it into the garden. The wall, however, declines to budge. "As for burglary," goes on Felix, trying to be gay, and succeeding villainously. "You must exonerate your sister at all events. But I—I confess I have stolen something belonging to you."

"Oh, no; not stolen," says Joyce, in a rather faint tone. "Barbara, I know what you will think, but ——"

"I know what I do think!" cries Barbara, joyously. "Oh, is it, can it be true?"

It never occurs to her that Felix now is not altogether a brilliant match for a sister with a fortune —she remembers only in that lovely mind of hers that he had loved Joyce when she was without a penny, and that he is now what he had always seemed to her, the one man that could make Joyce happy.

"Yes; it is true!" says Dysart. He has given up that unsuccessful gayety now and has grown very grave; there is even a slight tremble in his voice. He comes up to Mrs. Monkton and takes both her hands. "She has given herself to me. You are really glad! You are not angry about it? I know I am not good enough for her, but——"

Here Joyce gives way to a little outburst of mirth that is rather tremulous, and coming away from the unfriendly wall, that has not been of the least use to her, brings herself somewhat shamefacedly into the only light the room receives through the western window. The twilight at all events is kind to her. It is difficult to see her face.

"I really can't stay here," says she, "and listen to my own praises being sung. And besides," turning to Felix a lovely but embarrassed face, "Barbara will not regard it as you do; she will, on the contrary, say you are a great deal too good for me, and that I ought to be pilloried for all the

trouble I have given through not being able to make up my own mind for so long a time."

"Indeed, I shall say nothing but that you are the dearest girl in the world, and that I'm delighted things have turned out so well. I always said it would be like this," cries Barbara exultantly, who certainly never had said it, and had always indeed been distinctly doubtful about it.

"Is Mr. Monkton in?" says Felix, in a way that leads Monkton's wife to imagine that if she should chance to say he was out, the news would be hailed with rapture.

"Oh, never mind him," says she, beaming upon the happy but awkward couple before her. "I'll tell him all about it. He will be just as glad as I am. There, go away you two; you will find the small parlor empty, and I dare say you have a great deal to say to each other still. Of course you will dine with us, Felix, and give Freddy an opportunity of saying something ridiculous to you."

"Thank you," says Dysart warmly. "I suppose I can write a line to my cousin explaining matters."

"Of course. Joyce, take some writing things into the small parlor, and call for a lamp as you go."

She is smiling at Joyce as she speaks, and now, going up to her, kisses her impulsively. Joyce returns the caress with fervor. It is natural that she should never have felt the sweetness, the content of Barbara so entirely as she does now, when her heart is open and full of ecstasy, and when sympathy seems so necessary. Darling Barbara! But then she must love Felix now just as much as she loves her. She rather electrifies Barbara and Felix by saying anxiously to the former:

"Kiss Felix, too."

It is impossible not to laugh. Mrs. Monkton gives way to immediate and unrestrained mirth, and Dysart follows suit.

"It is a command," says he, and Barbara thereupon kisses him affectionately.

"Well, now I have got a brother at last," says she. It is indeed her first knowledge of one, for that poor suicide in Nice had never been anything to her—or to any one else in the world for the matter of that—except a great trouble. "There, go," says she. "I think I hear Freddy coming."

They fly. They both feel that further explanations are beyond them just as present; and as for Barbara, she is quite determined that no one but she shall let Freddy into the all-important secret. She is now fully convinced in her own mind that she had always had special prescience of this affair, and the devouring desire we all have to say "I told you how 'twould be" to our unfortunate fellow-travellers through this vale of tears, whether the cause for the hateful reminder be for weal or woe, is strong upon her now.

She goes to the window, and seeing Monkton some way off, flings up the sash and waves to him in a frenzied fashion to come to her at once. There is something that almost approaches tragedy in her air and gesture. Monkton hastens to obey.

"Now, what—what—what do you think has happened?" cries she, when he has vaulted the window sill and is standing beside her, somewhat breathless and distinctly uneasy. Nothing short of an accident to the children could, in his opinion, have warranted so vehement a call. Yet Barbara, as he examines her features carefully, seems all joyous excitement. After a short contemplation of her beaming face he tell himself that he was an ass to give up that pilgrimage of his to the lower field, where he had been going to inspect a new-born calf.

"The skys are all right," says he, with an upward glance at them through the window. "And—you hadn't another uncle, had you?"

"Oh, Freddy," says she, very justly disgusted.

"Well, my good child, what then? I'm all curiosity."

"Guess," says she, too happy to be able to give him the round scolding he deserves.

"Oh! if it's a riddle," says he, "you might remember I am only a little one, and unequal to the great things of life."

"Ah! but, Freddy, I've something delicious to tell you. There sit down there, you look quite queer, while I——"

"No wonder I do," says he, at last rather wrathfully. "To judge by your wild gesticulations at the window just now, any one might have imagined that the house was on fire and a hostile race tearing en masse into the back yard. And now—why, it appears you are quite pleased about something or other. Really such disappointments are enough to age any man—or make him look 'queer,' that was the word you used, I think?"

"Listen," says she, seating herself beside him, and flipping her arm around his neck. "Joyce is going to marry Felix—after all. There!" Still with her arm holding him, she leans back a little to mark the effect of this astonishing disclosure.

CHAPTER LIV.

"Well said; that was laid on with a trowel."

"Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice."

"After all, indeed; you may well say that," says Mr. Monkton, with indignation. "If those two idiots meant matrimony all along, why on earth didn't they do it all before. See what a lot of time they've lost, and what a disgraceful amount of trouble they have given all round."

"Yes, yes, of course. But then you see, Freddy, it takes some time to make up one's mind about such an important matter as that."

"It didn't take you long," says Mr. Monkton most unwisely.

"It took me a great deal longer than it took you," replies his wife with dignity. "You have always said that it was the very first day you ever saw me—and I'm sure it took me quite a week!"

This lucid speech she delivers with some severity.

"More shame for you," says Monkton promptly.

"Well, never mind," says she, too happy and too engrossed with her news to enjoy even a skirmish with her husband. "Isn't it all charming, Freddy?"

"It has certainly turned out very well, all things considered."

"I think it is the happiest thing. And when two people who love each other are quite young——"

"Really, my dear, you are too flattering," says Monkton. "Considering the gray hairs that are beginning to make themselves so unpleasantly at home in my head, I, at all events, can hardly lay claim to extreme youth."

"Good gracious! I'm not talking of us; I'm talking of them," cries she, giving him a shake. "Wake up, Freddy. Bring your mind to bear upon this big news of mine, and you will see how enchanting it is. Don't you think Felix has behaved beautifully—so faithful, so constant, and against such terrible odds? You know Joyce is a little difficult sometimes. Now hasn't he been perfect all through?"

"He is a genuine hero of romance," says Mr. Monkton with conviction. "None of your cheap articles—a regular bonafide thirteenth century knight. The country ought to contribute its stray half-pennies and buy him a pedestal and put him on the top of it, whether he likes it or not. Once there Simon Stylites would be forgotten in half an hour. Was there ever before heard of such an heroic case! Did ever yet living man have the prowess to propose to the girl he loved! It is an entirely new departure, and should be noticed. It is quite unique!"

"Don't be horrid," says his wife. "You know exactly what I mean—that it is a delightful ending to what promised to be a miserable muddle. And he is so charming; isn't he, now, Freddy?"

"Is he?" asks Mr. Monkton, regarding her with a thoughtful eye.

"You can see for yourself. He is so satisfactory. I always said he was the very husband for Joyce. He is so kind, so earnest, so sweet in every way."

"Nearly as sweet as I am, eh?" There is stern inquiry now in his regard.

"Pouf! I know what you are, of course. Who would, if I didn't? But really, Freddy, don't you think he will make her an ideal husband? So open. So frank. So free from everything—everything—oh, well, everything—you know!"

"I don't," says Monkton, uncompromisingly.

"Well—everything hateful, I mean. Oh! she is a lucky girl!"

"Nearly as lucky as her sister," says Monkton, growing momentarily more stern in his determination to uphold his own cause.

"Don't be absurd. I declare," with a little burst of amusement, "when he—they—told me about it, I never felt so happy in my life."

"Except when you married me." He throws quite a tragical expression into his face, that is, however, lost upon her.

"Of course, with her present fortune, she might have made what the world would call a more distinguished match. But his family are unexceptionable, and he has some money—not much, I know, but still, some. And even if he hadn't she has now enough for both. After all"—with noble disregard of the necessaries of life—"what is money?"

"Dross—mere dross!" says Mr. Monkton.

"And he is just the sort of man not to give a thought to it."

"He couldn't, my dear. Heroes of romance are quite above all that sort of thing."

"Well, he is, certainly," says Mrs. Monkton, a little offended. "You may go on pretending as much as you like, Freddy, but I know you think about him just as I do. He is exactly the sort of charming character to make Joyce happy."

"Nearly as happy as I have made you!" says her husband, severely.

"Dear me, Freddy—I really do wish you would try and forget yourself for one moment!"

"I might be able to do that, my dear, if I were quite sure that you were not forgetting me, too."

"Oh, as to that! I declare you are a perfect baby! You love teasing. Well—there then!" The "there" represents a kiss, and Mr. Monkton, having graciously accepted this tribute to his charms, condescends to come down from his mental elevation and discuss the new engagement with considerable affability. Once, indeed, there is a dangerous lapse back into his old style, but this time there seems to be occasion for it.

"When they stood there stammering and stuttering, Freddy, and looking so awfully silly, I declare I was so glad about it that I actually kissed him!'"

"What!" says Mr. Monkton. "And you have lived to tell the tale! You have, therefore; lived too long. Perfidious woman, prepare for death."

"I declare I think you'd have done it," says Barbara, eloquently. Whereupon, having reconsidered her speech, they both give way to mirth.

"I'll try it when I see him," says Monkton. "Even a hero of romance couldn't object to a chaste salute from me."

"He is coming to dinner. I hope when you do see him. Freddy,"—anxiously this—"you will be very sober about it."

"Barbara! You know I never get—er—that is—not before dinner at all events."

"Well, but promise me now, you will be very serious about it. They are taking it seriously, and they won't like it if you persist in treating it as a jest."

"I'll be a perfect judge."

"I know what that means"—indignantly—"that you are going to be as frivolous as possible."

"My dear girl! If the bench could only hear you. Well, there then! Yes, really! I'll be everything of the most desirable. A regular funeral mute. And," seeing she is still offended, "I am glad about it, Barbara. Honestly I think him as good a fellow as I know—and Joyce another."

Having convinced her of his good faith in the matter, and argued with her on every single point, and so far perjured himself as to remember perfectly and accurately the very day and hour on which, three months ago, she had said that she knew Joyce preferred Felix to Beauclerk, he is forgiven, and presently allowed to depart in peace with another "there," even warmer than the first.

But it is unquestionable that she keeps a severe eye on him all through dinner, and so forbids any trifling with the sacred topic. "It would have put the poor things out so!" She had said to herself; and, indeed, it must be confessed that the lovers are very shy and uncomfortable, and that conversation drifts a good deal, and is only carried on irregularly by fits and starts. But later, when Felix has unburdened his mind to Monkton during the quarter of an hour over their wine—when Barbara has been compelled, in fear and trembling, to leave Freddy to his own devices—things grow more genial, and the extreme happiness that dwells in the lovers' hearts is given full play. There is even a delightful half hour granted them upon the balcony, Barbara having—like the good angel she is—declared that the night is almost warm enough for June.

CHAPTER LV.

> "Great discontents there are, and many murmurs."
>
> "There is a kind of mournful eloquence
> In thy dumb grief."

Lady Baltimore, too, had been very pleased by the news when Felix told her next morning of his good luck. In all her own great unhappiness she had still a kindly word and thought for her cousin and his fiancée.

"One of the nicest girls," she says, pressing his hands warmly. "I often think, indeed, the nicest girl I know. You are fortunate, Felix, but"—very kindly—"she is fortunate, too."

"Oh, no, the luck is all on my side," says he.

"It will be a blow to Norman," she says, presently.

"I think not," with an irrepressible touch of scorn. "There is Miss Maliphant."

"You mean that he can decline upon her. Of course I can quite understand that you do not like him," says she with a quick sigh. "But, believe me, any heart he has was really given to Joyce. Well, he must devote himself to ambition now."

"Miss Maliphant can help him to that."

"No, no. That is all knocked on the head. It appears—this is in strict confidence, Felix—but it appears he asked her to marry him last evening, and she refused."

Felix turns to her as if to give utterance to some vehement words, and then checks himself. After all, why add to her unhappiness? Why tell her of that cur's baseness? Her own brother, too! It would be but another grief to her.

To think he should have gone from her to Miss Maliphant! What a pitiful creature! Beneath contempt! Well, if his pride survives those two downfalls—both in one day—it must be made of leather. It does Felix good to think of how Miss Maliphant must have worded her refusal. She is not famous for grace of speech. He must have had a real bad time of it. Of course, Joyce had told him of her interview with the sturdy heiress.

"Ah, she refused?" says he hardly knowing what to say.

"Yes; and not very graciously, I'm afraid. He gave me the mere fact of the refusal—no more, and only that because he had to give a reason for his abrupt departure. You know he is going this evening?"

"No, I did not know it. Of course, under the circumstances——"

"Yes, he could hardly stay here. Margaret came to me and said she would go, but I would not allow that. After all, every woman has a right to refuse or accept as she will."

"True." His heart gives an exultant leap as he remembers how his love had willed.

"I only wish she had not hurt him in the refusal. But I could see he was wounded. He was not in his usual careless spirits. He struck me as being a little—well, you know, a little——" She hesitates.

"Out of temper," suggests Felix involuntarily.

"Well, yes. Disappointment takes that course with some people. After all, it might have been worse if he had set his heart on Joyce and been refused."

"Much worse," says Felix, his eyes on the ground.

"She would have been a severe loss."

"Severe, indeed." By this time Felix is beginning to feel like an advanced hypocrite.

"As for Margaret Maliphant, I am afraid he was more concerned about the loss of her bonds and scrips than of herself. It is a terrible world, Felix, when all is told," says she, suddenly crossing her beautiful long white hands over her knees, and leaning toward him. There is a touch of misery so sharp in her voice that he starts as he looks at her. It is a momentary fit of emotion, however, and passes before he dare comment on it. With a heart nigh to breaking she still retains her composure and talks calmly to Felix, and lets him talk to her, as though the fact that she is soon to lose forever the man who once had gained her heart—that fatal "once" that means for always, in spite of everything that has come and gone—is as little or nothing to her. Seeing her sitting there, strangely pale indeed, but so collected, it would be impossible to guess at the tempest of passion and grief and terror that reigns within her breast. Women are not so strong to bear as men, and therefore in the world's storms suffer most.

"It is a lovely world," says he smiling, thinking of Joyce, and then, remembering her sad lot, his smile fades. "One might make—perhaps—a bad world—better," he says, stammering.

"Ah! teach me how," says she with a melancholy glance.

"There is such a thing as forgiveness. Forgive him!" blurts he out in a frightened sort of way. He is horrified, at himself—at his own temerity—a second later, and rises to his feet as if to meet the indignation he has certainly courted. But to his surprise no such indignation betrays itself.

"Is that your advice?" says she, still with the thin white hands clasped over the knee, and the earnest gaze on him. "Well, well, well!"

Her eyes droop. She seems to be thinking, and he, gazing at her, refrains from speech with his heart sad with pity. Presently she lifts her head and looks at him.

"There! Go back to your love," she says with a glance that thrills him. "Tell her from me that if you had the whole world to choose from, I should still select her as your wife. I like her; I love her! There, go!" She seems to grow all at once very tired. Are those tears that are rising in her eyes? She holds out to him her hand.

Felix, taking it, holds it closely for a moment, and presently, as if moved to do it, he stoops and presses a warm kiss upon it.

She is so unhappy, and so kind, and so true. God deliver her out of her sorrow!

CHAPTER LVI.

"I would that I were low laid in my grave."

She is still sitting silent, lost in thought, after Felix's departure, when the door opens once again to admit her husband. His hands are full of papers.

"Are you at liberty?" says he. "Have you a moment? These," pointing to the papers, "want signing. Can you give your attention to them now?"

"What are they?" asks she, rising.

"Mere law papers. You need not look so terrified." His tone is bitter. "There are certain matters that must be arranged before my departure—matters that concern your welfare and the boy's. Here," laying the papers upon the davenport and spreading them out. "You sign your name here."

"But," recoiling, "what is it? What does it all mean?"

"It is not your death warrant, I assure you," says he, with a sneer. "Come, sign!" Seeing her still hesitate, he turns upon her savagely. Who shall say what hidden storms of grief and regret lie within that burst of anger?

"Do you want your son to live and die a poor man?" says he. "Come! there is yourself to be considered, too! Once I am out of your way, you will be able to begin life again with a light heart; and this," tapping the paper heavily, "will enable you to do it. I make over to you and the boy everything—at least, as nearly everything as will enable me to live."

"It should be the other way," says she. "Take everything, and leave us enough on which to live."

"Why?" says he, facing round, something in her voice that resembles remorse striking him.

"We—shall have each other," says she, faintly.

"Having happily got rid of such useless lumber as the father and husband. Well, you will be the happier so," rejoins he with a laugh that hurts him more than it hurts her, though she cannot know that. "'Two is company,' you know, according to the good old proverb, 'three trumpery.' You and he will get on very well without me, no doubt."

"It is your arrangement," says she.

"If that thought is a salve to your conscience, pray think so," rejoins he. "It isn't worth an argument. We are only wasting time." He hands her the pen; she takes it mechanically, but makes no use of it.

"You will at least tell me where you are going?" says she.

"Certainly I should, if I only knew myself. To America first, but that is a big direction, and I am afraid the tenderest love letter would not reach me through it. When your friends ask you, say I have gone to the North Pole; it is as likely a destination as another."

"But not to know!" says she, lifting her dark eyes to his—dark eyes that seem to glow like fire in her white face. "That would be terrible. It is unfair. You should think—think—" Her voice grows husky and uncertain. She stops abruptly.

"Don't be uneasy about that," says he. "I shall take care that my death, when it occurs, is made known to you as soon as possible. Your mind shall be relieved on that score with as little delay as I can manage. The welcome news shall be conveyed to you by a swift messenger."

She flings the pen upon the writing table, and turns away.

"Insult me to the last if you will!" she says; "but consider your son. He loves you. He will desire news of you from time to time. It is impossible that you can put him out of your life as you have put me."

"It appears you can be unjust to the last," says he, flinging her own accusation back at her. "Have I put you out of my life?"

"Ah! was I ever in it?" says she. "But—you will write?"

"No. Not a line. Once for all I break with you. Should my death occur you will hear of it. And I have arranged so, that now and after that event you and the boy will have your positions clearly defined. That is all you can possibly require of me. Even if you marry again your jointure will be

secured to you."

"Baltimore!" exclaims she, turning upon him passionately. She seems to struggle with herself for words. "Has marriage proved so sweet a thing?" cries she presently, "that I should care to try it again? There! Go! I shall sign none of these things." She makes a disdainful gesture towards the loose papers lying on the table, and moves angrily away.

"You have your son to consider."

"Your son will inherit the title and the property without those papers."

"There are complications, however, that perhaps you do not understand."

"Let them lie there. I shall sign nothing."

"In that case you will probably find yourself immersed in troubles of the meaner kinds after my departure. The child cannot inherit until after my death and——"

"I don't care," says she, sullenly. "Go, if you will. I refuse to benefit by it."

"What a stubborn woman you are," cries he, in great wrath. "You have for years declined to acknowledge me as your husband. You have by your manner almost commanded my absence from your side; yet now when I bring you the joyful news that in a short time you will actually be rid of me, you throw a thousand difficulties in my path. Is it that you desire to keep me near you for the purposes of torture? It is too late for that. You have gone a trifle too far. The hope you have so clearly expressed in many ways that time would take me out of your path is at last about to be fulfilled."

"I have had no such hope."

"No! You can look me in the face and say that! Saintly lips never lie, however, do they? Well, I'm sick of this life; you are not. I have borne a good deal from you, as I told you before. I'll bear no more. I give in. Fate has been too strong for me."

"You have created your own fate."

"You are my fate! You are inexorable! There is no reason why I should stay."

Here the sound of running, childish, pattering footsteps can be heard outside the door, and a merry little shout of laughter. The door is suddenly burst open in rather unconventional style, and Bertie rushes into the room, a fox terrier at his heels. The dog is evidently quite as much up to the game as the boy, and both race tempestuously up the room and precipitate themselves against Lady Baltimore's skirts. Round and round her the chase continues, until the boy, bursting away from his mother, dashes toward his father, the terrier after him.

There isn't so much scope for talent in a pair of trousers as in a mass of dainty petticoats, and presently Bertie grows tired, flings himself down upon the ground, and lets the dog tumble over him there. The joust is virtually at an end.

Lady Baltimore, who has stood immoveable during the attack upon her, always with that cold, white, beautiful look upon her face, now points to the stricken child lying panting, laughing, and playing with the dog at his father's feet.

"There is a reason!" says she, almost inaudibly.

Baltimore shakes his head. "I have thought all that out. It is not enough," says he.

"Bertie!" says his mother, turning to the child. "Do you know this, that your father is going to leave you?"

"Going?" says the boy vaguely, forgetting the dog for a moment and glancing upward. "Where?"

"Away. Forever."

"Where?" says the boy again. He rises to his feet now, and looks anxiously at his father; then he smiles and flings himself into his arms. "Oh, no!" says he, in a little soft, happy, sure sort of a way.

"Forever! Forever!" repeals Isabel in a curious monotone.

"Take me up," says the child, tugging at his father's arms. "What does mamma mean? Where are you going?"

"To America, to shoot bears," returns Baltimore with an embarrassed laugh. How near to tears it is.

"Real live bears?"

"Yes."

"Take me with you"? says the child, excitedly.

"And leave mamma?"

"Oh, she'll come, too," says Bertie, confidently. "She'll come where I go." Where he would go—the

child! But would she go where the father went? Baltimore's brow darkens.

"I am afraid it is out of the question," he says, putting Bertie back again upon the carpet where the fox terrier is barking furiously and jumping up and down in a frenzied fashion as if desirous of devouring the child's legs. "The bears might eat you. When you are big and strong——"

"You will come back for me?" cries Bertie, eagerly.

"Perhaps."

"He will not," breaks in Lady Baltimore violently. "He will come back no more. When he goes you will never see him again. He has said so. He is going forever!" These last two terrible words seem to have sunk into her soul. She cannot cease from repeating them.

"Let the boy alone," says Baltimore angrily.

The child is looking from one parent to the other. He seems puzzled, expectant, but scarcely unhappy. Childhood can grasp a great deal, but not all. The more unhappy the childhood, the more it can understand of the sudden and larger ways of life. But children delicately brought up and clothed in love from their cradle find it hard to realize that an end to their happiness can ever come.

"Tell me, papa!" says he at last in a vague, sweet little way.

"What is there to tell?" replies his father with a most meagre laugh, "except that I saw Beecher bringing in some fresh oranges half an hour ago. Perhaps he hasn't eaten them all yet. If you were to ask him for one——"

"I'll find him," cries Bertie brightly, forgetting everything but the present moment. "Come, Trixy, come," to his dog, "you shall have some, too."

"You see there' won't be much trouble with him," says Baltimore, when the boy has run out of the room in pursuit of oranges. "It will take him a day, perhaps, and after that he will be quite your own. If you won't sign these papers to-day you will perhaps to-morrow. I had better go and tell Hansard that you would like to have a little time to look them over."

He walks quickly down the room, opens the door, and closes it after him.

CHAPTER LVII.

"This is that happy morn—
That day, long-wished day
    Of all my life so dark
(If cruel stars have not my ruin sworn
And fates my hopes betray)
Which, purely white, deserves
    An everlasting diamond should it mark."

He has not, however, gone three yards down the corridor when the door is again opened, and Lady Baltimore's voice calls after him:

"Baltimore!" Her tone is sharp, high-agonized—the tone of one strung to the highest pitch of despair. It startles him. He turns to look at her. She is standing, framed in by the doorway, and one hand is grasping the woodwork with a hold so firm that the knuckles are showing white. With the other hand she beckons him to approach her. He obeys her. He is even so frightened at the strange gray look in her face that he draws her bodily into the room again, shutting the door with a pressure of the hand he can best spare.

"What is it?" says he, looking down at her.

She has managed to so far overcome the faintness that has been threatening her as to shake him off and stand free, leaning against a chair behind her.

"Don't go," says she, hoarsely.

It is impossible to misunderstand her meaning. It has nothing whatever to do with his interview with the lawyer waiting so patiently down below, but with that final wandering of his into regions unknown. She is as white as death.

"How is this, Isabel?" asks he. He is as white as she is now. "Do you know what you are saying? This is a moment of excitement; you do not comprehend what your words mean."

"Stay! Stay for his sake."

"Is that all?" says he, his eyes searching hers.

"For mine, then."

The words seem to scorch her. She covers her face with her hands and stands before him, stricken dumb, miserable—confessed.

"For yours!"

He goes closer to her, and ventures to take her hand. It is cold—cold as death. His is burning.

"You have given a reason for my staying, indeed," says he. "But what is the meaning of it?"

"This!" cried she, throwing up her head, and showing him her shamed and grief-stricken face. "I am a coward! In spite of everything I would not have you go—so far!"

"I see. I understand," he sighs, heavily. "And yet that story was a foul lie! It is all that stands between us, Isabel. Is it not so? But you will not believe."

There, is a long silence, during which neither of them stirs. They seem wrapt in thought—in silence—he still holding her hand.

"If it was a lie," says she at last, breaking the quiet around them by an effort, "would you so far forgive my distrust of you as to be holding my hand like this?"

"Yes. What is there I would not forgive you?" says he. "And it was a lie!"

"Cyril," cries she in great agitation, "take care! It is a last moment! Do you dare to tell me that still? Supposing your story to be true, and mine—that woman's—false, how would it be between us then?"

"As it was in the first good old time when we were married."

"You, could forgive the wrong I have done you all these years, supposing——"

"Everything—all."

"Ah!" This sound seems crushed out of her. She steps backward, and a dry sob breaks from her.

"What is it?" asks he, quickly.

"Oh, that I could—that I dared—believe," says she.

"You would have proofs," says he, coldly, resigning her hand. "My word is not enough. You might love me did I prove worthy; your love is not strong enough to endure the pang of distrust. Was ever real love so poor a thing as that? However, you shall have them."

"What?" asks she, raising her head.

"The proofs you desire," responds he, icily. "That woman—your friend—the immaculate one—died the the day before yesterday. What? You never heard? And you and she——"

"She was nothing to me," says Lady Baltimore. "Nothing since."

"The day she reviled me! And yet"—with a most joyless laugh—"for the sake of a woman you cared so little about, that even her death has not caused you a pang, you severed the tie that should have been the closest to you on earth? Well, she is dead. 'Heaven rest her sowl!' as the peasants say. She wrote me a letter on her bed of death."

"Yes?" Eagerly.

"You still doubt?" says he, with a stern glance at her. "So be it; you shall see the letter, though how will that satisfy you? For you can always gratify your desire for suspicion by regarding it as a forgery. The woman herself is dead, so, of course, there is no one to contradict. Do think this all out," says he, with a contemptuous laugh, "before you commit yourself to a fresh belief in me. You see I give you every chance. To such a veritable 'Thomas' in petticoats every road should be laid open. Now"—tauntingly—"will you wait here whilst I bring the proof?"

He is gazing at her in a heartbroken sort of way. Is it the end? Is it all really over? There had been a faint flicker of the dying candle—a tiny glare—and now for all time is it to be darkness?

As for her. Ever since he had let her hand go, she had stood with bent head looking at it. He had taken it, he had let it go; there seemed to be a promise of heaven—was it a false one?

She is silent, and Baltimore, who had hoped for one word of trust, of belief, makes a gesture of despair.

"I will bring you the letter," he says, moving toward the door. When he does bring it—when she had read it and satisfied herself of the loyalty so long doubted, where, he asks himself, will they two be then? Further apart than ever? He has forgiven a great deal—much more than this—and yet, strange human nature, he knows if he once leaves the room and her presence now, he will never return again. The letter she will see—but him—never!

The door is open. He has almost crossed the threshold. Once again her voice recalls him, once again he looks back, she is holding out her arms to him.

"Cyril! Cyril!" she cried. "I believe you."

She staggers toward him. Mercifully the fountain of her tears breaks loose, she flings herself into his willing arms, and sobs out a whole world of grief upon his bosom.

It is a cruel moment, yet one fraught with joy as keen as the sorrow—a fire of anguish out of which both emerge purified, calmed—gladdened.

CHAPTER LVIII.

> "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth;
> the time of the singing of the birds has come."

The vague suspicion of rain that had filled their thoughts at breakfast has proved idle. The sun is shining forth again with redoubled vigor, as if laughing their silly doubts to scorn. Never was there so fair a day. One can almost see the plants growing in the garden, and from every bough the nesting birds are singing loud songs of joy.

The meadows are showing a lovely green, and in the glades and uplands the

> "Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares,"

are uprearing their lovely heads. The air is full of sweet scents and sounds, and Joyce, jumping down from the drawing-room window, that lies close to the ground, looks gladly round her. Perhaps it is not so much the beauty of the scene as the warmth of happiness in her own heart that brings the smile to her lips and eyes.

He will be here to-day! Involuntarily she raises one hand and looks at the ring that encircles her engaged finger. A charming ring of pearls and sapphires. It evidently brings her happy thoughts, as, after gazing at it for a moment or two, she stoops and presses her lips eagerly to it. It is his first gift (though not his last), and therefore the most precious. What girl does not like receiving a present from her lover? The least mercenary woman on earth must feel a glow at her heart and a fonder recognition of her sweetheart's worth when he lays a love-offering at her feet.

Joyce, after her one act of devotion to her sweetheart, runs down the garden path and toward the summer house. She is not expecting Dysart until the day has well grown into its afternoon; but, book in hand, she has escaped from all possible visitors to spend a quiet hour in the old earwiggy shanty at the end of the garden, sure of finding herself safe there from interruptions.

The sequel proves the futility of all human belief.

Inside the summer house; book in hand likewise, sits Mr. Browne, a picture of studious virtue.

Miss Kavanagh, seeing him, stops dead short, so great is her surprise, and Mr. Browne, raising his eyes, as if with difficulty, from the book on his knee, surveys her with a calmly judicial eye.

"Not here. Not here, my child," quotes he, incorrectly. "You had better try next door."

"Try for what?" demands she, indignantly.

"For whom? You mean——"

"No, I don't," with increasing anger.

"Jocelyne!" says Mr. Browne, severely. "When one forsakes the path of truth it is only to tread in ——"

"Nonsense!" says Miss Kavanagh, irreverently.

"As you will!" says he, meekly. "But I assure you he is not here."

"I could have told you that," says she, coloring, however, very warmly. "I must say, Dicky, you are the most ingeniously stupid person I ever met in my life."

"To shine in even the smallest line in life is to achieve something," says Mr. Browne, complacently. "And so you knew he wouldn't be here just now?"

This is uttered in an insinuating tone. Miss Kavanagh feels she has made a false move. To give Dicky an inch is, indeed, to give him an ell.

"He? Who?" says she, weakly.

"Don't descend to dissimulation, Jocelyne," advises he, severely. "It's the surest road to ruin, if one is to believe the good old copy books. By he—you see I scorn subterfuge—I mean Dysart, the person to whom in a mistaken moment you have affianced yourself, as though I—I were not ready at any time to espouse you."

"I'm not going to be espoused," says Miss Kavanagh, half laughing.

"No? I quite understood——"

"I won't have that word," petulantly. "It sounds like something out of the dark ages."

"So does he," says Mr. Browne. "'Felix,' you know. So Latin! Quite like one of the old monks. I shouldn't wonder if he turned out a——"

"I wish you wouldn't tease me, Dicky," says she. "You think you are amusing, you know, but I think you are one of the rudest people I ever met. I wish you would let me alone."

"Ah! Why didn't you leave me alone?" says he, with a sigh that would have set a furnace ablaze. "However!" with a noble determination to overcome his grief. "Let the past lie. You want to go and meet Dysart, isn't that it? And I'll go and meet him with you. Could self-sacrifice further go? 'Jim along Josy,' no doubt he is at the upper gate by this time, flying on the wings of love."

"He is not," says Joyce; "and I wish once for all, Dicky, that you wouldn't call me 'Josy.' 'Jocelyne' is bad enough, but 'Josy!' And I'm not going to 'jim' anywhere, and certainly"—with strong determination—"not with you." She looks at him with sudden curiosity. "What brought you here to-day?" asks she, most inhospitably it must be confessed.

"What brings me here every day? To see the unkindest girl in the world."

"She doesn't live here," says Miss Kavanagh. "Dicky"—changing her tone suddenly and looking at him with earnest eyes. "What is this I hear about Lady Baltimore and her husband? Be sensible now, do, and tell me."

"They're going abroad together—with Bertie. They've made it up," says he, growing as sensible as even she can desire. "It is such a complete make up all round that they didn't even ask me to go with them. However, I'm determined to join them at Nice on their return from Egypt. Too much billing and cooing is bad for people."

"I'm so glad," says Joyce, her eyes filling with tears. "They are two such dear people, and if it hadn't been for Lady—By the by, where is Lady Swansdown?"

"Russia, I think."

"Well, I liked her, too," says Joyce, with a sigh; "but she wasn't good for Baltimore, was she?"

"Not very!" says Mr. Browne, dryly. "I should say, on the whole, that she disagreed with him. Tonics are sometimes dangerous."

"I'm so delighted," says Joyce, still thinking of Lady Baltimore. "Well," smiling at him, "why don't you go in and see Barbara?"

"I have seen her, talked with her a long while, and bid her adieu. I was on my way back to the Court, having failed in my hope of seeing you, when I found this delightful nest of earwigs, and thought I'd stay and confabulate with them a while in default of better companions."

"Poor Dicky!" says she. "Come with me, then, and I'll talk to you for half an hour."

"Too late!" says he, looking at his watch. "There is only one thing left me now to, say to you, and that is, 'Good-by.'"

"Why this mad haste?"

"Ah, ha! I Can have my little secrets, too," says he. "A whisper in your ear," leaning toward her.

"No, thank you," says she, waving him off with determination. "I remember your last whisper. There! if you can't stay, Dicky, good by indeed. I'm going for a walk."

She turns away resolutely, leaving Mr. Browne to sink back upon the seat and continue his reading, or else to go and meet that secret he spoke of.

"I say," calls he, running after her. "You may as well see me as far as the gate, any way." It is evident the book at least has lost its charms. Miss Kavanagh not being stony hearted so far gives in as to walk with him to a side gate, and having finally bidden him adieu, goes back to the summer house he has quitted, and, opening her book, prepares to enjoy herself.

Vain preparation! It is plain that the fates are against her to-day. She is no sooner seated, with her book of poetry open on her knee, than a little flying form turns the corner and Tommy precipitates himself upon her.

"What are you doing?" asks he.

CHAPTER LIX.

"Lips are so like flowers
I might snatch at those
Redder than the rose leaves,
Sweeter than the rose."

"Love is a great master."

"I am reading," says she. "Can't you see that?"

"Read to me, then," says Tommy, scrambling up on the bench beside her and snuggling himself under her arm. "I love to hear people."

"Well, not this, at all events," says Miss Kavanagh, placing the dainty copy of "The Muses of Mayfair," she has been reading on the rustic table in front of her.

"Why not that one? What is it?" asks Tommy, staring at the book.

"Nothing you would like. Horrid stuff. Only poetry."

"What's poetry?"

"Oh, nonsense, Tommy, you know very well what poetry is. Your hymns are poetry." This she considers will put an end to all desire for the book in question. It is a clever and skilful move, but it fails signally. There is silence for a moment while Tommy cogitates, and then——

"Are those hymns?" demands he, pointing at the discarded volume.

"N-o, not exactly." This is scarcely disingenuous, and Miss Kavanagh has the grace to blush a little. She is the further discomposed in that she becomes aware presently that Tommy sees through her perfectly.

"Well, what are they?" asks he.

"Oh—er—well—just poetry, you know."

"I don't," says Tommy, flatly, who is nothing if not painfully truthful. "Let me hear them." He pauses here and regards her with a searching eye. "They"—with careful forethought—"they aren't lessons, are they?"

"No; they are not lessons," says his aunt, laughing. "But you won't like them for all that. If you are athirst for literature, get me one of your own books, and I will read 'Jack the Giant Killer' to you."

"I'm sick of him," says Tommy, most ungratefully. That tremendous hero having filled up many an idle hour of his during his short lifetime. "No," nestling closer to her. "Go on with your poetry one!"

"You would hate it. It is worse than 'Jack,'" says she.

"Let me hear it," says Tommy, persistently.

"Well," says Miss Kavanagh, with a sigh, "if you will have it, at least, don't interrupt." She has tried very hard to get rid of him, but, having failed in so signal a fashion, she gives herself up with an admirable resignation to the inevitable.

"What would I do that for?" asks Tommy, rather indignantly.

"I don't know, I'm sure. But I thought I'd warn you," says she, wisely precautious. "Now, sit down there," pointing to the seat beside her; "and when you feel you have had enough of it, say so at once."

"That would be interrupting," says Tommy, the Conscientious.

"Well, I give you leave to interrupt so far," says Joyce, glad to leave him a loop-hole that may insure his departure before Felix comes. "But no further—mind that."

"Oh, I'm minding!" says Tommy, impatiently. "Go on. Why don't you begin?"

Miss Kavanagh, taking up her book once more, opens it at random. All its contents are sweetmeats of the prettiest, so she is not driven to a choice. She commences to read in a firm, soft voice:—

"The wind and the beam loved the rose,
    And the roses loved one:
For who recks the——"

"What's that?" says Tommy.

"What's what?"

"You aren't reading it right, are you?"

"Certainly I am. Why?"

"I don't believe a beam of wood could love anything," says Tommy; "it's too heavy."

"It doesn't mean a beam of wood."

"Doesn't it?" staring up into her face. "What's it mean, then—'The beam that is in thine own

eye?'"

He is now examining her own eye with great interest. As usual, Tommy is strong in Bible lore.

"I have no beam in my eye, I hope," says Joyce, laughing; "and, at all events, it doesn't mean that either. The poet who wrote this meant a sunbeam."

"Well, why couldn't he say so?" says Tommy, gruffly.

"I really think you had better bring me one of your own books," says Joyce. "I told you this would ——"

"No," obstinately, "I like this. It sounds so nice and smoothly. Go on," says Tommy, giving her a nudge.

Joyce, with a sigh, reopens the volume, and gives herself up for lost. To argue with Tommy is always to know fatigue, and nothing else. One never gains anything by it.

"Well, do be quiet now, and listen," says she, protesting faintly.

"I'm listening like anything," says Tommy. And, indeed, now at last it seems as if he were.

So silent does he grow as his aunt reads on that you might have heard a mouse squeak. But for the low, soft tones of Joyce no smallest sound breaks the sweet silence of the day. Miss Kavanagh is beginning to feel distinctly flattered. If one can captivate the flitting fancies of a child by one's eloquent rendering of charming verse, what may one not aspire to? There must be something in her style if it can reduce a boy of seven to such a state of ecstatic attention, considering the subject is hardly such a one as would suit his tender years.

But Tommy was always thoughtful beyond his age. A dear, clever little fellow! So appreciative! Far, far beyond the average! He——

The mild sweetness of the spring evening and her own thoughts are broken in upon at this instant by the "dear, clever little fellow."

"He has just got to your waist now," says he, with an air of wild if subdued excitement.

"He! Who! What!" shrieks Joyce, springing to her feet. A long acquaintance with Tommy has taught her to dread the worst.

"Oh, there! Of course you've knocked him down, and I did want to see how high he would go. I was tickling his tail to make him hurry up," says Tommy, in an aggrieved tone. "I can't see him anywhere now," peering about on the ground at her feet.

"Oh! What was it, Tommy? Do speak!" cries Joyce, in a frenzy of fear and disgust.

"'Twas an earwig!" says Tommy, lifting a seraphic face to hers. "And such a big one! He was racing up your dress most beautifully, and now you've upset him. Poor thing—I don't believe he'll ever find his way back to you again."

"I should hope not, indeed!" says Miss Kavanagh, hastily.

"He began at the very end of your frock," goes on Tommy, still searching diligently on the ground, as if to find the earwig, with a view to restoring it to its lost hunting ground; "and it wriggled up so nicely. I don't know where he is now"—sorrowfully—"unless," with a sudden brightening of his expressive face, "he is up your petticoats."

"Tommy! What a horrid, bad boy you are!" cries poor Joyce, wildly. She gives a frantic shake to the petticoats in question. "Find him at once, sir! He must be somewhere down there. I shan't have an instant's peace until I know where he is."

"I can't see him anywhere," says Tommy. "Maybe you'll feel him presently, and then we'll know. He isn't on your leg now, is he?"

"Oh! don't!" cries Joyce, who looks as if she is going, to cry. She gives herself another vigorous shake, and stands away from the spot where Tommy evidently thinks the noxious beast in question may be, with her petticoats held carefully up in both hands. "Oh, Tommy, darling! Do find him. He can't be up my petticoats, can he?"

"He can. There's, nothing they can't do," says Tommy, who is plainly revelling in the storm he has raised. Her open fright is beer and skittles to him. "Why did you stir? He was as good as gold, until then; and there wasn't anything to be afraid of. I was watching him. When he got to your ear I'd have told you. I wouldn't like him to make you deaf, but I wanted to see if he would go to your ear. But you spoiled all my fun, and now—where is he now?" asks Tommy, with an awful suggestion in his tone.

"On the grass, perhaps," says Joyce, miserably, looking round her everywhere, and even on her shoulder. "I don't feel him anywhere."

"Sometimes they stay quite a long time, and then they crawl!" says Tommy, the most horrible anticipation in his tone.

"Really, Tommy," cries his aunt, indignantly, "I do think you are the most abominable boy I ever met in my life. There, go away! I certainly shan't read another line to you—either now—or—ever!"

"What is the matter?" asks a voice at this moment, that sounds close to her elbow. She turns round with a start.

"It is you, Felix!" says she, coloring warmly. "Oh—oh, it's nothing. Only Tommy. And he said I had an earwig on me. And I was just a little unnerved, you know."

"And no wonder," says her lover, with delightful sympathy. "I can't bear that sort of wild animal myself. Tommy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. When you saw him why didn't you rise up and slay the destroyer of your aunt's peace? There; run away into the hall. You will find on one of the tables a box of chocolate. I told Mabel it was there; perhaps she——"

Like an arrow from the bow, Tommy departs.

"He has evidently his doubts of Mabel," says Joyce, laughing rather nervously. She is still a little shy with Felix. "He doesn't trust her."

"No." He has seated himself and now draws her down beside him. "You were reading?" he says.

"Yes."

"To Tommy?"

"Yes," laughing more naturally this time.

"Tommy is a more learned person than one would have supposed. Is this the sort of thing he likes?" pointing to Nydia's exquisite song.

"I am afraid not, though he would insist upon my reading it. The earwig was evidently far more engrossing as a subject than either the wind or the rose."

"And yet—" he has his arm round her now, and is reading the poem over her shoulder.

"You are my Rose," says he, softly. "And you—do you love but one?"

She makes a little mute gesture that might signify anything or nothing to the uninitiated, but to him is instinct with a most happy meaning.

"Am I that one, darling?"

She makes the same little silent movement again, but this time she adds to it by casting a swift glance upward at him from under her lowered lids.

"Make me sure of it," entreated he almost in a whisper. He leans over her, lower, lower still. With a little tremulous laugh, dangerously akin to tears, she raises her soft palm to his cheek and tries to press him—from her. But he holds her fast.

"Make me sure!" he says again. There is a last faint hesitation on her part, and then—their lips meet.

"I have doubted always—always a little—ever since that night down by the river," says he, "but now——"

"Oh, no! You must not doubt me again!" says she with tears in her eyes.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK APRIL'S LADY: A NOVEL ***

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