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"I hope you do not think I was wrong?"

DOCTOR LUTTRELL'S FIRST PATIENT

BY

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"THE MISTRESS OF BRAE FARM," "ESTHER," ETC.**

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CHAPTER I.

AT THE CORNER HOUSE.

"Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish."—*Epictetus*.

There is an old adage, worn almost threadbare with continual use, "When poverty looks in at the door, love flies out at the window," and, doubtless, there is an element of truth in the saying; nevertheless, though there were lines of care on Marcus Luttrell's face, and in the strong sunlight the seams of his wife's black gown looked a little shiny, there was still peace, and the patience of a great and enduring affection in the corner house at Galvaston Terrace.

When the brass plate, glittering with newness, had been first affixed to the door, Marcus Luttrell's heart had been sanguine with hope, and he had brought his young *fiancée* to see it. The small, narrow house, with its dark, square entry, its double parlours communicating with folding-doors, and the corner room, that would do for a surgery, had seemed to them both a most desirable abode.

Olivia, who prided herself on being unusually practical, pointed out its numerous advantages with great satisfaction. The side entrance in Harbut Street, for instance, and the front room where patients would be interviewed, and which had a window in Galvaston Terrace.

"It is so conspicuous, Marcus," she said, with legitimate pride in her voice. "No one can overlook it, it is worth paying a few pounds more rent, instead of being jammed in between two terrace houses. Harbut Street is ever so much nicer than Galvaston Terrace, and the houses are larger, and it is so convenient having those shops opposite."

Olivia was disposed to see everything in *couleur de rose*, but to most people Galvaston Terrace would have appeared woefully dingy. Two or three of the houses had cards in the sitting-room windows, with "Desirable apartments for a single gentleman" affixed thereon, and at the farther end a French dressmaker eked out a slender income.

The Terrace had by no means a prosperous look, a little fresh paint and cleaner blinds would have been improvements. Nevertheless, people lived out harmless lives there, and on the whole were tolerably contented with their lot.

When Marcus Luttrell made that fatal mistake of marrying in haste and repenting at leisure, things had not looked so badly with him. He had bought his partnership and had a little money in hand, and Olivia had had sufficient for her modest trousseau. How could either of them have suspected that the partnership was a deceit and a fraud—that old Dr. Slade had let Marcus in for a rotten concern—that no paying patients would crowd the small dining-room—and that two years of professional profits would be represented in shillings? Now and then when he was tired and discouraged Dr. Luttrell would accuse himself of rashness and folly in no measured terms.

"Your Aunt Madge is right, Olive," he would say, "we have been a couple of fools; but I was the biggest. What business had I to tempt Providence in this way? I do believe when a man is in love he loses his judgment; look at the life to which my selfishness has condemned you. You will be an old woman before your time, with the effort to make a sixpence go as far as a shilling! And there is Dot ——" And here the young doctor sighed and frowned, but Olivia, who had plenty of spirit, refused to be depressed.

"You took me from such a luxurious home, did you not, Marcus?" she would say, with a genial laugh. "A hard-working daily governess leads such an enjoyable life, and it was so exhilarating and refreshing to sit in one's lodgings of an evening, with no one to care if one were tired and dull. Yes, dear old boy, of course I was ever so much happier without you and Dot to worry me——" And, somehow, at these cheering words the harassed frown on Marcus's brow relaxed.

Had he been so wrong after all. How could he know that old Slade would prove a rogue and a humbug; it would have been wiser to wait a little, but then human nature is liable to make mistakes, and in spite of it all, they had been so happy. Olive was such a splendid companion, she had brains as well as heart. Yes, he had been a fool, but he knew that under like circumstances many a man would have done the same.

He remembered the events that had led to their hasty marriage. Olivia had not long lost her mother, the widow's annuity had died with her, and Olivia, who had only her salary as a daily governess in a large family, had just moved into humbler lodgings.

He had gone round with some flowers and a book that he thought would interest her, and as she came forward to greet him, he could see her eyes were red and swollen.

"What is it, dear?" he had asked, kindly, and then the poor girl had utterly broken down.

"Oh, Marcus, what shall I do?" she said, when her sobs would allow her to speak. "I cannot bear it; it is all so dull and miserable. I am missing mother and I am so tired, and the children have been so cross all day." And Olivia, whose nerves were on edge with the strain of grief and worry, looked so pallid and woebegone that Marcus had been filled with consternation. Never had he seen his

sweetheart in such distress, and then it was that the suggestion came to him.

Why should they both be lonely? Olivia could marry him and do her work as well, and there need be no more dull evenings for either of them.

"You will trust me to make you as happy as I can, dearest," he said, tenderly, as he pleaded for an early marriage. And as Olivia listened to him the sad burden seemed lifted from her heart.

"Are you quite sure we ought to do this, Marcus?" she had asked, a little dubiously, for in spite of her youth she had plenty of good sense, and then Marcus had been very ready with his arguments.

A doctor ought to be a married man, his house was too large for a bachelor, and needed a mistress. What was the use of Olivia paying for lodgings when he wanted a wife to make him comfortable? And if she liked she could still go on with her teaching.

It was this last proviso that overcame Olivia's objections. If she could keep her situation she would be no expense to Marcus. Her salary was good, and until paying patients came she could subscribe towards the housekeeping.

It was just one of those arrangements that look so promising and plausible until fairly tried, but before many months had passed there was a hitch—something out of gear in the daily machinery.

It was a dry summer, and Brompton is not exactly a bracing place. Olivia began to flag a little, the long hours of teaching, the hurried walks to and fro, tried her vigorous young frame. The little maids who followed each other in quick succession were all equally inefficient and unreliable. Marcus began to complain that such ill-cooked, tasteless meals would in time impair their digestion. The Marthas and Annes and Sallies, who clumped heavily about the corner house, with smudges on their round faces and bare red arms, had never heard of the School of Cookery at South Kensington. Olivia, fagged and weary, looked ready to cry when she saw the blackened steak and unwholesome chips set before Marcus. Not one man in a thousand, she thought, would have borne it all so patiently.

Then one hot oppressive evening the climax came. Olivia, who had never fainted in her life, found herself to her great astonishment lying on the little couch by the open window with her face very wet, and Marcus looking at her with grave professional eyes.

That night he spoke very plainly. There must be no more teaching. Olivia was simply killing herself, and he refused to sanction such madness any longer. In future he must be the only breadwinner. Until patients were obliging enough to send for him, they must just live on their little capital. Olivia must stay at home, and see after things and take care of herself, or he would not answer for the consequences.

"You have your husband to consider," he said, in a masterful tone, but how absurdly boyish he looked, as he stood on the rug, tossing back a loose wave of fair hair from his forehead. People always thought Dr. Luttrell younger than he was in reality. He was eight-and-twenty, and Olivia was six years younger. She was rather taller than her husband, and had a slim erect figure. She had no claims to beauty; her features were too irregular, but her clear, honest eyes and sweet smile and a certain effective dimple redeemed her from plainness, and the soft brown hair waving naturally over the temples had a sunny gleam in it.

When baby Dot made her appearance—Dorothy Maud Luttrell, as she was inscribed in the register—the young parents forgot their anxieties for a time in their joy in watching their first-born.

Marcus left his books to devote himself to nursing his pale wife back to health. And as Olivia lay on the couch with her baby near her, and feasted on the delicacies that Aunt Madge's thoughtfulness had provided, or listened to Marcus as he read to her, it seemed to her, as though the cup of her blessing were full.

"Oh, Marcus, how happy we are!" she would whisper, and Marcus would stifle a sigh bravely.

"Oh, Marcus, how happy we are!"

"Oh, Marcus, how happy we are!"

Alas! he knew the little capital was dwindling sadly—rent and taxes, bread and cheese, and even the modest wages of a second Martha were draining his purse too heavily. He had plenty of poor patients, but no one but the French dressmaker had yet sent for the late Dr. Slade's partner. It was then that those careworn lines came to the young doctor's brow.

It was bitterly hard, for Marcus loved his profession, and had studied hard. The poor people whom he attended were devoted to him.

"He allus tells a body the truth," said old Widow Bates. "I do hate a fellow who truckles and minces his words like that Sparks. Do you suppose Jem Arkwright would have let his leg be cut off in that lamb-like manner if it had been Benjamin Sparks to do it?

"I was down at their place, and I heard when Dr. Luttrell said, 'Now, my man, you must just make up your mind, and be quick about it. Will you be a brave chap and part with this poor useless limb, or will you leave your poor wife to bring up six fatherless children? I am telling you the truth, Jem. If you will not consent to part with your leg, there is no chance for you.' Laws' sakes, you would have thought he was a grey-headed old fellow to hear him; it kind of made one jump to see his young, beardless face; but there, he was good to Jem Arkwright, that he was. Polly can't say enough for him. She fairly cries if one mentions his name.

"'I should have been Jem's widow but for Dr. Luttrell,' she said one day. 'Why, before he came in Jem was lying there vowing "that he had sooner die than part with his leg." It was the thought of the little uns that broke him. My Jem always had a feeling heart.'"

And other folks, although they had not Widow Bates's garrulous tongue, were ready enough to sing the doctor's praises.

When Dot was a year old and able to pull herself up by the help of her mother's hand, things were no better at the corner house. Olivia had even consulted her Aunt Madge about the advisability of sending Martha away and doing the work of the house herself.

"Martha is the best girl we have had yet," she said. "Marcus owned that yesterday. She is rough, but her ways are nicer than Anne's or Sally's, and she keeps herself clean; but then, Aunt Madge, she has such a good appetite, and one cannot stint growing girls."

"I should keep her a little longer," was Aunt Madge's reply to this. "It will only take the heart out of Marcus, knowing that you have to scrub and black-lead stoves, and he is discouraged enough already. When Dot is able to run about, you may be able to dispense with Martha's services," and Olivia returned a reluctant assent to this.

But her conscience was not quite satisfied. Even Aunt Madge, she thought, hardly knew how bad things really were.

Mrs. Broderick was a chronic invalid, and never went beyond the two rooms that made her little world. Most people would have considered it a dull, narrow life, and one hardly worth living; but the invalid would have contradicted this.

Madge Broderick had learned the secret of contentment; she had lived through great troubles—the loss of the husband she had idolised, and her only little child. Since then acute suffering that the doctors had been unable to relieve had wasted her strength. Nevertheless, there was a peaceful atmosphere in the sunshiny room, where she lay hour after hour reading and working with her faithful companion Zoe beside her.

Zoe was a beautiful brown-and-white spaniel, with eyes that were almost human in their soft

beseechingness, and Mrs. Broderick often lamented that she could not eulogise his doggish virtues as Mrs. Browning had immortalised her Flush.

Olivia was devoted to her Aunt Madge; they had a mutual admiration for each other's character, and her sister's child was dear to Mrs. Broderick's heart, and perhaps the saddest hours she ever spent now were passed in thinking over the young couple's future.

"I was wrong," she would say to herself, with a painful contraction of the brow. "I said too little at the time to discourage their marriage; if I had been firm and reasoned with the child, she would have listened to me. Livy is always so manageable, but I was a romantic old goose! And then she was in love, poor dear! And now—oh, it breaks one's heart to see their young anxious faces! I know so well what Marcus feels; he is ready to go out into the roads and break stones if he can only keep a roof over his wife's head." And there were tears in Madge Broderick's eyes as she took up her work.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

"I at least will do my duty."—*Caesar*.

Young Mrs. Luttrell stood at the window one November afternoon, buttoning her gloves in an absent and perfunctory manner, as she looked out at the slushy road and greasy pavement. There was a crinkle on her smooth broad forehead, and an uneasy expression in her eyes—as though some troublesome thought had obtruded itself—presently the crinkle deepened and widened into a frown, and she walked impatiently to the fireplace, where a black, uninviting fire smouldered in a cheerless sort of way, and took up the poker in rather an aggressive manner, then shook her head, as she glanced at the half-empty coal-scuttle.

She was cold, and the clinging damp peculiar to November made her shiver; but a cheery blaze would be too great a self-indulgence; left to itself the fire would last until tea-time—she would be back in plenty of time for Marcus's late tea—he should have a warm clear fire to welcome him and a plate of smoking French toast, because it was so economical and only took half the amount of butter. It had been a favourite delicacy in her nursery days, and the revival had given her great solace.

Yes, he should have his tea first, and then she would bring in the vexed subject for argument; in spite of Aunt Madge's well-meant advice, it was a foregone conclusion in Olivia's mind that Martha must go. Of course it was a pity. She liked the girl, she was so willing and good-tempered; and her round childish face was always well washed and free from smudges, and she was so good to Dot, caring for her as if she were a baby sister of her own. Nevertheless, stern in her youthful integrity, Olivia had already decided that Martha's hours at the corner house were numbered.

And then there was the stuff for Dot's new winter pelisse. Marcus would give her the few shillings without a murmur, she was sure of that, but he would sigh furtively as he counted out the coins. Whatever deprivations they might be called upon to endure their little one must be warmly clad.

She must do without her new pair of gloves, that was all, and here Olivia looked disconsolately at her worn finger-tips; she could ink the seams and use her old muff, and no one would notice; what was the use of buying new gloves, when her hands would soon be as red and rough as Martha's. Olivia was just a little vain of her hands; they were not small, but the long slender fingers with almond-shaped nails were full of character, and Marcus had often praised them.

For his sake she would try to take care of them, but black-leading stoves and washing Dot's little garments would not help to beautify them. Of course, it was nonsense to care about such trifles, she must be strong-minded and live above such sublunary things. Marcus would only honour her the more for her self-forgetfulness and labours of love. Here the pucker vanished from Olivia's brow, and a sweet, earnest look came to her face.

The next moment her attention was distracted; a tall old man in a great-coat with a fur-lined collar passed the window; he was a little bent and walked feebly, leaning on a gold-headed stick.

Olivia watched him until he was out of sight; for some occult reason, not comprehensible even to her, she felt interested in the old man, although she had never spoken to him; but he looked old and ill and lonely; three decided claims on Olivia's bountiful and sympathetic nature.

She knew his name—Mr. Gaythorne—he was a neighbour of theirs, and he lived at Galvaston House, the dull-looking red brick house, with two stone lions on the gate-posts.

Olivia had amused her husband more than once with imaginary stories about their neighbour. "He was a miser—a recluse—a misanthrope—he had a wife in a lunatic asylum—he had known some great

trouble that had embittered his life; he had made a vow never to let a human being cross his threshold; he was a Roman Catholic priest in disguise, an Agnostic, a Nihilist." There was no end to Olivia's quaint surmises, but she could only be certain of two facts—that the mysterious Mr. Gaythorne was methodical by nature, and whatever might be the weather always took his exercise at the same hour, and also that only tradespeople entered the lion-guarded portals of Galvaston House.

Olivia had only once come face to face with him. She was hurrying along one afternoon, when in turning a corner she almost ran against him, and pulled herself up with a confused word of apology.

A suppressed grunt answered her, a singular old face, with bright, deeply-sunken eyes, and a white, peaked beard and moustache seemed to rise stiffly from the fur-lined collar; then the old man's hand touched his slouched hat mechanically, and he walked on. It was that night that Olivia was convinced that Mr. Gaythorne was a Nihilist and an Agnostic, and hinted darkly at the storage of dynamite and infernal machines in the cellars of Galvaston House.

"My dear child, you might write a novel," had been her husband's remark on this. "Your imagination is really immense," but in spite of sarcasm and gibes on Marcus's part, Olivia chose to indulge in these harmless fancies. She had always enjoyed making up stories about her neighbours, and it did no one any harm.

When Mr. Gaythorne was out of sight she went to the kitchen to take a last look at Dot, who was slumbering peacefully in her cot; the kitchen was the warmest place, and Martha could clean her knives and wash her plates and keep an eye on her.

Martha gave her usual broad grin when her mistress entered; the little handmaid adored her master and mistress and Dot. During her rare holiday she always entertained her mother and brothers and sisters with wonderful descriptions of her mistress's cleverness and Miss Baby's ways.

Martha had eleven brothers and sisters, and the house in Somers Row was not a luxurious abode. Her mother took in washing, and eleven brothers and sisters of all ages, and of every variety of snub-nose, made any sort of privacy impossible. Nevertheless, on her previous holiday, as Martha, or Patty, as they called her at home, sat in her best blue merino frock, with her youngest sister on her lap and a paper-bag of sugar-sticks for distribution to the family, there were few happier girls to be found anywhere.

"And I have brought you half-a-pound of really good tea, mother," observed Martha, proudly. "I knew what a treat that would be to you and father."

"You are a good girl, Patty," returned her mother, winking away the moisture in her eyes, as she went on with her ironing. "Amabel, don't you be trampling on Patty's best dress, there's a good little lass. Well, as I was saying, Patty, only the children do interrupt so. There, Joe and Ben, just take your sugar-sticks and be off to play. I think I have found a nice little place for Susan. She is to sleep at home, but will have all her meals and half-a-crown a week, and the lady will teach her everything; that is pretty fair for a beginning, and as father says, the money will just find her in shoe-leather and aprons. Father's looking out for a place for Joe now."

"I wish Susan could have a place like mine, mother," returned Martha, proudly. "They are real gentlefolks, that is what they are. 'Will you be so good as to clean my boots, Martha?' or 'Thank you, Martha,' when I dry the paper of a morning. Oh, it is like play living at the corner house, and as for that darling Miss Baby——" but here words failed Martha.

It could not be denied that Olivia was unusually depressed that afternoon, fog and damp always had this effect on her. Her nature needed sunshine and crisp, bracing air.

There was no buoyancy and elasticity in her tread. When people looked at her, as they often did, for her pliant, slim figure rather attracted notice, she thought they were only commenting on her old black hat and jacket. Only one article of her dress satisfied her; her boots were neat and strong. Marcus had found her one wet day warming her feet at the fire and had gone off to examine her boots without a word. Olivia had flushed up and looked uncomfortable when he came back with the boots in his hand.

"Do you want to be laid up with bronchitis or congestion of the lungs?" he asked, rather sadly, as he showed her the thin, worn soles; "do you think that will make things easier for me, Livy?" The next day he had taken her himself to the bootmaker's and had had her fitted with a serviceable stout pair.

Somehow in spite of her pleasure in the boots and Marcus's thoughtfulness she had felt rather like a scolded child.

Her unusual pessimism had a moment's distraction, for as she passed the print-shop, at the corner of Harbut Street, she saw her mysterious old gentleman standing still on the pavement fixedly regarding a small oil-painting.

Olivia had a good view of the lean, cadaverous face and peaked white beard; the heavy grey eyebrows seemed to beetle over the dark sunken eyes.

"After all he looks more like a Spaniard than a Russian," she thought, and again her theory of the Roman Catholic priest came into her mind. "If I could only see him without his hat, I should know if he had a tonsure," and then with youthful curiosity she looked to see what picture had interested him.

It was a small painting of the Prodigal Son, but was evidently by no amateur, the face of both father and son were admirably portrayed. The strong Syrian faces were mellowed by the ruddy gleams of sunset. A tame kid was gambolling behind them, and two women were grinding corn, with the millstone between them. On the flat white roof of the house, another woman had just laid aside her distaff in a hurry. The father's arms with their gold bracelets were clasping the gaunt, sharp shoulders of the starving youth.

Olivia knew the picture well. Marcus had been very much struck with it, it was good work, he said; the Syrian faces were perfect types, and he had made Olivia notice the strong resemblance between father and son.

"That is the mother, I suppose?" had been her comment; "she has just caught sight of them, there is a puzzled look in her eyes as she lays aside her distaff, as though she is not quite sure that that wild-looking figure in sheep-skin is her own long-lost son."

"It must be a grand thing to be an artist," was Marcus's reply to this. "Goddard, I do not know the name; the picture is cheap, too, only 25 pounds, but I would wager any money that it was painted in Syria."

Olivia stole a second glance at the old man, but he never moved; then she shivered, and walked faster. It was bitterly cold, a miserable afternoon for Marcus, who was visiting his poor patients in the squalid back streets and slums that fringed Brompton.

Mayfield Villas were about ten minutes' walk from Galvaston Terrace; the villas had verandahs and long, narrow gardens, but most of them had lodgings to let.

Mrs. Broderick and her maid occupied the first floor at number six, the drawing-room and back bedroom belonged to the invalid, and Deborah had a tiny room close by her mistress, the other room had been converted into a kitchen; none of the rooms were large, but they were well-furnished, and thoroughly comfortable. During her husband's lifetime Mrs. Broderick had been comfortably off, and had had a good house—the carved book-cases, Turkey-carpet, and deep easy-chairs, and a few proof-engravings handsomely framed, all spoke of better days.

When Olivia's foot sounded on the stairs, a tall, hard-featured woman came out of the kitchen.

"I knew it was you," she said. "Come in. My mistress is just wearying for you. She never sleeps in daylight, and it is ill-reading and working in the fading light. I will soon have the tea ready. I have been baking some scones."

Olivia sniffed the warm perfume delightedly. She was hungry, oh, so hungry! although two hours had not elapsed since dinner-time, and Deb's scones, with sweet, fresh country butter, was ambrosial food.

"Don't let Deb keep you with her chatter, come ben, my woman, as my poor Fergus would have said."

The voice was peculiarly youthful and melodious, the timbre exquisite in modulation and volume, but the face belonged to a woman aged more by pain and trouble than years.

Madge Broderick had never been a handsome woman, her nose was too long, and her skin too sallow for beauty, but her bright eyes and a certain gracefulness of figure, and her beautiful voice had been her charms. Fergus Broderick, a rough Scotchman, with a tongue as uncouth as his native dales, had fallen in love with her at their first meeting; he had been invited to dine at the house of the senior partner, in whose employ he was, and as the awkward, bashful young Scotchman entered the firelit room, a clear laugh from amongst a group of girls gathered round the hearth penetrated like music to his ear.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow," said the voice, with much pathos, "that I could say good-bye until the morrow; those are your sentiments, Katie, are they not?"

"Hush, Madge! here is Mr. Broderick waiting for us to speak to him," and the daughter of the house rose with a laugh to greet him.

When the lamps were lighted Fergus Broderick had scanned all the girlish faces with furtive eagerness. He had felt a shock of disappointment when the owner of the exquisite voice had revealed her identity. Madge's long nose and sallow skin were no beauties certainly; nevertheless, before the evening was over, Fergus Broderick knew he had found his mate; and for eight blissful years Madge dwelt in her woman's kingdom, and gathered more roses than thorns.

Her first trouble had been the loss of her boy; he had succumbed to some childish ailment; her husband's death—the result of an accident—had followed a few months later.

The strain of the long nursing and excessive grief had broken down Madge Broderick's strength. The seeds of an unsuspected disease latent in her system now showed itself, and for some two or three years her sufferings, both mental and physical, would have killed most women.

Then came alleviation and the lull that resembles peace; the pain was no longer so acute; the

disease had reached a stage when there would be days and even weeks of tolerable comfort; then Madge courageously set herself to make the most of her life.

With a courage that was almost heroic, she divided and subdivided the hours of each day—so many duties, so many hours of recreation. She had her charity work, her fancy work, her heavy and light reading; books and flowers were her luxuries; the newest books, the sweetest flowers, were always to be found on the table beside her couch.

Madge often said laughingly that she lived in a world of her own. "But I have very good society," she would add; "the best and wisest of all ages give me their company. This morning I was listening to Plato's Dialogues, and this afternoon Sir Edwin Arnold was entertaining me at the Maple Club in Tokio. This evening—well, please do not think me frivolous, but affairs at Rome and a certain Prince Saracinesca claim my attention.

"A good novel puts me in a better humour and disposes me to sleep, you know," she would finish, brightly, "that I always read aloud to Fergus in the evening; we were going through a course of Thackeray—we were in the middle of 'Philip on his way through the world' when the accident happened. After that he could only bear a few verses or a psalm."

CHAPTER III.

AUNT MADGE.

"It is more delightful and more honourable to give than receive."—*Epicurus*.

Most people thought it a strange thing that Mrs. Broderick spoke so constantly of her husband. Mrs. Tolman, the Vicar's wife, who was a frequent visitor, had been scandalised more than once, and had expressed herself rather strongly on the subject to her husband.

"I know you think very highly of poor Mrs. Broderick, Stephen, and so do I," she remarked one day. "Very few women would bear things in that quiet, uncomplaining way, and the amount of work she gets through is astonishing; but that perpetual dragging in of her husband's name seems to me such bad taste."

"Upon my word, Isabella, I cannot say that I agree with you." And the Vicar straightened himself on the rug in his favourite attitude. He was a heavy, ponderous man, with an expression of shrewd good sense on his face that won people's confidence. "I wish other women were as faithful to their husband's memory, that flighty little Mrs. Martin, for example."

"My dear Stephen, what an absurd idea! Fancy talking of Lydia Martin, every one knows she is making a dead set at Mr. Germaine, although poor Jack Martin has hardly been dead a year. She is Mrs. Broderick's exact opposite. Please do not misunderstand me in this tiresome way," and here Mrs. Tolman frowned slightly. "It is the manner in which Mrs. Broderick speaks of her husband that offends my tastes. In my opinion"—compressing her lips as she spoke—"our departed dear ones are sacred, and should not be mentioned in a secular manner."

At the word "secular" there was a twinkle in the Vicar's eyes, though he held his peace. And to tell the truth, Mrs. Tolman had been unable to find the expression she needed.

"But with Mrs. Broderick it is 'Fergus here' and 'Fergus there,' just as though he were alive and in the next room, and she was expecting him in every moment. Sometimes in the twilight it makes me quite creepy to hear her speaking in that sprightly voice, just as though she were making believe that he heard her."

"Poor soul!" was the Vicar's answer to this; but he was used to keeping his thoughts to himself—he and Mrs. Broderick understood each other perfectly. She had not a firmer friend in the world, unless it was her kind physician, Dr. Randolph. "Poor soul!" he repeated when his wife in silent dudgeon had retired from the room.

"It is not likely that Isabella would understand her; Mrs. Broderick is the bravest and the brightest woman I know, and yet the furnace was heated sevenfold for her. Make believe that he is alive! Why, he has never been dead to her! It is her vivid faith and her vivid imagination that has helped her to live all these years instead of lying there a crushed wreck for people to patronise and pity."

And here again there was a wicked little twinkle in the Vicar's eyes. Did he not know his Isabella, and how good she was to those who would allow her to advise and lecture them.

"Mrs. Broderick has just laughed and put her foot down, that is why Isabella is always complaining of her. They have not exactly hit it off." And here the Vicar laughed softly as he sat down to consider his

sermon.

"Aunt Madge, how cosy you look!" exclaimed Olivia, as she stood on the threshold of the warm firelit room; and then a swift transition of thought carried her back to the dismal little dining-room at Galvaston Terrace, with its black smouldering fire, and the damp clinging to the window-panes, and an involuntary shiver crossed her as she knelt down beside her aunt's couch.

"My dear Livy, you are a perfect iceberg!" exclaimed Mrs. Broderick. "No, you shall not kiss me again until you are warmer. Sit down in that easy-chair close to the fire where I can see you, and take that handscreen for the good of your complexion.—Now, Deb, bring the tea-things, like a good soul, for Mrs. Luttrell has made a poor dinner."

"How could you guess that, Aunt Madge? Are you a witch or a magician?" asked Olivia, in her astonished voice. It was pure guess-work on Mrs. Broderick's part, but as usual her keen wits had grazed the truth.

Olivia, who had a healthy girlish appetite, had risen from the midday meal almost as hungry as when she had sat down. The dish of hashed mutton had been small, and if Olivia had eaten her share, Martha would have fared badly. A convenient flower-pot, a gift from Aunt Madge, had prevented Marcus from seeing his wife's plate. Olivia, who had dined off potatoes and gravy, was already faint from exhaustion. As usual, she confessed the truth.

"It was my fault, Aunt Madge," she said, basking like a blissful salamander in the warm glow. "I ought to have known the meat would not go round properly; but happily Marcus did not notice, or else there would have been a fuss. He and Martha dined properly, and I mean to enjoy my tea."

But Mrs. Broderick's only answer was to ring her handbell.

"Deb, boil two of those nice new-laid eggs that Mrs. Broughton sent me. Mrs. Luttrell has had no dinner; if the scones are ready we will have tea at once." And as Deborah nodded and vanished, she shook her head a little sadly. "Olive dear, it won't pay; you are not the sort of person who can safely starve. I thought there was something wrong about you when you came in; you had a peaky, under-fed look. Oh, I thought so!" as the tears rose to Olivia's eyes. "Now, I am not going to say another word until you have had your tea. Look at Zoe; she thinks you are in trouble about something, and wants to lick your face. Is not the sympathy of a dumb creature touching? They don't understand what is wrong, but they see plainly that their human friend is unhappy. Come to me, Zoe, and I will explain matters. It is not much of a trouble. Olive is not really miserable; she is only cold and hungry and weak, and wants petting and cosseting."

"I think I am rather unhappy, Aunt Madge," returned Olivia, in a sad voice. "Things are getting worse, and Marcus looks so careworn; he was talking in his sleep last night. We have so little money left—only just enough for six months' rent and the coals, and ever so little for housekeeping, and no patients come, and now I have made up my mind to tell him to-night that Martha must go."

"My dear Olivia, we talked that over a few weeks ago, and we decided then that you had better keep her."

"Yes, Aunt Madge, I know; but indeed, indeed we cannot afford her food—these growing girls must be properly fed, and the amount of bread and butter she eats would astonish Deb——" and here Olivia heaved a harassed sigh.

"Well, well, we will talk it over again"—and then Deb brought in the tea-things, and the scones, and the new-laid eggs, and as Mrs. Broderick sipped her tea it did her kind heart good to see how her niece enjoyed the good things before her.

"There now, you feel ever so much better," she said, when the meal was finished. "Now we can talk comfortably. I have been thinking over what you have said, and I suppose you are right from your point of view, and that if you cannot afford Martha's food she must go, but I have been thinking of Marcus. He is at the turning-point of his career. Everything depends on his making a practice. When patients send for him, and they will send for him by-and-by, do you think it will look well for his wife to open the door to them."

"But, Aunt Madge——"

"Olive, you were always a good, honest little girl, and you have grown up an honest woman; you want to do your duty and slave for Marcus and Dot, and you have begun nobly by starving yourself until you are on the verge of an hysterical attack, but we must think of Marcus. Martha must not go, at least, not until the winter is over. I have been saving a few pounds for your Christmas present I meant you to have had a new dress and jacket, and a few other little things you needed; but if you like to pay Martha's wages with it until Easter you can please yourself—only take it and say no more—what, crying again! What nonsense, as though I may not give my own niece a little present."

"It is the goodness and the kindness," returned Olivia, with a low sob. "Aunt Madge, why are you so good to me? You have saved all this, and you have so little to spare—as though I do not know what a small income you really have."

"It is a very respectable income, and my dear Fergus worked hard to make it. I never professed to

be a rich woman, but I have everything I want. If people would only cut their coat by their cloth, as Fergus used to say, there would be less distress in the world; well, my wants are few; I have no milliner's bills;" here there was a gleam of fun in the invalid's eyes. "No smart bonnets or fashionable mantles needed at this establishment; only just a cosy tea-gown now and then when the old one is too shabby. Come, Olive, are you not going to count your money?" And then Olivia emptied the contents of the little purse on her lap.

"Well?" as the slim fingers sorted the gold and silver; "will there be enough for Martha's wages until Easter?"

"Yes, indeed, Aunt Madge, and there will be some over. I can buy the stuff for baby's winter pelisse without troubling Marcus, and do you know," knitting her brows in careful calculation, "I do believe that with a little contrivance and management I can get some new trimming for my Sunday hat, and a pair of chevrette gloves; good chevrette gloves are dear, but they wear splendidly, and a pair would last me most of the winter—yes," her eyes brightening, "I am sure I could do it; it does fret Marcus so to see me shabby."

Mrs. Broderick nodded in a sympathising way—she knew the joy of these small economies and contrivances; the little purse of savings had not been gathered together without some self-denial; but as she saw the lovely rainbow smile on Olivia's face, she felt that she had her reward.

"This is my red-letter day," she said, quaintly; "it is always a red-letter day when I can really help someone. I have my black-letter days when I can do nothing special, when it is all noughts and crosses in my diary, I have had my Christmas treat beforehand, and I shall be quite happy till bed-time thinking about Dot's pelisse and the new hat-trimming; by-the-bye, what colour is the pelisse to be?"

"Blue, baby is so fair, and blue suits her best; I think I shall get some cotton-backed velvet just to trim it;—I must not dream of fur."

"How would miniver look round the cape and neck? I have two or three yards in very good condition. Deb picked it off my wadded satin mantle years ago. I was keeping it for some special occasion. If you buy a really good cashmere, and trim it with my old miniver, Dot will have a grand pelisse," and then Mrs. Broderick hunted in her key-basket for a certain key, and instructed her niece to unlock a drawer in her wardrobe.

It was growing late by this time, and Olivia was obliged to take her leave. Marcus had promised to be back by seven, and it was six o'clock now; but as she walked briskly through the quiet streets she felt as light-hearted as a child.

What a happy evening she and Marcus would spend! There would be no need now to tell him about Martha, or to beg him to give her the few shillings for Dot's pelisse; he should have a nice tea. Aunt Madge had made her take a couple of the new-laid eggs and a pot of Deb's delicious marmalade home with her, and she knew how Marcus would enjoy the little treat.

"Dear Aunt Madge, how I love her? I think she is the very best woman in the world;" but here Olivia gave a surprised start. She had reached the print-shop at the corner of Harbut Street, and in the strong glare of the gas-lamp she distinctly saw the tall, bent form of her mysterious neighbour.

He was coming out of the shop, and walking stiffly and with difficulty in the direction of his house. She had never known him out so late before. His afternoon walk was always timed for him to be back by four. She glanced at the shop window, but there was no picture of "The Prodigal Son" to be seen.

Had he bought it? Was this the reason why he was out so late? Olivia felt a little anxious as she noticed how feebly he walked; the greasy pavements were rather slippery, and Galvaston Terrace was not a well-lighted thoroughfare. Perhaps it was nonsense, but she would not enter her house until she had seen him safely across the road, and within the lion-guarded portals.

It was just kindly womanly instinct, but all her life long Olivia was glad that she had yielded to that impulse. She was still standing upon the step, and the old man was nearly across the road, when she saw him slip. A piece of orange-peel on the curb had escaped him in the darkness, and he had put his foot on the slippery substance. Olivia gave a quick exclamation as she saw him try to recover his balance, and then fall forward rather heavily. No one was passing just then, and happily the road was clear of vehicles. Olivia ran across and picked up his stick, then she took him by the arm and helped him to rise.

"I trust you have not hurt yourself," she said, anxiously. "Please do not be afraid of leaning on me, I am very strong. Ah," as the old man uttered a groan, "you have injured yourself in some way. The curb is rather steep just here."

"It is my ankle, but I must get home somehow. You are very good, madam; if you will allow me to take your arm, I think I can manage those few yards. I live there," pointing to the grim doorway.

"Yes, I know: Mr. Gaythorne, of Galvaston House; we are neighbours of yours, and I have seen you come out of the house frequently. Shall I ring the bell for you, and perhaps"—hesitating a little, as though she were taking a liberty—"you will allow me to go as far as the hall-door with you."

But to her alarm the old man suddenly stood still. It was pitchy dark under the overhanging trees,

and only a faint gleam from a large bow window showed her the length of the garden-path that they would have to traverse.

"I can do no more," he said, faintly; "I believe I have broken my ankle. Mrs. Crampton and the maids must find some way of getting me in. Perhaps, madam, you will be so good as to explain the matter to them. I see the door is open," and Olivia at once left him and went up to the house.

"Your master has met with a slight accident," she said to the astonished maid. "He has fallen and hurt his foot, and it is quite impossible for him to walk up to the house. He mentioned Mrs. Crampton; perhaps you will ask her what is to be done," and the girl, a good-natured, buxom country lass, at once ran off.

Olivia stood patiently for a few minutes. The hall with its handsome rugs and blazing fire looked delightfully inviting. A lean, old hound, stretched on a tiger skin, turned its head and then rose stiffly and came towards her. As its slender nose touched her dress, she saw the poor thing was blind. The next moment a cheerful-looking, grey-haired woman hurried towards her, followed by two maids.

"What is it that Phoebe tells me, ma'am; Mr. Gaythorne has met with an accident? Times out of number I have begged and prayed him not to go out alone; but he was not to be persuaded."

"He is down there by the gate, the trees hide him," returned Olivia, hastily. "I think it would be best to take an arm-chair, if you think we could carry him in. He is in dreadful pain and cannot walk a step farther."

"Phoebe, tell cook to light the lantern, and then you two girls bring one of the study chairs—the lantern first, mind.

"Now, ma'am, perhaps we had better find my master, and the lasses will follow us. There are four of us, and Mr. Gaythorne is not so very heavy, and we will have him on the library couch in no time."

CHAPTER IV.

DR. LUTTRELL'S FIRST PATIENT.

"Sudden the worst, turns the best to the brave,"—*Browning*.

Olivia felt as if she were dreaming as she followed the little procession down the dark garden-path. Once she pinched her wrist slightly to assure herself that she was awake. Mrs. Crampton held the lantern, and the cook and the two maids carried the arm-chair, with jolting uneven footsteps, that brought a suppressed groan to Mr. Gaythorne's lips. As they lifted him on the couch he looked so white that Olivia thought he was going to faint, and begged the housekeeper to give him some wine; he was evidently in severe pain.

"It would be better not to touch the foot until the doctor comes," she observed. And then Mrs. Crampton looked perplexed.

"My master does not hold with doctors, ma'am. I don't remember one ever crossing the threshold since poor Miriam had typhoid fever. The foot is swelling already, and it will be a job to get the boot off. Ah, I thought so"—as Mr. Gaythorne winced and motioned her away—"he will be afraid of one touching it!"

"My husband lives just opposite—the corner house with the red lamp in Harbut Street. He is a doctor and very clever, and I am nearly sure that he is in just now." Olivia spoke a little breathlessly and anxiously; then she bent over the old man.

"If Mrs. Crampton does not know of another doctor would you mind one of the maids running across the road for Dr. Luttrell? You are suffering so much, and your foot ought to be treated at once. It is impossible for any one to know if it be only a sprain until the boot is removed. You fell so heavily that perhaps a small bone might be broken."

"Yes—send—send," returned the invalid, irritably. "Clear the room, Crampton. You know that I hate to have a parcel of women round me.—There is no need for you to go, madam"—with an attempt at civility as Olivia was about to withdraw at this plain speaking. "Give the lady a chair, Phoebe."

But Olivia, who had excellent tact, only smiled pleasantly, and shook her head.

"I think it will be best for me to send the doctor across, there is nothing that I can do for you until he comes."

She took the old man's hand as she spoke and pressed it gently.

"I am so sorry to leave you in such pain, but I hope you will soon be relieved. Perhaps you will not mind my inquiring another day, but a stranger is only in the way to-night."

Olivia's soft, well-modulated voice was so full of kindly sympathy, that Mr. Gaythorne opened his weary eyes again.

"Thank you," was all he said; but he watched her keenly as she crossed the long room.

Olivia walked so quickly that she was almost out of breath when she reached her own door. The dining-room looked cold and comfortless. Martha was on her knees before the fireplace trying to revive the blackened embers with the help of the kitchen bellows, and Dr. Luttrell, with a tired face and puckered brow, was watching the proceedings somewhat impatiently. A tallow candle was guttering uncomfortably on the table.

"Is the fire out? Oh, Marcus, I am so sorry, but Martha and I will soon put things to rights. Will you go across to Galvaston House at once, please?"—and here Olivia's voice was full of suppressed excitement. "Mr. Gaythorne has slipped against the curb and hurt his foot; he is in great pain. I have been helping him, and then I said I would send you. I have left the gate open so you can just go up to the door."

Marcus listened to these details with an astonished face; then he caught up his black bag and nodded acquiescence. The tired frown left his face, and he moved away with his quiet, professional step.

Olivia watched him from the doorstep. As she closed the door after him, she could have clapped her hands with sheer delight and excitement. It was her doing that Marcus had his first patient. Those foolish maids would never have thought of sending for him. Dot was awake and singing to herself in her usual chuckling fashion in the firelight, but Olivia had no time to play with her pet.

"The bellows are no good, Martha," she said, quickly. "You must just fetch a bundle of sticks and a newspaper, and relay the fire, while I kindle the lamp and set the table for tea; the room feels like a vault."

"There is a good fire in the kitchen, ma'am, if you want to make toast," observed Martha, rising reluctantly from her knees; "I have been ironing Miss Baby's pinnys." Olivia, who was drawing the heavy curtain across the window, was relieved to hear this.

In another quarter of an hour the little room wore a more cheerful aspect. The sticks crackled and blazed lustily; the green-shaded lamp diffused a mellow light. The tea-tray was set and the plate of French toast was frizzling gently on a brass trivet. At the sound of her master's footstep Martha had orders to fill up the teapot and boil the eggs.

After this Olivia played with Dot, and undressed her, and then brought her in to say good-night to her father. But she waxed sleepy long before he let himself in with his latch-key.

Marcus paused on the threshold a moment as though something struck him. Olivia's face looked fair and sweet as she sat in her low chair with the sleepy child in her arms. She put back her head with a soft questioning smile as he bent down to kiss her face.

"Dot is nearly asleep, but I had not the heart to put her in her cot until you had seen her; tea is quite ready, and Martha is boiling some new-laid eggs. Aunt Madge has sent you, too, a pot of her home-made marmalade, because she knows how fond you are of it. Sit down and begin, I shall not be a moment," and Olivia's voice was so full of suppressed excitement, that Marcus laughed as he drew his chair to the table; he was tired and hungry, but he no longer felt impatient and depressed.

"Now tell me everything," she exclaimed, when she came back. "What have you done? Was the foot very bad? Will you have to go to Galvaston House again?"

"Rather!" returned Marcus; "it is a pretty bad sprain, I can tell you. Why, I should not be surprised if Mr. Gaythorne is laid up for the next two or three weeks; he is not in good condition and the shaking and fright have upset him. He will want good nursing and plenty of attention, as I told his housekeeper. I am going again early in the morning."

"And was he civil to you? Mrs. Crampton says he hates doctors," and Olivia's tone was a trifle anxious.

"Well, he was a bit grumpy at first, but I had my work to do, and took no notice, but when I had helped him upstairs and put him comfortable for the night, he waxed a shade more gracious and thanked me quite civilly. I fancy he is a character and has lived so long alone that he has grown morose and unsociable. That blind hound of his followed us upstairs and would not leave him. Did you notice him, Livy?"

"Yes; and is it not a nice house, Marcus? That library is a beautiful room. All those hundreds of well-bound books, and the massive oak furniture. I had not time to notice things, but I could not help feeling how deliciously soft and warm the carpets felt to one's feet, and then those lovely rugs and skins

in the hall."

"His bedroom was just as luxurious. Mr. Gaythorne is evidently a rich man, though he keeps no carriage. Mrs. Crampton told me so. He is very fond of flowers; there is a sort of conservatory on the first floor full of beautiful plants, and an alcove where he can sit and enjoy them. I could not help stopping a moment to admire them, but Mrs. Crampton did not invite me to go in. You may depend upon it the old gentleman is a strict martinet, and rules his household with a rod of iron. Mrs. Crampton seems a good creature, but he spoke pretty sharply to her once or twice."

"But he was in such pain, Marcus."

"Yes, my dear, I know that. Oh, by-the-bye, he sent his compliments to you. 'I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Luttrell, and I trust that I shall soon have an opportunity of thanking her properly for her kind helpfulness.' There, Livy, now we shall hear no more of the Nihilist or the Roman priest."

Dr. Luttrell was in spirits; it was easy to see that. The first patient, the first brief, the first book—aye, and the first love. What a halo remains round them!

Our first-fruits may be immature, unripe, but to us they have a goodly flavour, a subtle, sweet aroma of their own. All through his successful life Dr. Luttrell will look back to this evening as the turning-point of his career, when; he stood cold and tired watching Martha's bellows, and his wife's voice with a triumphant ring in it had called to him from the threshold.

Marcus's first piece of good luck had so absorbed them that it was some time before Olivia remembered to tell him about Aunt Madge's present. Marcus forgot to go on with his tea when he saw the little heap of coins in his wife's hand. Martha's wages, Dot's pelisse, and even the gloves and new hat-trimming were all duly canvassed. When Marcus said, abruptly, "Aunt Madge is a trump," his glistening eyes were eloquent enough. They had so much to discuss that it was nearly bedtime before he offered to go on with the book he was reading aloud, but after all they were neither in the mood for other people's stories.

In youth life is so interesting. No chapters of past memories, no wide experiences are so beguiling and absorbing. "Oh, we lived then." How often we hear that phrase, as the old man looks back over a long life, to the time when lad's love filled his days with sunshine.

When Marcus lay awake that night there was no deadly coldness at his heart, no lurking demon of despondency, waiting for the small dark hours to assail him. On the contrary, hope with seraph wings fanned him blissfully. Marcus Luttrell was young, but he was no coward. For two years he had waited patiently until the tide should turn. "Wait till the clouds roll by," he used to say, cheerily, but only his wife guessed how he was really losing heart, as day after day and month after month passed and no paying patients presented themselves at the corner house at Galvaston Terrace.

Olivia was at the window the following morning with Dot in her arms. As Dr. Luttrell, with his shabby black bag crossed the road, he looked back once, and Dot kissed her dimpled hand to him. Olivia, who admired her husband with all her honest girlish heart, watched eagerly until the slight, well-built figure passed between the stone lions.

"If he were only a little older-looking," she thought, regretfully, but his smooth face and fair hair gave him a boyish look.

It was absurd, of course, but she could settle to nothing until he came back; but Marcus, who had a bad accident case on his mind, was in too great a hurry to satisfy his wife's curiosity. "The foot was going on as well as he expected, but Mr. Gaythorne was unable to leave his bed. He was going again in the evening, and now he must be off to the model lodging-house to see if the poor fellow had pulled through the night."

Olivia had planned out her morning. She had her marketing to do, and her purchases to make. Then it was only right to go round and tell Aunt Madge of the wonderful piece of good fortune that had befallen them.

Mrs. Broderick was unfeignedly pleased. "Still, Olive," she remarked, with commendable prudence, "one swallow does not make a summer."

"No, Aunt Madge, of course not; but, as Marcus says, one patient brings others. Galvaston House is a big place, and when the neighbours see him going in and out, it will be a sort of testimonial; besides, I shall quote Deb's favourite proverb, 'Every mickle makes a muckle.' Now I really must go, for I want to cut out Dot's pelisse."

"And the dinner, Olive; are you sure it will go round to-day?"

Then Olivia laughed in a shamefaced way.

"Yes, indeed; I have been dreadfully extravagant, and we are going to have steaks and chips because it is Marcus's favourite dish, and Martha does it so well. There is a whole pound of steak and just a little over. I saw it cut myself, and it was such good weight." And hesitating a little, "There are currant dumplings too."

"Come—this is feasting indeed!"

But Aunt Madge smiled a little sadly when she found herself alone.

"Does Olive half realise how happy she is!" she said to herself. "She is a rich woman in spite of all her poverty and cares. When one has youth and love and health and a good conscience, every day is a feast and a delight. One day Marcus will drive in his carriage and pair. He is a clever fellow and there is real grit in him, and people will find it out, they always do. And Olive will wear silk dresses, and get stout with prosperity and good living; but I doubt if she will be quite as happy as she is to-day—cutting out Dot's pelisse, and enjoying her day-dreams."

And very probably Mrs. Broderick was right. Marcus was more communicative that evening when he returned from his second visit to Galvaston House. Mr. Gaythorne was not exactly an ideal patient; he had a will and a temper of his own, and already his opinion clashed with his doctor's.

Marcus had laid great stress on perfect rest. He wished his patient to remain in bed for the next two or three days, but Mr. Gaythorne perversely refused to do anything of the kind; he would put on his dressing-gown and lie on the couch. He hated bed in the daytime—it made him nervous, and spoilt his night's sleep.

"I shall have to give in to him," went on Marcus, a little irritably. "If I were in good practice I should just throw up the case. 'My good sir,' I should say, 'if you will not follow my directions it will be useless for me to prescribe for you. My professional reputation is at stake, and I cannot stand by and see you retard your cure.' Can't you fancy me saying it, Livy?"—and Marcus tossed back his wave of hair in his old boyish way.

"Yes, dear; but people will soon find out what a splendid doctor you are; and so that poor glazier in the Models will recover, you think?"

"Yes, I hope so; the chances are in his favour, poor chap; it was hard lines crashing through the roof of that conservatory. If I had not been on the spot he would have bled to death before they could have got him to a hospital. You might go and see them, Livy; they are decent people. She is a pleasant, hard-working young woman, and they have two little children, and the place is as clean as possible. I told Mr. Gaythorne about them just to amuse him, but he only grunted and looked bored. By-the-way, you are right in one of your surmises—he has bought your favourite picture of the Prodigal Son. It was on a chair beside his bed, and he consulted me as to where he could have it hung. I was going to suggest over the mantel-piece, but then I saw there was a large picture there with a silk curtain over it."

"That must be his wife's picture, Marcus. How nice of him to have curtains over it!"

"Very nice if we could be sure that Mr. Gaythorne has been married and had a wife," he returned, a little dryly; "but I should not be surprised to find that he was an old bachelor; he is far too fussy and precise for a widower. But, my dear child, we are getting into very gossiping ways, and I must really get on with that book Aunt Madge lent us." And then Olivia consented to hold her tongue and let him read aloud to her as usual.

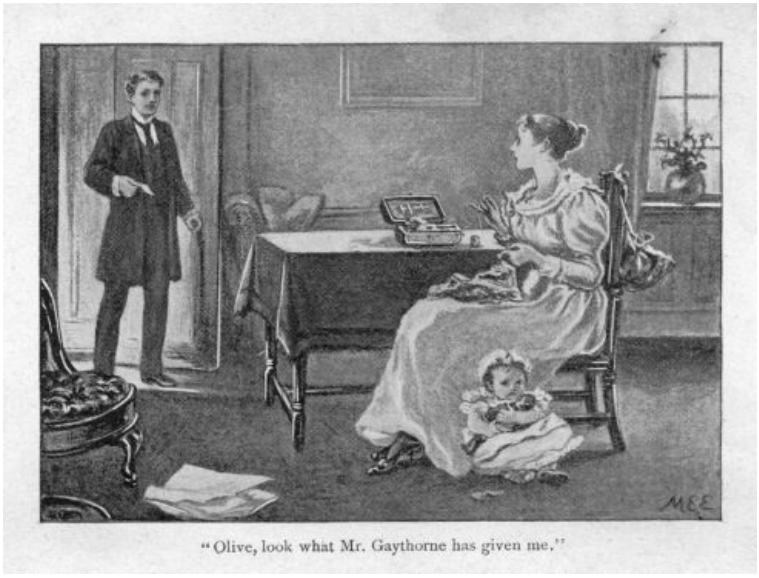
CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO GALVASTON HOUSE.

"He who knows how to speak knows also when to speak."—*Plutarch*.

The next morning as Olivia sat at work with Dot on the rug at her feet, playing with a limp furry monkey, over which she was gurgling and cooing like a baby dove, Dr. Luttrell entered the room; there was a pleased look on his face.

"Olive," he said, "look what Mr. Gaythorne has given me for poor Jack Travers," and he held a five-pound note before his wife's eyes. "Don't you think we owe him a handsome apology for calling him a miser? it does not do to judge by appearances in this world; Mr. Gaythorne is eccentric, and a trifle cantankerous, but he is not stingy."



"Olive, look what Mr. Gaythorne has given me."

"Olive, look what Mr. Gaythorne has given me."

"Jack Travers! is that the poor man in the Models? Oh, Marcus, how splendid of him to give all that; it will be quite a fortune to the poor things."

"Yes, it will pay their rent until Travers gets about again; he is not going to die this journey. Was it not liberal of the old fellow? but if you had only seen the way he gave it to me, as though he were ashamed of the whole thing.

"'That is for the man you told me about last night,' he said, in quite a grumpy voice; and he had hardly seemed as though he had listened yesterday; and he would not let me thank him, he turned testy at once; by-the-bye, Livy, he wants you to go and see him; you have evidently won his heart, my dear. 'If Mrs. Luttrell has half an hour's leisure I shall be pleased to see her,' those were his very words."

"I hope you told him that it would be rather difficult to find leisure with all my numerous engagements," returned Olivia, saucily, "but that I would do my best for him. How many callers have we had since we were married, Marcus? let me see, the Vicar and Mrs. Tolman, oh, and one day Mrs. Tolman brought a friend. I remember how excited I was that afternoon, and that horrid little Sarah Jane had her sleeves rolled up to her elbows when she opened the door, and I dared not offer them tea because I knew she would never have had boiling water. Oh, yes," continued Olivia, merrily, "I will look over my visiting list, and see how I am to squeeze in a call at Galvaston House. What hour do you think would suit him best, Marcus?"

Then Dr. Luttrell, who had been much amused by his wife's drollery, gravely considered the point.

"About three o'clock, I should say; I think he wants to show you his flowers; he is going to have his couch wheeled into the conservatory, or his winter garden, as he calls it. Why should you not go across this afternoon? Now I must be off to the Models;" and as Olivia took up her work again there was a soft flush on her cheek, and a happy look in her eyes as she listened to his light springing tread.

"Dear Marcus," she said to herself; "how pleased he is about this, it has done him good already. Oh, how I hope Mr. Gaythorne will take a fancy to him; he is rich and liberal, I am sure of that; he will pay Marcus well, and perhaps before long someone else will send for him. What, Dot, my sweet, must I love Jacko too?" as Dot laid her treasure on her mother's lap.

When Olivia rang at the bell of Galvaston House that afternoon the same rosy-cheeked maid admitted her.

"If you will step into the library a minute, ma'am," she observed, "I will tell Mrs. Crampton," and Olivia was left alone in the beautiful room she remembered so well.

A bright fire burned cheerily on the hearth and the blind hound lay on the rug; he came up to Olivia and thrust his slender nose into her hand in a friendly fashion. It was in this room that Mr. Gaythorne evidently passed his days; the tables bore signs of his numerous occupations; one table seemed loaded with books of reference. A pile of neatly written manuscripts were on the escritoire. Portfolios of engravings and a microscope on a pedestal stand occupied one corner, and a small inner room seemed full of cabinets and cases of stuffed birds and butterflies.

Mr. Gaythorne was evidently a collector and a man of culture; the volumes in the carved oak book-cases were mostly bound in Russian calf. Olivia had only time to read a few titles when Mrs. Crampton appeared; her comely face had a pleased smile on it.

"Mr. Gaythorne will be extremely obliged if you will step upstairs and see him, ma'am," she said, civilly; "he has been wheeled into the conservatory; my master thinks a deal of his flowers—books and flowers—they are his main amusements when his cough keeps him from going out Oh! you must come

too, Eros, of course," as the hound followed them closely.

Galvaston House had been built in rather an unusual fashion; a conservatory had been thrown out at the back of the first floor landing and ran along one side of the house, forming a sort of verandah to the lower rooms.

As Mrs. Crampton opened the glass door, the warm fragrant air met them deliciously. At the farther end Mr. Gaythorne lay on a couch under a tall palm, with an oriental quilt thrown over him; his dark crimson dressing-gown, and black velvet cap gave him a picturesque appearance; with his white peaked beard and moustache, and his dark sunken eyes, he would have passed for a Venetian Doge; the mass of brilliant bloom, and the warm flower-scented air made Olivia slightly giddy.

"This is very kind of you, Mrs. Luttrell," observed Mr. Gaythorne, in a slow, precise voice, as she stooped over him and took his hand. "Crampton, bring a chair for the lady. I have been wanting to thank you for your kind assistance that unlucky evening. I told the doctor so, and he has been good enough to give you my message."

"Indeed, I did very little," returned Olivia, in her mellow voice. "You seemed so feeble that I could not help watching you cross the road; and then you slipped, and I felt you had hurt yourself. I fear from what my husband tells me that it will be some little time before you will be able to get out again."

"So he says, and he threatens me with crutches," returned the old man, grimly; "but, as I seldom cross the threshold in winter, I need not trouble myself about that. Are you fond of flowers, Mrs. Luttrell?" as Olivia's eyes wandered to the splendid exotics round her. "Crampton shall cut you some presently. My library and my winter garden form my entire world now."

"And you live among all these lovely things!" observed Olivia, almost in a tone of awe. "Oh, if only Aunt Madge could see these flowers!"

She spoke impulsively without considering her words, and blushed a little when she saw Mr. Gaythorne lift his eyebrows cynically.

"I was only thinking of my aunt, Mrs. Broderick," she said, apologetically. "She is such a sad invalid; she has never been out once since Uncle Fergus died, and that is ever so many years ago, and she suffers such dreadful pain sometimes. The doctors say her complaint is incurable, and she is not at all old. She lives all alone with her maid, and never goes beyond her two rooms, and yet no one hears her complain."

"Mrs. Broderick must be a wonderful person. She beats Job," returned Mr. Gaythorne, with a cynical curl of his lip; but Olivia was too much engrossed with her subject to notice it.

"Oh, she is wonderful!" she returned, earnestly. "I never met any one like her. She is the bravest woman I know. Even the Vicar says so. Don't you love pluck, Mr. Gaythorne? So few people are plucky in that sense. Aunt Madge has lost everything she cares for—husband and child and health; but she bears it all so beautifully, and makes the best of things. I could not help thinking of her when I saw all those lovely flowers; she simply dotes on flowers! There are always some on her little table; flowers and books, those are her sole pleasures."

"What on earth made you hold forth on Aunt Madge's virtues, you absurd child?" was Marcus's comment when Olivia repeated this portion of her conversation. "Fancy entertaining Mr. Gaythorne with an account of your relations!"—and Olivia blushed guiltily.

"It does sound odd if you put it in that way, Marcus," she returned; "but when I saw all those beautiful flowers, Aunt Madge just jumped into my head, and I always do speak out my thoughts so. But I could see he was interested. He said little sharp sneering things at first, but afterwards he questioned me a good deal. Oh, we got on splendidly! He began asking me about ourselves, and if you had much of a practice. Oh, he said it quite nicely!" as Marcus dropped the loaf he was cutting and frowned anxiously. "He was quite gentlemanly, and only hinted at things; but I understood him, of course."

"And you told him, I suppose, that he was my first patient," in an annoyed tone. "You may as well own it, Livy; you are honest enough even for that," and there was no denying that Marcus's voice was decidedly sarcastic. With all her virtues Olivia never did know when to hold her tongue.

"Oh, Marcus dear, how could I help it," replied Olivia, nervously. "Of course I had to tell him that we were just beginners, and how Dr. Slade had deceived us; that there was no redress, as he was dead. But I told him, too, how hard you worked among the poor—— He did not say much. I don't think he is a great talker, but he stroked that funny beard of his and nodded his head. Then when Mrs. Crampton came up he told her to bring coffee, and he made me stay and pour it out for him. There was such a lovely chased coffee-pot and cream-jug, and such delicious cakes, and when I said at last that I must go he thanked me quite pleasantly. 'It is long since I have been so well amused, and I hope you will come and see me again.' Yes, he said that, Marcus, so I am sure he did not mind my frankness. But oh, dear! he quite forgot to tell Mrs. Crampton to cut me some flowers."

"You need not expect any flowers now," returned her husband, impatiently. "You have done for yourself and me too I expect. A beginner you said, Livy, and you a sensible woman! When I go this evening, I have no doubt I shall be civilly told that a second opinion will be desirable. My dear girl, don't you know that a modest reticence, a judicious silence, is sometimes the safest policy. A

professional beggar may whine and show his sores, but a needy doctor out at elbows must wear a good appearance;" but Olivia, who was on the verge of tears from sheer vexation at her own impulsiveness, did not seek to defend herself.

If she had imperilled Marcus's professional reputation by her carelessness, she felt she should never hold up her head again, but Marcus, who was tired and a little out of humour, was not disposed to comfort her.

He had had a worrying day among his poor patients, the one bright spot had been his visit to the Models, when Jack Travers had sobbed and broken down in the attempt to speak his gratitude. And now just as they were getting on so well, Olivia's want of tact and that terribly honest tongue of hers had spoilt everything. Was it likely—was it within the bounds of possibility—that a man of the world—a rich man too—would be content with the services of an unknown practitioner? If he put himself in Mr. Gaythorne's place, he knew that he should be disposed to request Dr. Bevan to call. It was not only a sprained ankle. Mr. Gaythorne was an ailing man, and needed medical care. Marcus, who was clever and quick-witted, had already formed a pretty correct diagnosis of the case. "There is mental as well as physical trouble," he had said to himself the previous evening, and with professional reticence he had kept this opinion to himself, but he was already deeply interested in his patient. So much was at stake, and their fortunes were at so low an ebb, that Marcus might be pardoned for his unusual touchiness. Yet when he left the room without further remark, Olivia's heart sank within her.

"Why could I not have held my tongue," she thought, with tardy repentance. "What could have induced me to talk so much, but Mr. Gaythorne really seemed interested, and somehow he encouraged me to go on. If he had appeared bored or tired I should have stopped at once, but he seemed so curious about Aunt Madge, he even asked if she had a good doctor. Oh, dear, surely that is not Marcus going out!" as the street door opened; and now there were actual tears in Olivia's eyes.

In all the two years of their happy married life they had never had more than a momentary misunderstanding. If a hasty word had been uttered by one of them, the other had always an eager protest or a smooth answer ready. When Olivia had been impatient and captious, Marcus had only laughed and coaxed her into good humour again. And even when he had indulged in a few sarcastic speeches, Olivia's soft voice and ready acquiescence had avoided friction.

Marcus often told her that they were a model couple, and had earned the Dunmow Flitch over and over again, but in reality their mutual respect and thorough understanding of each other's salient points had conduced to this harmony.

That Marcus should leave the house therefore without speaking to her alarmed Olivia excessively. She must have vexed him, indeed, if he could do such a thing as that, and here one or two bright drops ran down on the blue pelisse.

She was actually crying like a scolded child, when two or three minutes later the parlour-door opened and Marcus entered. His face wore a queer expression, and in each hand he held an exquisite bunch of hot-house flowers; their perfume reached Olivia before he laid them before her.

"There, Olive," he said, "I take back my words;" then, as he caught sight of her tear-stained face: "Oh, you foolish little woman, you absurd child," but his hand rested affectionately on her soft, brown hair, as she put back her head against him.

"Oh, Marcus, I could not help crying to think I had vexed you so. Somehow it is the one thing I cannot bear, to think my foolish tongue should have harmed you."

"I was in an awful funk, certainly," returned Marcus, frankly, "but I never meant to bother you like that. Cheer up, Livy, I daresay it is all right, and I know you will be a model of discretion for the future. Aren't you going to look at your flowers?" and then Olivia did permit herself to be consoled.

"Think of his cutting all those lovely flowers for me," she cried, ecstatically. "Is he not an old dear, Marcus? But why two bouquets?" knitting her brows in a puzzled fashion.

"You had better open that folded slip of paper," suggested her husband, sensibly, "it may explain matters," and Olivia took his advice.

"Mrs. Luttrell, with Mr. Gaythorne's compliments," was pencilled in a shaky hand, and on the second slip, almost illegibly, "For Mrs. Luttrell's aunt."

"Oh, Marcus, how sweet of him!" and Olivia looked almost lovely in her excitement, and Marcus agreed that he was a good old sort.

"If you are going to write a note of thanks, you must just hurry up, as it is nearly time for me to go across," and then Olivia put the flowers in water, and got out her writing-case.

CHAPTER VI.

"I REMIND YOU OF SOMEONE?"

"The fire in the flint
Shows not till it be struck."—*Timon of Athens*.

Although Marcus had other visits to pay, and would not be back until quite late, Olivia sat up for him on pretence of finishing Dot's pelisse, but to her disappointment he had very little to tell her on his return.

Mr. Gaythorne had been tired and out of spirits, and he had had no inducement to prolong his visit; he had not read Olivia's note, only placed it beside him.

"Perhaps he was a shade more civil than usual," observed Marcus, dryly, "but his manners certainly want mending. Could you not illuminate that motto, Livy, 'Manners makyth man?' and we would frame it, and give it him as a Christmas present." But Olivia could not be induced to see the joke; Mr. Gaythorne was still an old dear, and the perfume of his flowers was sweet to her.

Marcus would have wondered if he had intercepted one of the searching glances that were reading him so acutely; those deep-set, melancholy eyes could pierce like a gimlet; sometimes a vivid blue light seemed to dart from them. "When master has one of his awful looks on, I dare not face him," Phoebe would say, and Mrs. Crampton, conscious as she was of rectitude and the claim of long and faithful service, felt there were limitations to her intercourse with her master.

Once, and once only, had she ventured on a tabooed subject, and had retired from the room with her comely face quite pale with fear.

"I thought he would have struck me," she said to her confidante, the middle-aged housemaid, "or that he would have had a fit; I should have one myself if I ever tried it on again; but I never will, Rebecca, I will take my oath of that."

"Master has an awful temper when he is drove wrong," returned Rebecca, primly; "I don't wonder at Mr. Alwyn myself. I don't hold with keeping too tight a hand over a young man, it fairly throttles all the goodness out of them. He was none so bad that he would not have done better, if only he had had a word of encouragement instead of all those flouts and jibes."

"Those are exactly my sentiments, Becky," returned Mrs. Crampton, wiping her eyes with her snowy-frilled apron, "and having a boy of my own, bless him, I am a pretty fair judge. Tom was a pickle before he went to sea, but neither his poor father nor me ever cast it at him. He ran away and took the Queen's shilling, though it nigh broke our hearts. Well, he is a sergeant now, and Polly makes him a good wife, and all's well that ends well. But I must be looking after master's supper," and Mrs. Crampton bustled away to her duties.

Olivia took her flowers round to Aunt Madge as soon as her household duties were done in the morning. Mrs. Broderick, who had had a sleepless night of pain, looked more worn and languid than usual, but she brightened up at the sight of the flowers, and poked her long nose into the heart of a rose with an air of rapt enjoyment, but the next moment she frowned.

"Livy," she said, severely, "I am extremely angry! how dare you be guilty of such extravagance, even if it be my birthday! Don't I know what these exquisite flowers must have cost!" then Olivia's face fell a little.

"Oh, Aunt Madge, I had no idea it was your birthday, and I have brought you nothing, nothing at all. Do let me explain," and then Mrs. Broderick listened with much interest to Olivia's recital.

"The flowers are even sweeter than I thought them," she said, presently, and her face flushed a little. "I thought the day would be so blank, and that I should just lie here missing Fergus. He always made such a fuss on my birthdays; they were red-letter days to him, and now this friendly message has come to me. Give me my writing-case, Livy. I must scrawl a few lines to your old gentleman," and she refused to dictate the note to Olivia.

"MY DEAR SIR," she wrote, "do you know what you have done? You have given a poor invalid a very happy day. Your beautiful flowers have come to me like a lovely message of sympathy and goodwill from an unknown friend.

"If you were ever sad and lonely, if life has not always been easy to you, it will sweeten your solitary hours to know that you have given enjoyment to a crippled sufferer.

"To-day is my birthday, the forty-sixth milestone on my life's journey. During a long, wakeful night of pain I have been counting up past blessings, and the new day seemed a blank to me, and then your flowers came, and I thanked God and took courage.

"Dear sir, I remain,
"Yours gratefully,
"MARGARET BRODERICK (widow)."

That was one of Aunt Madge's fads, one of her harmless little peculiarities, to sign herself in that fashion. "There is so much in the word widow," she would say; "if it were not for seeming odd or making people smile, I would always sign myself 'Fergus's widow,' instead of my proper name," but nothing could induce her to send even a note without that curious signature.

Olivia could not quite get over her grievance of forgetting Aunt Madge's birthday.

"It was so horrid of me," she said, with a long face, "but, anyhow, I will come to tea."

"No, dear, not to-day," returned Mrs. Broderick, quietly. "To-morrow Deb and I will be delighted to welcome you. And Deb shall bake some shortbread and scones. Marcus might come too, it is long since I saw him."

"But why not to-day, dear Aunt Madge?" persisted Olivia, rather curiously.

"Fergus and I always spent the day alone together, and I keep up the custom still," returned Mrs. Broderick, in a dreamy voice. "He never gave me his present until the evening, and it was always such a grand surprise. His last present to me was that revolving book-table. How splendid I thought it, and what a comfort it has been to me all these years. Don't look so serious, Livy, I don't mean to be dull, I never am, but I like to fancy that on my birthday I have Fergus near me still," and nothing that Olivia could say would shake her resolution.

Olivia hesitated to repeat her visit to Galvaston House, and when she consulted Marcus he advised her to wait a little.

"We must not be too pushing. I daresay one of these days Mr. Gaythorne will send you another message. He is rather ailing and out of sorts just now, and inclined to bristle up at a word," but, though Marcus laughed in this way, he had not found his berth an easy one.

Mr. Gaythorne was often irritable, and the least contradiction—even the assertion of an opinion—would ruffle him. Once, when Marcus had proposed discontinuing his evening visits, Mr. Gaythorne had appeared quite affronted.

"If I can afford to pay for medical advice, I suppose I may be allowed to have it," he had returned, testily. "Of course, if your time is too valuable——"

But Marcus, flushing at the covert sneer, answered, in his quick, straightforward way:

"I wish it were more valuable; but as I have no wish to pick your pocket, I thought it would be only honest to tell you that the evening visit is no longer necessary."

"Very well, then we will regard it in the light of a luxury," returned Mr. Gaythorne, a little less grimly. "By-the-bye, Dr. Luttrell, I want to ask you if you will kindly let me have your account at the end of the month. Monthly payments are my rule, if it will not inconvenience you."

Marcus assured him he was quite ready to meet his wishes.

Olivia, who had few amusements, often thought longingly of that beautiful winter garden, and wished to revisit it. She had described it so vividly and graphically to Aunt Madge, that Mrs. Broderick declared she could picture it exactly. She was never weary of hearing her niece's description.

"I feel as though my world were enlarged, and that I had got a new friend," she said one day, and Olivia was amused to hear that the faded flowers had been carefully pressed.

She was much delighted then when one raw, foggy November morning Marcus brought her a message. Mr. Gaythorne felt himself better, and would be very pleased if Mrs. Luttrell would give him an hour that afternoon.

Her visit was a very pleasant one. The yellow fog outside had been extremely depressing, but as she stepped into the hall, the whole house seemed brightly illuminated. Mr. Gaythorne, who was on crutches, met her at the head of the staircase. He had discarded his dressing-gown, and wore a black velvet coat that became him still better.

The conservatory, lighted up by lamps cunningly concealed among the foliage, looked more like fairyland than ever. And the deep easy-chairs, with their crimson cushions, were deliciously inviting.

Her admiration seemed to gratify Mr. Gaythorne, and as he pointed out his favourite flowers, and descanted on their habits and peculiar beauties, Olivia listened with such intelligent interest, and asked such sensible and pertinent questions, that he was drawn insensibly into giving her a botanical lesson.

They were so engrossed with their subject that it was almost an effort to break off when coffee was brought.

Mrs. Crampton had sent up a profusion of dainty cakes, and as Olivia drank her coffee and feasted on the various delicacies, the one drawback to her pleasure was that Marcus was not there to share it. At this present moment he was in some slum or other supplementing the labours of the overworked parish doctor.

How surprised Dr. Luttrell would have been if he could have seen the transformation in his patient's appearance—the lean, cadaverous face had lost its fretful look, the melancholy dark eyes had grown bright and vivid, the slow precise voice had waxed animated and even eloquent as he discoursed learnedly on his floral treasures.

Flowers, butterflies, and birds were his great hobbies, and his magnificent collections had been gathered from all parts of the world; he had been a great traveller in his early manhood.

"I have been everywhere and seen everything," he said once. Towards the end of the afternoon Olivia had been much touched by a little incident; she had asked him a question about a curious cactus. "If you will come with me, my dear," he had answered, "I could show you a better specimen"—and then a dull red had risen to his forehead. "Excuse me, Mrs. Luttrell. I forgot whom I was addressing—and—and—you——" but here he checked himself.

"Oh, do finish your sentence!" she said, in her bright persuasive voice. "You were going to say that I remind you of someone?"—and as he met her kind friendly glance, his shy stiffness relaxed.

"Yes," he said, simply, and a great sadness came into his eyes, "you remind me of my daughter. That first evening when you spoke to me you reminded me of her then."

"And you have lost her! Oh, I am so sorry! Does it pain you to speak of her? I should so like to know her name!"

"Her name was Olivia," he returned, slowly, "but we always called her Olive. She was born at Beyrout, under the Syrian sun, and in the land of grey olive-trees."

"How strange! What a curious coincidence!" returned young Mrs. Luttrell, softly. "That is my name too, and Marcus often calls me Olive; and I remind you of her?"

"Yes, Olive spoke in just that brisk, cheerful manner. She was so full of life and energy. She died of fever at Rome—we were staying there. She was only two-and-twenty, and she was to have been married that summer. Her poor mother never got over the shock; before the autumn she had followed her."

"Oh, how sad—how dreadfully sad!" observed Olivia, with tears in her eyes. "What a tragedy to live through. And her poor lover too!"

"Oh, yes, Arbuthnot; he was bitterly cut up. He is a judge now, and has a good wife, but I doubt if he has ever forgotten Olive. She was no beauty, but she had a way with her. Stay—I will show you her picture."

"Poor man! No wonder he looks melancholy," thought Olivia, as he slowly hobbled away on his crutches. "How strange that I should remind him of her, and that she should be Olive too!" but when Mr. Gaythorne returned and placed a beautiful miniature before her, she could see no resemblance to herself in the dark sweet face of Olive Gaythorne.

No, she was not beautiful, but there was something wonderfully attractive and winning in her expression; the eyes, deep-set like her father's, had a frank soft look.

"Your only child—and you lost her," murmured Olivia, sympathetically.

"My only daughter," corrected Mr. Gaythorne, in a tone so peculiar, that Olivia raised her eyes, and then she felt a little frightened. There was a curious pallor on Mr. Gaythorne's face, which made it look like old ivory, and his bushy eyebrows were drawn closely together.

"It is a sweet face—a dear face," returned Olivia, hurriedly. She was a little nervous over her mistake. "It is kind of you to show me this, and I like to think her name was Olive." And then she closed the case reverently and put it back in his hands. "I must go now," she said; "it has been such a lovely time, and you have taught me so much. Will you send for me again when you want to see me? I think that is best; it would be such a pity for me to disturb you when you felt tired or disinclined for visitors."

"You are my only visitor," returned Mr. Gaythorne, in his old grim manner. "The Vicar's wife—what is the woman's name?—forced her way in one day, but I do not think her reception pleased her. The Vicar himself is an honest man. I have given him a hint that he will be welcome if he comes alone, but no bustling prying vicaress for me."

"Oh, poor Mrs. Tolman; well, she is a little officious, as Marcus calls her, and I know she often sets Aunt Madge's nerves on edge."

"Oh, by the way, I intend to send Mrs. Broderick some more flowers; will it be a trouble to you to take them, or shall one of the lasses carry them straight to her house?"

"Oh, no; please let me have the pleasure of taking them. If you had only seen Aunt Madge's delight ——"

"She wrote me a pretty sort of note," returned Mr. Gaythorne; "but tell her not to do that again, gratitude is for favours to come; you may remind her of that. Does she always sign her name in that fashion—Margaret Broderick, widow——?"

"Yes, always; it is one of Aunt Madge's whimsies; but you will never get her to alter."

"It does not sound badly, but it is certainly unique. How would it answer if one were to follow her example. John Alwyn Gaythorne, widower," and here Mr. Gaythorne gave a short sardonic laugh.

"Marcus! oh, Marcus!" exclaimed Olivia, coming into the room in her breezy fashion. "I have so much to tell you. Mr. Gaythorne is a widower—and he has lost his only daughter, and her name was Olivia, and that is why he has taken to me, because I remind him of her; but"—checking herself as she caught sight of her husband's face—"you have something to tell me too."

"Only that they sent for me from Fairfax Lodge, that is that ivy-covered house next to Galvaston House. A child taken suddenly with croup. I have been there most of the afternoon."

Then Olivia clapped her hands with a little exclamation of delight. Marcus's tone had been quite cool and matter-of-fact, but there was a glint of satisfaction in his eyes. The tide had turned at last.

CHAPTER VII.

BLOWING BUBBLES.

"How pleasant it is to be acquainted with new and clever things."—*Aristophanes*.

Marcus certainly carried his head a little higher than usual that evening; as for Olivia, she trod on air. As she sat at her needlework later on, waiting until Marcus returned from his second visit to Galvaston House, her thoughts were busy about the future.

Marcus would soon have a large practice; it was all very well for Aunt Madge to be sententious, and say that one swallow does not make a spring; but already the second harbinger of good luck had put in an appearance.

There was no fear of parting with Martha now; before long Olivia was building magnificent castles. The house next door to Galvaston House was to let, it had a garden and a small conservatory, and Marcus had once remarked that it was just the house for a medical man; the reception-rooms were good and there was a capital stable.

"Supposing we were ever rich enough to take Kempton Lodge," she said to herself.

Marcus threw back his head and indulged in a hearty laugh, when he heard where his wife's imagination had landed her.

"Kempton Lodge—my dear child—why do you not suggest Prince's Gate, or Belgravia? My own thoughts had not gone further than a new greatcoat this winter. I am afraid my old one is getting a little seedy." And at this remark, Olivia's airily constructed fabric dissolved into nothingness.

To blow bubbles is an enchanting pastime even with grown-up children. The big bright-coloured bubbles soar into the air and look so beautiful before they burst. One is gone, but another takes its place, just as rainbow-tinted, and gorgeous. There are people who blow endless bubbles until their life's end, who cannot be induced to discontinue the harmless pursuit.

"Life is so hard and dreary," they say. "The wheels of drudgery are for ever turning and grinding; let us sit in the sun a little and float our fairy balls. What if they are dreams and never come to anything; the dreams and the sunlight have made us happy; there is plenty of time in which to do our work."

Marcus laughed at his wife's fancies; but he never crushed them ruthlessly. "Poor little Livy," he thought, "why should she not build her air castles if they make her happy, and perhaps, after all, who knows——" but Marcus did not finish his sentence even to himself.

But the next day when he went to Maybrick Villas to fetch his wife home, he had a good deal to say about his new patients.

"I am in luck," he said, as he stood warming himself before the fire, while the two women watched him. "I thought of course when they sent for me that it was because I was the nearest doctor, and that perhaps their own medical man was engaged—in an imminent case like that it is impossible to wait—but no, it was nothing of the kind. Mrs. Stanwell told me herself—she is such a nice little person, Livy—

that they have only been a few months at Fairfax Lodge, and that before that they had lived in Yorkshire.

"Being strangers in the place they were sadly perplexed on the subject of doctors, until the nurse told her mistress that she had seen me going in and out of Galvaston House. And this decided Mrs. Stanwell to send for me. As I was able to do the child good, they are ridiculously grateful. I am likely to have another patient there; Mrs. Stanwell has an aunt living with her, and she is ailing. I have only taken a hasty diagnosis of the case, but I am going again to-morrow. I am half afraid the poor old lady is in a bad way."

"It is a long lane that has no turning, Marcus," observed Aunt Madge. "There, you must take Olive away, she has been wearying the past half-hour to get back to Dot!" but as they left her alone in the firelight she said to herself:

"Dear things, how happy they look! at their age life is so dreadfully exciting. I believe myself Marcus will get on; he is really clever, and never spares himself, but I doubt if Livy or I will ever be so interested in anyone as we are in Marcus's first patient."

Olivia would have indorsed this sentiment readily; before long Mr. Gaythorne became an important factor in her daily life, the friendship between them ripened rapidly.

Olivia kept to her resolution of never going to Galvaston House unless she were specially invited; but every three or four days a message from the old man reached her.

Olivia, whose only dissipation had been a weekly tea with Aunt Madge, and a biannual call at the Vicarage, with or without tea, according to Mrs. Tolman's mood, found these afternoons at Galvaston House very stimulating.

At first she was sorry when Mr. Gaythorne gave up sitting in the winter garden, and ensconced himself in the library, but she soon changed her opinion when he began to show her his curiosities and rare prints. He had so much to tell her about the birds and butterflies in the museum as he called the inner room, that the hours flew past as she listened to him, and it was always with real regret that she took her leave when the time came for her to go home.

"Aunt Madge and Marcus find me so much more interesting ever since you have taken me in hand," she said once. "I try and repeat all you tell me, but, of course, I forget half. Very often Marcus helps me to remember—he has read so much on these subjects, you see."

Perhaps it was this artless speech that led to Mr. Gaythorne showing Marcus a case of curious insects, and Dr. Luttrell had been so fascinated, so utterly engrossed, that the old man, much flattered, had cordially invited him into the museum. Marcus, who had still much time on his hands, often spent a pleasant hour or two with his patient. Mr. Gaythorne lent him books, and gave him choice brands of cigars.

Olivia was highly delighted at these evident marks of favour, but it troubled her that Mr. Gaythorne never liked them to come together. Olivia was always invited pointedly when Marcus's visit had been paid, and now and then he would ask Dr. Luttrell to have a chat with him after dinner. Once when Olivia had ventured to hint her disapproval of this he had answered with unwonted irritability.

"I like to take my pleasures singly, Mrs. Luttrell. I am sorry if I keep you from your husband. I am a selfish old misanthrope, I am afraid;" but Olivia, alarmed by this decided acerbity, hastened to assure him that her remark had meant nothing.

"It is so natural of me to want Marcus to share my pleasure," she said so sweetly that Mr. Gaythorne was mollified.

Even Marcus noticed a decided improvement in his patient's manner. He was less irritable and contradictory, and was evidently grateful for the relief he had derived from his doctor's treatment. The bare civility with which he had at first tolerated Marcus soon changed into greater cordiality. Dr. Luttrell's intelligence could appreciate Mr. Gaythorne's culture and learning. Before long they were on the best of terms, but it was Olivia who was the prime favourite.

When Olivia's face appeared on the threshold Mr. Gaythorne's eyes brightened under their rugged brows, and his voice insensibly softened. To her, and her only, he showed his real self.

"He has a strange complex nature," she said once to her husband. "He is very reserved, there are some things of which he never speaks. He has not once mentioned his son. I should not have known he had one, only I saw the name of Alwyn Gaythorne in a book. 'I thought your first name was John?' I said rather heedlessly.

"'So it is, John Alwyn,' he returned; 'that book belonged to my son,' but his voice was so constrained that I did not venture to say more. Depend upon it there is a mystery there, Marcus."

"'Perhaps Alwyn the younger is a Nihilist," returned Marcus, in a teasing voice. "Probably he is at Portland at the present moment, undergoing his sentence. No wonder poor Mr. Gaythorne is such a recluse;" but Olivia refused to be entertained by this badinage.

"I am quite in earnest," she returned, with a grave air. "So you need not trouble yourself to be ridiculous, Marcus. Why should he talk so much of his daughter and never mention his only son?"

"According to you he is almost as silent on the subject of his wife."

"Oh, that is different," she answered, hastily. "He once said to me that he could never bear even to hear her name mentioned, that it upset him so. 'I was a happy man as long as she lived,' he said, so sadly, 'but it was all up with me when I lost her. She was a peacemaker, she always kept things smooth; her name was Olivia too.'"

"Poor old boy," was Marcus's irrelevant remark at this.

"Yes, he is a strange mixture," went on Olivia, thoughtfully. "He has an affectionate nature, but he is hard too; he could be terribly hard, I am sure of that. And then see how good he is to those poor Traverses and to Aunt Madge. Could anyone be more generous. And yet he is not liberal by nature. That very day that he sent Mrs. Crampton to the Models with all those good things—jellies and beef-tea and chicken and actually two bottles of port wine—he was as angry as possible with Phoebe, because she had broken his medicine glass. Mrs. Crampton had orders to deduct the price of the glass from her wages. 'I always do that,' he said to me, 'it teaches them to be careful,' but poor Phoebe cried about it afterwards.

"'I call it real mean of master,' Phoebe had said; 'it is the first thing that ever I broke in this house, and it was all through Eros getting between my feet. It is not the few pence I mind, for we have good wages paid down on the day, but I call it shabby of master to be down on a poor servant-girl like that.'

"His servants don't seem to love him," went on Olivia. "They serve him well, because it is their interest to do so, but even Mrs. Crampton, who has been with him twenty years, does not dare to contradict him."

"Anyhow, he is liberal to us," returned Marcus, patting his waistcoat pocket, for he had that morning received his first cheque.

Marcus's first act had been to go to the coal merchant and order in a ton of excellent coal, then he had gone home and told his wife in a peremptory tone to put on her hat and jacket.

"I am going to take you to Harvey and Phelps to get a new dress and jacket," he said, severely. "I am not going to put up with that rusty old serge any longer," and Olivia had remonstrated in vain against such extravagance.

It was all very well to blow bubbles and furnish Kempton Lodge from garret to basement, but when it came to spending Marcus's first cheque——!

"Marcus, dear," she said, imploringly, "my old dress is quite tidy. I put new braid round it yesterday, and I would so much rather you got a new great-coat. Even Aunt Madge noticed that your present one was dreadfully shabby."

"Of course I shall get a new coat too," returned Dr. Luttrell, coolly. Then at the thought of this lavishness Olivia was stricken dumb.

Marcus made his purchases with great discretion; the grey tweed and warm jacket to match suited Olivia's tall supple figure perfectly—he had a momentary debate with himself before he ventured on a modest black straw hat with velvet trimmings, but in the end the order was given.

"Oh, Marcus, how could you!" exclaimed Olivia, who was at fever point by this time.

"Hold your tongue, Livy!" returned Marcus, good-humouredly. "I mean my wife to be well-dressed for once in her life. Now I must go to the tailor's for that great-coat. There won't be much of Mr. Gaythorne's cheque left by the time I get home. We shall want the balance for Christmas groceries."

Olivia groaned in spirit over Marcus's recklessness, but she could not bear to damp his enjoyment. She unburdened her mind to Mrs. Broderick the next day.

"Don't you think it would have been wiser to have put it by for a rainy day?" she said, anxiously. But Aunt Madge did not seem quite to share this opinion.

"My dear," she said, shrewdly, "I think Marcus knows what he is about; it would never do for him to go to those good houses in a shabby greatcoat. A little outlay is sometimes a good investment."

"Oh, yes, but I was thinking of the dress and jacket and that hat, Aunt Madge——"

"Ah, well, we must forgive Marcus that extravagance! It hurt his pride to see you calling at Galvaston House in that old serge dress. He is not really improvident, Livy. You have enough in hand for present necessities, and there will be something coming in next month."

"Oh, dear, yes; and do you know, Aunt Madge, they have sent for Marcus to attend the lodger at number seventeen. He is a music-teacher and very respectable, and can afford to pay his doctor, so that is swallow number three."

"Then I am sure you can wear your new dress with an easy conscience," and then Olivia's last scruples vanished.

Olivia looked so distinguished in her grey tweed that Marcus made her blush by telling her that she had never looked so handsome.

Mr. Gaythorne gave her an odd penetrating glance when she entered the library.

"I hardly knew you, Mrs. Luttrell," he said, dryly, and then his manner changed and softened. "That was her favourite colour," he said. "Olive was always a grey bird; she liked soft, subdued tints; she was a bit of a Puritan. I often told her so."

"I am glad you like my new dress," returned Olivia, simply. "My husband chose it for me, he has such good taste."

"You need not tell me that, Mrs. Luttrell." And again Olivia blushed like a girl at the implied compliment.

Mr. Gaythorne was looking over a portfolio of water-colour paintings. Olivia had not yet seen them, and she was full of outspoken admiration, as Mr. Gaythorne placed one after another before her.

"They are all the work of a young artist who died at Rome," he said. "I bought them of his widow. They are very well done; he had great promise, poor fellow. If he had lived, he would have done good work. These were merely pot-boilers, as he called them—little things he painted on the spur of the moment."

"To me they are perfectly beautiful," returned Olivia. "Those two are so lovely that I could not choose between them. Please let me look at them a little longer, Mr. Gaythorne, I want to tell Aunt Madge about them." And Olivia, who was always charmingly natural in her movements, propped her chin on her hands, and looked long and earnestly at the pictures.

Their beauty lay in the soft rich colouring and a certain suggestiveness in the subject.

One was a little grey church on a hill-side; the church was ruinous and out of repair, the churchyard full of weeds and thistles; a storm had just broken, and an old shepherd in a ragged smock had taken refuge in the porch, his rough-looking dog at his feet. The bowed figure and knotted hands, and the peaceful look in the wrinkled face were wonderfully striking, the patient eyes turned upwards were gazing at the rainbow. "'Tis a love token, I reckon," were the words written underneath the sketch.

Olivia could almost hear them through the parted lips; ruins and thistles and weeds and a broken storm, and beyond them the message of peace, written on the bright tints of the rainbow, for one simple heart to read.

"Aunt Madge would understand that," she said to herself; "she would like that picture best, but this is just as beautiful to my mind."

The second sketch was equally suggestive; it was a cornfield with poppies growing in it; under the hedge in the cool shade lay a brown baby asleep. A dish tied up in a blue handkerchief and a stone bottle lay beside the infant; an old terrier kept watch over them both.

"Keeping watch and ward" was the title of this picture; it was certainly very well painted. A breeze seemed rippling through the corn in the nook where the child lay; there were festoons of honeysuckle and dog-roses, and long sprays of traveller's joy. The stumpy grey terrier sitting erect at his post of duty was full of significance and individuality. The mother was evidently among the reapers in the far distance.

"One would never be tired of looking at that cornfield," observed Olivia, and though Mr. Gaythorne smiled at her enthusiasm, he would not spoil her enjoyment by pointing out to her one or two defects that he had already noticed.

By-and-by he called her to pour out the coffee—Mr. Gaythorne never indulged in afternoon tea.

"This is not much like Christmas weather," he said, looking out at the cold mizzling rain; "the forecasts promise a change, however. I suppose I must not ask if you dislike Christmas, it would not be a fair question at your age."

"No, indeed; I love it dearly. I have only had one sad Christmas—the year dear mother died—it is my birthday too, that makes it doubly festive. I am so glad I was born on such a beautiful day; that is why my second name is Noel."

"And you hold high festival on it?"

"Well, we cannot do much. Marcus and I always go to the early service, that is how we begin the day, and then he always has some little present on the breakfast table. It is the one day in the year we always dine with Aunt Madge; she is such an invalid, you see, that very little tires her; but on Christmas Day, we first dine with her quietly, and have an early tea, then come home; we are generally back by six o'clock, and have a long evening by ourselves. Do you spend Christmas Day quite alone, Mr.

Gaythorne?"

"Yes, quite alone," he returned, gloomily; "but I have plenty of ghosts to visit me," and his face twitched, and he stooped over the pictures as he spoke.

CHAPTER VIII.

"'TIS A LOVE TOKEN, I RECKON."

"It is in men as in soils—where sometimes there is a vein of gold which the owner knows not of."—*Dean Swift*.

"Marcus, I have an idea."

Olivia had been sitting for some time in a brown study, staring into the red caverns, where the yellow fire-elves were beating out their rainbow gold on their glowing, hissing anvils.

It was in the gloaming, and the little sitting-room was warm and cosy. Dot was on her mother's lap, toasting her pink toes gleefully, and chuckling over them in baby fashion. And Marcus, who had finished his day's work, had left off trying to read by the light of the flickering flame, and was indulging in a furtive doze. He roused up when Olivia's clear voice broke the silence.

"Marcus, do you hear me? I have such a nice plan."

"Is it a riddle?" he returned, lazily. "I give it up." Then he contemplated his small daughter with much satisfaction. "I wonder none of you advanced women have ever turned your attention to baby-language," he observed presently; "we are studying the ape-vocabulary, you know. Dot has got quite a little language of her own. As far as I can make out each sentence is finished off with a 'gurgle-doe.' Something between the 'gobble, gobble' of a turkey and the coo of the ring-dove. I suppose it all means something."

"Means something!" and Olivia kissed the little rings of curly hair with passionate fondness. "Of course my girlie means something! I understand her as well as possible. She is scolding the fire, because it has burnt her dear little toes. Look, she is showing them to me. Naughty fire, to burn my baby." And thereupon followed one of those maternal and infantine duets, which appear such hopeless jargon to the masculine mind.

To Marcus it had a lulling effect, his eyes began to blink drowsily again, but Olivia, who had passed a solitary day, was not disposed for silence.

"You are not a bit curious about my plan, dear," she said presently. "I have been thinking so much of that sad, sad speech of Mr. Gaythorne's yesterday. I cannot bear to think of him alone all Christmas Day, with only the ghosts of happier years to haunt him."

"There is no need for him to be alone," returned Marcus, coolly. "He could invite us to supper. Why don't you propose it, Livy? You seem to say anything that comes into your head. A good bowl of steaming punch would drive all the grey and black spirits away. I would undertake to amuse him." But Olivia only looked at him rebukingly.

"Marcus, it is so tiresome that you will always joke when I want to be serious. Now, do give me a straightforward answer, if you can. Shall you have any visits to pay on Christmas Day?"

"My dear child, how can you expect me to answer in that off-hand way, and without consulting my visiting list? Well, if you must know," as Olivia uttered an impatient exclamation, "I shall have to go up to the Models after tea, to see that poor woman who was confined yesterday. The baby is not likely to live; and then I shall look in on Travers. I don't suppose I shall be out more than an hour."

"Oh, that will do nicely," returned his wife, in a satisfied tone. "Marcus, do you know, I have made up my mind to pay Mr. Gaythorne a surprise visit on Christmas evening. We are always back by six, and I know he does not dine until half-past seven. Do you think I dare venture? You see, I have never been without an invitation yet."

"And you actually mean 'to beard the lion in his den, and Douglas in his hall,'" spouted Marcus. And then, in his ordinary voice, "Well, you might try it, if you like; but I should not be surprised if you got snubbed. Christmas ghosts have a ghastly effect, and rub a man up the wrong way."

"Oh, I will take my chance of that," returned Olivia, cheerfully. "Now I will put Dot to bed, and leave you to finish your nap in peace."

"Thank goodness!" was on the tip of Marcus's tongue, but he refrained and only curled himself up

afresh in his easy-chair. He had sat up late over his books the previous night, wasting lamp-oil and coals, as his wife had remarked, rather severely, and the cold air, with a touch of frost in it, had made him sleepy.

Olivia had been bristling all day, like a blissful porcupine, with little plans and surprises: first, she had actually saved out of Aunt Madge's Christmas gift enough money to buy Marcus another of Thackeray's novels; last Christmas she had given him *The Newcomes*, and this year she had fixed on *Esmond*.

Marcus was devoted to Thackeray, and thirsted for a complete set of his works, but at present only *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes* were on his modest bookshelves. Neither the husband nor wife thought it right to spend even those few shillings on the purchase of books, when they could make use of the Free Library.

The new copy of *Esmond* looked decidedly inviting, with its clean, uncut pages, and then there was really a handsome work-bag for Aunt Madge, fashioned by Olivia's skilful fingers out of a yard of cretonne. Olivia had already received her Christmas presents, and had nothing to expect. Her new outfit, and Dot's pelisse, and Martha's wages were all birthday and Christmas gifts. Nevertheless when Marcus came on Christmas Eve to hang up their scanty store of holly, he was met by his wife's excited face.

"Oh, Marcus!" she exclaimed, "I thought you would never come home; there is such a hamper from Galvaston House, and I am waiting for you to open it. And oh! do you know, dear, Aunt Madge has sent us some of her delicious mince pies, and a Christmas cake!"

"She is a good old soul," returned Marcus, fervently. "By-the-bye, Olive, could not we have supper earlier? for this sharp air—and it is freezing hard, let me tell you—has made me as hungry as a hunter." And as Olivia conceded this point graciously, he was induced to follow her to the small kitchen, where Martha, all smiles and excitement, awaited them.

Martha had her best dress on, for she was going round to her mother's presently, with her little store of Christmas gifts: a red knitted shawl for her mother and half a pound of tea, a comforter for her father, and some warm cuffs for the boys, and gingerbread-nuts and some oranges for the children, to which Olivia had added a bag of mixed sweets.

Martha's round eyes widened with amazement when the hamper was opened, and a plump turkey, and a fine York ham came to view; there were also half a dozen bottles of old port-wine for Dr. Luttrell, with Mr. Gaythorne's compliments, and a box of candied fruit and a jar of preserved ginger for his wife.

"Oh, Marcus! is not this kind?" Olivia's voice was almost awe-struck; her acquaintance with turkeys had hitherto been strictly limited to a partial view of their limp bodies as they dangled above her in the poulterers' shops; now her little larder would be filled to overflowing.

"Shall I step across and thank him, while you put those things away?" suggested Marcus. And as Olivia agreed to this, he caught up his hat and vanished.

When everything was safely stowed away, and Martha had been made supremely happy by the gift of two mince pies for her mother, and had trotted off red in the face with excitement, Olivia busied herself in getting the supper ready. The unsightly remains of a cold shoulder of mutton had been transformed into tempting rissoles. Olivia always treated her husband to a hot supper on Christmas Eve. Potatoes cooked in their coats, and a couple of Deborah's mince pies, finished off the *menu*, to which Marcus did ample justice. Afterwards he hung up their holly, and then Olivia fetched her work-basket, and Marcus went on with the novel that he was reading aloud, and both of them looked at the clock in amazement when Martha's modest ring told them the evening was over.

When Marcus put on his new great-coat the next morning, he shrugged his shoulders as he opened the front-door. Instead of the frost he had expected, the icy coldness of the air and the heavy aspect of the wintry sky were premonitory signs of a snow-storm.

"It is hardly fit for you to go out," he said, as Olivia joined him, but she only smiled at him, her vigorous young strength was proof against the cold.

"We must hurry, Marcus," she said, briskly, "or we shall be late, and I want to enjoy my Christmas service," for she had already arranged to take care of Dot during the morning, while Martha went to church. Marcus had his rounds, and would fetch her in time for the early dinner at Maybrick Villas.

The quiet service in the warm, well-lighted church was very soothing and refreshing. As Olivia knelt beside her husband, her heart swelled with thankfulness for countless blessings. "I have not deserved to be so happy," she said to herself, as she thought of her two treasures.

Martha had breakfast ready for them on their return, and Olivia hurried upstairs to take off her hat. She was just stepping into the dining-room, when Marcus caught hold of her, and blindfolded her playfully.

"No, you are not to look yet!" he said, teasingly. "There is a surprise in store for you." But as he took his hands from her eyes, she uttered a little cry of ecstasy.

On the breakfast-table, propped up with books, was a small framed picture, the very cornfield, with the brown baby asleep under the hedge, and the old terrier guarding it, that she had so admired. A card, with Mr. Gaythorne's compliments and Christmas greeting, was beside it.

"What do you think of your friend now, Livy?"

But Olivia seemed to have no answer ready, her lips trembled, and the tears gathered in her bright eyes. Marcus, who was almost as pleased as she was, patted her on the shoulder kindly, and bade her pour out the coffee, but for a long time Olivia could not be induced to go on with her breakfast.

"If only I could take it to show Aunt Madge!" she said at last. But Marcus negatived this at once; the picture was heavy, and the damp, cold air might injure it.

That was a happy morning to Olivia, as she played with Dot, and then sang her to sleep. When Marcus came home he told her to wrap up as warmly as possible. "The damp quite gets into one's bones," he said; and even Olivia owned that it was disagreeably cold.

Aunt Madge received them with her usual kind welcome, but she looked at her niece with a queer expression.

"Livy," she said, "I feel as though I were living in the days of Aladdin and his wonderful lamp. I had to pinch myself this morning, to be sure I was not dreaming. What do you think our dear old magician has done now?" And as she pointed to the table beside her, Olivia saw the picture of the ruined church, and the old shepherd in his tattered smock. "'Tis a love token, I reckon," repeated Aunt Madge, but her voice was not quite steady. As for Olivia, the tears were fairly running down her face.

"Dear Aunt Madge, I do love him for this. What do you think, he has sent me the picture of the cornfield that I described to you, and such a hamper of good things!"

"Yes, and a brace of pheasants have come to me. Livy, do you know what that picture means to me? I have just been feasting my eyes on it all the morning. I mean to get an easel and stand it at the foot of my couch, with that Indian scarf of mine just draped over it; won't it cheer me up on one of my bad days when I can't read or work, and even thinking is too hard for my poor head? '"Tis a love token, I reckon,' I shall just say that to myself."

"Marcus, I shall have to pay that visit," observed Olivia, desperately. "Oh, dear, if only we could do something in return for him! Don't laugh at me, you tiresome boy; it is all very well for you, you are doing him a good turn every day, that is why it is so grand to be a doctor, but Aunt Madge and I want to have our share too."

"Take off your hat, Livy," interrupted Aunt Madge, "for I hear Deb dishing up the dinner, and Marcus looks blue in the face with cold and hunger." And at this reminder Olivia hurried.

Mrs. Broderick always gave them the same dinner, a roast fowl and a piece of boiled ham, with plum pudding and mince pies to follow, but Deborah's cookery always gave it a different and most delicious flavour.

When dinner was over they sat by the fire and roasted chestnuts, and talked softly to each other, while Aunt Madge dozed. She roused up when Deb brought in the tea-things, and chatted in her old bright way, but Marcus's professional eyes detected lassitude, and in spite of her entreaties took his wife away rather earlier than usual.

"Livy," observed Aunt Madge, as her niece stooped over her to kiss her, "I have not been able to write a note of thanks to Mr. Gaythorne yet, but will you tell him that I have not had such a Christmas gift as that since my husband left me, and that I have been praying for him off and on all day, that he may have his heart's desire—there, tell him that——" And then she sank back wearily on her pillows.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHRISTMAS GUEST.

"This life of ours is a wild Aeolian harp of many a joyous strain;
But under them all there runs a loud perpetual wail, as of souls in pain."—*Longfellow*.

Olivia felt a little nervous as she sent in her name by Phoebe; the girl had looked at her dubiously.

"I am not sure whether master will see you, ma'am," she said. "He never sees anyone on Christmas Day; and Mrs. Crampton says he is but poorly;" nevertheless, at Olivia's request, she had taken the message.

After a brief delay she returned. Her master would see Mrs. Luttrell; but Olivia's heart beat a little quickly as she entered the library. For the first time she was not sure of her welcome.

The grand old room looked unusually gloomy. The tall standard lamps were unlighted, and only the blazing fire and a small green reading-lamp made a spot of brightness. Deep shadows lurked in the corners, and the heavy book-cases and window recesses only seemed to add to the gloom.

Mr. Gaythorne sat in his great ebony chair—with its crimson cushions. His face looked more cadaverous and sunken than usual; the fine features looked as if they were carved in old ivory, they were so fixed and rigid; as he held out his hand to Olivia there was no smile of welcome on his face—the melancholy deep-set eyes were sombre and piercing.

Mr. Gaythorne sat in his great ebony chair.

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"This is indeed a surprise, Mrs. Luttrell."

"I hope you will not think it an intrusion," she returned, a little breathlessly. "I wanted so much to see you and give you Aunt Madge's message. Somehow I could not bear to think that we were so happy and that you were sitting alone and feeling sad. Are you vexed with me for coming?" she continued, in her winning way; "I can see you are not a bit pleased to see me."

"My dear Mrs. Luttrell," he said, in his harsh, grating voice, "it is one of my bad days, and nothing on earth would yield me pleasure. I gave you warning, did I not? You are visiting a haunted man! The Christmas ghosts have been holding high revel this evening; one of them has been pointing and gibing at me for ever so long: 'You are reaping what you have sown,' that was what it said. 'Why do you grumble at your harvest—there is no ripening without sunshine? Young hearts must be won by love and not severity; it is your own fault, your own obstinacy, your own blindness'—that is what it has been saying over and over again."

He shivered slightly as he said this, and held out his thin hands to the blaze. He had not asked her to sit down, but Olivia drew a small chair forward and seated herself.

"Do not listen to them any longer," she said, gently. "You are ill and sad, and so everything looks black and hopeless—let me talk to you instead; I want to tell you how we have spent our day."

Olivia had a charming voice. As she went on with her simple narrative the muscles of Mr. Gaythorne's face insensibly relaxed; hesitation, nervousness, a touch of self-consciousness even, would have repelled him; but her gentleness and childlike directness seemed to soothe him in spite of himself. And as she repeated Mrs. Broderick's message, though he shrugged his shoulders and muttered "Pshaw," she could see that he was gratified; and even his remark—"that Mrs. Broderick must be a very emotional person"—did not daunt her.

"If Aunt Madge is emotional, I am too," she said, softly. "Do you know what I said when I saw that picture of the old shepherd looking at the rainbow? 'I love him for this,' and, dear Mr. Gaythorne, I meant it."

"Tut, nonsense!" but as Olivia took his hand and held it in her firm grasp, there was a sudden moisture in the old man's eyes.

"No one has loved me since my two Olives left me," he muttered. "If only one had been spared to me, only one; but I am left here alone with my sorrow and remorse."

"You are not really alone," she returned, soothingly. "Why do you speak as if your wife and daughter had ceased to love you? Do you imagine for one moment that they forget you? It would do you good to talk to Aunt Madge; she has such wonderful ideas about all that. Some people—people like Mrs. Tolman, our vicar's wife—laugh at her and call her fanciful, but to me she is so real. Why should it not

be true?" she went on, with gathering excitement, "nothing that is good can die! Love is eternal, and it is only pain and grief and sin that can come to an end. That is what Aunt Madge says, and she does more than say it, she lives it. Of course she misses her husband dreadfully—they were everything to each other—but he never seems dead like other women's husbands, if you know what I mean by that. She seems to keep step with him somehow, and think his thoughts. I have heard her say once that it is just as though a high wall separated them. 'I cannot see him or hear him, but I know he is just the other side of the wall; only he has all the sunshine, and I have to grope alone in the shadows.'"

"Oh, she is right there; I know what it is to grope among shadows. My dear young lady," laying his hand heavily on her arm, "Mrs. Broderick must be a wonderful woman, and I hope to see her some day; and I am not above caring for a good woman's prayers, but our cases are not exactly similar."

"I daresay not," returned Olivia, hesitatingly.

"No, indeed"—and Mr. Gaythorne's heavy eyebrows drew together—"look here, Mrs. Luttrell, what sort of comfort do you suppose a man can have in thinking of his wife, when he knows he has acted contrary to her desires, when he has failed to carry out even the wishes expressed on her deathbed. What would you say to that man?"

"I would say that he must be very unhappy, and that no doubt circumstances were too hard for him. Perhaps he did his best; but it is not always possible for dying people to judge rightly, they may make mistakes."

"No, it was I who made all the mistakes," and there was such anguish in the old man's eyes as he said this, that Olivia almost started; "but God help me, if it were to come over again I should do the same. Mrs. Luttrell, you do not know me; it is my whim to be generous now and then. I like to give and it costs me nothing, but I am a hard, domineering man; when people oppose and anger me, I can be relentless; it is not easy for me to forgive, even when the offender is my own flesh and blood, and I am no hypocrite. I must speak the truth at all costs."

"And yet we expect our Father to forgive us," returned Olivia, almost to herself, but Mr. Gaythorne heard her, and a strange expression crossed his face.

"That is what she always said—my Olive, but it never seemed to make any difference to me. Ah, well, it is no use talking, some spirits refuse to be laid, but this is poor entertainment, my dear, and on your birthday too!"

"Please do not say that. I should love to stay, but I must not; it is late now, and Marcus will be waiting for me," and Olivia rose as she spoke. "And now before I go may I ring for the lamps to be lighted? there is something uncanny in this darkness, and the fire is getting hollow too."

"Well, well, do as you like," was the abrupt answer. "I am going to have my dinner here tonight, it is warmer," and so Olivia had her way. As she bade him good-night, he said, a little wistfully, "You can come to-morrow afternoon if you like. I have those views of Venice and Florence to show you. I had an old Florentine palace for six months, the year before my little Olive died; that was our last happy year."

"Of course I will come," she replied, smiling at him. But as she left the room she sighed; had she really exorcised those evil spirits? or would they return again, with tenfold force? "remorse;" that was the word he used, this was the canker-worm that was robbing him of peace. "It is not easy for me to forgive even if the offender is my own flesh and blood." How sad it was to hear him say that.

"I think, after all, I did him some little good," she thought, as she groped her way cautiously through the dark shrubbery. "That hard, rigid look had quite disappeared before I left. I have a feeling somehow that one day he will open his heart to me and tell me his trouble. Every now and then he drops a word or two; perhaps this evening, if I had not been so hurried, he would have spoken out."

Olivia's warm heart was full of pity for the lonely man sitting beside his desolate hearth, but she was young, and as the heavy gate closed after her, and she hurried across the road, a sudden vision of her own bright little parlour with Marcus waiting for her rose blissfully before her.

Marcus would have returned long ago and would be wondering at her delay. She knew what he was doing—cutting the pages of *Esmond* for their evening reading. How charmed he had been with her gift, although he had pretended to be angry at her extravagance.

A few particles of snow powdered her as she rang the bell. Marcus answered it himself.

"Livy, my dear child," he said, quickly, "what an age you have been! Come into the kitchen a moment, I want to speak to you, and Martha is upstairs. No, not there," catching hold of her arm as she absently turned the handle of the parlour door. "I said the kitchen."

"Oh, Marcus, what is it?" in an alarmed voice, as she suddenly perceived his grave, preoccupied look, "there is something wrong—with baby," but his smile reassured her.

"Nothing is wrong, I am only a little perplexed. Dot's all right, and the house is not on fire, and Martha is enjoying her usual health, but we have got a Christmas guest, that's all."

"Marcus, what can you mean, when we know no one here? Is it one of your old hospital friends?

And why may I not go in and see him?"

"So you shall, but I must explain matters first. I have a poor fellow in there whom I picked up off a door-step. At first I thought he was drunk, and I meant to call a policeman, but I very soon found out my mistake. The poor wretch had fainted from cold and exhaustion, he was simply starving."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Olivia, much shocked at this. "Have you given him some food? But why is he not here instead of in the sitting-room? Martha has a capital fire."

"Yes, she has been making him some tea, and luckily there was some cold bacon. He has had nothing but a penny roll and some coffee since yesterday morning. Another night of exposure and want would have killed him. I took him into the parlour because the couch was handy, but directly he spoke I saw he was a gentleman—at least an educated man, but his clothes are threadbare. He has parted with his waistcoat for food. Now you know why I brought you in here, to save you a shock."

"But, Marcus, what are we to do with him?"

"Ah, that is what puzzles me. I have fed and warmed him, and could give him money for a night's lodging, but he is not fit to move. When he tried to sit up just now, he nearly fell back from exhaustion. I should say from the look of him that he has been ill, perhaps in some hospital, and has not got up his strength. And he is quite young too—not more than five-and-twenty, I should say."

"May I go and look at him first, and then we will think what is to be done."

"Yes, dear, that will be best. But, Livy, I really cannot wait just now. All this has hindered me so that I have not been to the Traverses'. I shall not be long—not more than half an hour."

Olivia looked rather troubled at this, but it was no use making a fuss. Marcus must do his work, but her vision of a cosy evening was sadly marred. Instead of listening to *Esmond* she had to interview a strange man.

Directly Marcus had gone she went into the sitting-room; the couch had been drawn near the fire and Marcus's easy chair was pushed back, and there in the warmth and firelight, with an old plaid thrown over him, the forlorn wanderer lay sleeping as placidly as a child.

Olivia trod on tiptoe as she crossed the room and stood beside the couch, and studied him attentively.

Marcus was right; of course he was a gentleman; in spite of his emaciated appearance and poor, threadbare garments, this was evident; the features were well-cut and refined; the wasted hands bore no signs of manual labour, and the filbert nails were carefully attended.

Some poor prodigal fallen to low estate lay before her, and yet he looked so boyish and innocent in his sleep, that Olivia's heart grew very pitiful over him.

Turn him out in the winter's cold, and on Christmas night, too; when all the merciful angels were moving betwixt heaven and earth. When the bond of brotherhood that linked human beings together was drawn closer, and the rich man's gift and the widow's mite were paid into the same treasury of love, it was impossible!

How soundly he was sleeping, poor fellow, lulled by the very fulness of comfort, his sick hunger appeased, and his bones no longer aching with cold. A fair moustache covered his mouth, but Olivia, who prided herself on reading character, soon decided that the chin and lower part of the face showed signs of weakness, but as the thought passed through her mind a pair of deep blue eyes opened full on her face, and gazed at her in bewilderment.

"Where am I?" he said, feebly; "oh, I remember, I fainted on a doorstep, and some good Samaritan carried me in;" then in the same weak voice, "Forgive me, madam, but I am afraid to rise."

"Lie still—please lie still until my husband comes back," returned Olivia, a little nervously. How ill he looked—the eyes looked preternaturally large in the wasted face. "It is sad to see anyone in such distress," she continued, gently, "and on Christmas night, too."

"Yes, I am down on my luck," returned the stranger; but even in his feebleness he spoke a little recklessly; "I was always 'Murad the Unlucky;' it would have been all over with me in a few hours if the doctor had not found me. I was just at the end of my tether,"—but here a hard cough seemed to tear him to pieces.

"Lie still and try to sleep again," returned Olivia, hurriedly; then she went out of the room and summoned Martha.

When Marcus returned and went in search of her, he found her airing some sheets at the kitchen fire.

"Marcus," she said, "Martha has been lighting a fire in that little empty room, where the iron bedstead is; there are the mattress and the two blankets Aunt Madge lent me when I was ill; I am going to make up a bed there for to-night."

"You think we ought to keep him, then," returned her husband, looking at her questioningly. "To be sure, I hardly know how we are to turn him out; but if he falls ill on our hands, eh, Livy?"

"If he be very ill, you would have to take him to a hospital," she returned, quickly. "We have not got the cruise of oil, remember, and, as Aunt Madge says, we must be just before we are generous—but he has such a terrible cough, Marcus."

"Oh, that is from cold and exhaustion, and, as I told you before, he has evidently recovered from some severe illness, probably pleurisy or pneumonia. Well, Livy, I think you are about right; we must do our best for the poor beggar; now and then one must help 'lame dogs over stiles,'" and Marcus, whose bump of benevolence was largely developed, and who believed in practical religion, was sincerely grateful that his wife had fallen in with his views.

"I think you were sent to him to help him," returned Olivia, softly. "'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren.' Oh, Marcus, you know how that finishes," and Marcus smiled back at her as he left the room.

CHAPTER X.

A GENTLEMANLY TRAMP.

"'Tis not enough to help the feeble up,
But to support him after."—*Timon of Athens*.

When Olivia had finished her preparations she summoned Marcus upstairs, and with an air of housewifely pride showed him all the arrangements she had made.

In his bachelor days Dr. Luttrell had been in the habit of picking up all sorts of miscellaneous articles at sales, that he thought might be useful some day, and though Olivia had often laughed at his purchases and called them old lumber, they had often proved serviceable.

The strip of faded carpet and shabby little shut up washstand intended for the surgery, and a couple of chairs, had been put into the empty room, and though it looked bare enough to Marcus's eyes, and in spite of the bright little fire terribly chilly, it would doubtless be a haven of refuge to their miserable guest.

"He says it is just heaven," observed Marcus, when he came downstairs to his wife; "the night before last, poor beggar, he was in the casual ward, and last night he had a few hours in some refuge. 'Fancy the casual ward for a gentleman's son,' he said to me so bitterly, 'and there was actually a barrister there too, and we fraternised.' It is just as I thought, Livy, he was discharged from the hospital about three weeks ago, and has been roughing it ever since."

"Did you ask him his name, Marcus?"

"Yes, and he hesitated; I don't believe Robert Barton is his real name; the way he gave it looked a bit shady; he is a good-looking fellow, and I can't think he is vicious, but he is one of those weak fellows who get led away. If we are to help him, he must tell us more about himself."

Olivia found her hands full the next day; when Marcus went up to see Barton, he found him flushed and feverish, and complained of aching in his limbs.

"It is only a bad chill," he said, when Olivia looked grave at this report; "but unless we take care of him well for a day or two, it will be pneumonia or congestion of the lungs. I shall be pretty busy for the next two or three hours, and am afraid I must leave him to you and Martha. Don't let him talk, and keep the fire up, that room is still like an ice-house. Are you sure you don't mind the bother, Livy?"

And though Olivia was too truthful to answer in the negative, she promised to do her best for Marcus's *protégé*.

Robert Barton looked more to advantage lying in bed in Dr. Luttrell's old red striped blazer than he had done in his threadbare shabby clothes the previous night; indeed, Olivia quite started when she saw him; he was certainly what Marcus called him, a good-looking fellow, the dark blue eyes were beautiful and full of expression; he flushed as Olivia asked him kindly how he felt.

"I feel pretty bad," he returned, "and the doctor says I must lie here. I used not to think much of the story of the Good Samaritan, but I believe in it now. Oh, if you knew what it was to feel clean linen about me again."

"My husband says you are not to talk," replied Olivia, gently, "so I must carry out his orders; there

is some medicine you are to take, and by-and-by I shall bring you some hot broth; if only your cough were easier you would be able to sleep, but perhaps the drops will do you good."

"Thanks awfully; if you will put them down by me, I will take them, but please, please do not trouble about me, I am not worth it. I never was worth anything;" he sighed and there were tears in his eyes; but Olivia took no notice, she put things straight and then went about her business. On her next visit she found him sleeping; but as she put down the cup of hot broth beside him he half woke.

"Mother," he said, in a hoarse voice, "I never did it, I swear to you on my honour; I was never as bad as that; ask Olive, she believes in me, she knows I could not be such a low cad."

"Mr. Barton, I have brought you your broth; will you please take it before it gets cold?" and Olivia's clear voice roused Robert Barton effectually.

"I was dreaming," he said, looking at her rather confusedly. "I thought I was at Medhurst, in the old library; oh, what a fool I am!" and there was almost a despairing look in his eyes.

"You are weak, or you would not dream so, and yet it must be natural to dream about your own people. I am so glad you have someone belonging to you; last night we were afraid that you were quite friendless," then she stopped as she remembered Marcus's injunctions.

"No, I am not friendless," he returned, raising himself with difficulty, and coughing as he spoke. "Even the prodigal son had relatives, you know—a father and an elder brother; but he was better off than I, for he knew where to find them"—but here such a terrible fit of coughing came on, that Olivia forbade him to say another word.

"You shall tell us all about it when you are better," she said, kindly; "perhaps, who knows, we may be able to help you find your friends; we are poor people ourselves, my husband is only just beginning to make a practice, so there is not much that we can do."

Then as she stooped over him and wiped his brow, she was almost startled by the sweetness of the smile that crossed the young man's face.

"Not much," he reiterated; but Olivia shook her head at him to inculcate silence, and carried away the empty cup.

When Marcus came home at dinner-time, she proposed sending a note across to Galvaston House to tell Mr. Gaythorne that she could not leave home that afternoon, but to her surprise Dr. Luttrell objected to this.

"You know how crotchety Mr. Gaythorne is," he said, quickly, "and it will never do to disappoint him; he might be a bit touchy. Barton will be all right, and I shall be in myself the greater part of the afternoon." And then Olivia's scruples vanished.

She felt Marcus had been wise when she entered the library. Mr. Gaythorne was evidently expecting her; he had a large portfolio open before him. As he held out his hand to her without rising—for he had still great difficulty in moving—there was a brighter look on his face.

"We must make the most of the daylight," he said, and the next moment Olivia found herself in Venice.

The views were so beautiful and Mr. Gaythorne's descriptions so interesting, that, as usual, the time passed quickly. It was not until they were drinking their coffee in the pleasant firelight that Olivia found an opportunity of narrating her husband's strange adventure of the previous evening.

Mr. Gaythorne listened with his usual air of half contemptuous amusement; but before she came to the end of the recital he turned upon her quickly.

"Do you mean that the tramp is actually in your house at this moment?" he asked, indignantly.

"Oh, please don't call him that; he is a gentleman, he speaks in quite an educated manner, and his ways are so refined. Marcus saw that at once."

"Pooh, nonsense! My dear Mrs. Luttrell, a gentlemanly tramp is the worst kind; it is generally drink and profligacy that have dragged them down. You will be robbed or burnt in your beds!"

Olivia could not conceal her amusement. A vivid remembrance of the flushed, weary young face of the wanderer rose before her; it was so boyish-looking with the fair hair and golden brown moustache.

"I am sure he does not drink," she returned, trying vainly to suppress a smile; but this contradiction did not please Mr. Gaythorne.

"How can you know anything about it?" he asked, testily; "from your own account he has told you nothing except that he has been in a hospital and a casual ward—they have plenty of cases of delirium tremens in both places. Good heavens! and I thought Dr. Luttrell was a sensible man. This is the way he takes care of his wife and child, harbouring a frozen-out tramp."

"Dear Mr. Gaythorne," returned Olivia, pleadingly, "just put yourself in my husband's place. Marcus

found the poor young fellow on a doorstep in Harbut Road not a dozen yards from his own door. Being a doctor, he saw at once that he must be warmed and fed or life would be endangered, and Christmas night of all nights. How could he forbear in sheer humanity to take in the poor creature, and then when he found how weak he was, how was he to turn him out into the streets again?"

"He might have sent for a cab and had him driven to a hospital."

"No—Marcus said it was no case for a hospital, at least at present; they would not have admitted him; indeed—indeed he could not have done otherwise—I told him so at once. What is the use of going to church and saying one's prayers if one shrinks from such a clear duty as that? Why, we should never dare to read St. James again!"

"And why not, may I ask?"

"Because we should have set our faces against his teaching. Oh, you know what I mean, Mr. Gaythorne," and Olivia repeated the text reverently: "'If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them go in peace, be ye clothed and fed, and yet you give them not those things needful for the body, what doth it profit?' Marcus does not only profess his religion. Oh"—finished Olivia, with sparkling eyes—"I did feel so proud of my husband last night."

"Well—well; if you choose to be Quixotic it is your own affair, not mine," but Mr. Gaythorne spoke with less irritation. "Now shall we go on with the portfolio, or do you want to go back to your gentlemanly tramp?" Then Olivia begged to finish the pictures.

"I have nearly half an hour before Dot's bedtime," she said, cheerfully, "and then I must go," and so harmony was restored.

When the half-hour had passed, Olivia took her leave, but before she reached the door, Mr. Gaythorne called her back and thrust something into her hand.

"That will help you to provide for your tramp," he said, hurriedly, "and prevent him from eating you out of house and home. Mind you repay yourself before you lay out any for him: do you suppose," in a cynical tone, "that your husband's income will bear the expense of such an inmate as that?" and Olivia, to her intense astonishment, found the two crumpled bits of paper in her hand were five-pound notes.

"Oh there is no need for this," she said, in distress; "have you forgotten the turkey and all those good things Aunt Madge sent us?" but Mr. Gaythorne waved her away.

"Nonsense," he said, crossly; "do you suppose a trifle like that matters to me? Why, I am not spending half my income; if you want any more you can just let me know; but if you take my advice you will get rid of that fellow as soon as possible."

Marcus smiled when Olivia showed him the money. "Put it away for the present," he said, "it will buy Barton some warm clothes; we can afford to give him his bit and sup for a few days; he is stone broke, as they call it, and a few pounds may be just what he requires, and put him on his feet again."

When Mrs. Broderick heard of the strange guest at No. 1, Galvaston Terrace, she was deeply interested, and warmly commended Marcus's philanthropy.

"I wonder," she said, thoughtfully, after a few minutes' silence, "whether any of Fergus's things would fit him; you know what a foolish body I have been, Livy, to keep them all this time, and it gives Deb so much trouble to preserve them from moth; but there, we all have our crazes.

"I have been meaning to part with them for a long time, and this seems a good opportunity; it does seem such a pity to touch that money; it would set him up to have a few pounds in hand."

Olivia could not deny this, and in her secret heart she thought Aunt Madge could not do better with her dead husband's things.

"It will be a real act of charity," she said, frankly. "Oh, Aunt Madge, if you could only see his clothes, they are so worn and threadbare, and when Martha washed his shirt and socks she almost cried over the holes; and then his boots!"

"Say no more, my child, it shall be done, and at once," and Mrs. Broderick's mouth looked unusually firm.

The very next day Marcus carried a big parcel upstairs and opened it before Robert Barton's astonished eyes.

Mrs. Broderick, who did nothing grudgingly, had put up all she thought requisite—a warm suit, and a great coat, a pair of boots, some coloured flannel shirts and warm underclothing.

"It has upset him a bit," Marcus said, when he re-entered the parlour, "he is still so weak, you see. He fairly broke down when I showed him the things. He is very grateful; by-the-bye, Livy," sitting down beside her as he spoke, "he has been telling me more about himself to-night; not much, certainly, he does not seem to like speaking of himself, but he gave me a brief outline.

"He has relations, only he has not seen them for some years; it appeared he quarrelled with them

or got wrong somehow; in fact, he owned he had been a bit wild, and then things went from bad to worse with him, and he had a run of ill-luck.

"It seems he is an artist and rather fond of his profession, but he hurt his hand, and blood-poisoning came on, and for some time he was afraid he would lose his right arm; for months he could paint no pictures, and so all his little capital was swallowed up."

"But why did he not write to his people, Marcus, and make it up with them?"

"So he did, but his letters never got answered, and he got sick of it at last. When he was pretty nearly at the end of his tether he came back to England. I think he said he was in Paris then, or was it Beyrout? well, never mind, he went straight to his old home; but to his horror the house was shut up, and to let, and the caretaker told him that no one had lived there for years, and that she believed the party who had owned it was abroad; he could get nothing more than that out of her.

"He put up at a little wayside inn that night, meaning to make inquiries in the neighbourhood, but the next day he fell ill, and after a bit they took him to the hospital, and since then he drifted up to London, hoping to see his father's old lawyer and glean intelligence from him, but he found he was dead. His fixed intention was to go down again to the place and see the vicar and prosecute his inquiries in person, but ill-luck pursued him; he was robbed in some wretched lodging, and soon found himself in actual want; 'but I mean, if I die for it, to get to Medhurst somehow,' he said to me. 'I could have found someone to identify me there; not that we had been there long, for my people mostly lived abroad, but there must be some friends who could tell me about them.'

"It is a queer story altogether, and yet not a wholly improbable one; but there is a mystery somewhere, Livy, and I am sure of one thing, that his name is not Barton. I hinted as much, but he only flushed up and said nothing."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NIGHT-BELL RINGS.

"A bad beginning leads to a bad ending."—*Livy.*

The next few days passed quietly. Dr. Luttrell professed himself perfectly satisfied with his patient's progress. In spite of his delicate aspect, and the terrible hardships he had experienced, Robert Barton proved that he had a fair amount of recuperative power. Perhaps his youth was in his favour, and it was soon evident that he had a naturally sanguine temperament. His nature was singularly ill-balanced, he was always in extremes—either in the depths of depression or else unaccountably excited. Olivia would sometimes find him crouching over the fire with his head between his hands in a state of morose misery. And at other times she would hear him whistling a few bars from some opera in quite a light-hearted way.

"If you do not mind, Olive, I think that Barton had better come down to-morrow afternoon," Marcus observed one evening. "He will get on all the faster." And as Olivia made no objection to this the matter was settled.

Marcus secretly wondered how Robert Barton could take things quite so coolly. Perhaps it might be partly owing to his enfeebled state, but he certainly did not seem to trouble himself much about the future. "I feel as if I should pull through now," he said, once. "I only wanted a helping hand to lift me out of the slough of despond. When I am a bit stronger, doctor, I must paint a pot-boiler or two," and Marcus had quietly assented to this.

"I have made up my mind what I must do, Livy," continued Dr. Luttrell later on that same evening, when he had arranged that his patient should come downstairs. "You know that nice Mrs. Randall in the Models; well, she has a lodger, but she expects that he will leave her in a week or so, as he has work at a distance. I might take the room for Barton, it is a clean, tidy little place. And Mrs. Randall is a motherly sort of woman, and will look after him."

"Oh, what a good idea, Marcus."

"Yes, it came into my head when I was leaving the Models yesterday. And I had half a mind to go back and ask the price of the room, but I was in such a hurry. I would pay her a month in advance, and we would use some of Mr. Gaythorne's money in buying him what he wants for his painting. I have no idea what sort of an artist he is, but it seems the only thing he can do."

"Oh, how pleased he will be, poor fellow," exclaimed Olivia, "but surely he is not well enough to leave us just now, and in this weather?" for a hard frost had set in.

"Not for another week, perhaps, but we must not let him think himself a fixture here. We have had him ten days already."

Marcus had not repented of his philanthropy, he was too highly principled for that, but though he would not have confessed it to his wife for worlds, he was a little alarmed at the responsibility so suddenly thrown on him.

Barton seemed such a happy-go-lucky, casual sort of person. The gentlemanly tramp was not a bad name for him. He was not quite open, either. In Dr. Luttrell's opinion he ought by this time to have confided in them fully. "He is a bit shifty and hazy about things," he said to himself, "and I shall be glad when Livy and I have the house to ourselves."

"Ten days," repeated Olivia, thoughtfully; "is it so long as that, Marcus? How time flies when one is busy! Do you know, dear, I have such an odd feeling sometimes. I feel as though that poor fellow was sent to us for some special purpose, that we had a sort of mission towards him. It is not that I want him, for of course his being here makes so much work for Martha, but all the same, I do not wish you to lose sight of him."

"My dear child," returned Marcus, rather impatiently, "am I likely to lose sight of him when I am at the Models at least three times a week?"

"No, but we can see him so much better under our own roof," she replied, quietly. "We must not get tired of him too soon. Yes, you are tired, dear," laying her hand affectionately on his. "Do you think I do not know that, although you are so good about it, and never grumble, but it will be trying to us both when he comes downstairs."

"Yes, and one hardly knows how to treat him," returned Marcus, feeling it a relief to utter his thoughts. "He is clever and refined, and I suppose we must allow that he is a gentleman, but it is impossible somehow to trust him, or to feel at one's ease with him. There is something that fascinates and yet repels one."

"I know what you mean," replied Olivia, thoughtfully, "but somehow I like him in spite of everything; Marcus, what a blessing it is to think that I went to Galvaston House this afternoon, and so I shall be free to-morrow," for Olivia's sunny, nature always looked on the bright side of things.

That night a wonderful thing happened. The night-bell rang.

That sound so dreaded by the hard-worked doctor was like a triumphal *reveille* in Marcus's ears. And Robert Barton's muttered "poor devil" as he turned on his pillow would not have been endorsed.

Olivia indeed had been alarmed for a moment by the unaccustomed sound, and thought drowsily that the house must be on fire, but she was soon wide awake and hushing Dot.

"Go to sleep, girlie, it is only someone come to see dada," she said, rocking her little one. Dot had been startled and was cross in consequence, and it was sometime before she could be pacified.

The next minute Marcus came back fully dressed. "I must go round to 15, Brunswick Place," he said, hurriedly. "Don't expect me back till you see me," and then she heard him running downstairs.

"He expects to be detained, so I suppose some poor baby is to enter this wintry world," she thought, as she composed herself to sleep, but she little guessed the terribly hard work that was before Marcus.

It was early morning and Martha had already crept softly past her door in her stocking' feet, as she would have said, so as not to wake Miss Baby, before Dr. Luttrell let himself in with his latchkey.

He looked sadly jaded, but utterly refused to lie down and have a nap. "I will have my tub and some breakfast instead," he observed. "They gave me some hot coffee a couple of hours ago. My word, it is freezing hard still. Tell Martha to give us a good-sized rasher of ham."

"Is the poor thing all right," asked Olivia presently, when they were seated at their breakfast, with Dot crawling between them. Then for the moment Dr. Luttrell looked puzzled.

"What poor thing—oh," with a laugh, "I see what you mean now, but it was nothing of that sort. I have not had such a business since my hospital days," he went on; "poor Livy, you would not have slept so comfortably if you had known. It was a case of delirium tremens; an elderly man, too, and his poor daughter was frightened out of her wits; but she behaved splendidly; you women have pluck; I must tell you that she actually helped me when the man-servant was afraid to come near his master."

"Oh, Marcus, he might have hurt you," and Olivia turned pale—perhaps it is as well that doctors' wives know so little about their husbands' experiences.

"Oh, we had plenty of that sort of business at Bart's," he returned, coolly; "but I shall have to get him a nurse. I must see after one at once, or poor Miss Williams will be worn out; will you give me another cup of tea, Livy?"

"Are they new people too, Marcus, like the Stanwell's?" but Dr. Luttrell shook his head.

"No, they have lived in the place for years, but Mr. Williams quarrelled with Dr. Bevan, and his daughter dared not send for him, and as I was the nearest medical man, the servant came to me; it was just a fluke, that's all."

"Is there only one daughter, Marcus?"

"Well, my dear, it was not likely that I questioned Miss Williams about her family, but I imagine she is the only daughter; poor girl, I felt sorry for her; there have been plenty of briers besetting her path, I should say; as the poet writes so feelingly, she has had more kicks than halfpence," and as usual, when Marcus began to joke, Olivia took the hint and left off questioning him.

The little parlour looked a haven of comfort to Robert Barton's eyes as he entered it that afternoon, leaning on Dr. Luttrell's arm.

Olivia was sitting at needlework as usual, with Dot playing at her feet, and sprawling on the rug in exact imitation of Jet the black kitten; she rose at once with a bright, welcoming smile, and arranged the cushions in the easy-chair.

"I daresay you are glad to be down again," she said, kindly, as Barton sank back in them rather heavily; "but you must be careful, you are far from strong yet."

"Thanks, I am tolerably fit," but the weak, shaking hand rather contradicted this.

"Oh, what a pretty child! I should like to make a sketch of her. Will you come to me, little one?" And Robert Barton's smile was so winning that Dot crawled to him at once, and hauled herself up by the help of one finger.

Olivia gave her husband a quick glance which he quite understood; "there cannot be much harm in him if he likes children," this was what her look meant, and even Marcus was touched and surprised when he saw his little daughter put up her round face to be kissed, and then make playful dabs at him.

"What a darling she is—rather like you, Mrs. Luttrell, but she has a look of the doctor too. I have always been fond of children, they are never afraid of me," and this speech completely won the young mother's heart.

"He is really very distinguished-looking," she said to herself, as she watched him playing with Dot; "he is dreadfully thin, and, of course, Uncle Fergus's clothes are too big for him, but no one could help seeing that he is a gentleman."

They began to talk presently in quite a friendly way, and after a time Olivia said, quite simply:

"Your name is not really Robert Barton, is it?" She had blurted this out almost without thinking.

"Well, no," he returned, reddening a little, "but I have been calling myself by that name for the last month or two, it was handy," and his face twitched. "I did not care to carry my father's name into the places I have been obliged to frequent lately."

"You have a father then, Mr. Barton?" in an interested tone.

"Oh, yes, and a mother and a sister, though I have heard nothing of them for half a dozen years."

"Oh, not so long as that, surely," and then Olivia looked at him with kindly gravity. "Why, you could only have been a boy when you left home."

"I am older than you think, Mrs. Luttrell—I shall soon be eight-and-twenty—but I was young enough, certainly, when they shunted me off. Confession may be good for the soul," he went on, with a reckless laugh; "but it is not particularly pleasant. As I told your husband, I quarrelled with my people. It was my own fault in a great measure; but I do not mean to take all the blame; if they had treated me differently, things would not have come to this; but this is all ancient history; if a man sows thistles he must expect a harvest of the same. I have had my evil things certainly, and perhaps I deserved them."

"And you wish now that you had acted differently;" then such a look of intense pain crossed Robert Barton's face that Olivia was quite startled.

"I would give my right hand if those months could be blotted out," he said, vehemently. "You know the proverb, Mrs. Luttrell—'Give a dog a bad name, and hang him'—well, they were for hanging me, I mean figuratively, so I took the bit between my teeth and bolted."

"It seems to me, Mr. Barton," she said, thoughtfully, "that your one chance to retrieve the past is to find out your own people. I suppose"—hesitating a little—"that they are in a position to help you?"

"Most certainly they are; we lived mostly abroad, but always in good style; the house we had at Medhurst was only taken on lease for a short time; it was my father's fancy never to stay long in one place; he was fond of travelling; when I am strong enough to brave the weather, I will go down to Medhurst and hunt up an acquaintance or two; there must be someone who knew him; but the doctor will not give me leave yet."

"Did my husband say anything to you about the future?" asked Olivia, tentatively; then Robert

Barton's face, that had grown suddenly old and haggard, brightened up.

"He told me some old gentleman, a friend of yours, had been awfully kind, and that he would be able to take a room for me for a month, and get me some canvas and colours. If I only had my tools, I could take a sketch of your little girl at once, just as she is now with the kitten. I could call it 'Playfellows,' just a small thing, you know, but it would be sure to take. I do not paint badly, although I have not made my mark yet, but I have sold two or three small pictures besides pot-boilers. I could begin to-morrow if only I had my easel and palette," and his tone was so eager, that Olivia promised to consult her husband, and, if he approved, to go herself for the necessary things.

When Marcus came in he told them at once that he had been round to the Models. "The room will be vacant next Tuesday, Barton," he said, briskly, "and I have settled with Mrs. Randall that you will take it for a month. It is a poor place, of course, but in my opinion it is not so bare as your present diggings, and it is very clean and comfortable, so you may be sure of board and lodging for a month. You will have to be careful, you know," he went on, "as long as this weather lasts. You must not think of moving about the country just yet or you will be laid up again," and then Olivia chimed in, and after a little consultation it was arranged that Olivia should go to the picture-shop at the corner of Harbut Street the next morning.

Robert Barton made a list of things required. He was in such good spirits all tea-time, and told such amusing stories of his life in Paris, that even Marcus, tired as he was, was much entertained.

"He is really a well-informed fellow," he observed, when Barton had retired. "I am not so sure that we shall find him in the way, after all. He told us that story about the artist's model in quite a racy fashion. He seems to be up to date in his notions. I am a bit curious to find out if he can paint or if it is only tall talk, but he certainly seems bent on it. Now I must turn in, for I am dead beat. Oh, by-the-bye, Livy, I told Miss Williams that you would go round and see her to-morrow afternoon. It would really be a charity," as Olivia seemed very much astonished at this. "The poor girl is so lonely, she has no brothers and sisters, and as far as I can find out no friends either."

"No friends, Marcus—and they live in one of those nice houses in Brunswick Place, and keep a man-servant!"

"Oh, I daresay they have a few acquaintances," returned Dr. Luttrell, with a yawn. "Most likely it has been impossible for her to have friends. When I proposed sending you to cheer her up, she looked quite grateful. Poor soul, you will like her, Olive. She is just your sort; no nonsense about her, plenty of feeling, but nothing hysterical."

"Marcus," observed Olivia, slipping her hand through his arm, and speaking very deliberately, "do you not think we had better have those cards printed? our visiting acquaintance is so much increased," and then Marcus laughed and turned down the lamp.

CHAPTER XII.

GRETA.

"For I am the only one of my friends that I can rely on."—*Appolodamus*.

Olivia set out in good spirits to pay her call the next afternoon. It was a clear, frosty day, sunless and excessively cold, but Olivia felt a certain exhilaration in the ring of the horses' hoofs on the hard road, and the brisk exercise brought such a glow to her face, that more than one passer-by looked at her approvingly.

There are no cosmetiques so beneficial as good health, happiness, and an easy conscience. Olivia, who had never been handsome, looked so fresh and comely, that many a languid beauty might have envied her.

Brunswick Place was considered rather a desirable spot; it was quiet and retired, and the houses were well-built and substantial looking. They were chiefly inhabited by solicitors in good practice, and retired army men who had private means of their own. The very air was redolent of respectability and prosperity. No one with a small income would have thought of settling down in Brunswick Place.

The man-servant who admitted Olivia ushered her into a large, handsomely furnished drawing-room with a conservatory opening out of it, and the next moment Miss Williams joined her.

To her great surprise Olivia recognised her at once. She was the tall girl in brown that she had so often noticed in church, who was always alone, and who looked so sad. Yes, it was the same tired-looking young face, she was certain of it.

"I am sure I have often seen you," she said, as they shook hands, and Miss Williams smiled.

"I was just thinking the same of you. You attend St. Matthew's, do you not? I have seen you with Dr. Luttrell. Please sit down—no, not that chair. Come a little closer to the fire, it is so bitterly cold," and here she shivered a little.

"I do not mind the cold as much as some people," replied Olivia, sturdily. "I am very strong and take plenty of exercise. Perhaps you have not been out; it is so difficult to keep warm indoors."

"No, I have not been out," returned Miss Williams, and then she looked at Olivia. "It is very kind of you to come and see me—Mrs. Luttrell."

She spoke slowly, almost deliberately, but her voice was pleasant. In her light tweed, she looked even taller than Olivia had thought her, and very thin.

In spite of her pale complexion and want of animation, Miss Williams had some claims to good looks. She had soft grey eyes, with remarkably long lashes, and the coils of fair hair set off a finely shaped head.

"My husband thought that you seemed rather lonely," returned Olivia, in her usual straightforward fashion. Then a faint colour rose to Miss Williams's face.

"Yes, it was so kind of him to propose it, and I was very grateful. I suppose he told you that I had no friends—no one, I mean, that I could ask to come in and sit with me a little. I know the next-door people slightly. We call at intervals, and they have invited me to a party, but I have never got beyond that. It has been difficult for me to make friends. I am rather shy—and——" here she broke off rather awkwardly.

"I think I know what you mean," replied Olivia. "When one is in trouble, one wants real friends, not chance acquaintances, and if one has not made them——"

"Just so—that is precisely my case. Circumstances have been to blame, for I think I am sociable by nature. Dr. Luttrell was very quick; he understood at once, and he said it was not good for me to be so much alone. Oh, he was such a comfort to me. Even the first moment he did not seem like a stranger. I felt before half-an-hour was over that I could trust him implicitly. And when he suggested yesterday that you should come and cheer me up, I said yes at once."

"I was very glad to come," replied Olivia, quickly. "Like yourself, I have no friends here, with the exception of another patient of my husband's, an old gentleman who lives opposite to us. So I hope you will let me be of some use to you. You know," after a moment's hesitation, "Dr. Luttrell is not one to talk about his patients, but he told me a little about your trouble."

"So I imagined, and of course it makes it easier for me." And here Miss Williams's lips trembled slightly. "You could not help me or be any comfort without knowing a little. Oh, Mrs. Luttrell, is it not dreadful? My poor father, and such a good father, too. He is just killing himself, I know that."

"And you are all alone?"

"Yes, since my mother died. Things were bad enough then, but they have been worse since. She used to be able to influence him and keep him straight, but he will not listen to me."

"Have you had this to bear long?" and Olivia looked at her pityingly. What a life for a young, sensitive girl!

"For some years. Ever since Dacre, my brother, died. It was a boating accident, and they brought him home quite dead. We thought it was the shock, but Dr. Bevan, who attended him, then told us that it was due also to hereditary disease. We dared not send for Dr. Bevan the other night, though he understood him so thoroughly, and was so kind. My father had quarrelled with him, but Dr. Luttrell saw him yesterday and they had a long talk."

"My husband always speaks so highly of Dr. Bevan."

"Yes, and I liked him so much. He was such a comfort to me when poor mother died, and I shall always be grateful to him, but I dared not run the risk of exciting my father. He is a little better today; Dr. Luttrell says so; but of course he is coming again to-night. We have a good nurse, so things are more hopeful, but I shall have to get rid of our man. He is no use. Dr. Luttrell says I must have someone older and more reliable, who can help in an emergency. Roberts is far too young to be any real good."

Olivia listened and assented. She was quick-witted enough to see that it would be better to let Miss Williams talk and unburden herself a little. The girl, in spite of a naturally shy temperament, seemed ready to open her heart to her. Perhaps Olivia's winning personality had already won her. Human nature is so strangely constituted—the laws of attraction and repulsion are so unaccountable.

Some natures seem magnetic; they attract and draw us almost without our own volition. With others we make no way, months and years of intercourse will not bind us more closely. We are not on the same plane.

Olivia's sympathetic manner, the pitying kindness in her eyes, appealed strongly to Greta Williams,

the lonely girl—isolated by the worst curse that can affect humanity—grievous hereditary vice—the innocent scape-goat of another's sin. Alas, how many homes even in our favoured land are desolated as well as desecrated from this one cause. What piteous waste of sweet young life, crushed under unnatural burdens. The sin of England, we say—the shameful curse of diseased self-indulgence.

Greta Williams seemed patient by nature; though it was a relief to talk openly to another woman, she did not complain. In spite of her father's faults, he was evidently very dear to her.

"It is a disease—a madness," she said once, "but it would never do to have young people here; one could not be sure, and for his sake it is better not," and in these few words there lay a world of tragedy.

To love, and yet not to be sure that the object of our love will not disgrace us. What misery to a refined and sensitive nature, to have to blush and grow pale from very shame and terror; to stretch out a helping hand to some dear one who has sunk too low to reach it. Ah, only One, the All-merciful, can rightly gauge the anguish of such a sorrow. No wonder Greta Williams looked so worn and pale, and that her eyes had grown sad.

"He is worse than he has ever been," she whispered, presently. "Dr. Luttrell does not tell me, but I know he was alarmed for him that night. He has been so much better lately," she went on, with a little sob in her throat. "I had felt almost comfortable; not quite comfortable, you know, because it never really lasted, but he liked me to read to him, and we played chess; but now"—her voice dropped into weariness—"I shall never feel quite easy again."

Olivia had long ago outstayed an ordinary conventional visit; but Marcus had sent her for a purpose: she was to try and cheer, and, if possible, comfort, this poor girl, so, when Greta rang for tea, she simply stayed on, and towards the end of her visit she thought her young hostess looked a shade brighter.

"You will come and see me," she said when she rose to take leave; but Miss Williams hesitated.

"Will you forgive me if I do not return your call just now? I simply dare not leave the house. You understand, do you not, Mrs. Luttrell? but if you would be so very kind as to come again."

"Most certainly I will come again; did you think that I should not? but, dear Miss Williams, you must not shut yourself up too closely, or your health will suffer."

But Greta only smiled faintly at this.

"I shall tell Dr. Luttrell that you have done me good," she said, pressing Olivia's hand; "how strange it seems—there is no cure for such a trouble as mine, and yet telling you about it has seemed to make it more bearable. Oh, please come again soon—very soon," and of course Olivia readily promised this.

It was rather a disappointment on her return to find Marcus had been in for tea and had gone out again. Robert Barton, who was reading by the fire, said that he would not be back for an hour or two.

"Have you had a pleasant afternoon, Mrs. Luttrell?" he asked, putting down his book, and trying to stifle a yawn; but, though Olivia replied in the affirmative, she did not vouchsafe any information about her visit.

When Marcus returned two hours later, he found their guest had betaken himself to bed, and Olivia was able to give him a graphic account of her afternoon.

"I am very much interested in Miss Williams," she observed presently; "fancy her turning out to be the very tall girl in brown at St. Matthew's."

"Did your ears burn just now, Livy," observed Marcus, mischievously. "I am glad to find someone appreciates my wife properly; you seem to have got on like a house on fire; well, you will be doing good work there."

"She said you were rather alarmed about her father that first night."

"Did she? I never said so," he returned, dryly; "in some cases it is best to reserve one's opinion; but of course at Mr. Williams's age it is a grave matter;" then he drew his chair closer to the fire. "Life's an awful muddle, Livy, as that man said in *Hard Times*; fancy the loneliness of a young creature like that; why, she cannot be more than two- or three-and-twenty, and her lawful protector drinking himself to death."

Olivia shuddered, her own young life had been anxious and hardworking; but compared with Greta Williams it had been strewn with roses. Could any parents have been more honoured than hers had been? And then had she not always had Aunt Madge's wise counsel and sympathy to aid her? and, lastly, had not the sunshine of a happy love glorified it? But Miss Williams apparently had none of these things.

"Not more than others I deserve, but God has given me more," she thought, with a swelling heart, as she made her thanksgiving that night.

In spite of outside weather, there was plenty of life and movement in the corner house at Galvaston Terrace. The next day Mr. Barton began his sketch of Dot, and he soon became so absorbed in it that

he seemed to forget his weakness and lassitude.

Olivia watched the progress of the picture with intense delight, and carried a favourable report of it on her next visit to Galvaston House.

"It is a striking likeness of my little girl," she said. "Even my husband, who is not easy to please in such matters, allows that. He owned yesterday that Mr. Barton is certainly a good artist, and understands his business. I like to watch him? he looks so happy when he is painting, as though he has forgotten all his troubles; he is staying with us a day or two longer on account of the picture, but he will certainly leave us on Thursday."

Mr. Gaythorne did not answer; he seemed to be considering something; at last he said, rather abruptly:

"Yes, Dr. Luttrell has been telling me what a clever fellow he seems, and I think I shall get him to do a little job for me.

"That picture I bought at Stangrove's wants touching up; it has been injured; I knew that when I bought it; but it was so slight that it did not matter, and I meant to get it put to rights. If I send it over to-morrow or the next day, do you think Mr. Barton will undertake the job? it will only take him an hour or two."

"He will gladly do so, I am sure of that. Is it the picture that my husband admired so much?"

"Yes, the Prodigal Son; I bought it that day I sprained my ankle. Very well, Mrs. Luttrell, it shall be sent to your house."

CHAPTER XIII.

FRESH COMPLICATIONS.

"It is best to be cautious and avoid extremes."—*Plutarch*.

Greta Williams's pathetic little speech, "Come soon, very soon, please," rather haunted Olivia, and she very speedily found an excuse for repeating her visit. This time she was welcomed so warmly, and Miss Williams seemed so unfeignedly pleased to see her, that she felt she had done the right thing, and after that she went frequently to Brunswick Place.

Circumstances certainly favoured the rapid growth of their intimacy. Greta, who had caught a severe cold, was obliged to remain closely confined to the house, and Dr. Luttrell, who was sincerely sorry for the lonely girl, encouraged his wife to go as often as possible.

"She has not a soul belonging to her, at least in England," he said once, "though she has relations in New Zealand, uncles and aunts and cousins. There is a colony of Williamses in Christ-church. The worst of it is people seemed to have left off calling, her father made himself so disagreeable; it is hard lines for her, poor girl. I believe Mrs. Tolman looks her up occasionally." Then Olivia, at the mention of the vicar's wife, made a naughty little face.

"Miss Williams rather dreads her visits," she replied. "She calls her an east-windy sort of person, and I know what she means. Mrs. Tolman is an excellent woman, but she rubs one up the wrong way. I always feel bristly all over after one of her parochial visits, and I know Aunt Madge feels the same. When the vicar is with her he seems to tone her down somehow, but the very swing of her gown as she enters the room, and the way she sits down, as though she were taking possession of one's chair, irritates my nerves," but though Marcus laughed he did not contradict this.

The new friendship gave Olivia a great deal of pleasure. Since her school-days she had never enjoyed the society of anyone of her own age. The hard-working young governess had had scant leisure for cementing intimacies.

It had always been a wonder to her how Marcus had managed his courting, and she often told him so. She had met him at the house of one of her pupils, and, it being a wet day, he had offered his umbrella, and walked back with her to her lodgings.

She had a vague idea that he had detained her for such a long time talking on the doorstep that her mother had come down and invited him to wait until the rain was over, but Marcus always repudiated this, and declared that she had talked so fast that he found it impossible to get away; but after this he and her mother had seemed to play into each other's hands.

Perhaps under other circumstances Olivia would hardly have found Miss Williams so attractive and

interesting, for, though amiable and affectionate, she was by no means clever. Her accomplishments consisted in a tolerable knowledge of French and Italian picked up abroad, but she had no decided tastes. She read little, knew nothing of music, and her chief pleasure seemed the care of her flowers and her beautiful needlework, for some French nuns had taught her embroidery and lace-making. Olivia, who was intellectual and well read, and who thought deeply on most subjects, had soon reached the limits of Greta's knowledge, but happily there is culture of the heart as well as of the head.

Greta had plenty of sweet, womanly virtues. She was patient by nature and capable of much long-suffering and endurance. Her affections were warm and deep, but she had hitherto found no fitting scope for them. The sad grey eyes told their own story: her youthful bloom had been wasted amid sterile surroundings. Greta Williams had one of those strong womanly characters that are meant to be the prop of weaker natures, that are veritable towers of strength in hours of adversity. It was for this that Olivia grew to love her when she knew her better.

"She is so patient," she said once when she was discussing her with Mrs. Broderick. "She has so much staying power, and then she never quite loses her faith in anyone, however hopeless they seem. Even Marcus has said more than once that her pluck is wonderful, but of course it wears her out."

"You must bring her to see me, Livy," returned Aunt Madge. "We will have a little tea party, and Deb shall distinguish herself," but Greta only smiled faintly when Olivia repeated this.

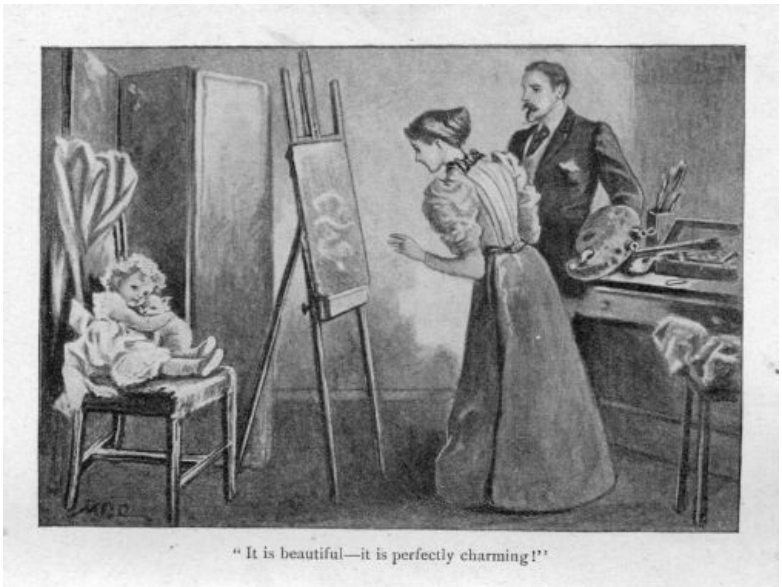
"Some day, perhaps," she said, quietly, and then her eyes had suddenly filled with tears. "Oh, Mrs. Luttrell, we have had such a dreadful time. Nurse only left him a minute, and he managed to get to the brandy. It must have been Roberts's fault that the cellarette was unlocked, but ever since he has seemed quite mad; we were obliged to send for Dr. Luttrell." And then at the thought of the grim shadows brooding over that unhappy home, Olivia's little plans seemed out of place.

Mr. Gaythorne kept his promise, and before Robert Barton left them, the picture was sent to the corner house.

Mr. Barton, who had just finished his sketch of Dot and the kitten, had that moment invited Olivia to look at it.

"I may touch it up a bit more, but I suppose it will do now," he said, in a tone of complacency.

"Do! it is beautiful—it is perfectly charming. Oh, if we were only rich enough to buy it for ourselves, but," looking at him severely, "you know what my husband said this morning, Mr. Barton, that he would not allow me to accept it as a gift. You are to take it round to that picture dealer's in Harbut Street, and see if they will not give you a fair price for it, and then you must set about something bigger for the Royal Academy." And though Robert Barton shook his head in a melancholy dissenting fashion, he knew that Dr. Luttrell had been right.



"It is beautiful—it is perfectly charming!"

"It is beautiful—it is perfectly charming."

"I should have liked you to have it," he said, with a sigh, "but I suppose beggars ought not to be generous. If I only get on, I will paint Dot again;" and then Martha had come in with the picture.

"There is no light now. I shall have to wait till to-morrow, but of course your old gentleman knows that."

Robert Barton always spoke of him as the old gentleman, but when Olivia had first mentioned his name, he had seemed a little startled, and had questioned her about him.

"He lives alone," he said presently; "it is rather an uncommon name. There were some Gaythornes in London—a firm of solicitors—perhaps it is one of those. They make plenty of money sometimes." And then the subject had dropped.

Olivia, who had promised to spend an hour or two with Mr. Gaythorne that evening, looked at the clock, and then folded up her work; but as she put it away, a sudden quick exclamation from Robert Barton made her look at him.

He was staring at the picture. "Why, it is my own work," he said, with a flush of pleasure. "The picture I painted at Beyrout, and that I sold for a mere song. Of course the fellow cheated me, he was a mean sort of chap; but it is not so bad after all. And what's this?—'Goddard.' Well, of all the cads! He has put his own name to it, but I swear I painted it. Abdul and his son Hassan were my models. Oh, I see by your face that you like it, Mrs. Luttrell. I don't think myself that I ever did anything better. Isn't it Carlyle that says 'Genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains.' Well, I took lots of pains with that picture. I meant to get it into the Royal Academy, but ill-luck obliged me to sell it."

"You painted that picture of the Prodigal Son!" exclaimed Olivia, excitedly.

"Oh, yes, I painted it all right. It was a nasty trick of Goddard's putting his name to it. Look, that was Abdul's wife, the one with the distaff; the other two were two women I saw sitting under a palm-tree one evening. Well, your old gentleman has sent it to the right person to touch it up. It shall be done to-morrow before I go."

Olivia was so full of this wonderful piece of intelligence that she could hardly wait until Phoebe had closed the library door. "Oh, Mr. Gaythorne," she exclaimed, "what do you think! Your beautiful picture of the Prodigal Son is Mr. Barton's work. Goddard is only the name of the man who bought it. Yes," as Mr. Gaythorne looked very much astonished at this. "You will not call him the gentlemanly tramp any longer, now that he is a real artist."

"Look here, Mrs. Luttrell," he said, abruptly, "I don't believe all this. You are being gulled. Goddard painted that picture, not Barton; I hate imposition. I daresay the fellow can paint in a pretty amateurish sort of way, and he will be able to do my job, but I am not going to swallow this without proof. Tell him to bring the picture back himself, and you can come too if you like. If he has been imposing on your credulity I shall very soon detect him." But Olivia was indignant at this.

"Of course he shall bring back the picture if you wish it," she said, a little stiffly. "And I shall ask him to bring the sketch of Dot, too, and then you will see for yourself how well he paints, but he is no impostor, I am certain of that;" but as usual Mr. Gaythorne only held obstinately to his opinion.

"My dear young lady," he said, irritably, "you have hardly enough experience to judge in a case like this. If Mr. Barton really painted that picture, which I deny, for Goddard painted it, he is a worse scamp than I thought him. What business had he to be starving on a doorstep or supping off dry bread and thin cocoa in a casual ward? My dear, we old fellows know the world better than that. Robert Barton is a black sheep, and not all your charity can wash him white."

Mr. Gaythorne was evidently in one of his obstinate moods, and Olivia thought it prudent to say no more on this subject. Robert Barton would be able to vindicate himself without difficulty. When Mr. Gaythorne saw the sketch of Dot and the kitten he would be more lenient in his judgment of the young artist.

During the remainder of her visit she chatted to him cheerfully about a book he had lent her; but just before she took her leave she unfortunately broached the subject of her new friend. At the mention of her name Mr. Gaythorne started and changed color.

"Greta Williams," he observed, with a sharp, almost displeased intonation in his voice. "That is not a common name. And she lives in Brunswick Place?"

"Yes; they have been living there for some years, but before that they were in the country." But to her surprise Mr. Gaythorne interrupted her impatiently.

"Yes, yes, you said that before; go on with what you were telling me about her father. He is a dipsomaniac, you say." And then Olivia proceeded with her story.

"Is it not sad for the poor girl?" she observed when she had finished, but Mr. Gaythorne made no reply. He was sitting in a stooping attitude over the fire and seemed lost in thought.

His first remark took Olivia by surprise. "Have you ever mentioned my name to Miss Williams?" he asked, with one of his keen searching looks. "You are very frank, Mrs. Luttrell. I daresay you have dropped a word or two about me."

But Olivia shook her head.

"I am quite sure that I have not done so. I have only seen Miss Williams four or five times, and we have only talked about her own troubles and—oh yes, a little about Mr. Barton. No, I am certain that your name has never been mentioned."

"That is well," he returned, slowly. "Perhaps you will be good enough for the future to leave me out of your conversations when you go to Brunswick Place.

"The fact is, Mrs. Luttrell," he went on, slowly, "the Williamses were old neighbours of ours. And Greta and my Olive were dear friends, but they left the neighbourhood long before we did. I never liked

Mr. Williams; he had a knack of quarrelling with all his friends, and we soon came to loggerheads. He made himself obnoxious in many ways, and I declared I would never enter his house again. I am sorry to hear we are such close neighbours."

"What a pity!" observed Olivia, regretfully. "And poor Miss Williams is so nice."

"Oh, I have no fault to find with her," he returned, in a softer voice. "She was a good creature, and my Olive was very fond of her. At one time she was always in our house, and she and Alwyn—let me see, what was I saying?" interrupting himself with a frown of vexation. "No, there is no harm in the girl, and I shall always wish her well, for my little Olive's sake. But it would be painful for us both to meet." He stopped, sighed heavily, and then, shading his eyes, sat for some minutes without speaking.

Olivia rose at last. Her visit had not been a pleasant one; the subjects of conversation had been unlucky. She was vexed with herself, and yet it was no fault of hers. For once Mr. Gaythorne did not try to detain her, but there was no want of cordiality in his manner as he bid her good-bye.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he said; "you had better come early, as the afternoons are so short," but before she had closed the door he seemed again lost in thought.

That evening Robert Barton was in high spirits, and talked in a most sanguine manner of his future. He would set about a picture for the Royal Academy at once. He had his subject ready. A group in the casual ward that had greatly impressed him. He had sketched it roughly with an old, battered lead-pencil he had picked up. He discussed it with animation all tea-time.

"It is just the sort of thing to take the fancy of the public," he said. "I shall take pains with it and work it up, patches and all. It will be sure to sell." And Marcus applauded this resolution.

During the rest of the evening Robert Barton was excellent company. He told stories—pathetic stories and comical ones, until Olivia put down her work to listen. And Marcus's laugh had more than once brought Martha out of the kitchen.

But towards the end of the evening, when Olivia brought him a cup of hot cocoa, his gaiety suddenly vanished, and he looked at her a little sadly.

"To-morrow evening I shall be missing my kind nurse and hostess," he said, gently, "and shall be wishing myself back in this cosy parlour," and then he added, abruptly, "Look here, Mrs. Luttrell, I am not much of a hand at making pretty speeches, but if ever I can do a good turn for you and the doctor I shall be proud and happy to do it."

"He is very grateful, Marcus," observed Olivia, as she lingered a moment by her husband's side. "There were tears in his eyes as he said that. Poor fellow, I cannot help liking him. There is something *débonnaire* and boyish about him, in spite of all he has been through, and certainly he has been very amusing this evening, but," with a little caressing touch, "how nice it will be when we are alone again!" And Marcus smiled assent.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EVENTFUL DAY.

"Forget not thy sins that thou mayest sorrow and repent."—*Petrarch*.

When Olivia woke the next morning she was conscious of a curious feeling; an indefinable presentiment that she could not put into words. "How I wish the day were over," she said to herself; and the thought of her visit to Galvaston House, and Mr. Gaythorne's sharp, cynical speeches, quite oppressed her.

"I hope he will be civil to Mr. Barton," she observed later on to her husband. "Mr. Barton is very proud and touchy, and he will not submit to a course of cross-examination from a stranger. I am quite dreading the afternoon." But Marcus only laughed at her fears.

"Barton can hold his own," was his reply. "He is a bit peppery, but he is not such a fool as to quarrel with his bread and butter. He knows Mr. Gaythorne is a connoisseur, and he will put up with a few sarcastic speeches in the hope of future profits. Mr. Gaythorne could make him extremely useful; he hinted as much to me this morning. There are some pictures he wants rehung, and one or two that need cleaning and varnishing. Barton has only got to prove without doubt that he and not Goddard painted that picture, and then they will get on all right. You must just hold your tongue, Livy, and leave them to fight it out." And Olivia resolved to abide by this prudent advice.

Robert Barton worked hard most of the morning, and then, as the sun shone brightly, he went out

for a stroll before the early dinner.

He came back looking so pale and tired that Olivia scolded him for taking too long a walk.

"I have not been far," he returned, sitting down in rather a weary manner, "and it was so warm and pleasant in the sunshine that I thought it would do me good." Then he gave a short laugh, and said, abruptly, "The fact is, something has bowled me over—I have seen a ghost." Then Olivia, who was clearing the table for the early dinner, stared at him.

"Oh, of course, I am only speaking figuratively," he went on. "I suppose it was really flesh and blood that I saw; but no ghost could have been more startling. I wonder"—speaking as though to himself—"if my sight deceived me; but it was certainly a singular likeness. If I had only had the courage to stop and speak; but when I recollected myself the opportunity had gone—a passing omnibus hindered me—and then I was too late."

"Did you think it was someone you knew?"

"Yes," very curtly—"a friend of my happier days." But he seemed disinclined to say more. He was so silent and moody all dinner-time that Dr. Luttrell looked at him in surprise more than once.

"I suppose you will go straight to your lodgings from Galvaston House," he said, presently; "it will never do for you to be out late, Barton." And Robert Barton assented to this.

"I shall just fetch my bag and one or two things; I do not suppose we shall be long." And then he rose from the table and began putting up his brushes, and then took up a book, which he read upside down, until Olivia was ready to accompany him.

As they crossed the road she said to him, gently:

"I am sorry to see that you are a little out of spirits, and I am afraid this visit may be rather trying—an elderly invalid has all sorts of fads and cranks—but I hope you will be patient." Then Robert Barton smiled pleasantly.

"Oh, yes, I am quite prepared to be regarded as a fraud; but I shall soon prove that Goddard is the cheat in this case." And then they rang the bell, and Phoebe, telling them that her master was still in the dining-room, ushered them into the library.

"Please tell Mr. Gaythorne we are in no hurry," observed Olivia, vexed that they had come so early; but Robert Barton, with one quick glance round the beautiful room, busied himself with placing the pictures in the best possible light.

"There," he said, stepping back with a complacent smile, "I think your old gentleman will own that the same artist painted those two pictures, when he sees them side by side."

But as he spoke the sound of footsteps made him look towards the open door. As he did so, Olivia saw him suddenly recoil and turn deadly white at the sight of Mr. Gaythorne standing rigid and motionless on the threshold.

A stifled voice cried, "Alwyn! Good Heavens! it is Alwyn!"—and the next moment the heavy crutch-handled stick fell from the old man's trembling hand with a sudden crash.

At the sound, Robert Barton shivered and shrank back against the easel.

Olivia picked it up, and tried to place it in Mr. Gaythorne's hand again, but he never noticed her. His eyes were fixed with a look of agonised intensity on the white face of the young artist.

"It is Alwyn," he said again, in the same suppressed voice, "and yet he does not speak or look at me!" And at the anguish in his tone the young man raised his head.

"Father, I was not prepared for this," he stammered; "what am I to say to you?" And then, without advancing a step, he looked round him wildly. "Father, what does this mean—am I dreaming—where are my mother and Olive?" Then a low moan of intense pain broke from Mr. Gaythorne's lips.

"He does not know. Oh, this is too dreadful, Mrs. Luttrell!" He looked at her almost appealingly, as though his strength were gone, and then she put her arm round him and guided him gently to a chair.

"Sit quiet for a moment," she whispered; "you are not fit for this." And as she wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead, his ashen look terrified her. "Dear Mr. Gaythorne, try to compose yourself. Shall I ring for Mrs. Crampton?—perhaps she would know what to do." But he shook his head vehemently.

"No, no—only give me time. Ah, look there!"—for the blind hound that had just come into the room was now whining and fawning upon Robert Barton in the most excited way.

"Eros knows him. Alwyn,"—trying to raise his voice, but it was strangely feeble—"come nearer to me. When I told you you were never to see my face again, that you were no son of mine, I was labouring under a grievous mistake. I know now who forged that cheque—I have known it for years. No, with all your faults you never did that." And as he said this Mr. Gaythorne put out a shaking hand to his son,

but the young man did not take it. There was a fierce, angry light in his blue eyes and a contemptuous smile on his lips.

"I am glad you have done me this tardy justice, sir," he said, in a firmer tone, "and that I have heard from your own lips that I am no criminal. When we parted, I remember you threatened me with penal servitude. No, I have not disgraced your name to that extent. I have starved, and nearly died of cold on a doorstep, but I have kept my hands clean."

"Alwyn," exclaimed Mr. Gaythorne, piteously, "I was too hard, I will confess that. All these years I have been longing to atone, and the sorrow and remorse have made me an old man before my time. There was much to forgive—much that you made me bear. Surely you cannot deny that."

"No, sir, I will not deny that I was a sad scapegrace, but you never took the right way to keep me straight. But for my mother and Olive, I should have run away long before. Father"—and here there was a frightened look in his eyes—"where are they? Why are you alone?" Then, as Mr. Gaythorne raised his hand with a solemn gesture, the young man laid his head down on the mantelpiece and his whole frame shook with convulsive sobs.

"Dead! Oh, no—impossible! My own mother, who always believed in me, and my little Olive!" he gasped out more than once.

"Mr. Alwyn," observed Olivia, putting her hand on his shoulder, but the tears were running down her face as she spoke, "your father cannot bear much more. I am afraid he is ill." But even as she spoke, Mr. Gaythorne, who had risen from his chair rather stiffly, suddenly fell on the rug at his son's feet.

The next moment the pealing of the bell brought Mrs. Crampton and the frightened servants to the room. They found Mrs. Luttrell and the stranger kneeling by the side of the prostrate form; but as the housekeeper caught sight of the young artist's face, she uttered a sudden cry. "It is Mr. Alwyn," she said, "and the joy of seeing him has killed my master." But Olivia hushed her.

"Send for Dr. Luttrell," she said; "we must do nothing till he comes. Mr. Alwyn,"—for the unfortunate young man seemed on the verge of fainting,—"I do not think he is dead; it is some sort of attack. We must do the best we can for him, without moving him, until my husband comes." But to her intense relief Marcus entered a moment afterwards.

One quick glance at the young artist's agitated face gave Dr. Luttrell a vague clue to the mystery, but he was soon too deeply engrossed with his patient to think of anything else. Under his directions, a temporary bed was made in the library, and the invalid was undressed and laid on it. Mrs. Crampton, who was a capable nurse, carried out the doctor's instructions, and Olivia made herself useful.

After the first few minutes Alwyn had left the room, unable to endure the sight any longer. An hour or two passed, then Dr. Luttrell rose from his seat beside his patient, and beckoned his wife from the room.

"Livy," he said, as they stood together by the hall fire, "I feel a little more sanguine now there is partial consciousness, but everything depends on keeping him quiet. I shall remain with him tonight and Mrs. Crampton will be with me. I want you to tell me what brought on this attack. From all your faces I can see something has happened. Barton looked as if he would have a stroke, too?"

"Oh, where is he, Marcus? I have not seen him for more than an hour. Ah, you may well think that something has happened. I never was present at such a scene. Mr. Barton is his son Alwyn. They recognised each other in a moment. Poor Mr. Gaythorne accused himself of harshness and made a sort of apology, but Mr. Alwyn looked so angry and contemptuous, and would not shake hands. And then he asked after his mother and sister—they are dead, you know. And then, oh, he broke down and sobbed so dreadfully that it quite upset me.

"I am sure the poor old man was trying to get to him when he suddenly fell down at his feet, and Mr. Alwyn screamed out, thinking he was dead."

"Yes, I see, poor little Livy. What a sad scene; but you behaved very well. Now, as there is nothing more you can do, suppose you take Barton—I mean Gaythorne—back with you. We can't let him go to the Models now, and it would not be safe to have him here. Give him some food and talk to him. Mrs. Crampton will look after my comforts. I will run across later on and tell you how he is." And then Olivia reluctantly obeyed him. Marcus was right, and she would not venture to contradict his orders, but how she longed to stay and share his watch.

"Good child," he said, kissing her. "You are a splendid doctor's wife! No fuss and no arguing." And this little bit of praise went far to console her.

"Promise me that you will take care of yourself and I will do my best for Mr. Alwyn," she said, nestling up to him for a moment. And then the door-bell rang, and Phoebe, with rather a scared face, went to the door.

"Is Dr. Luttrell here?" asked a clear voice that they both recognised as Greta Williams's, and then she caught sight of them and stepped into the hall.

"They told me you were here, so I ventured to come across," she said, in a low tone, as Marcus

looked at her anxiously. "Oh, there is nothing wrong, only nurse forgot to ask you something, and as it was a fine evening I said I would call."

"I am coming round later on. I am sorry you have had your walk for nothing," returned Marcus. And then they went apart and talked together for a few minutes. Then Marcus went back to his patient and Greta joined Olivia, who was sitting on the oaken settee by the blazing fire. She was tired out with the strain of the last two hours, and felt in need of a little rest before she went in search of Alwyn.

"Sit down, Greta,", she whispered. "How strange you should have come to this house! But then everything is strange to-day——" But here she stopped confusedly, as she remembered Mr. Gaythorne's injunction.

"Why is it strange?" asked Greta, innocently. "There is someone seriously ill here, is there not? But your servant did not tell me the name. How pale and tired you look, Mrs. Luttrell! I suppose it is some friend of yours who is ill?" She glanced at Olivia questioningly, but she only nodded in answer.

"Yes; it was a sudden attack—I think it must have been a stroke. Oh, Greta, what is it?"—for Miss Williams had suddenly risen from her seat with a startled exclamation and was gazing with wide, frightened eyes and parted lips into the shadowy corner behind her.

The next moment Robert Barton came forward into the firelight, with his pale face and fair, dishevelled hair. He looked almost like a ghost of himself, but Greta, with a little cry, held out her hand to him.

"Alwyn, it is you; but how you startled me! Why did you stand there in that silent, ghostly fashion?" But as he only looked at her in a dazed way, and made no answer, she turned to Olivia.

"Mrs. Luttrell," she said, piteously, "what does it all mean? Why does he not speak to me, and we are such old friends? Is he ill? He looks dreadful. I should hardly have known him—and yet—and yet—it must be Alwyn."

"Yes, I am Alwyn," returned the young man, in a hollow voice. "But you must not touch me, Greta. I am not worthy to take your hand. I have killed my father!"

CHAPTER XV.

"THEY WERE BOTH TO BLAME."

"It befits a son to be dutiful to his father."—*Plautus*.

As Alwyn uttered these despairing words Greta shrank back in alarm, but Olivia, with a reassuring smile, put her hand gently on his arm.

"Do not talk so wildly, Mr. Alwyn," she said, soothingly; "you are frightening poor Miss Williams. How can you have killed your father when he is not dead? My husband has only just left me. He seems hopeful about him; he thinks consciousness is returning; but he must have perfect quiet. Even our voices may disturb him—that is why I must beg you to come back with me at once."

"You are not deceiving me, Mrs. Luttrell?" returned Alwyn, suspiciously. "You are sure that he is not dead?"

"Quite sure," she returned, quietly; and then again Greta put out her hand.

"You will come with us, will you not, Alwyn?" she said, with sisterly tenderness; "there is so much that I have to hear and that you must tell me, and we must not talk here. To think that we should have met like this, by accident—if there be such a thing as accident in this life of ours. But no; it was Providence that brought me to this house." And as Olivia followed them down the dark shrubbery she could hear her quiet tones still talking, as though to a younger brother.

Olivia was too tired to do more than wonder vaguely as she listened; the sight of her own little parlour and Martha's sturdy figure arranging the tea-table gave her a pleasant revulsion of feeling. When Martha whispered confidentially, as she brought in the lamp, "The seed-cake is nicely baked; hadn't I better bring it in, ma'am?" Olivia gave a little hysterical laugh. After all that tragedy it was so odd to think of freshly baked cakes.

"Yes, yes, and make the tea quickly," she said, waving off the little handmaiden impatiently; and Martha, somewhat affronted and vaguely alarmed, retreated to the kitchen.

"What's come over the mistress?" she said to herself. "I have never known her so huffy." But Olivia,

with difficulty recovering her calmness, busied herself in ministering to her guests.

"Mr. Alwyn," she said, gently, "you must rest on that couch—you are just worn out; but a cup of tea will do you good. Greta, you must stop and have some too. Do you know this is the first time you have entered this house? Dot is asleep. I am going up to see her now. Would you like to come too?"—for she guessed intuitively that the girl was longing to question her—and Greta, with a grateful look, followed her at once.

Olivia kissed the sleeping child with her usual tenderness. How she longed to lie down beside Dot and sleep off her overpowering weariness; but the day's work was not over.

Greta, who had only just glanced at the little one, put her arms suddenly round Olivia and drew her down beside her.

"Mrs. Luttrell," she said, breathlessly, "tell me what it all means. What has happened to Alwyn, and what makes him talk so strangely? Do you know, for one moment, I believed him! In the old time they often quarrelled—but of course it is paralysis." And then Olivia told her all that had occurred that afternoon.

Greta listened with painful attention; then her eyes filled with tears.

"And he never knew that his mother and Olive were dead," she observed. "Oh, Mrs. Luttrell, how sad—how terribly sad it all is! No wonder he looked bewildered, poor fellow; it must have been such an awful shock to hear that, and then to see his poor father fall at his feet."

"Yes, and he had been ill too; think of all the hardships he has been through." And Greta shivered as Olivia said this.

"How little I thought," she said, "that when you were telling me about the poor young artist that Dr. Luttrell had found on the doorstep on Christmas night, that it was Alwyn Gaythorne, my old playmate and friend!" Then she added, with a sigh, "What would his poor mother have said? She and Olive almost worshipped that boy."

"We ought not to leave him too long alone," observed Olivia, wearily. "I promised my husband that I would look after him. We must coax him to take some food, and then he must go to bed; he is very weak still, and all this has exhausted him." And as Greta evidently shared her anxiety, they went back to the parlour.

They found Alwyn pacing the room restlessly. He stopped and looked relieved as Greta entered.

"I was afraid you had gone," he said, abruptly. "Do you know you passed me in the street this morning? You had that thing on"—touching her sealskin mantle—"but you were not looking at me. I thought it was a ghost, and then I tried to follow you, but some vehicles got in my way, and then you disappeared."

"I wish I had seen you," she said, softly. And then Alwyn resumed his restless walk.

It was with difficulty that Olivia could induce him to come to the table, and then he could not eat; his eyes looked feverishly bright, and his cough made Greta glance at him anxiously.

When tea was over Olivia left the room for a little. Alwyn had utterly refused to go to bed until he had seen Dr. Luttrell; he was evidently tormented by remorse for his hardness to his father, and Olivia thought that he might unburden himself more freely to his old friend; and she was right. On her return she found them talking together, and the strained, hunted look had left Alwyn's eyes.

Greta's were swollen with weeping, but there was a smile on her lips.

"Alwyn has been telling me his troubles," she said, simply, "and I could not help crying over them, he has suffered so, and I felt so sorry for him. If only we had not gone abroad! But when we came back the Grange was empty, and no one knew what had become of Alwyn. He had quarrelled with his father, and it was supposed he had enlisted and gone to India; and he had talked so often of doing this that I thought it was probably the truth. Now I must go, but I shall come again to-morrow." And then she smiled at him and rose from her seat.

"He has talked it all out and it has done him good," she observed, as she and Olivia lingered a moment in the passage; "but if his father dies, Alwyn will never get over it.

"Oh, he is much to blame," she went on; "he has been very wild, very imprudent, utterly mad and reckless; but his poor father was to blame, too. A high-spirited lad like Alwyn would not be kept in leading-strings. Mr. Gaythorne was far too strict with him—his own mother said so—and yet in his way he loved him. How often poor Olive would cry about it to me.

"Dear, dear Olive, how I loved her! And I was very fond of Mrs. Gaythorne, too, she was so sweet and motherly; she always called us her big and her little daughter. I was so much taller than Olive; but there"—interrupting herself—"if I begin talking about the old days at the Grange I shall never finish."

"But you will come to-morrow?"

"Yes; indeed, how could I keep away? Do you know that for years Alwyn and I were just like brother and sister—I don't believe he cared much more for Olive than he did for me. I think I understood him better than she did—his mother always said so. Well, good-night, dear Mrs. Luttrell; I shall come to-morrow as early as I can."

When Olivia went back to the parlour she found Alwyn lying back in his chair looking utterly spent and exhausted.

"I believe I shall have to take your advice and go to bed," he said. "All this has taken the starch out of me, and I feel dead beat"—and he looked so ill that Olivia half thought of sending for her husband. Fortunately he came in half an hour later, and went up at once to Alwyn's room.

He was some time with him, and then he came down and told Olivia that she had better fill a hot-water bottle and heat some flannel.

"It is a sort of nervous attack," he explained, "and his teeth are chattering with cold, and he is shaking as though he were in an ague fit; but I am going to mix him a composing draught, and he will soon quiet down. I have brought him a favourable report of Mr. Gaythorne, but he is too weak to be cheered by it. This will have done him no end of harm. We shall have him in bed for the next day or two."

Olivia gave a tired sigh, but she would not add to Marcus's burdens by selfish complaints of her own fatigue. She would have taken the eider-down off her own bed, but Marcus preferred borrowing a couple of blankets from Mrs. Crampton. In a few minutes he returned again laden with warm things that the housekeeper had sent for her young master's use, and, soothed by the unaccustomed comfort and the powerful narcotic, Alwyn sank into an exhausted sleep.

It was eleven o'clock before Olivia could lay her own head on her pillow. As Dot nestled to her with a sleepy cry, the young mother breathed her nightly thanksgiving for her two blessings, and then knew no more until Martha came to pull up her blinds in the morning.

When Marcus came across for his breakfast he seemed in excellent spirits. He had had three or four hours' rest, and, in his opinion, the stroke was a slight one. Mr. Gaythorne had regained consciousness, and, though the right arm and his speech were certainly affected, he believed that it was only temporary mischief.

"Of course one knows at his age that it is the danger signal," he went on, "but I hope with care that his life may be prolonged for years. I shall get Dr. Bevan to look at him, as I do not care for such undivided responsibility. And perhaps it will be well to have a nurse for a week or two. Mrs. Crampton is not as young as she was, and it is a pity to knock her up."

As the day wore on there were still more cheering reports. Mr. Gaythorne had said a few words almost distinctly—at least, Dr. Luttrell had understood him.

"Where is Alwyn?" He was quite sure those were his words; but he had seemed quite satisfied when Marcus told him he was with his wife, and had not spoken again.

Olivia had hoped for a talk with Aunt Madge, for it was quite three days since she had been round to Mayfield Villas; but she found it impossible to leave the house. Alwyn needed a great deal of attention; he was very low and depressed.

Marcus had given orders that he was to have frequent nourishment, and as Mrs. Crampton had sent Phoebe across with a store of good things—soup and jelly and grapes—there were no demands on Olivia's simple larder. A ready-cooked pheasant would be sent for his dinner, and anything else that he could fancy.

"Mrs. Crampton says that she knows her master would approve, so I suppose we need not be too scrupulous," observed Marcus; but at that moment the surgery bell rang.

Dr. Luttrell's services were required at number seventeen, and with an expressive look at his wife Marcus took up his hat and hastened out.

Olivia had expected Greta quite early, but she did not make her appearance until late in the afternoon. She had been detained, she said—nurse had asked her to take her place for a couple of hours. And then she looked anxiously at Olivia.

"I am afraid Alwyn is ill," she observed; but Olivia assured her that it was only a temporary break-down. "We have such good news of Mr. Gaythorne that he cannot fail to be cheered, but of course he is fretting about the loss of his mother and sister. It was such a shock, you see, and, as my husband says, we must give him time to pull himself together. But you do not look very well yourself, Greta; you are terribly pale."

"Oh, that is nothing," she returned. "I suppose I was too much excited, for I could not sleep for hours. I seemed to be living through my old life again. They were such happy days, Mrs. Luttrell; one's existence was not meagre and colourless then."

"I wish you would tell me a little about it all," observed Olivia as she ensconced Greta in the most

comfortable chair. "You cannot imagine how it interests me." And then Miss Williams smiled.

"Oh, you are so sympathetic—that is your great charm; but indeed I love to dwell on that part of my life. You know the Gaythornes lived at Medlicott Grange. It was a quaint, picturesque, old house, covered with ivy, and with a lovely garden. There was a lime-walk that was delicious on hot summer afternoons; I can smell the limes now.

"Mr. Gaythorne, who had been abroad a great many years, had taken a fancy to the place and half thought of buying it, but he changed his mind later.

"We lived at the Lodge, a much smaller house, looking over the village green; it was rather an inconvenient house, full of small rooms all opening out of each other, and long, rambling passages; but dear mother and I were very fond of it. We liked the three-cornered little drawing-room with its bay-window, where we could sit and work and watch the old men in their grey smocks having a palaver under the big elm in the centre of the green.

"Mrs. Luttrell"—interrupting herself—"do you know Ivy Dene Lodge is to let now? I saw the advertisement in the *Standard*. Now, I should love to live there again. If anything happened to poor father I know I should go back there; it is the only place I ever called home. Don't you love a village green, with geese waddling over it and a big pond where little bare-legged urchins are always sailing their boats, and then the church and the lich-gate and the vicarage smothered in creepers?"

"Why, Greta, what a charming description! You quite make me long to see it."

"But it is not as charming as it really is; even strangers allow that Medlicott is a pretty village. It is true that Ivy Dene has not much of a garden—just a little patch of lawn and a mulberry tree and a flower-bed or two; but as I spent most of my time in the Grange garden that did not matter.

"Dear mother was always so unselfish. She would never let me stay at home with her. She thought it good for me to be with young people of my own age, and so Olive and Alwyn and I were always together. Olive was my friend, but I always looked upon Alwyn as a dear younger brother. He is not really much younger—only a few months—but I was always a little older than my age."

"He must have been very handsome," observed Olivia, and Greta coloured slightly.

"Yes; all the Gaythornes were handsome. Mr. Gaythorne himself was a fine, stately-looking man, only a little foreign and unusual in his dress. I was always a little afraid of him, and I never approved of the way he treated Alwyn. He had been over-indulged and petted in his boyhood, but later on his father thwarted him unnecessarily. He was always calling him to account for some foolish imprudence. And though his mother and Olive shielded him as much as possible, there were often sad scenes at the Grange. Mr. Gaythorne had set his heart on Alwyn's reading for the Bar. He thought he had sufficient money and influence to warrant the hope that his only son might eventually enter Parliament, but Alwyn had already secretly determined to be an artist. He detested his law studies and could not be induced to work, and spoilt all his father's plans.

"As I told you last night," finished Greta, "they were both to blame. But at the time I could not help taking Alwyn's part. He was not good to his father, and often lost his temper and said disrespectful things. But Mr. Gaythorne had no right to be so tyrannical.

"When my mother died father would not hear of our living at Ivy Dene. He said he hated the place, and we went to America for a year or two, and there I heard of Olive's death. Olive had told me in her letters of Alwyn's disappearance.

"'There has been an awful scene,' she wrote, 'poor dear mother has been so ill. Father thinks that Alwyn has done something very wrong, but of course neither mother nor I believe it for a moment, though it cannot be denied that appearances are terribly against him. Forgive me, dearest Greta, if I do not enlarge on this painful subject. We do not know what has become of Alwyn; but we think he has enlisted.'

"This was the last letter I received from Olive. Before many months had passed she died at Rome, and her mother did not long survive her."

CHAPTER XVI.

BUSY DAYS.

"Rely upon it, the spiritual life is not knowing or learning, but doing. We only know so far as we can do; we learn to do by doing; and we learn to know by doing; what we do truly, rightly, in the way of duty, that and only that we are."—*Rev. Frederick Robertson.*

When Alwyn heard that Greta was downstairs, he brightened perceptibly. "She is a dear creature," he said; "except in looks she has not changed a bit. She used to be rather a pretty girl,—interesting-looking, that was the word for Greta; but she is very graceful still. Will you give my love to her, Mrs. Luttrell? I shall hope to see her to-morrow or the next day," and then he turned wearily on his pillow, as though talking were too great an effort.

The following afternoon Greta came earlier; but, as she was unable to stay long, Olivia found an opportunity of going round to Mayfield Villas.

It was just in the gloaming,—Aunt Madge's rest hour, as she called it,—and there was unmistakable gladness in her voice, when Olivia's tall figure appeared on the threshold. "Welcome, welcome, little stranger," she said, merrily; "do you know, Livy, that you have played truant for four whole days. I was just thinking of sending Deb round this evening to know if anything were the matter. Oh, I see," as her bright, penetrating glance read her niece's face. "You have something wonderful to tell me. Draw up your chair and I will be as quiet as a mouse. I am a splendid listener, as my dear Fergus used to say."

"Something wonderful," repeated Olivia, breathlessly. "Why, Aunt Madge, I feel as though I were in the third volume of a sensational novel. What do you think? Robert Barton, whom Marcus found starving on a doorstep, is Mr. Gaythorne's long-lost son, Alwyn."

It was evident that Mrs. Broderick was intensely surprised, for she quite flushed up with excitement.

"Go on. Tell me everything from the beginning. I will not interrupt," she said, quickly, and Olivia, nothing loath, gave a graphic account of the afternoon at Galvaston House.

"Is it not grand, Aunt Madge?" she finished, but Mrs. Broderick's voice was not so steady as usual as she answered,—

"So the blessing has come to him, and he will have his heart's desire; but there is a heavy load laid on him, too, poor, stricken man. Oh, Livy, we must just pray for him until he is able to pray for himself."

"His brain is really much clearer to-day," returned Olivia; "he spoke quite sensibly to Marcus, only his speech is a little affected. He asked why his son had left the house, and then Marcus told him that he was weak and needed rest, and that I was taking care of him.

"'Crampton will see that he has all he requires,' he said, and Mrs. Crampton came over of her own accord last night. Do you know, Aunt Madge, I felt so ashamed of her seeing him in that bare little room, and I tried to explain to her that it was only a sort of disused lumber room, but she soon made plenty of suggestions for his comfort. She has sent a pair of thick curtains for the window, and a big rug that nearly covers the floor, and a softer mattress and another pillow. And now the room looks so cosy. Marcus quite stared when he went up this morning. It was quite touching to see Mr. Alwyn with her. He actually kissed her and called her his dear old 'Goody.' I find she has lived with them ever since they were quite children. I think she was Olive's nurse. And the fuss she made over him, calling him her 'poor, ill-used lamb.' It almost made me cry to hear her."

"Poor fellow, he has certainly had his fill of husks."

"Yes, indeed; but Mrs. Crampton is determined to kill the fatted calf now. The things she sends over would feed half a dozen prodigal sons,—game and soups, and jellies and fruit. She says her master has given her *carte blanche*, and that the doctor has laid a great stress on nourishment, so of course we can say nothing."

"Well, Livy, your life is not exactly stagnant just now."

"No, indeed; but, oh, there is one thing I forgot to tell you. Marcus has another patient,—that is number five. Actually the surgery bell rang twice yesterday."

Mrs. Broderick clapped her hands. Then she said, in a teasing voice, "Are you not glad that you kept Martha?" and Olivia laughed.

"Why, Aunt Madge," she said in an amused tone, "Marcus actually proposed this morning that we should get an older and more capable servant, but I told him I would rather work twice as hard than part with Martha; she is such a good, willing little soul."

"Of course, as long as Mr. Alwyn keeps his room we shall have plenty of running about, and Dot is cutting some more teeth, and is rather fretful, so our hands are full; but the only thing that troubles me is that I see so little of Marcus. He is out most of the evening, either at Galvaston House or in Brunswick Place. Alas, things are no better there, and if this influenza epidemic comes on, as the doctors predict, he will have a busy spring."

"No doubt, but as we have only to live one day at a time, we will not trouble our heads about that. Well, you have given me food enough for some days. I shall send Deb round to-morrow evening to inquire after the invalids, but you must not come again until you are more at leisure. Teething troubles and the care of a sick man are enough for any woman."

"Dear Aunt Madge!" exclaimed Olivia, affectionately. "If I could only be as unselfish as you. I do

believe you never think of yourself at all."

"Nonsense," returned Mrs. Broderick, "I am an old bundle of selfishness. Well, I shall be thinking of those two poor things. My heart aches for that young man, but I pity his father, too. I was reading about the deaf man with an impediment in his speech this morning; it is the lesson for to-day, you know, and I could not help pondering for some time on those words, 'Jesus took him apart from the multitude.' Just as though quiet and stillness were needed for the healing. I think that is the lesson that sickness teaches us; the poor sufferer is led apart to wait for the word of healing; sometimes he waits long, but the time has not been lost. 'Lord, it is good for us to be here;' I think some of us will say that when our painful sojourning at the Mount of Suffering is over. Yes, it is good for us to have drunk of His cup without complaining."

Aunt Madge's eyes had a dreamy look in them; the beautiful voice vibrated in Olive's ear like music; but as she stooped to kiss her, somewhat awed by her unusual solemnity, the old kind smile returned to her lips.

"Good-bye, Livy darling, my love, and congratulations to Marcus."

Olivia was putting a good face on things, but Marcus, oppressed with the heavy responsibility of three serious cases, hardly knew how hard she worked from morning to night. Dot, feverish and fretful, was always wanting to be in her mother's arms. Martha, with all her willingness, was too young and inexperienced to be a very efficient help; so, although Olivia always wore a bright expression when Marcus came in for his meals, and chatted to him in her old cheerful way, she was often too weary to sleep.

It was a relief, therefore, when Alwyn was able to leave his room and lie on the couch downstairs. Greta's afternoon visits were then a real boon; she could leave them together while she went out and did her business.

Olivia's healthy, robust constitution always needed fresh air and regular exercise. Confinement to the house tried her, and the small rooms and low ceilings at No. 1, Galvaston Terrace, were certainly rather cramping. Half an hour's brisk walk always refreshed her and acted like a tonic. She would look in at Mayfield Villas for ten minutes and give her report of the invalids, and then come back to tea looking so fresh and invigorated that Alwyn once told her that she was as good as a whiff of moorland air.

Alwyn was slow in recovering from that terrible shock. His nerves had suffered severely, and at times his restlessness and depression were sad to see.

"If he could only be reconciled to his father," Greta would sigh; "but the thought of another interview seems to terrify him. He is so painfully morbid," she went on, "and distrusts himself. He is afraid of saying and doing the wrong thing; somehow he seems to have lost all faith in his father's love."

"'I long for his forgiveness. I know that I have been a bad son,' he said, yesterday. 'But he will never believe in my penitence.' Oh, it is dreadful the way he talks and works himself up."

"Marcus says it is a good deal owing to nervous exhaustion," returned Olivia; "but he is very sorry for him. Mr. Gaythorne has begged more than once to see him; he is evidently craving for a sight of him, but Marcus dare not bring them together yet. Mr. Gaythorne is only just able to sit up, and he is very weak. And then while Mr. Alwyn is in this nervous state he is hardly to be trusted."

"Yes, we must be patient, I suppose. I have perfect faith in Dr. Luttrell's opinion," and then her manner changed, and she said, mournfully, "Do you know how badly he thinks of father? He is afraid he will never leave his bed again."

"Yes, I know; and Dr. Bevan agrees with him. Poor Greta, I am so sorry for you," and she laid her hand affectionately on her shoulder.

"Yes, but I dare not murmur," returned the girl, in a low voice. "It would be more merciful to let him die than linger on in suffering, and"—with a little burst of feeling—"the disease that is killing him has not been brought on by his own fault. Oh, the gratitude I felt when Dr. Luttrell said that it has been latent in the system, and that only lately Dr. Bevan suspected it. But, oh, dear Mrs. Luttrell, do not wish him to live. No one who cared for him could wish it."

"Poor child. Yes, I know; Marcus explained things to me."

"He is quite himself," went on Greta, drying her eyes. "And so dear and affectionate, but it hurt me so to hear him asking my pardon for the life he had led me. 'I have not deserved such a good daughter,' he said over and over again. 'Since your poor mother died you have been my one blessing.'"

"Dear Greta, you will let these words comfort you?"

"Oh, yes; I was repeating them in my dreams all night. When he was talking to me I felt that I had got the old father back. What do you think, Mrs. Luttrell? he actually asked me if I should go on living at Brunswick Place when he was gone, and then it came into my head to tell him about Ivydene, and he was so interested. I am sure he was pleased when I told him that I should like to go back there. He actually wanted me to write to the lawyer about it. But when he saw how shocked I was at the idea, he

said perhaps we had better wait a little."

Olivia thought over this conversation when Greta left her; her heart ached for the lonely girl. When Marcus came in a few minutes later, he seemed struck with her unusual gravity.

"Is there anything wrong, Livy?" he asked. "You seem in the doldrums." And as she smiled and shook her head, he continued cheerfully, "I am glad to hear it. Do you know I have actually a free evening until ten? I feel as though I was a schoolboy again, and had an unexpected holiday. In my opinion, only busy people know how to enjoy a holiday properly."

"And I am really to have you to myself for three whole hours," and Olivia's face beamed with delight. As Marcus drew his chair to the fire and took up the long-neglected book, Greta's troubles went into the background.

"Oh don't read just now," she said, imploringly; "let us talk a little first, Marcus, is it very naughty of me? but once or twice during the last few days, when you have been too busy to stay with me, or to play with Dot, I have thought that even prosperity will have its limitations; that being a successful doctor means that I shall see far too little of you."

Then Marcus drew back his head with one of his boyish laughs.

"Oh, Livy, what a child you are! have you just found out that? How delightfully illogical a woman can be! It stands to reason that I cannot be in two places at once."

"Oh, of course your patients will want you, and I am not really grumbling. Do you suppose that I shall not be proud of your success? I was only trying to tell you that, in spite of all our difficulties and little petty troubles, I have been perfectly happy."

"Especially on Saturday evenings, when you totted up your little red book, and the balance was always on the wrong side. I have seen you pull an uncommonly long face on those occasions. I am not quite sure about the perfect happiness then." Then, as Olivia looked reproachfully at him, his teasing manner changed.

"Dear Olive," he said, tenderly, "I am not really laughing at you. I understand quite well what you mean. I am not such an old married man that I cannot appreciate a compliment like that, when my wife tells me with her own lips that my society can sweeten even poverty and hardship.

"You are quite right, love; prosperity will have its limitations; these pleasant evening hours will often have to be sacrificed. But in all professions we must take the rough with the smooth. We must just put our shoulder to the wheel, you and I, and 'Doe the nexte thinge,' eh, Livy?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, eagerly, "and yours is such a grand work. I have always been so thankful you are a doctor. When I was quite young I used to tell mother that I wanted to marry a clergyman. But I think a doctor comes next. Oh, Marcus, did you ever read Whittier's verses on this subject? Greta brought me his poems and read them to me. I think I know the last two verses by heart,—

"'Beside the unveiled mysteries
  Of life and death go stand
With guarded lips and reverent eyes
  And pure of heart and hand.
The good physician liveth yet
  Thy friend and guide to be,
The Healer by Gennesaret
  Shall walk thy rounds with thee.'"

And as Olivia repeated the lines in a voice tremulous with deep feeling, Dr. Luttrell's firm lips unbent with a moved expression.

"That is beautiful," he said. "I think those words ought to be illuminated and hung up in every doctor's waiting-room."

"'The Healer by Gennesaret
Shall walk thy rounds with thee.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

PRODIGAL SONS.

"But by all thy nature's weakness,
Hidden faults and follies known,
Be thou in rebuking evil,
Conscious of thy own."—*Whittier*.

It was some few weeks before Mr. Gaythorne was allowed to see any one, and then Olivia was his first visitor. To her great surprise he had asked for her.

"I think I can trust you," Marcus said to her; but there was a trace of anxiety in his manner that did not escape her. "You must talk to him, of course; but you must be very careful not to agitate him; he wants all his strength for to-morrow;" for on the following day father and son were to meet again.

Olivia felt a little nervous. Marcus's professional gravity frightened her.

"Do you not think it would be better for me to wait a day or two," she asked. "It is very nice of him to want to see me, but it seems to me that Mr. Alwyn ought to be his first visitor;" but although Marcus agreed with her, he said that Mr. Gaythorne had expressed such a strong wish to see her first, that he dared not refuse him.

"He was never fond of contradiction," he returned. "And we should only excite him if we opposed his wish. Although he is quite himself, little things irritate him; don't make yourself nervous beforehand; you will say the right thing when the time comes for saying it;" and, though Olivia could not be sure of this, she felt that it was sensible advice.

But when the moment came and she saw how shrunken and aged the invalid looked, and heard the slight hesitation in his speech as he held out his hands to her with a pathetic smile, Olivia's warm womanly nature was not at fault, for she bent over him and kissed his cheek as a daughter might have done.

"Dear Mr. Gaythorne," she said, earnestly, "if you knew how thankful we all are that you are better."

"Thank you, thank you," he said, with a faint flush of pleasure. "You speak kindly and as though you meant it. Sit down, my dear, we must have a little talk together, you and I. If I ever get my boy back, if the breach between us is ever healed, it will be owing to you and Dr. Luttrell."

"Oh, please do not say that, we were only the means under Providence."

"Yes, yes," with a touch of impatience—"I am not forgetting that. In some ways I am a civilised heathen; but I have never omitted my prayers, thank God. 'He loveth best who prayeth best.' Who said that, Mrs. Luttrell? Perhaps I never prayed enough, or my boy would not have wandered so far. Ah, well, do you remember how hard I was on you for sheltering tramps, and now I can only say, God bless you for your divine charity."

Olivia's eyes glistened, but she only pressed his hand in acknowledgment of this. "And to-morrow you are to see him," she said, softly.

"Yes, to-morrow," he repeated slowly, "that is why I must not talk much to-day; but I wanted to thank you for bringing Alwyn, and to tell you how grateful I am to you both.

"I am an old man," he continued, "old in sorrows more than in years; for, with Jacob, I can truly say that 'few and evil have been my years.' Oh, Mrs. Luttrell, my dear, take warning by me; you have a little one of your own, and perhap in future years you may have sons growing up beside you, never for one instant let anything come between you and them."

He paused for a moment and then went on: "When Alwyn was a little child, I simply worshipped him; his own mother begged me with tears in her eyes not to set my heart so much on him. He was delicate, and I knew what she meant, that she feared whether we should rear him; and I remember, as she said this, that I struck my hand passionately against his little cot, 'if that boy dies I shall never hold up my head again;' how well I remember that speech. Oh, my dear, the time came when I wished that I had no son, when the sharpness of the serpent's tooth entered my very vitals. God grant that you and Dr. Luttrell may never have to blush for a son's misdoings."

"Dear friend, remember you are not to agitate yourself."

"No, no, I will take care; but I think it does me good to talk a little; the steam must have vent, you know, and I have kept silence for so many years. All these weeks they have kept my boy from me; but they were right," his voice trembling with weakness. "I could not have borne it, neither could Alwyn. Ah, how changed and ill he looked."

"Dear Mr. Gaythorne," returned Olivia, beseechingly, "indeed I must go away now, unless you will consent to rest and let me read to you a little."

"Well, well, do as you like," he replied, closing his eyes, "you all tyrannise over the sick man, but perhaps I am a bit tired," and then Olivia found a book and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him sink into a peaceful sleep. What a grand face it looked with its fine chiselled features and grey peaked beard lying against the dark red cushions. Alwyn would never be such a handsome man as his father, Olivia thought. There was power and intellect on the broad forehead, the thin lips and obstinate chin were hidden under the drooping grey moustache.

Olivia sat by him for some time, and then softly left the room. When Marcus had paid his evening

visit he was able to assure her that her little visit had done his patient no harm.

Mr. Gaythorne had stipulated that he should see his son alone, but Dr. Luttrell, who was keenly alive to the danger of any strong excitement, had decided to remain in the house during the interview.

Alwyn seemed so unnerved and miserable that it was impossible to do more than give him a word of warning.

"Say as little as possible, Gaythorne," he had observed as they walked across together; "if you take my advice, you will just let bygones be bygones. Don't be more emotional than you can help; remember how ill he has been, very little excites him."

And though Alwyn only nodded in answer to this, Marcus was sure that he understood him; but as he stood by the hall fire caressing Eros he could not help feeling very anxious.

"They are neither of them to be trusted," he thought, and he determined that if the talk were too prolonged he would make some excuse to go in and interrupt them; then he raised his head uneasily and listened as the sound of a man's stifled sobs reached his ear.

It was what he had feared, that Alwyn, weak and unstrung, would break down utterly, and the next moment Dr. Luttrell had opened the door of the library.

Neither of them perceived him as he stood for a moment, watching them with keen professional eyes. Alwyn was kneeling with his face hidden on his father's knees, and Mr. Gaythorne's clasped hands were resting on his head. "My boy, we must both say it," he whispered. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them"—but Marcus heard no more, he closed the door again softly—the scene was too sacred—not even to his dearer self—his wife—did he ever speak of what he had seen.

The Prodigal had eaten his fill of husks and had returned to his father's roof and his father's love. But in this case the father had also sinned, for surely undue severity and exacting hardness and failure of sympathy are sins to be bitterly repented. No one can gather grapes of thorns, or glean corn from a harvest of tares. And no parent who has first unwisely indulged his son, and then ruled him with a rod of iron, can well claim the glad obedience of a free son.

If Alwyn Gaythorne, trammelled and embittered by his father's tyranny, had dashed recklessly down the path that leads to destruction, his father had first driven him to the verge of frenzy.

Young limbs will not always adjust themselves to the Procrustean bed. Alwyn, who had inherited his father's strong will, refused to bear the yoke of his despotism.

"I would rather starve, and have room to breathe," he had once said to Greta. "There is no room here."

Another half-hour passed before Dr. Luttrell ventured into the room again. He found Mr. Gaythorne leaning back in his chair looking very white and exhausted, but with a peaceful expression on his face. Alwyn had just left his side and was standing by the window with a miniature in his hand.

"Dr. Luttrell," observed the old man feebly, as he gave him some restorative, "my son will stay with me to-night." And then Alwyn flushed as he met the doctor's eyes.

"He wishes it very much, and perhaps it will be better," he said in a low voice. "Will you explain how it is to Mrs. Luttrell? I will see her tomorrow."

"Very well, but there must be no more talking to-night. If you will go into the next room I will see you presently," and Alwyn nodded.

"It is all right, happiness never kills," observed Mr. Gaythorne, "and for the matter of that, grief, either. We must just bide our time." Then with a flash of strong feeling in the deeply-set eyes, he held out his hand to the young doctor.

"God bless you, Luttrell. He says you have been like a brother to him. And as for your wife, he has no words for her goodness. May Heaven repay you both for what you have done for me and my boy."

When Marcus returned home he found Greta sitting with his wife; they both looked at him anxiously.

"Mr. Gaythorne will not part with his son," he informed them. "Mrs. Crampton is getting a room ready for him, so your labours will be lightened, Livy. She looks tired, does she not, Miss Williams? though she will not confess it. Well, it has all passed off well. Mr. Gaythorne is very much exhausted, but nurse is getting him to bed, and I have told Alwyn to rest. I left Mrs. Crampton fussing round him, so he will be all right," and then Olivia smiled as though she were satisfied.

But more than once that evening she observed to Marcus how quiet the house seemed without their guest.

"Do you know I quite miss him," she said. "I suppose one always get attached to any one for whom one takes trouble. He was the sort of person who was always wanting something; you could never forget him for a moment. I wonder what Martha will say when I tell her he is gone away for good. He

gave her plenty to do, but I expect she will be sorry to lose him."

And Olivia was right. Martha burst out crying in quite a lamentable manner.

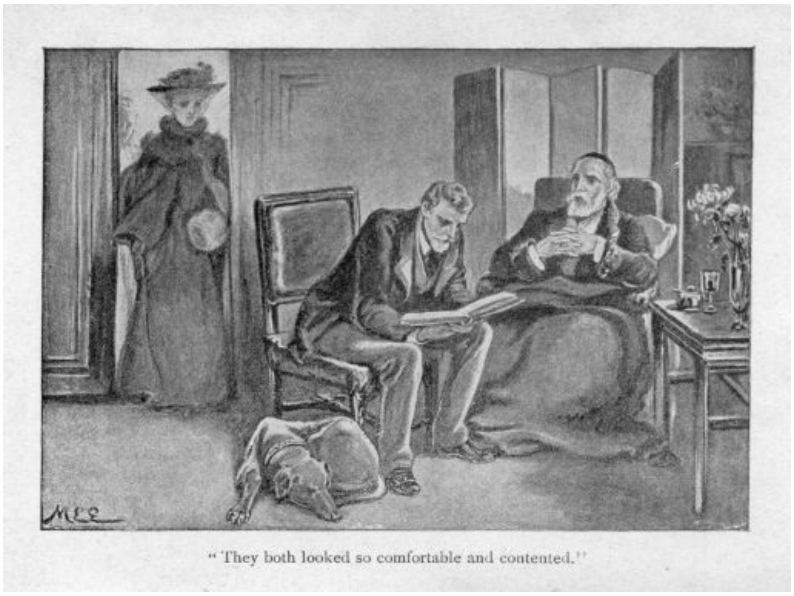
"Oh, ma'am," she sobbed, "and he was such a kind young gentleman. I am sorry, that I am, that he won't live with us no more. And he painted Miss Baby and the kitten so beautiful too; and he thought such a deal of you and master." But though Olivia smiled at Martha's lugubrious speeches, she could not help being rather sorry herself.

Alwyn was not a perfect character by any means, but somehow he had such nice ways with him,—little caressing ways that go to a woman's heart. His nature was affectionate and emotional, and all his troubles had not hardened him. Even Marcus had observed more than once lately that "he could not help liking the fellow."

"He was not cut out for a black sheep," he said once, "and the character does not suit him. He has the makings of a good man, only he has let himself drift so terribly. Well, he has pulled himself up in time. He could not have roughed it much longer."

When Olivia returned from her next visit to Galvaston House she went straight to Marcus.

"I just felt I must come and tell you all about it," she said in her enthusiastic manner. "I have had such a happy afternoon. Mr. Alwyn was reading to his father when I went in, and they both looked so comfortable and contented. They made me stay and pour out their coffee for them. At first Mr. Alwyn wanted to leave us; he declared that two was company and three none, and that he was only in the way; but of course I would not hear of that, and I was so glad to see him too."



"They both looked so comfortable and contented."

"They both looked so comfortable and contented."

"He is his father's right hand already, and does all sorts of things for him. It is so lovely to see them together. When he went out of the room for a moment, Mr. Gaythorne told me that he could scarcely realise sometimes that it was Alwyn."

"He has just Olive's ways," had been Mr. Gaythorne's words. "I could almost fancy it was my little Olive near me. If he were only stronger I should not have a wish ungratified, but I cannot help troubling about his cough. Dr. Luttrell thinks a sea voyage would do him good, but I do not know how I am to bring myself to part with him.

"Oh, by-the-bye, did Alwyn tell you that Greta Williams is coming to see us? She was my Olive's friend, so of course she will be welcome," and then, in rather a meaning voice, "I rather think she is Alwyn's friend too."

Olivia made no answer to this remark, but more than once lately she had noticed that Greta and Alwyn seemed very much engrossed with each other, and she was almost sure that Marcus had noticed it too.

"Surely Greta would never consent to marry him," she thought. "With her sad experience she would never venture to link her life with a man whom she could not wholly respect."

Greta's nature was a noble one. She had lofty aims and a high sense of duty. In spite of her gentleness she had plenty of firmness and backbone.

It was one thing to be sorry for her old friend and playmate, and to show him a sister's tenderness, but quite another to give herself to him, and more than once Olivia had felt uneasy, but delicacy had led her to keep her thoughts to herself.

"I do hope she would not carry self-sacrifice to such a length as that," said the young wife to herself. "Alwyn may be lovable, but he would never satisfy a girl like Greta. A woman ought to be able to look up to her husband, as I look up to my dear Marcus, and not be always trying to drag him up to her level.

"I do want Greta to be married. When her father dies she will be so utterly alone, but I cannot reconcile myself to her marrying Alwyn Gaythorne. For one thing, his health is so unsatisfactory that his wife would never be easy about him. Eyen Marcus owned the other day that he feared he would never be fit for much. But there is no use in trying to manage other people's lives. As Aunt Madge says, it takes all our strength and cleverness to manage our own. 'A meddler is always a muddler;' how well I remember her saying that. We did not make the world, and we cannot rule the world. When I see grown-up folk trying to arrange for other people, I always think of children playing at snap-dragon. One gets one's fingers burnt so badly when we try to pull out our neighbour's plum. No, no; bearing other people's burdens never meant that."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUNT MADGE GIVES HER OPINION.

"Death is a black camel that kneels at the gate of all."—*Abd-el-Kader*.

After all, the dreaded influenza epidemic did not make its appearance, and, though people still talked learnedly of germs and microbes, and put meddling fingers into the medical pie, it was decided by the legitimate authorities that the mischief had blown over for the present.

It is a curious fact that there is a fashion even in talk. A subject is discussed until it is worn threadbare. When the germ theory was exhausted the bicycle craze took its place. Perhaps future students of hieroglyphics may yet discover in some palimpsest that in old days the Egyptian maidens had quaint iron machines that carried them swiftly through the desert.

In the early March days, when the winds were keen and blusterous, Mr. Williams died; his end was very sudden.

Greta had just retired to her room for the night when the nurse noticed a change in him and hastily summoned her. A messenger was sent for Dr. Luttrell, but before he could reach the house Mr. Williams was dead.

He could have done nothing if he had been there. That was the sole comfort Marcus could give to the stricken daughter, and she knew that he spoke the truth.

The bow of the king of terrors is never drawn at a venture. The arrow goes deep and true, but to Greta and Olivia he was only the angel of sorrow, who did his master's bidding. Alwyn in after years worked out this idea in a noble picture called the "House of Mourning."

The little one, evidently the sole child and heir of a goodly heritage, lay panting out his feeble life on the pillow. The broken-hearted parents bent over him hand in hand. The filmy look of unshed tears in the mother's eyes was wonderfully rendered. On the threshold stood a kingly presence, in dark trailing robes of majesty and a starry crown on his head. The face, solemn and beautiful, wore an expression of infinite pity; the arms were stretched out to the child with a gesture of tenderness.

Underneath was written those striking words: "Is it well with the child?" and the answer, "It is well." It was that picture that made Alwyn Gaythorne's name.

Olivia hurried round to Brunswick Place as soon as her husband broke the news to her, and spent the greater part of each day there for the next week or two.

It was touching to see how the poor girl clung to her friends; she would do nothing without their advice.

Dr. Luttrell saved her as much as possible. He and Alwyn did the necessary business, and Olivia brought her work and Dot, and strove in every way to cheer and console her.

It was a very quiet funeral. Only Marcus and his wife and Alwyn and the lawyer were present. When they went back to the house the will was read. The provisions were perfectly simple. Everything, with the exception of a few minor legacies, was left to Greta,—the house in Brunswick Place and an income of nearly three thousand a year.

Olivia opened her eyes a little widely when she heard this. She had no idea that Greta would be such a rich woman. But Greta herself seemed utterly indifferent.

"How am I to live on here alone?" she said, with an outburst of grief, when she found herself left with Olivia. "Dear Mrs. Luttrell, you must both help me. All my friends must help me to some decision, but to live alone in this house just because it belongs to me; oh, I cannot do it," with a sudden shiver of repulsion. "I would sooner go into a hospital and learn nursing." But when Olivia repeated this speech to Marcus he only smiled.

"An attractive young woman with three thousand a year will soon discover some object of interest," he said, a little dryly. "But it would hardly do to hint at this just now. Nursing in a hospital is a fine work, no doubt, for anyone who has a vocation, but you may as well tell Miss Williams not to ask my advice. She has not the physical strength; besides, in her position, the idea is absurd.

"Why take the bread out of other women's mouths? No, no; just counsel her to patience, and in a few months we shall see which way the wind blows," for, though no word had yet passed between them, Marcus was quite aware of Alwyn Gaythorne's *penchant* for his old playfellow, though the idea was hardly more pleasing to him than it was to Olivia.

"There is not enough of him," he said to himself. "He does not come up to her mark. It is not her money, for Mr. Gaythorne is a rich man and his son will have plenty, but she stands on a higher plane than his, and, in my humble opinion, Miss Williams could do better for herself."

Strange to say, Mrs. Broderick differed from them. She had already made Greta's acquaintance, and they had mutually taken to each other. Greta had been charmed with Mrs. Broderick's cheerfulness and quaint speeches, and Aunt Madge, in her turn, had declared herself fascinated by Greta's gentleness. "She is exactly my idea of a young English gentlewoman," she had said after her first visit. "I thought the article had gone out of fashion. Oh," as Olivia looked shocked at this, "I grant you there are hundreds and thousands of good, honest girls, I'm thankful to say, but they are so terribly outspoken and up to date. Of course, I am only an old-fashioned frump and sadly behind the times, but though slang may not be sinful and a little outward roughness is only the husk, and there is plenty of sweet, sound kernel inside, yet I must own, Livy, I like gentleness as well."

Alwyn and Aunt Madge were already firm friends. She shared his artistic tastes and could talk intelligently to him on the subjects he liked best, and from the first she refused to see any defects in him.

"My dear Livy," she once said when Olivia had made a somewhat disparaging remark about his want of steadiness, "you are far too critical. You judge men by Marcus's standard, but you must remember every one is not a moral son of Anak.

"Now Mr. Alwyn is a great favourite of mine, and I think highly of him. Few young men would be so good-natured as to come two or three times a week to chat with an elderly invalid. And yet that is what Mr. Alwyn does, and he knows I enjoy his visits.

"Yesterday when he came in he found Miss Williams sitting with me, and they both looked as pleased as though they had not met for years. And it made me feel quite young to look at them. Oh!" in an exasperated tone, as Olivia shook her head, "I know what that means,—that you and Marcus forbid the banns,—but you might just as well try to stop an express train with a penny whistle, so you may as well save your breath.

"Those two mean to take each other for better or worse. They don't know it themselves yet, but it is written already in the book of fate."

"Oh, Aunt Madge, how can you say such things? You have not seen Greta more than three or four times."

"All the same, the oracle has spoken," with a wise nod of her head. "My dear, Greta Williams was born into this world to be someone's crutch. A strong, healthy-minded man could not utilise her best qualities. She would be simply wasted on him. She has got to mother her husband, you see, and that is what Mr. Alwyn wants his wife to do. Leave them alone, they will soon find out their need of each other. And then they will settle matters. And for pity's sake, Olive, don't you try and put a spoke in their wheel." But Olivia, who was a little huffy on the subject, refused to say another word.

"It was no business of hers or anyone's," she said, pointedly, "whom Alwyn Gaythorne chose to marry, but in her opinion it was always a pity to couple names together beforehand," and with this virtuous snub she rose to take her leave, but Mrs. Broderick only indulged in one of her hearty laughs.

"Livy, I do declare you are actually cross with me,—well, there, I will not say another word; don't look as though I have been talking treason. I quite allow your Greta is too good for any ordinary faulty man, and that even my young friend is not worthy of her," and at this admission Olivia's brow cleared.

"Thank you for saying that, Aunt Madge. I know we do not really differ, only—only," with a little laugh, "you are always so ready for a love-story."

"Yes, I love a lover," returned Mrs. Broderick, playfully, and then her manner changed. "No, I will not jest about it; life and death and love are no subjects for jests,—they are three splendid realities. Yes, my dear Olive, you are right, and love-stories, even the poorest, interest me. Haven't I lived mine? Do I not know how it glorifies life? but we can only read the first chapters here,—there is eternity for us presently. 'The many mansions,' I think I love those words more than any in the Bible; they always

make me think that even there there will be a special home for Fergus and me and our boy."

Olivia certainly found it difficult to satisfy the various claims on her; her household tasks occupied most of the morning; as long as Martha remained their sole domestic, it was necessary for the mistress to superintend the cooking. To look after Marcus's comfort was her first and paramount duty, and it was seldom that she found herself at leisure until the afternoon, and then she and Greta were generally together, either at Brunswick Place or Galvaston Terrace.

Sometimes she would combine her duties by taking Greta with her when she went to Mayfield Villas, but she never ventured to take her to Galvaston House after her first visit, as she found that Mr. Gaythorne preferred her to come alone.

"Miss Williams is all very well," he said once, "and we are always pleased to see her, but I like my pleasures singly; besides, Alwyn always monopolizes her. Invalids are allowed to be exacting, so I may tell you plainly that I like to have you to myself," and after that Olivia went alone.

It was always a pleasure to her to go there, she had such a warm welcome from the father and son, and it did her heart good to see the light of happiness in the old man's eyes, he seemed hardly able to bear his son out of his sight. Alwyn's health, his comforts and his tastes were his chief topics of conversation. One day he made Alwyn take her upstairs and show her the new studio that had been planned; two rooms were to be thrown into one, and a fresh window put in.

Directly the work was commenced he and Alwyn were going to Bournemouth for a few weeks. The sea-voyage had been postponed for the present. Mr. Gaythorne fretted himself at the idea of parting so soon with his boy, and he hated the thought of his going alone.

"If there were someone to look after him," he would say to Dr. Luttrell; "but I feel as though I could never trust him to take care of himself again; look at him, he is a perfect wreck." And though Marcus still held to his opinion that a long voyage would be his best remedy, he thought it more prudent to wait a little, and on his side Alwyn seemed reluctant to go.

"I have been too much my ain lane already," he said; "I should prefer to stay at home a little longer," and then Bournemouth was selected as a compromise. Mrs. Crampton would go with them, and, at Mr. Gaythorne's request, Marcus went down first and chose their rooms.

"Why not go from Saturday to Monday, and take your wife down? I will frank your expenses," he said, "and the little trip will do you both good." And though Marcus hesitated over this, as Martha was too young to be trusted with the care of Dot, Greta came to the rescue by undertaking to look after the child.

Olivia could scarcely believe her ears when this magnificent project was unfolded to her. Two whole days with Marcus by the sea! And they had neither of them had an outing since their modest wedding-trip,—a week at St. Leonards.

"It will be another honeymoon," she said, flushing with pleasure. And as they sat together in the hotel garden that Saturday evening, she thought of the humble lodging to which Marcus had taken her, and what fun they had got out of their first attempt at housekeeping.

The little change did them both good, but, though neither of them would have owned it for the world, No. 1, Galvaston Terrace, certainly looked a little dreary on their return.

The bright spring weather only made the dinginess more apparent, but nothing would induce the landlord to treat them to a fresh coat of paint. Marcus whitewashed one or two of the rooms in the intervals of his work, and Olivia put up clean curtains and purchased a plant or two. As far as scrupulous cleanliness could avail, the little house was in first-rate order. Nevertheless Marcus gave vent to an impatient sigh now and then as he looked round the small, low room. The side windows had been blocked up in the days of the window-tax, and the one small window lighted the room imperfectly.

"If we could only move," he said once. "I want you and Dot to have more light and air. We are too near the cemetery, too. We should do much better in Compton Street or Norfolk Terrace." And then, as Olivia looked at him in surprise, he said a little impatiently:

"Oh, I know it is not to be done yet. We shall have to want a little longer. I believe it was that insufferable woman, Mrs. Tolman, put it into my head. She actually told me that we ought to move, as no good class of patients would ever come to Galvaston Terrace. It was just like her impudence—eh, Livy?"

"Oh, Marcus, I am so sorry," and Olivia put down her work and looked at him sympathetically. "I thought something had annoyed you the moment you came in. It is too bad of Mrs. Tolman always to tread upon people's corns in this fashion. She might wait until one asks her advice."

"Oh, but it is true, all the same," he returned, with a tinge of despondency in his voice.

"A good house in a good neighbourhood would make all the difference to the practice. A house in Brunswick Place, for example."

But Olivia only laughed. "Someone besides myself can build air-castles," she said, archly. "You

might as well go on, Marcus. Why not be Dr. Bevan's partner, too?" Then Marcus started, and an odd little smile played round his mouth. The very same thought had already occurred to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

DAME FORTUNE SMILES.

"Of pleasures, those which occur most rarely give the greatest pleasure."—*Epictetus*.

Dr. Luttrell's fit of pessimism did not last long. The very next day he had a sharp twinge of remorse, when he went round to Galvaston House to take leave of his patient, and Mr. Gaythorne put a slip of folded paper in his hand.

"I am an old man," he said,—and his thin fingers held the young doctor's hand in a firm grasp, —"and I am using an old man's privilege. I know what a hard, up-hill fight life is at present to you, and I should like to ease the burden a little," and to Marcus's intense and overwhelming surprise he found it was a cheque for five hundred pounds.

Marcus never could remember what he said, but his first attempt to stammer a few words of gratitude for this unexpected and magnificent gift was promptly checked.

"It is all very well," observed Alwyn rather gloomily when Olivia told him of his father's munificence. She had shed tears of joy when Marcus had shown her the cheque.

"My father has settled up accounts with Dr. Luttrell after his own fashion, but he has not paid my debts." And then in a deeply moved voice, "There are some debts that cannot be paid. 'I was a stranger and ye took me in.' How many doors do you suppose, Mrs. Luttrell, would have opened to a starving outcast that Christmas night?" and then his blue eyes flashed with an expression of intense feeling that became him well.

"I shall never be able to repay either of you. I shall never try," he went on. "Do you know, as I lay on that doorstep too weak and stiff to move, and the doctor bent over me, it seemed to me, in my dazed condition, as though it were the face of a beneficent angel. God bless you both, for you have made a man of me." And then he lifted the kind, womanly hand to his lips.

Olivia missed her friends at Galvaston House, sorely, but she had more time to devote to Greta.

One day they had a pleasant outing together. Greta, who still hankered after her old home, had proposed that she and Olivia should go down to Medhurst together.

"It is only an hour's journey," she observed, "And there is a dear old inn where we could have tea. And just now it will be at its best. The horse-chestnuts will be out in the Grange garden, and the pink and white may at Ivy Dene." And Olivia consented readily. But though she thoroughly enjoyed the little expedition, and fell in love with Medhurst and the old church, the longed-for visit was only productive of disappointment to Greta.

Ivy Dene, in Olivia's eyes, was not a desirable abode. The rooms were low and cramped, and had a mouldy, disused smell in them. Even the little three-cornered drawing-room with the bay-window overlooking the village green and the elm-tree did not please her. The solitary old man in a smock-frock, with a red handkerchief knotted loosely round his lean old throat, might be a picturesque object in the distance, but on wet days she fancied even the green might be a dreary outlook. As they sat over their tea in the little inn parlour she gave her opinion in her usual downright fashion.

"Dear Greta," she said, "I do not advise your taking this step. Ivy Dene Lodge would want a good deal of money spent on it to make it decently habitable. And even if it were painted and papered from garret to basement it would never be a really comfortable house. All those small rooms opening into each other are so inconvenient. And then it is damp. I am sure Marcus would say so; and then I am certain you would be moped to death. There are no young people at the Grange. Only that stout, middle-aged couple we met in the pony-carriage, and the vicar is old and a widower. I do think it would be terribly dull for you." And Greta owned rather regretfully that her friend was right.

Her poor little air-castles had crumbled into nothingness. Her longings for the sweet country air and rustic quiet were doomed to be frustrated. In her heart she felt that Olivia was wise. A solitary life at Ivy Dene would hardly content her. And after all was she so ready to leave Brompton? She had found friends there—real friends—the Luttrells and Mrs. Broderick and the Gaythornes, and though she still felt terribly lonely in her big house, perhaps it would be better for her to wait a little.

"I suppose I should feel rather like a ghost if I tried to settle here," she said, presently. "I do not think so badly of poor little Ivy Dene as you do. It would be quite large enough for me, but somehow

Medhurst itself seems changed."

After tea they walked to the Grange, and asked leave to go into the garden, and Greta showed her friend the lime walk, and the orchard and the big elm-tree where they had swung their hammock.

"I think it looks just as lovely as it did in the old days," she said as they paced down the smooth velvety lawn. And even Olivia allowed that the Grange had not disappointed her. It was a fine, picturesque-looking house, and as they passed to the front, she had a glimpse of a handsome hall panelled in oak. "If you could only live at the Grange," she said, and Greta smiled.

Mrs. Broderick told her niece that she was growing very gay and worldly. Actually Marcus had taken her and Greta to the Royal Academy one afternoon, and they had sat in the Park afterwards. And Olivia in her new spring dress and hat had looked the embodiment of youth and freshness, and another afternoon they had gone to St. James's Hall to hear Sarasate.

"Livy has had more work than play. I mean her to enjoy herself a little," he said when Aunt Madge accused him playfully of spoiling his wife, but Olivia refused to endorse this.

"No one could be happier," she told herself day after day. Marcus's practice was certainly improving, and he was getting very intimate, too, with Dr. Bevan, and it was already settled between them that he should look after Dr. Bevan's patients while he was away in August.

Dr. Bevan had an extensive practice and was not young, and Dr. Luttrell suspected that he would soon take a partner. He had complained more than once lately that he was sadly overworked, but Marcus never could be sure if these hints were intentionally dropped. To be Dr. Bevan's partner would be the acme of his ambition, but in that case a good house would be absolutely necessary.

Olivia had only been joking when she had made the observation. She had no idea that Marcus even entertained such an idea for a moment, but Marcus, who had his foot on the first rung of the ladder, was eager to climb. All his spare time was spent in study. He still went to the Models, to gain experience he would say, but in reality because the people loved to have him, and because it gratified his organ of benevolence.

As the summer wore on the weather became exceedingly hot and oppressive, and Greta, who had taken a small house at Eastbourne for July and August, insisted on carrying off Olivia and Dot for the first month.

"It would be doing me the greatest kindness," she said almost tearfully as she gave the invitation, "for how could I enjoy anything alone? Dr. Luttrell has promised to run down from Saturday to Monday, and perhaps we could even induce him to stay longer, and it would do Dot so much good." And it was this last consideration that had the greatest weight with Olivia.

"But oh, Marcus! how am I to leave you?" she began in rather a dismal voice. But Marcus soon proved to her that he was only too willing to part with her.

"My good child," he said, "the idea of your hesitating for a moment. Miss Williams is behaving like a brick, and she had planned it all beforehand, too. Do you suppose she would have taken a house, if she had not meant you and Dot to go too?"

"But, Marcus," she pleaded, "I do not really need the change; you only said yourself the other day that I had never looked so well."

"Yes, and Eastbourne will enable you to keep well," he returned, cheerfully. "Think of a month of sea breezes; does not your maternal heart swell at the idea of Dot in a big sun-bonnet, stumping over the beach with her spade and bucket? Why, you and Miss Williams will be as happy as the day is long."

"Oh, no; not without you, Marcus," returned Olivia, tenderly. "Do you think any enjoyment would be perfect without my husband?" But as Marcus quietly reasoned with her, she yielded at last with a good grace.

"I could not well refuse, Aunt Madge, could I?" she said to her usual confidante, "when Greta wanted me so; and then it will do baby so much good. Marcus declares that Martha will manage all right, and that he will not be dull; and he has promised to spend a whole week with us if he can. And really, it is so very, very kind of Greta, and she is so happy about our coming."

"You are a wise woman, Livy," replied Aunt Madge. "And I am proud of you, and so is Marcus, for we both of us know you are making a brave effort. Deb shall give Martha a helping hand, now and then, when I can spare her. And Marcus has promised to have a cup of tea and chat with me sometimes on his way home from the Models. By-the-bye, when do Mr. Gaythorne and Mr. Alwyn return?" But Olivia could not answer this question.

Galvaston House would not be ready for them until the end of July. She knew that in his last letter to Marcus, Alwyn had spoken of their going on to Scarborough. He had given a good account of his father, he was less feeble and walked better; but Bournemouth was too relaxing, and they both felt the need of more bracing air.

"I shall keep him away until September, unless he turns restless," he had finished, and Marcus had

strongly commended this.

Greta sometimes heard from Alwyn. He wrote to her from time to time, and she would read his letters to Olivia.

The house that she had taken at Eastbourne was charmingly situated. From the windows they had a view of the sea, and Beachy Head in the distance. Marcus took them down and settled them in, and after the first few days Olivia got over her homesickness and thoroughly enjoyed her life.

In the mornings they were always on the beach with Dot, either reading or working, or watching the happy groups of children.

In the afternoons and evenings they either drove or walked over the downs. Greta, who was resolved to spare no expense, had hired a pretty little victoria for the month.

When Marcus came down for his promised week, he spent most of his time boating, and one or two days they went out in a sailing-boat and carried their luncheon with them. Both Greta and Olive proved themselves good sailors.

Greta had entreated her friend to prolong her visit, but Olivia would not hear of this.

"Martha had been left long enough," she said, decidedly, and she could not remain away from Marcus any longer. And Marcus was too glad to get his bright companion back to say a dissenting word.

"Oh, Aunt Madge, I have had such a splendid time," were Olivia's first words when she went round to Mayfield Villas on the morning after her return. "Greta has been such a dear, she has thoroughly spoilt me; but the loveliest time of all was the week Marcus spent with us."

"You look the very essence of a sunbeam, Livy," returned Mrs. Broderick, with an admiring look; "but what a nut-brown mayde you have become. Well, was Marcus pleased to get his wife and child back?" And then Olivia smiled happily, for only she knew how she had been missed.

Dr. Bevan left town early in August and Dr. Luttrell took up his position as *locum tenens*, and in spite of the emptiness of London found plenty of work.

Sometimes, as Olivia walked in the direction of Brunswick Place with Dot toddling beside her, the victoria with its bay horses would pass her. How Olivia would dimple with amusement as Marcus gravely lifted his hat to her.

Ever after a victoria with bay horses figured in Olivia's *châteaux d'espagne*.

Greta complained bitterly of her dullness when her friends had left. "Eastbourne has lost its charms," she wrote, "and the crowds of people on the Parade only make me feel more lonely. If it were not for fear of Dr. Luttrell, I should come back to Brunswick Place at once, but I dare not run the gauntlet of his sarcasms.

"My one amusement is making smocks for Dot. I have finished the pale blue one and it looks lovely, and now I have begun a cream-coloured one; in spite of your stuck-up pride, Olive, you cannot prevent me from working for my darling Dot."

This reproachful sentence was the outcome of a hot argument.

Greta had tried in her affectionate way to lavish gifts upon her friend, but Olivia had steadily refused to allow this.

"No, Greta," she had said, "you do far too much for me already. I have been treated like a princess for a whole month, but I will not have presents heaped on me. Even poor people have their feelings, you know, and rich people must respect them." But this dignified speech made no impression on Greta.

"You may call it proper pride," she said, contemptuously, "but I call it selfishness, for you are just depriving me of my greatest pleasure. Well, if you choose to be stiff and obstinate you must have your way, but you cannot hinder me from finishing those smocks." And Olivia, who was full of admiration for Greta's exquisite smocking, announced graciously that the smocks were to be the exception.

"I was obliged to put my foot down, Marcus," she said afterwards, "or she would have bought everything I admired. Perhaps I am proud, but no one but my husband or Aunt Madge shall buy my frocks." And as Olivia said this she held up her head, and looked so dignified and handsome that Marcus refrained from teasing her. Evidently such pride was no fault in his eyes, and it was certain that he very much enjoyed choosing his wife's gowns.

Greta was the first to return. The Gaythornes stayed away until the middle of September.

When Alwyn paid his first visit, Olivia was rejoiced to see the improvement in him. He had gained weight and flesh, and looked very handsome; but Marcus was less satisfied with Mr. Gaythorne.

"He is an old man before his time," he observed. "I am afraid he will never throw off his invalid habits now. He can just potter about in the sunshine and amuse himself with his flowers and museum,

but he will never be capable of work again. The least effort to concentrate his thoughts for more than a few minutes seems to irritate his brain. Nothing pleases him better than to creep up to the grand new studio and watch Alwyn at his work.

"'I shall be proud of him yet,' he said that to me yesterday, and if you had seen his face, Livy, when he said it!"

CHAPTER XX.

"SOMEBODY'S CRUTCH."

"Of all the paths that lead to a woman's love
Pity's the straightest."—*Beaumont and Fletcher*.

One afternoon in October Olivia sat at her work in the front parlour. She was expecting Greta to join her, and more than once she had looked at the clock on the mantelpiece as though wondering at her lateness.

The folding-doors were open; the young couple had taken advantage of their improved circumstances to add to their scanty stock of furniture. The dining-table and mahogany chairs bought second-hand in Dr. Luttrell's bachelor days and the small, ugly chiffonier had been moved into the smaller and duller back room, and the front parlour had been transformed into a dainty sitting-room. Greta's skilful fingers and good taste had been placed at her friend's service. To gratify Marcus's love of comfort two really handsome saddle-back chairs were beside the fireplace, and a little round table occupied the centre of the room. A second-hand writing-table with drawers had been picked up in the city as a great bargain and appropriated for Marcus's use. Over it hung the sketch of Dot and the kitten, long ago presented by the grateful artist. The pretty blue carpet and curtains gave an air of finish.

By Marcus's desire the folding-doors were always kept open, and Olivia no longer felt herself stifled for want of air. This afternoon the little sitting-room looked at its best. A bowl of dark-red cactus dahlias stood on the table, an offering from Alwyn, and a magnificent *Lilium auratum*, a gift from Greta, blocked up the dining-room window.

When the door-bell rang Olivia laid down her work with a pleased smile, and the next moment Greta entered the room.

"How late you are, you naughty girl," she said, kissing her affectionately. "I have been sewing for the last hour."

"Yes, I know; something unforeseen detained me," and then Greta dropped her eyes in sudden embarrassment and blushed. "Oh, Olive dear, can you guess what I have to tell you this afternoon?" and then Olivia looked at her steadily.

"Do you mean," she began, anxiously—but Greta, blushing still more rosily, interrupted her, "Yes, I do mean it; and, Olive, dear friend, truest of friends, you must congratulate me, for I am so happy."

"You take my breath away, Greta. Are you and Alwyn actually engaged?"

"Yes, dear, we settled it this afternoon; but, of course—of course, I have known for weeks what he meant and wished. He has gone round now to tell his father, and will be here presently. Dear Olive, why are you so silent? Are you not glad about this?"

"I am glad that anything should make you happy," returned Olivia, gently. "And you know how deeply interested I am in your and Alwyn's welfare. But forgive me, Greta, if I ask one question. Are you sure, are you perfectly sure, that this step will be for your happiness——"

Then Greta looked at her in surprise, and there was a reproachful expression in her grey eyes.

"Sure! when I have loved him all these months. My dear Olive, what can you mean? Alwyn is the only man I could ever marry."

"Oh, how it relieves me to hear you say that Dear Greta, I am so fond of you both. Alwyn is charming; but until you said that I was afraid to congratulate you. You know my views on this subject, dear. Do you remember how we talked on the beach at Eastbourne? I am afraid that more than once I made you a little sad; but I was thinking of this. I knew then in my own mind that Alwyn had begun to care for you, and I wanted you to have plenty of time for consideration."

"Oh, yes; you made your meaning clear to me even then," returned Greta, smiling; "but, indeed, no

consideration was necessary. When Alwyn came to me and said quite simply that he loved me and wanted me to be his wife, I just put my hand in his without a word. It almost shocked me to see his gratitude. He kept saying over and over again that he was not worthy of me; that he knew he had done nothing to win my respect, and I should not be able to look up to him. Oh, Olive, he quite broke down when he said this, but I soon comforted him. 'I only remember two things,' I said to him,—'that you love me, and that you need me.' And after that we understood each other."

"Dearest Greta. Aunt Madge was right when she told me that you were born into the world to be somebody's crutch."

"Did she say that?" and Greta's eyes had a dreamy look in them; "but I tell Alwyn that I mean to lean on him. Indeed, Olive, you must not undervalue him. Alwyn is stronger than you think. He has repented truly and deeply of all his boyish mistakes, and those who love him should utterly and for ever wipe out the record of his past. See how devotedly his father loves him; his forgiveness was absolute."

"Dear, you need not say any more;" and Olivia embraced her with tears in her eyes. "I can only wish you all the happiness you deserve."

"In that case my happiness would be little enough; but, of course, I know what you mean. And, Olive, for the first time in my life I can say with truth that I have found my vocation. It will be such a privilege to be allowed to take care of Alwyn; he is far from strong, and he will need care for a long time. I wonder if you know the feeling I have about that? With Dr. Luttrell you cannot have had it. You have never been anxious about him; and then he has always taken care of you. But I shall always have to think for Alwyn."

"Oh, you are right there!"

"We shall think for each other," she went on, fearing that she had admitted too much. "And there is one thing of which I am certain that I shall have every right to be proud of him. Do you know what his father says? that he has genius, unmistakable genius, and he is no mean judge. 'Mark my words, he will be an R.A. yet;' he only said that to me a few days ago."

"Marcus thinks the same; but, Greta, there is one thing: if you marry Alwyn, you will have to take his father too; you can never separate them."

"Those were Alwyn's very words," returned Greta, with a soft flush which made her look years younger; "but, indeed, I love him already for Alwyn's sake, and because he is so good to him. Oh, Olive dear, if you knew the joy it will be to me to have someone for whom I can care again. I do not want my life to be too easy or free from responsibility; but I do want it to be real, actual life. Mrs. Broderick and I were only talking about it yesterday. She says what single women miss in their lives is some absorbing interest; a work that shall fill up all the crannies."

"Oh, Aunt Madge is very strong on that point. I remember, before I knew Marcus, that we had wonderful talks on this subject. She used to be so fond of quoting Carmen Sylva's speech, 'A woman does not become a mother, she is a mother from her birth. A woman's family satisfies her vocation, but does not create it.' And she used to tell me to mother my pupils. 'You must love them hard,' she would say, 'and live their young lives as well as your own;' but, thank God, we can always find objects for our love. I should make you laugh, Greta, if I told you how I mapped out my future as an old maid; but I am quite sure I should have made a good one."

Just then the door-bell rang, and Alwyn entered; he looked eager and excited.

"Well, has she told you?" were his first words, as Olivia met him with outstretched hands; and then, as she warmly congratulated him, his eyes glowed with feeling. "I have not deserved such a prize, have I, Mrs. Luttrell? but Greta has promised to make the best of me. Will you forgive me if I take her away for a little? My father is most impatient to welcome his new daughter, and he will only excite himself if we keep him waiting."

"Go with him, Greta, dear," returned Olivia; "Mr. Alwyn will bring you back to us." And then Greta rose at once, though she looked a little shy.

As Olivia stood at the door watching them as they crossed the road, Marcus came up Harbut Street.

"Where are those two going?" he asked, curiously. "I thought Miss Williams was to spend the evening with us." Then Olivia linked her arm in his and drew him into the passage.

"Oh, do come in, Marcus," she said, breathlessly. "I cannot talk at the street-door, and I have such a lot to tell you." Then Marcus put down his hat and drew off his gloves with exasperating slowness.

"We have been married nearly three years," he said, flecking the dust off his coat-collar, "but I never remember the day when, as you so elegantly express it, you had not a 'lot to tell me.'"

"Yes, but something has really happened," she returned, ignoring this provoking speech.

"Oh, indeed," was the cool answer; "so they have settled it at last, have they? Well, I have changed my opinion lately. Gaythorne may not be quite up to the mark, but he will make a good husband. I

suppose he is taking her across for the parental blessing?" And then Olivia admitted that this was the case.

"I am so glad that you really do not mind," she said, in a relieved tone; "but I fancied you would not approve. You almost said as much one day."

"Oh, even great intellects change their opinions sometimes," returned Marcus, dryly; "Sir Robert Peel and Gladstone, for example. And then most people know their own business best. Perhaps if you were to cross-examine me severely I might own that Alwyn Gaythorne is not the man I should have selected for your interesting friend, but as she has chosen him, she is evidently of another opinion, and this is one thing in his favour, he is thoroughly in love with her, and really, take him all in all, he is not a bad fellow," and Olivia, who understood her husband perfectly, was quite content with this opinion.

When Marcus went upstairs to wash his hands, whistling the air of "My old Dutch," she knew he was quite as much excited as she was.

When Greta came back she looked a little flushed and agitated, and, at a sign from Alwyn, Olivia took her upstairs.

"What is it, dear?" she said, gently, as Greta shed a few tears; "was not Mr. Gaythorne nice to you?"

"Nice?" repeated Greta, with a little sob; "he was as dear as possible. If I had been Olive he could not have been more gentle. I tell Alwyn that I shall be quite spoiled between them, but somehow as he talked to me I could not help thinking of poor father and of my mother. How happy mother would have been, for she was always so fond of Alwyn."

"Yes; dear, I understand."

"Yes, and Alwyn understands, too. He told me so just now. He said that though this was the happiest day of his life, he could not help missing his mother and Olive. Olivia, do you know that Mr. Gaythorne means us to live with him? I was just a little bit frightened when I heard that, and I am afraid Alwyn saw it, for he spoke about it afterwards."

"Does he wish it himself?" Olivia was careful to reserve her own opinion. Both she and Marcus had their own views on this subject.

"I do not know what he really wishes, and it was too soon to discuss things, but he did say that he thought that his father ought not to be left alone, and, of course, he is right, and it is for him to decide," and then she gave an embarrassed little laugh.

"Mr. Gaythorne was very good to me, but you know what an autocrat he is. He wants it to be soon, very soon. Oh, he quite took my breath away, and I could see Alwyn was sorry for me. He thinks it is the impatience of the disease and that we must humour him a little. Alwyn was so beautifully gentle with him and so considerate for me, but he saw how overwhelmed I was."

"Yes, one wants quiet at first to realise one's happiness," returned Olivia, sympathetically. "Now I am going to make the tea, and you shall join us when you like."

But when she got downstairs she found Alwyn alone. He was pacing up and down as though he were anxious.

"Where is Marcus?" she asked at once.

"Oh, someone wanted him at No. 25, Sligo Street. I was to tell you that," and then, with a change of tone, "I hope my father did not really upset Greta."

"Oh, no; she was only a little overwhelmed."

"No wonder! You know what my father is, Mrs. Luttrell. He never will wait for anything. If a thing is to be done it must be done at once. Only yesterday I was laughing at him, and telling him he would have made an excellent slave-driver. He is immensely pleased and excited, and he treated Greta as though she were a princess. He has fine manners, you will allow that, but the dear girl looked dreadfully shy and embarrassed. And then, to put her at her ease, he wanted her to promise that she would marry me as soon as possible. It was no use trying to hush him, for he would have his say. I got her away at last by pretending you would be waiting tea for us. Oh, here she comes," and his face brightened as he hurried to his *fiancée's* side. Greta had recovered her tranquillity, and when Marcus entered she received his congratulations as happily as possible.

Olivia went over to Galvaston House the next day.

Mr. Gaythorne was evidently expecting her.

"Well," he said, holding her hand, "I suppose you have come to congratulate me on my new daughter. I tell Alwyn he is a lucky dog. A sweet girl and three thousand a year. Not that either he or I care about the money,—there will be plenty for Alwyn, plenty. I was telling them both last night," he went on, "that there must be no delay and nonsense. In my state of health any procrastination would be foolish. I want to see him with a good wife. Crampton is all very well, but a wife will understand him better. The house will hold us all. With the exception of the library and my own bedroom, it will all

belong to them. Alwyn can refurnish the drawing-room, if he likes; and there is that little room on the first floor, opening into the conservatory, that would make a charming morning-room for Greta. He can have *carte blanche* to do what he likes, and she and Crampton will manage the house between them, so what is the use of waiting?"

And as Olivia noted the old man's feverish excitement she could not help thinking that a short engagement would be best, and when Alwyn walked with her to Mayfield Villas she told him so.

"I quite agree with you," was his answer. "Dr. Luttrell and I had a talk over things last night, but I do not mean Greta to be bothered with plans and preparations until she has had a few days' quiet You do not know her as well as I do, Mrs. Luttrell. Greta is so unselfish, so absolutely self-less, that she will do anything for the good of those she loves. In the old days she always yielded her wishes to Olive, and she is just as ready to do so now," and, as Alwyn said this with his bright, winning smile, Olivia was not quite so sure, after all, that Greta had made a mistake.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUNSHINE AND CLOUDS.

"A friend who is both intelligent and well-affected is the most valuable of all possessions."—*Herodotus*.

About a fortnight after this eventful afternoon, Olivia received a note from Greta begging her to bring her work and to spend a few hours with her. The invitation was a pressing one. "Please do not disappoint me," she wrote, "for I want to talk to you so much. I think I can promise that we shall have no interruption. Alwyn is going up to town for the afternoon, and will not pay his usual call." And then Olivia, who had planned to have tea with Aunt Madge, put off her visit until another day, and sent a verbal message of acceptance.

It was one of those late October days, when a touch of frost in the air gives a hint of the approaching winter, and the bright little fire in Greta's pretty morning-room was very welcome.

Greta was sitting at her embroidery frame as usual. Her deep mourning was relieved by the little knot of white chrysanthemums and red leaves that she wore, and her fair, serious face looked bright and animated. "Dear Olive, it was so good of you to come," she said, as she ensconced her guest in a big easy-chair. "I suppose you guessed that I wanted you particularly," and Olivia nodded.

"I could hardly sleep thinking about it all. Olive, we have settled the day. Mr. Gaythorne gave Alwyn no peace, and so he was obliged to speak to me. He said it was very soon to ask me, and that he would willingly have given me more time, but that in his father's state of health any delay would only harass him, so I said that I would be ready by the middle of December. I hope you do not think I am wrong?"

"No, indeed. I think you are very wise."

"Alwyn was so grateful," went on Greta; "he knew my objection to a winter wedding; but, as he says, it will be so nice to begin the new year together; and, after all, what do these outward things matter? At first I thought I would be married in my travelling-dress, and go straight away from the church; and then I remembered how Alwyn once said that brides ought always to wear white, that it was symbolical and poetical, and that you agreed with him."

"Marcus thought just the same!" returned Olivia; "and though I was in mourning for dear mother, Aunt Madge bought me a lovely white cashmere. Alas! I have never worn it since, but sometimes I take it out and look at it. I remember how pleased Marcus was with it. Shall you wear silk or satin, Greta?" and then Greta owned that she had already decided on a rich ivory-coloured silk.

"But we will not discuss my *trousseau* just yet," she observed, blushing. "There is plenty of time for that. I shall have seven weeks for my preparations. I want to tell you about yesterday, Olive. You know I had promised to have luncheon at Galvaston House, and that Alwyn was to fetch me, but before we left this house it was all settled, and after luncheon Alwyn told his father. The dear old man was so pleased; he made Alwyn bring down his mother's trinkets, a pearl necklace and some diamond stars, and such splendid rings that he had given her, and he told Alwyn that they were all for me; you know I never cared much for jewelry, but Alwyn will always want me to be well dressed, so I shall have to be smart. I think I liked best a little cross set with diamonds, that Olive used to wear; he gave me that, too."

"How pleased Alwyn must have been."

"Yes, and, of course, I was pleased, too; and then Mr. Gaythorne made Alwyn take me over the house. What a handsome house it is, Olive! I like it ever so much better than Brunswick Place. I had no idea it was so large, but Mr. Gaythorne said that Italian palaces had spoilt him, and that he must always

have plenty of space. There is a room on the first floor opening into the conservatory that will make a charming morning-room, and then the studio is so lovely. Alwyn has been buying such beautiful things, and there is to be a corner fitted up for my use, where my embroidery frame can stand. I shall so love to watch him work; but oh, Olive, is it not absurd? Mr. Gaythorne talks of refurnishing the drawing-room, but it is not the least necessary. I want you to convince him of this, and to beg him not to spend money so needlessly. I have so many nice things of my own; all this beautiful china and those inlaid Japanese cabinets. A new carpet and a little fresh cretonne is all that is needed. And I know Alwyn agrees with me."

"Very well, then, we must bring Mr. Gaythorne to reason."

"I took Mrs. Crampton into confidence," went on Greta, "when she showed me the kitchen and store-rooms. What a nice creature she is, and how admirably she manages! There is to be another maid kept, so I asked if I might bring Merton; she has been with us so many years that I should dislike to part with her, and Alwyn has promised to speak to his father."

Olivia listened and approved; there was no mistaking Greta's happiness; she looked on the bright side of everything, and would allow of no drawbacks. When Olivia ventured to hint that Mr. Gaythorne might be trying at times, Greta only smiled and said, "That was very likely, only Alwyn managed him so beautifully, and she hoped in time to do the same. I know that he dislikes visitors," she went on, "but, as you and Dr. Luttrell are exceptions, I do not so much mind, and I shall be quite happy with Alwyn."

"Oh, no doubt," returned Olivia, in her quick, decided way; "but you must remember, Greta dear, that we owe a duty to our fellow-creatures, and you must not allow Mr. Gaythorne to carry his misanthropical views too far. There is no need for him to be troubled with visitors; he is far too ailing for much fatigue and exertion; but surely you and Alwyn can entertain your friends in your own rooms," and, though Greta hesitated and looked rather alarmed at the idea of opposing her formidable father-in-law-elect, she was soon brought to acknowledge that society would be good for Alwyn.

"There is no hurry, we can be quiet this first winter," she said; "but, of course, if people call upon me, I shall return their visits, but we cannot settle beforehand. I shall first wait and see what Alwyn wishes, and you must own, Olive, that I have not led a gay life here."

"By-the-bye," observed Olivia, suddenly, "what have you decided to do with this house and furniture?" but Greta had evidently not taken these matters into consideration.

"All the best things will go to Galvaston House, I suppose," she replied, looking round her, "but most of the furniture is old-fashioned and not up-to-date. I suppose people would call it handsome, and, of course, the oak in the dining-room is in thoroughly good taste. I must talk to Alwyn about it; perhaps it might be let furnished. Dear father used to say selling furniture was such a mistake,—one never got the full value."

"I remember how grand I thought it the first day I called," returned Olivia, smiling. "The drawing-room with that beautiful conservatory opening out of it, and the plush curtains, and those luxurious couches made me feel so shabby. But I suppose the drawing-room at Galvaston House is still better. The glass door opening on the garden is so pleasant, and those Venetian cabinets and that carved settle are really beautiful."

"Yes, and it would be such a pity to modernise the room. Besides, what does one want with a drawing-room at all? I am sure I never enter mine. I shall live in the morning-room and the studio, and I suppose in the evenings we shall be in the library. Ah, you are laughing, because I have thought it all out in this matter-of-fact way, but I assure you I hardly slept last night." And then by mutual consent they began on the mysteries of the *trousseau*, and they had not half finished when Olivia looked at the clock and declared that she had stayed too long.

"The world goes up and the world goes down and the sunshine follows the rain," says the old song, and human life is certainly made up of passing clouds and gleams of sunshine.

While Alwyn superintended the decorations of the new rooms at Galvaston House, and brought his artistic taste to bear on every petty detail for the use of his lady-love, and while Greta busied herself over her *trousseau*, Dr. Luttrell was engaged from morning to night among his patients.

With the damp, foggy days of November had come the dreaded epidemic, influenza. All the doctors were overworked, and more than one of them succumbed to the malady,—amongst them Dr. Bevan.

Marcus, who had been devoting himself to his poor patients, suddenly found the charge of a large practice thrown on him, and had scarcely time to take his meals. For a few days Dr. Bevan was extremely ill, and even when a short change had recruited his health it was evident that he would never be able to do the same amount of work again.

"He has been overworking himself for years," Mrs. Bevan said to Marcus, with tears in her eyes; "but he would never spare himself, and now Dr. Randolph says that this utter breakdown is the result. Oh, it is all very well for him to say that it is better to wear out than rust out, but if a man has a wife and children he has no right to risk his life in this way. It might not hurt a younger man to rise from his bed night after night in the depths of winter, but for my husband it is simply suicidal. When he gets well he must and shall have a partner. What is the use of waiting until Wilfred is ready to come into the practice," for Wilfred Bevan, the eldest son, was at that time walking the hospitals. And here Mrs.

Bevan, with her comely face looking quite worn and aged with anxiety, hurried away to sit with her husband.

Olivia had her own private anxieties. Those long solitary days were very trying to her, but she never dared be long absent from home lest she should miss one of Marcus's flying visits. His meals were taken at any odd hour, but if he came in for a minute on his morning round there was always a cup of good soup ready for him, or later in the day some hot coffee. But perhaps the best cordial to the tired, harassed doctor was the sight of his wife's bright face. He would drink the soup, snatch up his little daughter for a kiss and go back to his work refreshed, but even to him the strain was excessive.

Olivia, who was unwilling to damp Greta's cheerfulness, would pour out her troubles to her Aunt Madge, and Mrs. Broderick would listen with her usual sympathy.

"I hope it is not wicked of me, Aunt Madge," she would say, "but I do feel so worried and anxious. Marcus declares he is quite well, but he is so tired every night that he can hardly drag himself to bed, and when morning comes he is not a bit rested. I think Dr. Bevan's illness has made me nervous, for I am always dreading that Marcus will break down too."

"Women need lot of faith, don't they, Livy? Doctors' wives as well as soldiers' wives, but I am not sure that you need fear for Marcus. He is really strong, and at his age a little hard work will not hurt him. He has his laurels to gather, you must remember that. 'It is an ill wind that blows no one any good.'" But Olivia, who was tired and depressed, was not so ready to be comforted.

"I would rather go on being poor than see my poor boy work so hard," she said, mournfully. "But it is not only that, Aunt Madge. Marcus is very tender-hearted, and it makes him so unhappy when he loses a patient. Of course I know why he looked so dull last night, that poor young fellow Basil Greenwood is dead."

"Yes, I know; Dr. Randolph was called in," returned Mrs. Broderick; "but a hundred physicians could not have saved him, the fever ran too high."

"He was only eighteen and his poor mother doated on him, and now she is ill too. They called Marcus up last night; he did not get back till nearly five, but I had the fire lighted and some hot cocoa ready for him. Marcus scolded me; he is always so afraid of my knocking up, but I know he was glad of the cocoa. I tell Greta that I cannot be much with her just now. I am so afraid of missing him when he comes in, and of course she understands, but it is a little hard for her, poor child."

"Greta is very good," returned Aunt Madge. "She makes the best of things. By-the-bye, what is this I hear of a grand new dress for the wedding?" And then Olivia did brighten up a little.

Greta had begged in the most loving way that Olivia's dress and bonnet for the occasion should be her gift, and the dark heliotrope silk and dainty bonnet to match were at that moment in Greta's wardrobe.

"I tell Greta that it is far too handsome," replied Olivia, "and that Marcus will object to my being so smart, but she only laughs at me. There is such a lovely cape to go with it, but somehow, in spite of Greta's kindness, I shall not enjoy it one bit, unless Marcus has time to go with me."

"Oh, he will make time; don't be so lugubrious, Livy. You are just out of heart about things, but we must have cloudy days some time. Don't you remember what Longfellow says?

> "'Nothing that is can pause or stay,
> The moon will wax, the moon will wane,
> The mist and cloud will turn to rain,
> The rain to mist and cloud again,
> To-morrow be to-day.'"

"Yes, and November fogs will pass too. Well, dear Aunt Madge, I must go, and as usual you have cheered me up. What should I do without you, I wonder."

"I am glad you find the old log useful," returned Mrs. Broderick, "so come and grumble as often as you like. Greta is coming to tea with me to-morrow, and Mr. Alwyn has promised to fetch her. Why don't you come too, and you shall have a real Scotch tea, bannocks and scones and seed cake," but Olivia shook her head at this tempting invitation. "Marcus had asked her to go round to the model lodging houses," she said, "to see two families in trouble. And then it was that poor boy's funeral." And then Mrs. Broderick said no more.

"Poor Livy," she said to herself, as she lay alone in the twilight, "one may make light of her little troubles, but they are real to her. And I do not wonder that she worries over Marcus. Dr. Randolph was only speaking of him this morning. He told me what a splendid worker he was.

"'Bevan may be thankful to have got hold of such a man,' those were his very words. 'But he must be prudent and not burn the candle at both ends as Bevan did. "The foul fiend" has got hold of Harris now, he is Dr. Mordaunt's partner, and was married a few weeks ago. Apollyon, as we call it at our house, does not spare doctors,' but I hope, I really do hope, that Livy has not heard this."

CHAPTER XXII.

"YOU MUST NOT LOSE HEART."

"Cherish those that love you; that if ye love, ye may be loved again."—*Moschus*.

When Greta woke on her wedding morning, she was greeted by the pale wintry sunshine. The weather was unusually mild for December, the sky blue and cloudless, and only the bare blackness of the trees and their stripped branches testified that winter had come.

"Happy the bride that the sun shines on," says the old proverb, and as Olivia repeated the saying, she felt her old cheerfulness and buoyancy return. Marcus had promised to meet them at the church, and to return with them to Brunswick Place, and her finery would not be thrown away.

It would be of course a very quiet wedding, the only guests would be the lawyer, Mr. Treherne, an old family friend, who had undertaken to give the bride away, and Alwyn's best man, a young artist.

As soon as the young couple had partaken of refreshment and Greta had changed her dress, they were to drive round to Galvaston House on their way to the station. The brief fortnight's honeymoon was to be spent at St. Leonards. Mr. Gaythorne had begged that they would not go very far away, and Alwyn had been reluctant to leave his father for a longer time.

Olivia had promised to spend the remainder of the day with Mr. Gaythorne, and, if possible, Marcus was to join them in the evening, but she had another visit to pay on her way to Brunswick Place, so when the brougham came round she drove over in solitary state to Maybrick Villas.

Mrs. Broderick regarded her niece with satisfied eyes. "Why, Livy," she said, admiringly, "I have not seen you look so well since your own wedding-day. Fine feathers make fine birds. You are quite a striking-looking woman. Marcus will be proud of his wife."

"You must not make me vain," returned Olivia, blushing. She was as pleased as a child with her beautiful dress. "Look what Alwyn has given me," and she exhibited a pair of delicate gold bangles. "You cannot think how smart I feel, for that pretty brooch that Marcus gave me the day before we were married was my sole piece of jewelry."

Mrs. Broderick smiled. "I am not much richer than you in that respect, Livy. I never would let Fergus spend his money on trinkets. I told him I was far too ugly, and that I preferred books. There are only two handsome rings to come to you, Livy, when I am gone," but Olivia frowned at this speech. She never could endure to think of anything happening to Aunt Madge.

Marcus was at the church door to meet her, and there was unmistakable approval in his eyes as they stood together for a moment in the porch. And as they walked up the empty church together each was thinking of the day three years ago when they had plighted their troth in this very church.

Greta made a sweet-looking bride, there was a chastened gravity on her fair face, but no tremor as she repeated the solemn responses, but Alwyn was painfully nervous, and looked so pale, that Olivia feared more than once he was ill.

He looked more like himself when the service was over, but that he realised his responsibilities intensely was evident from the few words he said to Olivia while Greta was changing her dress.

"I have not deserved all this, have I, Mrs. Luttrell?" he said, in his impulsive way. "I feel as though coals of fire were heaped upon me. Fancy a sweet girl like Greta consenting to link her lot with mine. How am I to live up to it? but she believes in me, and God bless her. I will try not to disappoint her," and there were tears in the young man's eyes as he said this.

"Good-bye, Olive darling," whispered Greta, as she put her arms affectionately round her friend. "I am glad that we are not to be long away, the dear new home will be quite ready for us," and then she took her husband's arm and the little group of friends watched them as they drove away.

When Olive went to Mr. Gaythorne an hour later she found him looking pleased and excited. "Alwyn is a happy man," he said, "he has got a good wife. Greta has tact as well as heart. She will let him have his own way whenever it is possible, and he will not find out that he is guided. That is what Alwyn's nature needs. I have found that out by bitter experience." And the old man sighed heavily. In spite of his contentment the memory of the past was still painful, and both he and Alwyn would carry their scars to their dying day.

"I am sure you will love Greta dearly," Olivia observed. "She is a little shy and quiet until she gets used to people, but she is so wonderfully gentle."

"Yes, and she was my little Olive's friend. I shall never forget that, but as I told you just now, I have

two daughters," and then he laid his hand on Olivia's with one of his rare gestures of affection. "My dear, Alwyn and I were talking last night. I told him that he must be master here, and that he must put his wife in her proper place at once. I shall want little during the few months or years that remain to me. Just my quiet rooms and my children's affection and the society of the one or two friends that remain to me. But Alwyn needs more. He loves society, and to be a successful artist he must mix with his fellow-workers, and rub against other minds. He must go into the world and see and be seen."

"I think you are right," returned Olivia, slowly; she was secretly very much surprised by this speech. She had no idea how much he had brooded over this question.

"Yes," he returned, a little sadly, "I have learnt my lesson at last. Those young lives must not be overshadowed by a sick man's whims. My son must never be able to say again that his father's house was like a jail, and that he felt cramped in body and mind. Sooner than that," with a trace of the old excitement in his manner, "I would rather my weary bones were laid in the earth."

"Dear Mr. Gaythorne," in a soothing voice, "Alwyn loves you far too well ever to say or think such a thing."

"I hope so—I trust so, but I would rather not put his patience to the proof. My boy must be happy, or I can know no peace. 'If you will bring your wife here and stay with your old father I will never interfere with either of you,' that is what I said to him. 'You may turn the house out of window if you like, so that you leave me my two quiet rooms;' but he only laughed in my face. 'We will see about that,' was all he answered, but I shall prove to him that I meant what I said."

"Greta will not care for gaiety this winter. You must remember that she has been used to a very quiet life."

"That is for her and Alwyn to decide," returned Mr. Gaythorne. "Ah, Mrs. Luttrell, my dear, what it will be to me to hear a woman's step about the house again. It will be like music in my ears;" and then he leant back in his chair as though he were exhausted and asked Olivia to read to him.

Later in the evening, as she walked back with Marcus, she told him of this conversation, and then she added,—

"He will be very good to Greta, I am sure of that; his voice softened so when he spoke of her. She is a link with the past, you see. But, Marcus, as he talked he looked so old and broken that I cannot help fearing that they will not have him with them for long."

"Probably not. I have hinted this more than once to Alwyn, and though he always turns it off, I think he understands me. It was his own proposition that they should only be a fortnight away. Now I have two or three patients to see, so you must not wait up for me;" and tired as he was Marcus walked off briskly, whilst Olivia lingered on the doorstep for a moment to look at the stars shining in the dark wintry sky. Alwyn had begged her, as a special favour to him, to pay a daily visit to Galvaston House, so for the next three or four days she found it impossible to go round to Maybrick Villas.

Mr. Gaythorne took her visits as a matter of course. There was always something he wanted to discuss with her. Some fresh arrangement for his daughter-in-law's comfort. One day he consulted her about a brougham that he intended to buy as a surprise.

"I shall get Dr. Luttrell to choose it," he said; "and there is a man I know at Medhurst who will pick me up a pair of chestnuts. My son's wife is a rich woman, and ought to have a pair for her carriage. There is some good stabling to be got just by, and Dr. Luttrell knows a capital coachman who has been thrown out of place by his master's death. In the spring she might have a victoria, but a brougham will be more serviceable at this season of the year when Alwyn takes her to theatres and concerts." And though Olivia smiled, she could not but own that the brougham would be a boon to Greta.

"Then we will see about it at once," he returned, eagerly. "Would you ask your husband to call to-morrow morning if he can spare the time?" And as Olivia took her leave she promised to give the message.

To her surprise she found Marcus reading by the fire; he looked up at her a little gravely as she entered.

"You are rather late, are you not, Livy?" he said, laying down his paper. "Martha brought me some tea, but I waited to speak to you. I shall have to go out again directly."

"Let me give you Mr. Gaythorne's message first. He wants you to go round and speak to him tomorrow morning about a new brougham for Greta. How delighted she and Alwyn will be. Greta is not strong and does not care for walking much in the winter, and she catches cold so easily."

"It is just what Alwyn wished for her. Yes, I will try to run across to-morrow morning, but I have a long day's work before me. Olive, darling, I have rather bad news for you," and here he put his arm round her. "Aunt Madge is ill."

Olivia turned very pale. "Marcus, how did you know? Has Deb sent a message? I hope—oh, I do hope, it is not influenza."

"I fear it is," returned Marcus, reluctantly. "I met Randolph, and he stopped and told me. He was just going there for the second time. He wants to send a nurse in, but Deb was so against it that he did not venture to insist; but I am afraid she is very ill, Livy."

"I must go round at once. Marcus, do you think you can spare me? Martha is very careful; she will look after Dot. But you know"—and here there were hot, smarting tears in Olivia's eyes—"you know what Aunt Madge is to me. I cannot leave her to Deb."

Marcus sighed; he could not bear his wife to run the risk, and yet how could he be selfish enough to deprive Mrs. Broderick of the comfort of having her with her? He knew their deep affection for each other. Aunt Madge was her second mother; few aunts were so fondly beloved.

"I hate you to go, dearest," he said, "and yet I cannot deny that Randolph is very anxious about her. It is the prostration he fears; the fever has been so high these two days."

"She has been ill two whole days, and Deb has never sent for me," and Olivia sobbed in a heart-broken manner.

"My dear girl, you must not lose heart in this way," and Marcus stroked her hair tenderly. "Let me tell you exactly how it was. I went round with Randolph and waited while he paid his visit. Deb came out to speak to me; she is an obstinate, incorrigible, cross-grained old woman, and I told her so. Oh, I spoke my mind to her. She cannot deny that she has been up for three nights, and yet the mention of a nurse throws her into tantrums. 'I have always nursed my mistress, and as long as I can drag about she shall have no strangers to harass her dear soul,' she said, defiantly. Now what are you to do with a woman like that? I asked her why she had not let us know," he went on, "and she confessed that Aunt Madge had made her promise not to send. So you see Deb was not to blame for that."

"No, I see;" and then Olivia looked up in her husband's face pleadingly. "Marcus, dear, you will not forbid my sitting up with Aunt Madge tonight. Deb will not mind me; she knows how Aunt Madge will love to have me. I will be very careful, and do just as you tell me; but I must! I must be with her!" and then very reluctantly Marcus gave his permission.

Martha was interviewed and Dot kissed in her cot, and then Olivia told Marcus she was ready; and they walked to Maybrick Villas almost in silence.

Olivia's heart was too full for speech. If Aunt Madge died, she told herself, the world would never be the same to her again; some of the warmth and the light and the joy of life would have faded out of it. "She is one of my few treasures," she thought. "Marcus and dear baby come first, of course, but Aunt Madge has taken mother's place. All these years she has helped me so with her wise, loving counsel and sympathy."

"While there is life there is hope, Livy," observed Marcus, gently; and his hand touched hers in the darkness.

"Dr. Randolph does not own himself beaten by any means. Do what you can to help Deb, for she is just worn out, the foolish, faithful creature;" and his voice changing, "do not forget me or Dot, and for our sakes take care of yourself," and with these words he opened the little gate and left her to go in alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I HAVE COME TO STAY."

"The dear Lord's best interpreters
  Are humble human souls;
The gospel of a life
  Is more than books or scrolls."—*Whittier*.

"Deb, I have come to stay," were Olivia's first words, as the woman met her on the top of the stairs; but Deborah's only answer was to lift her hands in dumb protest and lead the way into the kitchen.

Deb's strong, hard-featured face was haggard and drawn with fatigue and anxiety, and she looked more gaunt and angular than ever: her reddened, swollen eyelids told their own tale.

"I am come to stay," repeated Olivia, firmly; but Deborah only shrugged her shoulders and walked over to the fireplace.

"You won't need to stay long, Miss Olive," she said, in a choked voice—at moments of excitement it was still "Miss Olive" with Deb—"she is failing fast, dear soul; the fever's gone and left her as weak as a

new-born babe. I always said my mistress was only fit to be among the angels!" and Deb gave an expressive sniff as she filled her kettle. Olivia felt a dull pain at her heart at this speech, but she would not let herself give way. Deborah, as she knew, always took a gloomy view of her mistress's illnesses.

"Dr. Randolph is coming again to-night," she observed; "my husband told me so;" but Olivia's hand shook as she took off her hat and jacket.

"Yes, Miss Olive, the doctor is coming again, and that speaks for itself, to my mind. I knew what it was four days ago, for she was taken ill the very night after you drove round to see her, but I dare not let you know. 'We won't tell Mrs. Luttrell, or she will be anxious, and will insist on coming to nurse me. Promise me that you will not send to Galvaston Terrace, Deb;' and what was a poor servant to do? I suppose if Dr. Luttrell has sent you you will have to stop, but I won't give up nursing my mistress even to you, Miss Olive," and Deb sniffed defiantly. "There, you may go in while I warm her milk, but she will not take any notice of you. She is too weak to speak."

The folding-doors were open, and the little sitting-room, with its cheery fire, had a cosy aspect, the sick-room was dimly lighted. As Olivia bent over the invalid her heart contracted with anguish. Could only four days have wrought such deadly havoc?

Aunt Madge's face looked pinched and sunken, and so changed that Olivia could hardly recognise it, but, as she hung over her in speechless grief, the heavy eyelids unclosed, and something like a smile passed over the features. "My little Livy" was all she whispered, but it was the old caressing tone.

When Dr. Randolph paid his last visit Olivia begged him to use his influence with Deborah. "She has been up three nights and is utterly worn out," she went on. "I want her to let me watch while she has a good sleep on that couch. I would promise to wake her if I saw the least change. Indeed, I know something of nursing, Dr. Randolph. I was with my dear mother when she died, and I will carry out all your instructions."

"Well, you heard what I said to Mrs. Higgins," returned Dr. Randolph, "that everything depends on frequent nourishment. The fever is down, but there is a state of collapse that makes me uneasy. Mrs. Broderick has a good constitution or she would not have got through her last illness, so I still hope we may pull her through;" but Dr. Randolph's voice was not sanguine as he said this. "Now I will go and have a talk with Mrs. Higgins. I shall tell her that unless she does as she is told to-night I shall bring round a nurse with me to-morrow. I think that will fetch her," and Dr. Randolph was right. Possibly Deb felt herself on the verge of breaking down, for she consented at last to lie down on her mistress's couch for an hour or two, but it was midnight before Olivia found herself in sole charge.

There was very little to be done except to give medicine and nourishment at stated intervals and to make up the two fires as noiselessly as possible, but Olivia felt her responsibilities too acutely to be overcome by drowsiness, though Deborah lay hour after hour in the heavy sleep of utter exhaustion.

Olivia's thoughts went back to her childhood as she sat there. A hundred instances of Aunt Madge's affection and devotion recurred to her. She remembered how the sprightly young aunt used to run up to the nursery with some new toy or gaily-dressed doll that she had purchased out of her scanty savings, for Aunt Madge had been a daily governess, too. She could recall the Sunday afternoons when she sat in her lap and the beautiful voice sang to her or told her stories,—Joseph and his brethren and Daniel in the lions' den,—or on other days dear old fairy stories such as children love. She had been her bridesmaid, too, and had grown very fond of the honest, sturdy Scotchman whom his wife so tenderly idealised.

"Uncle Fergus was a good, kind man," she thought, "but he was not all that Aunt Madge imagined him. Most people would not have called him interesting, but he was devoted to her. What a bright creature she was until little Malcolm died. That was the first of her troubles. What a happy home theirs had been, but it was Aunt Madge who had been the heart of the house, who had organised and planned. Uncle Fergus had never originated anything.

"And she loved him as dearly as I love Marcus," she went on. "And yet when she lost him there was not a murmuring word.

"'I thought it was too good to last,' she once said to me, 'but my widow's cruse will never be empty. I have the sweetest memories, and by-and-by I shall have my treasures again. Do you know I often pray, Livy, that I may not long so much to die? God's will, not mine, even in this.'

"Oh, Aunt Madge, dear Aunt Madge, I cannot spare you yet," murmured Olivia more than once that night, for it is hard for human affection to rid itself of selfishness.

When Olivia brought Deb a cup of tea at seven o'clock, the good creature seemed quite shocked. "To think I have slept all these hours," she said, in a dazed voice.

"Miss Olive, why did you not wake me long ago? You are fit to drop, and what will Dr. Luttrell say?" but Olivia shook her head with a faint smile.

"I will lie down now and get a nap. Deb, I am sure she is no worse; she has taken all Dr. Randolph ordered, and though she has not spoken, she seemed to me a shade less exhausted;" but, though Deb would not endorse this, Olivia felt certain that she was right.

She was sitting at her late breakfast, when Marcus called to see how they had spent the night. And her account evidently relieved him. He waited to hear Dr. Randolph's opinion. Olivia came back to him as soon as possible.

"Oh, Marcus," she said, the tears rushing to her eyes, "Dr. Randolph says that the exhaustion is not quite so great, and he owned frankly that he was afraid last night how he should find her this morning. We are to go on just the same. Everything depends on frequent nourishment; he thinks the heart is a little stronger, but she must not be moved at all. 'We must see what nature and rest will do,' he said to me; 'do not relax your efforts, we are not out of the woods yet.' He is coming again about four."

"Yes, I should not be surprised if she weathered it after all," returned Marcus; "she must have a tough constitution to have gone through all she has. Yesterday I certainly felt anxious, and so did Randolph. We both feared sudden collapse. I worried myself for a long time because I had not offered to sit up with you, Livy, but I have been up two nights already this week, and one has one's work to do;" but Olivia looked quite shocked at this.

"My dear boy, how could you think of such a thing? It would have made me more miserable than I was already; besides, there would have been no room for you, this is such a tiny place. Oh, how I wish Aunt Madge could move into better lodgings; her bedroom is far too small, and that wardrobe quite fills it up. By-the-bye, Marcus, I wish you would tell me what I had better do. May I come home for an hour or two and see baby?"

"I don't know that there would be any risk," he replied, slowly; "you cannot give influenza unless you have it yourself; but, all the same, I would keep away from Dot. She is perfectly well, and sat up in her high-chair pouring out imaginary tea in her wooden set while I had my breakfast, and Martha begged me to tell you 'that the butcher had called, and she had ordered a steak for master, and would make a rice-pudding for Miss Baby.'"

"Very well, then, I will stay; but, Marcus, I shall see you again this evening, shall I not?" and Marcus returned in an emphatic voice that he certainly intended to keep an eye on her.

"I won't have you getting into mischief and knocking yourself up," he remarked, severely. "So be a wise woman, or you will have to reckon with me!"

There was plenty to do that morning, putting things tidy in the sick-room and straightening the sitting-room. In the course of the day some choice flowers came from Galvaston House with Mr. Gaythorne's compliments, and at tea-time Marcus dropped in unexpectedly, and they had a cosy half-hour together in Deb's spotless little kitchen; to her surprise he told Olivia that Dot was at Galvaston House.

"Mrs. Crampton begged to have her, and Mr. Gaythorne thought it would be a good plan, so she fetched her this afternoon. I hope I have done right, Livy;" and Marcus spoke in an apologetic tone, as though he felt that he had trenched on the mother's prerogative; "but, you see, I am so much out, and Martha is so busy, that I thought that we should both be less anxious to know that Mrs. Crampton was looking after her," and Olivia agreed to this.

Olivia had already arranged to take the earlier part of the night in the sick-room, and when Dr. Randolph had paid his evening visit, Deb took possession of the couch again. Olivia had promised faithfully to wake her at three o'clock.

A long afternoon nap had refreshed Olivia, and a few hopeful words from the doctor had cheered her immensely. A little after midnight she was sitting down by the bedside with some knitting to keep her awake, when a movement from the bed made her look up. Aunt Madge's eyes were fixed on her; there was a strange solemnity and deep sadness in their expression, and as Olivia rose hastily and bent over her with a tender inquiry, the feeble voice whispered:

"Don't fret any more, Livy, the Master does not need me yet—not yet," and then scarcely audibly, "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord," and then it seemed to Olivia that the weary eyelids closed in sleep again.

When her turn for rest came, Olivia felt almost too agitated to sleep; the sad yearning in the sunken eyes haunted her; too well she knew that the fresh gift of life would only be an additional cross laid on the weary shoulders. What was life to Aunt Madge now but suffering and deprivation, a daily stumbling among shadows, as she had once called it.

There was no reserve and hesitation in Dr. Randolph's manner when he came out of the sick-room the next day.

"She has turned the corner now, but it was a narrow squeak," he said, rubbing his hands. "Now, all we have to do is to build up her strength. Your aunt is a wonderful woman, Mrs. Luttrell. I should not wonder if she is good for twenty years yet, but we must be careful still. I suppose you will be here for another day or two? Oh, that's all right," as Olivia gave a decided assent to this. "It would be a pity to knock Mrs. Higgins up. There are not many women like her; she is simply invaluable."

As the days went on the tension of anxiety was visibly relaxed. The invalid's progress was slow but sure. In another day or two Olivia was able to go home for an hour or two to have dinner with Marcus and give Martha directions; but while the night-work continued it was impossible for her to leave. And

it was arranged that Dot was to remain at Galvaston House for the present.

Greta had written to beg for an extension of her visit. "She is such a darling, and I shall be so delighted to have her," she wrote. "She will not be at all in the way," and indeed Dot ruled royally over the household.

She and Mr. Gaythorne became great friends. "Great dada," as she called him, took a good deal of notice of the pretty, golden-haired child who played at his feet for hours, and Eros was devoted to her.

Alwyn's first work when he returned was to paint a large picture of Dot in her cream-coloured smock, hanging a withered garland round the neck of the blind hound.

"Friends" he called it.

Olivia was able to spend an hour or two at Galvaston House the day after the young couple returned.

She found them in the studio with Dot and Eros. Alwyn was looking well and handsome, and Greta's sweet face wore an expression of gentle content. She carried Olivia off at once to the morning-room to have a chat, as she said, looking archly at her husband. And though Alwyn professed to grumble at the desertion, he was too busy stretching his canvas for the new picture to resent it.

"Let me know when tea is ready," he called after them, and then they heard him whistling in his usual light-hearted fashion.

"I need not ask you if you are happy, Greta," were Olivia's first words, and then a charming blush crossed the young bride's face.

"No, indeed! Oh, Olive, he is so good to me; if you only knew how he studies all my wishes. It was like a dream yesterday coming to this beautiful home. And then Mr. Gaythorne's delight at getting his son back. Oh, it was so touching to see them together. Alwyn wants me to call him 'Father,'" she continued, shyly. "He says it will please him so, so I must try to do it. You know I always called my own father dad. Now tell me about dear Mrs. Broderick. Poor Olive, what a time you have had; and you are looking so pale and tired." And then Olive poured out her anxieties and past troubles into Greta's sympathising ears.

"She is very weak still," she finished. "Dr. Randolph thinks it will be some time before she will be able to leave her bed. I have found such a nice woman who will come in and help Deb, for of course I cannot leave Marcus any longer. I am to go home the day after to-morrow. Deb will sleep on the couch in the sitting-room. She will have to give nourishment every two hours, but Deb manages to sleep with one eye open, as I tell her. I am to go for a couple of hours every afternoon, that will allow her to have a little rest. Marcus thinks this will work excellently. Oh, how glad I shall be to be at home again and look after him!"

"You want looking after yourself, dear," returned Greta, affectionately. And then Alwyn came into the room with Dot on his shoulder, but she clamoured to go to her mammy.

"How do you think Mrs. Alwyn Gaythorne looks?" asked Alwyn, mischievously. "She does me credit, does she not? By-the-bye, Greta, do you think father will like us to have coffee with him in the library this afternoon?"

"I told Phoebe that we would have it up here; shall I go and ask him, Alwyn?"

"Do, love; the attention will please him, and I am sure Mrs. Luttrell will not mind." Then as Greta left the room, he turned to Olivia and said in a tone of deep feeling,—

"She looks well and happy, don't you think so? Oh, Mrs. Luttrell, every day I feel more what a treasure I have. She is an embodied sunbeam. I never knew anyone so gentle and yet so bright. How my father will love her when he knows her better." And then, as his wife's step sounded in the corridor, he sprang from his seat to open the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"NOT YET."

"But here I bring within my trembling hand,
  This will of mine, a thing that seemeth small,
And Thou alone, O Lord, can understand,
  How when I yield Thee this, I yield mine all."—*Anon.*

It was some time before Aunt Madge could be lifted on to the couch in the sitting-room, and even then Deb declared that she was not the weight of a child of eight or nine.

"There is nothing of her, Miss Olive," she grumbled. "She is worn to such a shadow. Tire my arms, indeed—I could lift a heavier weight than that," and Deb gave one of her ominous sniffs, and went off to her kitchen to shed a few tears in private.

All those weeks Olivia had been unremitting in her attentions, and all other visits were interdicted; but the friends at Galvaston House showed their sympathy in every possible way. Mr. Gaythorne sent choice old wine and game, and Greta and Alwyn kept the invalid supplied with fruit and flowers. Mrs. Crampton made jellies and soups, the little larder at Mayfield Villas was filled to overflowing. Mrs. Broderick took it all gratefully, and gave her nurses no trouble. "I am under orders," she would say, with a pitiful attempt at her old drollery; but only Olivia, who loved and understood her, ever guessed at the sadness of those days of convalescence.

One evening, as they were together in the twilight, Olivia ventured to hint at this depression; she was waiting for Marcus to come and fetch her, for they were to dine at Galvaston House.

"Is it because you are too weak to feel cheerful, dear Aunt Madge?" she asked, tenderly; but Mrs. Broderick shook her head.

"It is because I am a coward," she returned, with a spirit of her old energy. "Ah, Livy, I am ashamed to tell you what a coward I have been; but I simply felt as though I could not face it. Let me explain myself; I feel strong enough to talk, and it may do me good. Dear child, dearest Livy," stroking her hand, "you have been such a comfort to me! Do you remember that night when I told you I was not going to die? Well, I had had a wonderful dream, a vision rather, for I shall always think it one. I thought that I was wandering in some strange place, some vast emptiness where there was nothing human but myself, and that I came suddenly to a wide arched portal that seemed to reach to the stars, and I said to myself, 'this is the Gate of Paradise.' As I stood on the threshold I could see a green space like a valley bathed in sunlight, and I even noticed the white starry flowers growing everywhere, and then I saw my dear Fergus, looking just as he did in life, only somehow with a grander and more peaceful look on his dear face, and he was leading our little Malcolm by the hand. I thought I kissed them both, and clung to them in a perfect ecstasy of joy, but Fergus looked at me in such a tender solemn way. 'Not yet, Madge,' he said, 'your work is not quite done yet; the Master has sent me to tell you so; be patient, true heart. When the time comes, Malcolm and I will be here.' And then I felt myself falling, and when I opened my eyes I saw you sitting there by the bedside."

"What a sweet dream, dearest!"

"Yes, I am beginning to feel the comfort of it now; but that night I felt as though my heart were broken to be so near and then to have to go back; but, Livy, I am trying to say it—'Thy will, not mine, be done.' God's will—not ours; surely our Father knows what is best for His poor child."

"And you are not unhappy?"

"Only a little sad and tired, but that will pass, it is passing now," and the old lovely smile came to her lips. "Don't you recollect what Keble says,—

> ""'Tis sweet as year by year we lose
> Friends out of sight, in faith to muse
> How grows in Paradise our store.'

"What are a few more years of loneliness when Fergus and I have eternity to spend together. There, I hear Marcus's knock; he will scold me for making you look sad."

But Aunt Madge was wrong, for once in his life Marcus was too preoccupied to notice the signs of agitation on his wife's face.

"What do you think, dear people," he said, brightly, when he had greeted the invalid. "Dr. Bevan and I have settled matters; he will have the deed of partnership drawn up at once. Nothing can be fairer or more liberal than his terms. I told him I had only half-a-dozen paying patients at present, but he said that I should soon have more. We have turned the corner, Livy, and my wife shall walk in silk attire yet," and Marcus flung back his head with a gesture of pride and importance.

"My dear laddie, I congratulate you with all my heart," returned Aunt Madge, affectionately, as she grasped his hands. "Livy looks quite dazed, and no wonder," and then a warm flush came to Olivia's cheek.

"Dear Marcus, I am so glad, so thankful," she whispered.

"Yes, but it will be uphill work at first," he returned, "and I shall have plenty to do. Bevan is not the man he was, Randolph does not seem satisfied about him; but he will pick up when the warm weather comes. Oh, by-the-bye, Livy, I have not told you half yet. Bevan insists on our moving at once; he wants me to take a good house, either in Brunswick Place or Montague Square, or one of those roads leading out of it; it is well that we have that nest egg, the five hundred pounds untouched, it will pay for the necessary furniture, and the first year's rent will be assured."

"Yes, indeed," returned Olivia, in a low voice; she was awed and overwhelmed by this unexpected

good fortune; but Marcus would not allow any more talking; his professional eyes had already noted the signs of weariness and exhaustion in the invalid.

"We must go now," he said, abruptly. "We will talk over details another time; it is no use giving Aunt Madge a bad night," and then Olivia rose reluctantly and put on her wraps.

"I shall come to-morrow afternoon and tell you everything," she said, and Mrs. Broderick nodded and smiled.

But as they slipped out into the wintry darkness and Olivia took her husband's arm, she said, with a little laugh,—

"I am so glad I have put on my wedding-dress to-night. I ought to be smart for such an occasion. This is our first dinner-party since we have been married."

"Then it won't be our last," returned Marcus, in a tone of conviction. "I wonder, Livy, whether we shall ever regret those cosy evenings in the dear little room at No. 1, Galvaston Terrace," but Olivia only sighed happily. She was too good a wife to regret anything that led to her husband's advancement. Very likely her cares and responsibilities would be doubled. She would have less of Marcus's society, and the world would have claims upon them. The long three years' honeymoon was over, but, thank God, something else was over too,—the dread of approaching poverty, the sadness of unproductive labour, of work done only for love's sake and without grudging.

The following afternoon Mrs. Broderick lay tranquilly in the pleasant fire-lit twilight, awaiting Olivia's promised visit.

A pine log was spluttering and diffusing tiny coloured sparks. Zoe lay curled up in a silken ball on the black bearskin rug, and Olivia's favourite low chair had been wheeled to the foot of the couch, the tea-things were on the table, and the brass trivet on the fender was suggestive of hot buttered scones.

"Oh, Aunt Madge, how cosy you look," were Olivia's first words. "May I take off my hat and jacket? I am going to stay a long time, and Marcus hopes to come round presently."

"Then we will wait tea for him," returned Aunt Madge, with something like her old briskness.

"Will you tell Deb not to bring in the kettle and scones until we ring? Come, this is like old times. It is months since Marcus had tea with me. Now draw up your chair, Livy, and begin your story, for you are just bursting with news," and, though Olivia laughed at this, she did not deny it.

"We had such a lovely time last night," she began. "Greta looked so pretty in her black evening dress at the top of the table. She wore the pearl necklace and Olive's diamond cross. She has such a beautiful white throat the pearls hardly showed against it Mr. Gaythorne came in to dinner and sat beside her, but he was very tired and left us directly after, and we all went up to Greta's morning-room and sat round the fire talking, just we four. It was so nice and cosy."

"I suppose Mr. Gaythorne was told the grand news?"

"Oh dear, yes. He and Alwyn were so keen about it. They drank the health of Dr. Bevan's new partner. Mr. Gaythorne proposed the toast himself. Just as we left the dining-room I noticed that Greta detained Alwyn, and they did not follow upstairs for quite a quarter of an hour, but of course Marcus and I took no notice. They both looked a little bit excited when they came in. Greta gave my arm a funny little squeeze, and Alwyn cleared his throat and looked at Marcus, and then said in such a serious voice that he had an important proposal to make to us. It was Greta's idea, but he heartily approved of it. The house at Brunswick Place was waiting for a tenant. Why should not Marcus take it? It was to be let furnished. They had decided on that already, so there would be no delay or fuss necessary. 'You might go in next week,' he finished. 'The rooms only need airing and warming.'"

"My dear Livy, what a splendid idea. Three cheers for Greta, I say."

"Yes, it was all Greta's thought; but oh, Aunt Madge, what a talk we had. First, the terms that Alwyn proposed were so absurdly low that Marcus got quite red and said in almost an annoyed tone—you know how proud he is—that he must decline living at other people's expense. He would pay a fair rent for the house or he would not have it at all. And then Alwyn patted him on the back and told him to keep calm, for no one wanted to insult him, and then they went on wrangling like two schoolboys. Marcus called Alwyn a stuck-up millionaire, and Alwyn retorted by telling him that he was as proud as a Highlander, and then Greta and I called them to order, but we were laughing so that we could hardly speak."

"How I should have loved to hear them. Marcus is so delicious when he gets on his high horse."

"Well, it was arranged at last to everybody's satisfaction, though Alwyn went on grumbling for a long time, and we are to move in next month. Marcus is to pay the full rent, and there is to be a fixed sum paid quarterly for the furniture, and at the end of two years it will be ours. They both thought this the best plan. You see, expenses will be heavy the first year, and we must not look for great profits. But there is every reasonable hope, as Marcus says, if he keeps his health, that in a year or two he may have a good practice. There is room for another doctor; even Dr. Randolph says so."

"Well, Livy dear, I can only congratulate you."

"Yes, indeed; Greta and I have been in Brunswick Place all the morning planning things. Oh, Aunt Madge, it is such a lovely house. The dining-room and drawing-room are such handsome rooms, and there is such a study for Marcus. It is too large for us, of course." And then Olivia stopped and her eyes grew very wistful.

"Aunt Madge, dear Aunt Madge, we want you and Deb to go with us. I have set my heart on it, darling, and Marcus wants it too. Don't get pale over it," as Mrs. Broderick gave a little gasp. "Listen to me a moment," and Olivia knelt by the couch and put her arms round her.

"There is Greta's morning-room on the first floor, it is such a large, cheerful room, with a bay-window overlooking the nice, old-fashioned garden, where you could lie and look out on the trees and flowers; here you see nothing but the four walls. Greta's bedroom is next to it; you would have that, too; it is a pleasant front room, very large and airy, and so nicely furnished, and my room would be just opposite. Deb could have the room just at the top of a short flight of stairs; it looks on the garden, too, and she could sit there and do her sewing. There are three or four other rooms besides attics, but they have not been used, so you can judge what a good house it is. Aunt Madge, do say you will come. It will make us so happy to know you are safe under our roof. Think what it would be to me to have you at hand in all my little difficulties. And you shall not be troubled; you shall live your old life, and Deb will have nothing to do but take care of you." But Aunt Madge made no answer, only a curiously sweet smite played round her lips.

"I should be no expense to you," she observed presently, in a reflective tone. "I might even be able to help a little. By-the-bye, Livy, how many servants do you propose to keep in this palatial mansion?"

"I am afraid we can only afford two good ones at present. That is my difficulty, Aunt Madge. What am I to do with Martha? She is certainly not eligible for a house-parlourmaid."

"Keep her as Dot's nurse, and I will pay her wages. Yes, I mean it, Livy. In a year or two with careful training that girl will be worth her weight in gold. She will be a second Deb to you in time. Oh, that is Marcus, and we have not finished."

"Well, are you coming to us, Aunt Madge?" were Marcus's first words as he entered the room. There was unmistakable eagerness in his tone. "If you do not want Livy to cry out her eyes with disappointment, and if I am to have a peaceful moment for the next six months, I entreat you to consent."

"Am I likely to refuse, Marcus?" But Aunt Madge's voice was not so clear as usual. "Don't you think that I shall love to have you and Livy caring for me? so it is 'yes,' and God bless you both." And a slow tear rolled down Aunt Madge's pale face.

Marcus and Olivia never repented that step. As the years went on and other children's voices were heard in the house at Brunswick Place, when three sturdy, boys climbed up on Dr. Luttrell's knees, and two small, brown-eyed girls toddled after mother, Aunt Madge's room was the heart and nucleus of the busy household.

There would come Marcus for a greeting word and a jest before he set off on his day's round, and there Olivia would betake herself for a rest and a chat. When her household tasks had been despatched, she seldom found Aunt Madge alone; Nigel or Hugh would have brought her their kites to mend, or to beg that Deb would make them new sails for their boat, and, of course, where Nigel went, fat, sturdy Ronald followed.

Or the twins would be playing with their Japanese babies on the carpet, or rolling over each other and Zoe (not the same Zoe, alas!) like kittens. But the most frequent visitor was Dot, dimpled and winsome as ever.

Olivia had verified Aunt Madge's words. She had grown a little stouter and more matronly, and had become a fine-looking woman, but the eyes were as frank and kindly as ever, and one only needed to look at her to find out that she was thoroughly in harmony with her environment.

And Madge Broderick was happy, although the years of her widowhood and banishment stretched out indefinitely.

"You will make an old woman yet," Dr. Randolph often told her, but she had ceased to wince when he said it as though a cold hand had struck her.

And year by year a deep peacefulness steals over the dear face, and the ring of cheerfulness in the full, mellow voice grows stronger. "I have two lovely homes, Livy," she would say. "One here with you and Marcus and the darling children, and one in the 'many mansions,' where Fergus and baby boy wait for me." And as she said this a radiant smile would light her features like sunshine.

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