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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIR HILTON'S SIN ***

George Manville Fenn

"Sir Hilton's Sin"

Chapter One.

Auntie and her Darling.

"Don't eat too much marmalade, Sydney dear. It may make you bilious."

"Oh, no, auntie dear, I'll be careful."

"You have a great deal of butter on your bread, dear?"

"Yes, auntie; that's the beauty of it Miller says—"

"Who is Miller, Syd dear?"

"Our chemistry chap at Loamborough. He shows us how when you mix acids and alkalis together they form new combinations which go off in gas."

"Indeed, dear! Your studies must be very interesting."

"Oh, they are, auntie—awfully. That's how it is with the marmalade and the fresh butter—this is real fresh butter, isn't it?"

"Of course, dear. Whatever did you think it was?"

"Dab, aunt dear. Margarine. That wouldn't do, of course; but the marmalade's nearly all sugar—that's carbon—and the butters all carbon, too; and then there's a lot of acid in the oranges, and it all combines, and one kills the other and does you good. It never hurts me. Shall I give you some game pie, auntie?"

"Thank you, no, my dear, but you may pass me the dry toast. Thanks. Pass your cup, my child."

Sydney Smithers, who, to use his own term, had been "going in" deeply for the marmalade, went backwards in his arrangement of the breakfast comestibles, and helped himself liberally to the game pie, especially the gelatinous portion, glancing once at the pale, handsome, sedate-looking lady presiding at the head of the table ready to meet his eyes and bestow a smile upon the dear child, her nephew, who made the Denes his home, when he was not at Loamborough spending his last terms before commencing a college career.

"Such a dear, sweet boy," Lady Lisle often said to herself, as she beamed upon him blandly with thirty-five-year-old eyes, and idolised him, as she had no children of her own, and he was her own special training.

"At it again," said the boy to himself, as he glanced at the lady furtively; "more letters. Lady doctors, lady barristers. Blest if I don't think she means to go in for a lady parson! More meetings to go to, auntie dear?" he said aloud.

"Yes, my darling," replied the lady, with a sigh and another affectionate beam upon the plump-looking darling intent upon the game pie. "The calls made upon my time are rather heavy. By and by, when you have grown up, I hope you will be able to help me."

"Why, of course I will, auntie. Didn't I want to write that answer for you yesterday?"

"Um—er—yes, my dear; but we must wait a little first. Your writing is not quite what I should like to see."

"No, auntie; it is a bit shaky yet. We don't go in for writing much at Loamborough; we leave that to the Board School cads."

"And I should like you to be a little more careful over your spelling."

"Oh, Mullins, M.A., says that'll all come right, auntie, when we've quite done with our classics."

"I hope so, my darling, and then you shall be my private secretary. I did hope at one time that I should win over your uncle to a love for my pursuits. But alas!"

"Don't seem in uncle's way much, auntie, but he means right, uncle does. You wait till he's in the House—he'll make some of 'em sit up."

"I hope not, my dear child. I rather trust to his brother members leading him into a better way."

"Ah, I don't think you ought to expect that, auntie," said the "dear boy," using his serviette to remove the high-water mark of coffee from an incipient moustache. "They go in for all-night sittings, you know."

"Yes, my dear, but only on emergencies, and for their country's good."

"Walker!" said the "dear boy," softly.

"I used to think at one time that I should be able to wean him from his bad habit of lying in bed so late. If he would only follow your example of getting up early enough for a long walk or ride before breakfast!"

"Nicest part of the day, auntie."

"Yes, my dear."

Lady Lisle sighed, and went on eating crumblets of dry toast and sipping her tea, as she opened and examined a pile of letters, many of which had a very charitable-institution-like look about them; and Sydney Smithers, her nephew, toiled pleasantly on at taking in stores, till his aunt sighed, glanced at the door, then at the clock, and then at her nephew.

"Have you finished, Syd, my dear?"

"Yes, auntie, quite."

"Ha!" sighed the lady, gathering up her letters, the boy springing up to assist her in carrying them to the side-table in the embayed window of the handsome room. "You will, I know, take advantage of your being with us, my dear, to avoid those of your poor dear uncle's habits which your own good sense will teach you are not right."

"Oh, of course, auntie dear."

"And to follow those which are estimable."

"To be sure, auntie dear."

"For your uncle is at heart a noble and generous gentleman."

"Regular brick in some things, auntie," said the "dear boy," and Lady Lisle winced.

"Try not to make use of more of those scholastic words, Syd dear, than you can help."

"All right, auntie, I won't; but brick is right enough. Mullins, M.A., says it's so suggestive of solidity and square firmness."

"Yes, my dear, of course, and I wish you to be firm; but, above all, be a gentleman, and—er—careful in your selection of your friends."

"Oh, yes, auntie; I am."

"You see, my dear, it is our misfortune that the Denes is situated here."

"But, auntie, it's a jolly place."

"Yes, my dear; but it was quite a wreck from neglect till your uncle married me, and he—er—we restored the place—his ancestral home—to what it is."

"You did it up beautifully, auntie."

"Well, I hope I did, my dear child, but I have often regretted the money that was spent over a place situated as it is."

"Situated, auntie? Why, it's lovely."

"Lovely by nature, my dear, but tainted and made ugly by the surroundings of the society which affects the district."

"Is it, auntie?"

"Yes, my dear. I never could understand why it should be selected by those dreadful people for their sports and pastimes."

"You mean the racing, auntie?"

"Yes, my dear"—with a shudder. "Tilborough has become a den of infamy—a place which attracts, so many times a year, all the ruffianism of London, to leave its trail behind. The late Lord Tilborough used to encourage it with his stabling and horses, and—yes, it's a great pity: the sweet innocency of the neighbourhood is destroyed."

"Yes, auntie."

"Of course, Lady Tilborough calls occasionally, and I am compelled to be civil to her; but I wish you to avoid all communication with her and her friends as much as possible."

"Oh, I never see her, auntie, except when she's driving. I've met her sometimes when I've been out with uncle."

Lady Lisle winced. "Not lately, Sydney dear?" she said after a pause.

"Not very lately, auntie. Last time it was when Dr Granton—"

"That person who comes and stays at Tilborough?"

"Yes, auntie; uncle's old friend."

Lady Lisle winced again.

"He's an awfully jolly chap. You like him, auntie?"

"No, my child, I do not. Your uncle's old friends of his bachelor days belong to quite a different world from mine."

"But he's a clever doctor, auntie. Done uncle no end of good. Proper sort of chap to know."

"How can you judge as to that, my dear?" said the lady, sternly.

"Well, you see, auntie, one does get a bit queer sometimes. I had such a headache the other day when he called to see uncle, and he laughed at me, and took me over to the hotel and gave me a dose of stuff that cured it in half an hour."

"Sydney, my dear, I beg that you will never go to that hotel again. Avoid Tilborough as much as you would any other evil place. The next time you have a headache either go and see Dr Linnett or come to me, and I will give you something out of the medicine-chest. Dr Granton cannot be an experienced practitioner."

"Why, they say, auntie, he's wonderfully clever over accidents in the hunting field."

"Yes, in the hunting field," said the lady, sarcastically; "but a medical man's practice should be at home, and in his own neighbourhood. A man who attends grooms at racing stables is to my mind more of what is, I believe, called a veter—"

"That's right, auntie—a vet."

"Than a family practitioner," continued the lady, sternly; "and it is a source of great trouble to me that your uncle does not give up his society. I desire that you avoid him."

"All right, auntie; I will."

"Always bear in mind, my dear, that it is easier to make acquaintances than to end them."

"Yes, auntie; I found that out in Loamborough. Some of the fellows will stick to you."

"Say adhere, my child."

"Yes, auntie."

"Always bear in mind what a great future you have before you. Some day—I sincerely hope that day is far distant—your dear grandfather must pass away, and then think of your future and the position you must hold. A title and a princely income."

"Oh, yes; I often think of it all, auntie. I say, though, I wish the chaps wouldn't be quite so fond of chaffing a fellow about the old gov'nor buying his title."

"He did not buy it, Sydney, my dear," said Lady Lisle, with a faint colour coming into her cheeks.

"Didn't he, auntie? They say so."

"The truth of the matter is, my dear, that the party—"

"Good old party!" said the "dear boy" to himself.

"The party was pressed for money to carry on the Parliamentary warfare, and, with your dear grandpapa's noble generosity, he placed his purse at the party's disposal."

"Keeps it pretty close when I want a few dibs," said the "dear boy" to himself.

"And the baronetcy was the very least return that the retiring Prime Minister could make him."

"Oh, that's it, is it, auntie?"

"Yes, my dear," said the lady, laying down one of her secretarial appeals she had that morning received from the enterprising dun of the Society for the Propagation of Moral Maxims. "Yes," she said, with some show of animation, "the title was honourably earned and bestowed, and some day, Syd, my dear boy, you will be very proud of it. New? Yes, of

course it is new."

"And it'll grow old, won't it, auntie?"

"Of course, my dear. And the Lises, your dear uncle's people, need not be so proud of their old family title. The Lisle, your uncle's ancestor, was only a wealthy country gentleman, who bought his baronetcy of King James the First."

"For a thousand quid, auntie?"

"A thousand *pounds*, my dear," said the lady, looking at him wonderingly.

"Yes, auntie; but he was a gentleman."

"And so is your grandfather, Sydney, my child," said the lady, rather austerely.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said the "dear boy," rather sulkily. "The fellows at Loamborough are always chucking the 'Devil' in my face."

"Syd!"

"They do, auntie—it's the machine that tears up the old shreds at the mills—and saying grandpa ought to have been made Baron Shoddy."

"My dear Syd!"

"And do you know what they call me?"

"No, no; and I don't want to know, sir."

"Young Devil's Dust," snarled the boy.

"Indeed!" said the lady, indignantly. "Loamborough was selected for your education because the pupils were supposed to be young gentlemen—aristocrats."

"So they are," grumbled the boy, "and that's the worst of them. Stink with pride."

"From envious poverty, Sydney, my child."

"Oh, yes, they're poor enough, some of 'em, and glad enough to borrow my tin."

"Of course," said the lady, bitterly. "The Lises, too, have shown me a good deal of haughtiness, but they were not too proud to see the representative of their family form an alliance with the Smitherses."

"When uncle had been sold up two or three times."

"Don't allude to such matters, Sydney, my child," said the lady, sternly.

"Can't help it," grumbled the boy, sourly, as if his breakfast had not agreed with him, consequent upon his making improper combinations of carbon, acid, and alkali—"it stings a bit. The fellows say uncle wouldn't have married you if it hadn't been for the dibs."

"Sydney, my dear boy, you can afford to look down with contempt upon such evil, envious remarks. Your dear uncle fell deeply in love with me, and I with him, and we are extremely happy. The only trouble I have is to combat—er—er—certain little weaknesses of his, and yearnings for the—er—er—the—"

"Turf, auntie. Yes, I know."

"The racing and the gambling into which he had been led by dissolute companions. But enough of this, my dear. I find I am being unconsciously led into details of a very unsavoury nature. Your uncle is now completely weaned from his old pursuits, and happy as a model country gentleman."

The "dear boy" winked solemnly at the bronze bust of a great Parliamentary leader on the chimney-piece, and the lady continued—

"In a few days he will address his constituents at the head of the poll as member for Deeploamshire."

"What price Watcombe?" said the "dear boy," sharply.

"I do not understand your metaphor, Sydney, my child," said the lady, coldly.

"I mean, suppose Watcombe romps in at the race."

"Race! Oh, my dear boy, pray do not use that word. If you mean suppose his adversary should be at the head, pray dismiss the thought. Your dear uncle must win and take his seat in the House. Some day I shall see his nephew, my dear child, following his example—the second baronet of our family. Think of this, Sydney, and learn to feel proud of descending from one of the manufacturing commercial princes of the Midlands, whose clever ingenuity resulted in the invention of a complicated instrument—"

"Improved devil," said the "dear boy" to himself.

"For tearing up old and waste woollen fragments into fibre and dust."

"Devils dust," said Sydney, silently.

"The former being worked up again into cloth—"

"Shoddy," muttered Sydney.

"And the latter utilised for fertilising the earth and making it return a hundredfold."

"Gammon," said Syd.

"The whole resulting in a colossal fortune."

"Which the old hunks sticks to like wax," said Syd to himself.

"And of which you ought to be very proud, my dear."

"Oh, I am, auntie. But I say, how was it pa and ma went off to Australia?"

"Pray do not revive old troubles, my dear. My brother never agreed with your grandfather. I grieve to say he was very wild, and given to horse-racing. Then he grievously offended your grandfather in the marriage he made clandestinely. Let it rest, my dear boy. Papa behaved very handsomely to John, and gave him ample funds to start a fresh career at the Antipodes, leaving you to my care—to be my own darling boy—to make you a true English gentleman; and I feel that I have done my duty by you."

"Oh, auntie, you are good," said the "dear boy." "I'm sure I try to do what you wish."

"Always, my darling, with a few exceptions. I have found out that."

"What, auntie?" said the "dear boy," changing colour.

"That my darling is a leetle disposed to be vulgar sometimes."

"Ha!" sighed the lad, with a look of relief.

"But he is going to be as good as gold, and grow into a noble gentleman, of whom his country will be proud. There, now we understand each other. Mr Trimmer is late this morning."

"Scissors! How she made me squirm!" muttered the boy, who had risen and walked to the window as if to hide his emotion with the scented white handkerchief he drew from his pocket. "He isn't late, auntie—just his usual time."

"Dear, dear, and your uncle not yet down!"

"Shall I go and rout him out, auntie?"

"No, my dear," said the lady, sternly, "I will speak to him when he comes down."

"Do, auntie. Tell him he loses all the fresh morning air," said the boy, demurely, feeling in the breast-pocket of his jacket the while, and causing a faint crackling sound as of writing-paper, while he noted that the lady was resuming her perusal of the morning's letters.

Just then the breakfast-room door opened and a pretty little dark-eyed parlourmaid entered the room.

"Mr Trimmer is in the libery, my lady."

"Show him in here, Jane," said Lady Lisle, without raising her eyes, "and tell Mark to have the pony-carriage round in half an hour."

"Yes, my lady."

The girl turned to go, her eyes meeting those of the "dear boy," who favoured her with a meaning wink, receiving by way of reply a telegraphic wrinkling up of the skin about a saucy little retroussé nose.

"Little minx," said the "dear boy" to himself.

"Young impudence," said the girl, and she closed the door, to return in a few minutes to show in Mr Trimmer, her ladyship's confidential bailiff and steward of the estate.

Chapter Two.

A Most Trustworthy Person.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr Trimmer," said Lady Lisle. "Don't go, Sydney, my dear. It is as well that you should be present. You cannot do better than begin to learn the duties of a person of position—the connection between the owner of property and his, or her, dependants."

"All right, auntie," said Syd, returning, with a quick nod and a keen look, the obsequious bow of the gaunt-looking man in white cravat and pepper-and-salt garb.

"Sit down, Mr Trimmer."

"Thank you, my lady."

The steward drew a chair to the table, and placed a particularly neat bag before him, which he proceeded to open, and brought out a packet of papers neatly docketed and tied up with green silk ferret in quite legal fashion.

"What are those, Mr Trimmer?" said the lady, assuming a gold-framed pince-nez.

"The reports upon the Parliamentary canvass, my lady. Ditto those in connection with the village charities and your donations in town. If your ladyship will glance over them I think you will find them perfectly correct."

"Of course, Mr Trimmer. I will read the latter over at my leisure."

At that moment the merry notes of a well-blown post-horn were heard, and Lady Lisle started, while Syd ran to the window.

"What is that?"

"I fancy it comes from a coach, my lady, passing the lodge gates."

"Yes, auntie. Drag going over to Tilborough," cried the boy, screwing his head on one side so as to follow the handsome four-in-hand with its well-driven team.

"Tut—tut!" ejaculated Lady Lisle. "These degrading meetings! Come away, Sydney, my dear."

"Yes, auntie," said the boy; and as he was not observed he leant forward, pressed one hand over the other as if taking a shorter hold of double reins, gave his right hand a twist to unwind an imaginary whiplash, followed by a wave something like the throwing of a fly with a rod, and then smiled to himself as he tickled up an imaginary off-leader, ending by holding himself up rigidly.

"That's the way to tool 'em along," he said to himself.

"Is there any fresh news in the village, Mr Trimmer?"

"No, my lady, nothing particular, except—er—a little report about Daniel Smart's daughter."

"Maria, Mr Trimmer. She has not returned?"

"No, my lady."

"Surely she has settled down in her new place?"

The steward coughed, a little hesitating cough.

"Nothing—"

Lady Lisle stopped and glanced at Sydney, who turned away and became very much interested in one of the pictures, but with his ears twitching the while.

"Oh, no, my lady," said the steward, quickly; "only I fear that your ladyship has been imposed upon?"

Syd moved to the mantelpiece and began to examine the mechanism of a magnificent skeleton clock.

"Imposed upon? But the girl has gone to the situation in town?"

"Ahem! No, my lady; the report I hear is that she has gone to fulfil an engagement with some dramatic agent who trains young people for—"

"The theatre?"

"No, my lady, for the music-halls."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lady Lisle. "Dreadful—dreadful!"

Syd's face was a study in the mirror behind the clock, as he placed one foot on the polished kerb and screwed up his mouth, listening with all his might.

"Yes, my lady, it is very sad. But I'm afraid that several of the better-looking girls in the neighbourhood have had their heads turned by the great success which has attended a Miss Mary Ann Simpkins in London."

Crash!

"Good gracious me!" cried Lady Lisle, starting up at the noise.

"It's nothing, auntie," cried Syd, excitedly. "Foot slipped on the fender—nothing broken."

The boy turned, with his face flushed, and his voice sounded husky.

"But that vase you knocked over, my dear?"

"It was trying to save myself, auntie. It isn't even cracked."

"But you've hurt yourself, my child?"

"Oh, no, auntie, not a bit," said the boy, with a forced laugh.

"Pray be careful, my dear."

"All right, auntie," said the boy, and he stooped down to begin rearranging the poker and shovel, which he had kicked off the fire-dog to clatter on the encaustic tiles.

"Pray go on, Mr Trimmer. How grievous that such a scandal should befall our peaceful village. A Miss—er—Miss—"

"Mary Ann Simpkins, my lady."

"Simpkins, Simpkins? Surely I know the name?"

"Yes, my lady, and I daresay you've seen her at Tilborough. Very pretty girl—daughter of Sam Simpkins."

"What, at the hotel?"

"Yes, my lady," said the agent, with sad deference. "He is the trainer and keeper of racing stables—Tilborough Arms."

"Yes, yes, I know. Ah! what a home for the poor girl! No wonder. But you said something about turning the girls' heads."

"Yes, my lady. She went into training in town."

"Ran away from home, of course?"

"Oh, no, my lady. Simpkins had her educated in London for that sort of thing—singing and dancing."

"Shocking! Shocking!"

"Yes, my lady. Her father has shares in one of the great music-halls, the Orphoan. I am told that she is quite the rage. You see, some of the young people here knew her at school. Such things quite spoil them for service."

"And all originating in this dreadful racing, Mr Trimmer. If it had not been for this, Mr Simpkins—"

"Exactly, my lady; but I beg your pardon for introducing so unpleasant a subject."

"Do not apologise, Mr Trimmer; it was quite right. I must see the parents of any of the girls who have tendencies in that direction, and Daniel Smart's daughter must certainly be brought back."

"Yes, my lady," said the agent. "Now let us change the subject. How is Sir Hilton's canvass progressing?"

"Admirably, my lady. You see, we have all the influence upon our side; but I think it is about time now for Sir Hilton to show a little—just a little—more interest in the matter."

"Of course, Mr Trimmer; he shall."

"He need not do much, my lady, beyond a little visiting amongst the voters, and, say, addressing three or four meetings. Our Parliamentary agent has prepared the heads of a very telling speech for him, a summary of which, my lady, you will find in that packet marked 'b' and endorsed 'Address.'"

"Certainly! Will go into the matter with Sir Hilton. His election will follow in due course."

"Yes, my lady—it is a certainty. Lord Beltower has withdrawn."

"Very wise of him."

"There is that Mr Watcombe, the big brewer, still in the field, and he has some influence, especially at Tilborough amongst the racing people; but, of course, he has not a chance."

"A brewer? Faugh!"

"Yes, my lady; the man's pretensions are absurd. Will you go through the estate accounts this morning?"

"Impossible now, Mr Trimmer; the news you have given me is too disturbing, and besides, Sir Hilton will be down here to breakfast. That will do now."

"Thank you, my lady—er—er—"

"Yes, Mr Trimmer?" said the lady, looking up inquiringly.

"I am very sorry to make a request, my lady, at such a time, especially as there is a good deal requires looking over at the farm just now; but I should be greatly obliged if your ladyship could spare me for the rest of the day."

"Oh, certainly, Mr Trimmer," said Lady Lisle, looking at her sedate steward so wonderingly that he felt it necessary to make some explanation.

"I regret to say that I have had a telegram from London, my lady—an aged relative—very ill, and expressing a desire

to see me.”

“Hullo!” said Sydney to himself; “the old humbug smells a legacy.”

“Pray go at once, Mr Trimmer.”

“Oh, thank you, my lady. You always are so sympathetic in a case of trouble.”

“I hope so, Mr Trimmer. Can I do anything for her, or for you?”

“Oh, no, my lady. Your permission is all I want. I am in hopes that my presence will be of some benefit to her. I am her favourite nephew.”

“Then pray go at once. You will return to-night, of course?”

“Oh, yes, my lady; but I fear that I shall have to make it the last train.”

“Of course. Give Sir Hilton’s man orders to meet you with the dogcart at the station. I would say stop as long as is necessary with the poor old invalid were it not that I wish you to be on the spot to watch over the progress of Sir Hilton’s Parliamentary affairs. Just now they are vital.”

“Exactly, my lady. Good-morning, my lady, and thank you for your kindness.”

Lady Lisle smiled and bowed, raising her hand in a queenly way, as if

to hold it out for her retainer to kiss, but contenting herself by giving it a slight wave towards the door.

“Good-morning, Mr Sydney. A delicious morning, sir; a nice breeze.”

“Oh, was it?” said the boy, rather surlily.

“Yes, sir; the trout were rising freely as I passed over the bridge in the lower meadows.”

“Humph!”

“I thought I would mention it, sir. I fancy the May-fly are up.”

Sydney nodded, and the steward reached the door, but returned, taking out his pocket-book, after placing the black bag upon a chair.

“I beg your ladyship’s pardon, but I omitted to show your ladyship a paragraph I cut out of this morning’s county paper.”

Lady Lisle took the scrap handed to her respectfully. “Thank you, Mr Trimmer. Oh! Yes. Listen, Sydney, my dear. Listen. This will interest you. Electioneering!” and she read aloud—

““We understand that Mr Watcombe, the well-known London brewer—”” Her ladyship stopped and frowned.

“Yes, auntie; I hear,” cried the boy—“brewer—?”

““Is making strenuous efforts to gain the seat for the Tilborough division of the county. He is now in Paris, but upon his return he will commence his campaign by delivering a series of addresses to the voters. The first, we understand, will be given at the Tilborough Arms Hotel.””

“Pah!” ejaculated Lady Lisle, making as if to throw down the fragment of paper.

“Pray read on, my lady.” Her ladyship rearranged her pince-nez and continued, beginning in a contemptuous tone of voice, which changed as she went on—

““But the gallant brewer, whose beer finds but little favour in this district, will learn that he has an extremely dangerous rival in our popular resident squire of the Denes—Sir Hilton Lisle, of sporting fame, who, to deal in vaticinations, we consider will be the right man in the right place.””

“He-ah, he-ah!” cried Sydney. “So he will.”

“Yes, my dear,” said his aunt, smiling at the boy’s enthusiasm; “the editor means well, but it is very vulgarly written, ‘of sporting fame.’ Bah!”

“But that’s right, auntie. Uncle used to be very famous. Wasn’t he Master of the Hounds six years ago?”

“Yes, my dear, to his sorrow,” said Lady Lisle, reprovingly.

The steward shook his head, and looked up as he passed out, with studied deliberation, as if to let the lady see how marked was the resemblance between his action and that of the steward in Hogarth’s picture “Marriage à la Mode,” while the lady portion of his audience moved towards the other door.

“Going out, auntie?”

“Yes, my dear, for a short drive down the village. The pony-carriage will be round in a few minutes. I was going to the vicarage, but my first call will be at the Smarts’. I should like you to go with me.”

"Go with you, auntie?" said the boy, in a hesitating voice.

"Yes, my dear. Do you not wish to go?"

"I did, auntie, but after what Mr Trimmer said about the trout rising, and the May-fly—you see, they only come once a year."

"Oh, very well, my darling; I suppose I must not object to your liking to fish. Isaac Walton was quite a poet."

"Regular, auntie; and the Prince says fishing begets a love of Nature."

"Who does, my dear?"

"The Prince—the Principal, auntie. He's a regular dab at throwing a fly."

Lady Lisle winced again but screwed up a smile, and made no allusion to the *dab*, which seemed to strike her in the face like a cold frog—tree frog—and made her wince. "You will be back to lunch, my dear?"

"Well, no, auntie. You see, the May-fly only rise once a year, and I thought I'd make a long day of it."

"Then tell Jane to cut you some sandwiches, and pray be careful not to fall in. You will bring us a dish of trout for dinner?"

"Oh, yes, of course, auntie, if they rise."

"Oh, Hilton, how late you are!" sighed the lady, and her stiff dress rustled over the carpet as she moved forward in a stately way, frowning, and then smiling with satisfaction, for her nephew darted to the door to throw it open, catching directly at the soft white hand extended to him and kissing it. Then, closing the door, he indulged in a frantic kind of dance, expressive of the most extreme delight, one, however, which came to a sudden end, the boy stopping short in a most absurd position as if suddenly turned to stone, for the door was quickly opened and a head was thrust into the room.

Chapter Three.

Four People's Skeletons.

"Hi! You, Jane, what are you always listening at the door for?"

"So as to be ready to see you coming your games," said the maid, laughing, "Ha, ha, ha! He thought it was his aunt, ketching him on the hop!"

"That I didn't, old saucy one."

"Yes, you did, and I've a good mind to tell her what a beauty you are—there!"

"Do; and I'll tell her what I saw in the shrubbery last week. Mark my words; see if I don't I will; mark my words."

"You tell if you dare!" cried the maid, with flaming face.

"Oh, I dare."

"But you won't. You wouldn't be such a coward. I say, going out?"

"Yes, I want some sandwiches—a good lot. And, look here, get uncle's flask and half fill it with milk, and then fill it up with sherry."

"What for? What are you going to do?"

"The May-fly's up."

"Up where?"

"Get out! Over the river. I'm going fishing."

"Don't believe you. You're going to the races."

"Sh!" the boy hissed, and looked sharply round.

"There, I knew it!" cried the girl. "I'll tell her ladyship, and stop that."

"Just you do. I'm going whipping the stream."

"Don't believe it. But she'll be whipping you for a naughty boy."

"Shrubbery and old Mark," said the boy, thoughtfully, as if speaking to himself. "Wonder what sort of a pair the new parlourmaid and groom and valet would be?"

"Oh, you!" cried the girl, with scarlet face and flashing eyes, in which the tears began to rise, making her dart out of the room so that they should not be seen.

"Checkmate, Miss Dustpan!" said Sydney, with a chuckle. "What a sharp one she is, though. My word! I never liked old Trim before. He's off on some game of his own. Artful old beast! He isn't such a saint as he pretends. Can't be going to the races, can he? No, not he; not in his line. Spree in London's more in his way. A beast, though, to talk like that. Knows too much about such matters. I wish I could find out something, and get him under my thumb, as I have saucy Jenny. How the beggar made me jump!"

He glanced round at the vase he had nearly broken, then at the door, and directly after at the window, to which he ran and looked out, for there was the grating sound of wheels on the drive, but growing fainter and fainter.

"My word! Isn't the old girl quick at putting on her hat and scarf! She's safe for the day. Bravo, old Trimmer! Just when I was done up for an idea to slope off. Fish rising? Yes, I'll rise 'em. Cookie'll have hard work to fry all the trout I catch to-day. Phew! There goes another brake. Blow up, you beauty! Why, auntie would have just met them tittuping along. They must have scared the ponies into fits. She can't half hold them."

He turned from the window, listening the while, though, to the rattle of wheels and the trotting of horses down the road, and after a glance at the door, through which the little maid had passed, he drew a note from his pocket and began to spell it over in a low voice.

"My dear darling Syd'—why, this is three days old. I didn't notice it before—'Here's nearly a week and you haven't been to see me. Do come. I want to say something so particular. If you don't come before, of course you'll be at the races. I've got a new frock'—frock without a k—'new frock for the occasion'—Ha, ha! What a rum little gipsy she is! Put the k she dropped in frock into occasion—I say, do tell your aunt and uncle all the truth'—Likely!—'and then I can tell dear dad'—Jigger dear dad!—'I feel so wicked. He must know soon.'—What did she put two thick lines under that for?—'That's all now, because the dressmaker'—with only one s—'has come to try on my frock. I say, do tell your dear aunt. She'll be awfully cross at first, but when she knows all—that's all, dear.—Your affeckshunt for ever and ever, Lar Sylphide'—Lar la—Yar! Yar! Tell auntie—phew! Talk about all the fat in the fire, and me with it. Uncle's parlous state won't be nothing to mine. Ugh!"

The boy jumped as if he had received a blow, and turned towards the window. For the door was opened suddenly and Jane reappeared.

"Not gone then, Impidence?"

"No, I'm not gone yet, Saucebox. Why don't you tell my aunt?"

"Never you mind. What was that you were scuffling into your jacket pocket? Worms for fishing?"

"Of course."

"Was it? I know better. I heered the paper crackle; it's another letter for her."

"What!" cried the boy, changing colour. "What her?"

"Her as you write to. I saw you scribbling, and watched you sneak off down to the village to post it."

"You're a wicked fibster, Jenny."

"Oh, no, I'm not. What did you give the postman five shillings for?"

"I didn't," said the boy, flaring up.

"Yes, you did, and it was to bring letters for you on the sly, I shall write and inform the post-office people."

"Yes, you do, and I'll half kill you, and poison old Mark."

"There! I knew it. Who is she?"

"You be off."

"No, nor I shan't be off neither. I believe it's Dan Smart's girl, who's gone to London. Oh, my! what a wicked one you are, Master Syd, for such a boy. Your sangwidges is ready. Shall I bring 'em here?"

"Did you get the flask?"

"Yes."

"And filled it with milk and sherry?"

"Yes, but you don't deserve it, for threatening to get poor Mark the sack."

"Then you shouldn't threaten to tell tales."

"I won't, Master Syd, if you won't."

"All right, then, it's a truce. Here, I must be off."

"What, without your sangwidges and flask?"

"No; to get my fishing-rod."

"Then you won't tell?"

"Tell? No. Here, give us a kiss, Jenny."

"Shan't. They're all for Mark."

"Must," cried the boy, seizing her round the waist.

"Pst! Someone coming."

Syd dashed out of the window, and the girl began to move some of the breakfast things, but was interrupted by the entrance of a sharp-looking young groom with very closely-cut hair, and trousers so tight in the leg that the wonder was how he put them on and pulled them off.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mark?" said the girl, tartly.

"Me it is, Jenny. Think it was the boss?"

"Maybe. Here's a pretty time of the morning to have breakfast things about."

"Pretty time? Of course, it's a pretty time. Eat when you're hungry. When the gov'nor wants his corn he'll come down to the sally-manger as they call it."

"But look at the time!"

"Oh, hang the time! A man ain't a locomotive, made to live up to a time-table. I believe her ladyship has a time for everything, down to sneezing and cleaning her teeth. It's orful, that it is."

"Ah! you're a pretty pair."

"We was in the old days, Jenny," said the young man, with a smirk, "before we began to go off and look seedy, him with being married to her ladyship, and me pulled down, fretting about you."

"Get along with your nonsense! I know. You were a pair of regular rackety rakes, and her ladyship has done wonders for Sir Hilton."

"Well, ain't you done wonders and improved me, dear? You know I ain't like the same chap."

"Oh, I don't know. I sometimes feel I'm very stupid to think about you. You're always talking about your old ramping, scampering days."

"But there wasn't any harm in 'em, Jenny. Only a bit of sport—a race here, a steeplechase there, and a turn at hunting in the winter. Ah! they was times, Jenny, my gal Reglar old English gentleman sort of life. Go to bed when you liked; get up when you liked. Breakfast in bed or out of it. None of your tea-and-toasting, but a hock and seltzer for a start; nice little devilled something after, and there you were, fit as a fiddle. None of your time-table life, like it is here."

"Yes, you were a nice pair."

"We were, Jenny, and we're not to be sneezed at now; but you're a bit hard on us, Jenny, both of you."

"I'm too soft on you, Mark, and you know it."

"Well—say sometimes, my dear; but you know you are orful nubbly now and then, and you say things to me that buzz in my ears like bluebottles in a stable window. I don't grumble, but I'm sorry for the gov'nor, that I am."

"Ah! he has a deal to grumble at. Wasted as good as three fortunes."

"Woho, my lass! Steady there! Not wasted. Spent 'em like a noble English baronet, and he always had his money's worth. Yes, we did."

"We indeed! Wasted everything, he did, on the Turf, and then was sold up disgraceful. Just like a pore man might be."

"Gently, my lass, gently!" cried Mark. "Sold up, and disgraceful? Nothing of the kind. The luck was again' us, and we can't quite meet our engagements; so we lets the things come to the hammer. Old Tat knocks 'em down to the highest bidder at High Park Corner, and we pays like gentlemen as far as the money goes. What more would you have till the luck turns and we pay up again?"

"Ah! you're a nice pair. It was time you were both off the Turf. Neither of you ever cared."

"Don't say that, my lass. I cared a deal, and when I see my satin-skinned beauties knocked down—"

"Your what?"

"'Osses, my gal, 'osses—the tears quite come in my eyes."

"I dessay," said Jenny, tartly. "I believe you think much more of a horse than you ever did about me."

"Nay, you don't, Jenny. You know better. Man's love for a hoss ain't the same as what he feels for his sweetheart. You know that. But a chap of the right sort as understands 'osses can't help loving the beautiful pets. I don't mind yer laughing at me. I quite cried when our La Sylphide was knocked down and I had to say good-bye to her. I don't know what I should ha' done if I hadn't known she was going into good quarters with someone who'd love her. All right! It's gallus weak, I suppose, but I did, and you may laugh."

"I wasn't laughing, Mark," said the girl, holding out her hand. "I was only smiling at you. I like it. Shows your 'art's in the right place."

"Jenny!" And "business," as theatrical people say.

"Now, don't, Mark. That'll do. Suppose Sir Hilton was to come?"

"Let him," said the groom, sharply. "I ain't ashamed of loving the dearest, sweetest little lass in the country, though she has got a sharp tongue that goes through me sometimes like a knife."

"All the better for you, Master Mark. You want talking-to, for you've been a deal too wild."

"Nay, nay, nay, Jenny; 'ossy, but never wild."

"Let's see," said Jane, going on giving touches to the breakfast-table. "But stop a minute. What do you want here? Her ladyship wouldn't like it if she caught you."

"Ain't she gone out?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot. Well, Sir Hilton'll be down directly, and he'll ask you why you've come."

"No, he won't. I shall have first word."

"What do you mean?"

"Ask him if he wouldn't like the 'orse put in the dogcart to run over to Tilborough."

"What for?"

"To see the race, my gal."

"What!"

"Our old mare La Sylphide's going to run."

"Our old mare indeed! Go to the race! Why, there'd be a regular eruption."

"So there would; but I do wish the gov'nor would risk it this once."

"He'd better! So that was the reason you come here, was it?"

"Well, partly, Jenny. You see, I thought I might get a minute with you alone."

"I don't believe it," said Jane, frowning, but with eyes looking very bright. "You pretend and pretend, and yet all the time you're sneaking off every chance you get over to Oakland."

"Well, I do, my lass; I own to that."

"There," cried the girl, "and yet you have the impudence to talk to me."

"Of course, you know why I go."

"Yes; to see that showy lady's maid that comes over to our church sometimes."

"Tchah! I go over to the stables to have a look at La Sylphide. Oh, Jenny, she is a picture now."

"Look here, Mark; 'pon your word, now, is that the truth?"

"Why, you dear, jealous, little darling, you know it is. Look here, Jenny; she runs to-day for the cup, and, with Josh Rowle up, it's a certainty."

"I know better than that, Mark. There's no certainty in horse-racing."

"Oh, yes, there is, if you've got the right mare and the man up who understands her, as Josh does, when he isn't on the drink. The gov'nor and Josh Rowle are the only two men who can ride La Sylphide, and I tell you it's a certainty. I've put the pot on this time."

"What for?"

"Because I want it to boil."

"What, to make a what-you-may-call-it—a mash for La Sylphide?"

"Na-a-a-y!" cried Mark. "What a dear, innocent, little darling you are, Jenny! We call it putting the pot on when we lay every dollar we can scrape together, and more too, on a horse winning."

"And that's what you've done?" said Jenny, quietly.

"That's right, little one; every mag."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mark."

"What!" cried the young man in dismay.

"Didn't you promise me that if I'd keep comp'ny with you, you'd give up all your old tricks you learnt with Master—Sir Hilton—and be steady?"

"And so I have been. Saved every penny, and thought of nothing but getting on for you."

"Yes, it looks like it," said the girl, sarcastically.

"Well, so it do. This is only a bit of a flutter."

"Flutter, indeed!"

"And what's it for?"

"To make a fool of yourself again, like your master."

"Oh, is it?" said the young fellow, sturdily. "You know well enough that if I saved all my wages I couldn't save enough to take a pub in twenty years. If La Sylphide passes the post first to-day she'll land me enough to take a nice little roadside hotel, something like Sam Simpkins, the trainer at Tilborough, only not so big, of course; nice little place, where I can plant my wife behind the bar, and do a nice trade with visitors, somewhere down in the country where there's waterfalls and mountains and lakes."

"And that is why you've begun betting again, Mark?" said the girl, a little more softly.

"Yes, that's what I meant, my gal, for I didn't think you'd take it like that. Our mare—I mean Lady Tilborough's—La Sylphide being a certainty. But if she loses, I shan't go and marry some rich woman for the sake of her money."

There was silence for a few moments, Mark turning a little away to take a pink out of his buttonhole and begin nibbling the stalk, and Jenny turning in the other direction so that her lover should not see a little sign of weakness in her eyes, which she strove hard to master, and so well that in a short time, when she spoke again, her voice sounded sharp and without a tremor.

"A pretty game, I'm sure, sir. Races indeed, and betting too! Sir Hilton had better take your precious dogcart and go La Sylphiding. You mark my words, if he does her ladyship will be sure to find it out, and then if she suspects you had anything to do with it you'll get the sack."

"Well, I don't know as it matters much," said the groom, drearily. "You don't seem to understand a fellow, and it's all wrong here, and it's miserable to see the poor gov'nor so down in the mouth."

"Down in the mouth indeed, after missus's father found the money to pay all his debts, and four thousand pounds for him to go into Parliament as an M.P."

"Tchah! Such nonsense! Our Sir Hilton ain't going to give up the Turf and chuck hisself away like that."

"Chuck hisself away?"

"Yes. Turn Jawkins. Him going to turn himself into a talking windmill, a-waving his arms about? Not he. But how come you to hear that?"

"Mr Trimmer told me."

"Mr Trimmer! How come he to tell you?" said the young man, with his face growing dark.

"Oh, Mr Trimmer is very pleasant and friendly to me sometimes."

"Oh, is he? Then he ain't going to be, and so I tell him. A long, lanky, white-chokered imitation Methody parson, that's what he is! What right has he got to be civil to you, I should like to know?"

"Well, I'm sure, sir," cried the girl, whose eyes were sparkling with delight to see how her lover was moved, "I don't know what her ladyship's bailiff and agent and steward and confidential man would say—him, a real gentleman—if he heard what poor Sir Hilton's groom and valet said."

"Gentleman—confidential man! Why, he ain't half a man, and he ain't the good sanctified chap he pretends to be, and I'd tell him so to his face. Look here, Jenny; he may be her ladyship's, but he ain't going to be your confidential man. But there, I ain't no right to say nothing, I suppose, and this about finishes it. Ladyship or no ladyship, whether the gov'nor comes or whether he don't, I'm going over to Tilborough racecourse 'safternoon, and if La Sylphide don't pull it off for me I shall make a hole in the water and leave it to cover me up."

"Mark!" said Jenny, softly, with her eyes half closed. "Well?"

"I can't help Mr Trimmer speaking civil to me when he comes to see her ladyship about the accounts."

"Oh, no, of course not," said the young man, sarcastically.

"I can't really, Mark—dear. He always seems to me like one of those nasty evats that come down in the stone passage in damp weather, and just as they do when they've rubbed a little of the whitewash on to their throats."

"Jenny!"

"Yes, Mark dear. I do hope La Sylphide will win."

"Oh!"

"Ahem!"

Smart-looking, well-built, dapper little Sir Hilton Lisle, looking the beau-ideal of a horse-loving country gentleman, entered the breakfast-room.

Chapter Four.

The Tempter's Call.

Mark and Jane started apart, looking extremely guilty—of a loving kiss—but quite ready to make the best of things, the latter darting to the table to rearrange the position of a couple of forks, and Sir Hilton's body-servant holding out a hand, palm upwards.

"Do look sharp, Jane," he said, "and hurry up that hot coffee and the kidneys. I knew Sir Hilton would be down directly."

"Mark!" said the baronet, sharply.

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

"You know I don't like humbug, eh?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton?"

"Jane, my girl, do you want to lose your place?"

"No, Sir Hilton. I'm very sorry, Sir Hilton—I—"

"Let him kiss you?"

"Oh, Sir Hilton!"

"Don't deny it! Saw more. You gave him one. Now, look here, both of you. You, Jane, are a very nice, respectable girl, and I like you. Mark, here, is a very good fellow, and if some time you two think of getting married, I don't say I will not give you both a hundred pounds to start life with—"

"Oh, Sir Hilton!"

"If I've got it. But no more of this. It looks bad, and is not respectful to your employers. You both know, I suppose, that if her ladyship saw half what I noted just now you would be dismissed, Jane, and I'm afraid, Mark, I should have to part with you."

"I beg—"

"That will do—not another word. Breakfast, Jane—quick, please."

"Yes, Sir Hilton!" and Jane drew a breath full of relief, as she hurried through the door.

"Heigh—ho—ha—hum!" yawned the baronet, placing his hands in his pockets and looking down in a dreamy way at the breakfast-table. Then he took out and opened his hunting watch, and closed it with a snap.

"E-lev-en o'clock," he said. "Her ladyship send for you, Mark?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton. Brought round the pony-carriage."

"Oh! Gone out?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Morning's paper, Sir Hilton," said the man, obsequiously, as he drew a sporting-print from his pocket and held it out meaningly turned down at a particular spot.

"What's that?" said the baronet, glancing at one line, and then, turning angrily, "Take it away!" he cried.

"Beg pardon, Sir Hilton. Tilborough first Summer Meeting."

"Take it away!"

"Yes, sir; but La Sylphide."

"Look here, Mark, my lad, no more of this. I know, of course, but take it away. Do you want to drive me mad?"

"Beg pardon, Sir Hilton. Then you won't drive over in the dogcart?"

"What?"

"Just to see her pull it off, Sir Hilton."

"Confound it, man! Hold your tongue! Be off!"

At that moment there were steps on the gravel, and directly after a peal arose from the door-bell.

"Go and see who that is, sir, and never mention anything connected with the Turf again. It's dead to me, and I'm dead to it," he muttered, as the man left the room, giving place to Jane, who hurried in with covered dishes upon a tray.

"Did you see who that was, Jane?"

"No, Sir Hilton. Some gentleman on horseback. His horse is hooked on one side of the gate."

"Who the deuce can it be?"

"Dr Granton, sir," said the groom, coming to the door.

"Oh! Where is he?"

"Study, sir."

"Bring him in here."

Sir Hilton looked quite transformed. There was a bright, alert look in his erstwhile dull eyes, and he seemed to pull himself together as he started actively from his chair, and made as if to hurry after his groom.

But he was too late, for the door reopened, and Mark showed in a handsome, dark, military-looking man of about five-and-thirty, who marched in, hunting-crop in hand, spurs jingling faintly at his heels, and dressed in faultless taste as a horseman.

"My dear old Jack!"

"Hilt, old boy!"

"This is a surprise. Here, Jane, another cover; the doctor will breakfast with me."

"My dear fellow, I breakfasted at eight."

"Never mind; have an eleven's. Mouthful of corn then never hurt anyone. A chair here, Mark. That will do, my man."

Mark backed out, with the half-grin, which had sprung up on seeing his master's animation, dying out, and shaking his head, while the visitor turned the chair placed for him back to the table and bestrode it as if it were a horse.

"Whatever brings you down into this dismal region?"

"Dismal, eh?" said the visitor, glancing round, and then out of the window. "Races."

"Humph!" ejaculated the baronet. "Yes; I heard they were to-day."

"You heard? Aren't you coming?"

"No, no. I've dropped all that sort of thing now."

"Oh, yes, I forgot; and my manners, too. How is her ladyship?"

"Oh, well—very well, Jack," said Sir Hilton, in a mournful way.

"That's right, old chap. Well, trot her out."

Sir Hilton frowned.

"I beg your pardon, old man. Presuming on old brotherly acquaintance. I shall be glad to see her, though."

"Of course, my dear boy; but the fact is, she is out."

"She is? Hang it all, then, I've come at the right time. Have a day off with me at Tilborough, and we'll dine afterwards at the hotel. We can get a snack of something."

"No, no; you misunderstand me. My wife is only having a morning drive in the pony chaise. A little business in the village."

"Oh, I see; Lady Bountiful—district visiting—buying curtsies of the old women, and that sort of thing."

"Yes—er—exactly."

"Ah! I've heard that Lady Lisle does a deal in that way. Takes the chair at charity meetings, eh? Primrose Dame, too?"

"Who told you that?"

"Told me? Let's see. Oh, it was Lady Tilborough."

The conversation ceased for a minute or two while Jane entered with a tray, busied herself, and then departed, leaving the visitor quite ready to show that his eight o'clock breakfast was a thing of the past.

"I say, though," he exclaimed, with his mouth half full, "I didn't mean this. I've left my horse hitched on to the gate."

Sir Hilton rose, stepped to the window, and returned.

"Not there. Mark would see to it, of course, and give it a feed in the stables."

"That's all right, then. Yes, Lady Tilborough was talking about you the other day."

"Was she? What did she say?"

"Oh, not much. Only that it was a pity you had given up hunting and the Turf."

The baronet sighed—almost groaned. "Anything else?"

"Well—er—no-o-o-o. Oh, yes; a little bit of badinage."

"Eh? What about? Nothing spiteful? No, she wouldn't. She's a dear good creature, bless her!"

"Good boy! So she is—bless her!"

"Ah! I once thought when the old man died, that—"

"Oh, did you? Well, you didn't, and you've married well enough to satisfy any man."

Sir Hilton sighed, and his visitor looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"Come, old man, you don't seem to care for your corn. You didn't have a wet night?"

"Hot coppers this morning? My dear boy, no! Why, I lead as quiet a life as a curate now."

"All the better for you."

Sir Hilton sighed again.

"Then it's true?" said the visitor, smiling.

"What's true? What have you been hearing? Did Lady Tilborough say—"

"Oh, nothing; only a bit of chaff about you."

"Tell me what the widow said."

"Oh, it was all good humouredly—a bit of her fun. You know what she is—wouldn't hurt the feelings of a fly."

"Yes, yes, I know; but she has been laughing at me. She has—"

"Nonsense—nonsense! Don't make your coat rough, old man. She only said it was a pity."

"What was a pity?"

"That dear old Hilt should be ridden with his curb chain so tight—by George! I didn't know how hungry I was."

"Yes," said Sir Hilton, sadly; "the curb is a bit too tight sometimes, Jack; but someone means well, and she has a right to be a bit firm. I always was a fool over money matters."

"Nonsense, old fellow! You were a prince, only you were unlucky, and were obliged to make a clear up; but you're all right again now."

"Yes," said the baronet, "I'm all right again now." But his voice sounded very doleful.

"It was thirty thou' a-year, wasn't it—I mean, isn't it?"

Sir Hilton nodded.

"She got the title and you got the tin. Quid pro quo!"

Sir Hilton nodded again, and then made a desperate effort to turn the conversation back upon his friend.

"Lady Lisle has always taken an interest in parish matters and the poor, and it pleases her. She would not, of course, like me to take an interest now in racing affairs."

"Of course not—of course not, my dear boy," said the visitor, helping himself to the marmalade left by Sydney.

"But what about you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm doing capitally," was the reply, rather thickly uttered.

"Nonsense! I mean that affair. How do matters go with the widow?"

"Hah!" sighed the visitor, laying down his knife.

"Hallo! Not off, is it, old chap?"

"No, not off, Hilt, but I'm just where I was. Like the farmer over the claret, I don't seem to get no further."

"Well, you must be a duffer, Jack."

"I suppose I am, old man. Pluck enough in some things, but I'm afraid of her."

"But haven't you spoken?"

"No; I daren't, for fear she should laugh at me, and the whole affair be quite off."

"I say, Jack, you're dead hit."

"I am, old man—dead. Bless her! She's an angel! But I'm afraid, after her experience with that old ruffian Tilborough, she has made up her mind never to run in double harness again."

"Nonsense! Pluck up, old fellow; a woman likes a man to be manly, and if she accepted you—"

"Ah, *if* Hilt, *if*."

"She would, or I don't know her. I should like to see it come off, for there wouldn't be a better matched pair in England. Go in and win."

"Well, hang me if I don't! I've been playing a shilly-shally waiting game, and now I'll come to the point. But I say, what's this about you in the papers—election news?"

"Oh, it's the wife's wish. She won't rest till I have 'M.P.' at the end of my name."

"Good thing too. You're getting mossy here. Go into Parliament, and it will soon be rubbed off. The poor dear lady is spoiling you. Too much apron-string. She's stopped your racing and hunting, but you must do something. Go in and win your seat."

"I don't care much about it."

"More fool you! Think of the chances it will give you of a little life. The House—there you are; an excuse for everything not quite in running order with the ideas of such a lady as madam. Club? Best in London. Late hours? Sitting till two, three, four, or milk-time."

"Yes; I never gave that a thought."

"An excuse for everything, dear boy, and your wife proud of you. Oh, I should enter for those stakes, certainly. It will cost you something, though."

"I suppose so; but, between ourselves, Lady Lisle has placed four thou' to my account for election expenses."

"Brave little woman! The widow's all wrong."

"How! Why? What do you mean?"

"She said her ladyship kept the chequebook, and saw to the estate herself, only allowing you a little pocket-money when you were a good boy."

"Tell Lady Tilborough to mind her own business, Jack," said the baronet, tartly.

"My dear Hilt, I'd share my last fiver with you, or I'd back any of your paper with pleasure; but I'll be hanged if I'll do that I say, though, come on to the race to-day."

Sir Hilton shook his head.

"Nonsense! Think of it. Your old filly, La Sylphide, first favourite. I saw her a week ago. Lovely! Lady Tilborough told me she wouldn't take four times as much for her as she gave at your sale."

"The beautiful gazelle-eyed creature!" sighed Sir Hilton.

"That she is."

"Who is up?" said Sir Hilton.

"Josh Rowle, your old jock, of course. The widow told me that she wouldn't—I mean the mare—let anyone else go near her."

"Just like her, Jack. She had a temper, but she was like a kitten with me. Came ambling up the paddock when I

whistled, and she'd rub her head against me for all the world like a cat, and fetch bits of carrot out of my pocket, or whinny for sugar. Ah! those were dear old days. Yes, she'll pull it off for certain."

"Come and see her run."

"I couldn't, old man. I couldn't bear it. No, I'm entered for the House of Commons. Lady Lisle says I'm to be a—*a* Minister some day."

"Bravo! Be Chancellor of the Exchequer, and keep the purse. But I say, do come. You must be hungry for a race after fasting so long."

"I am, Jack, I am."

"Come, then."

"No; don't ask me," said the baronet; "my racing days are over."

"And you've burnt your jockey cap and silk, the scarlet and blue stripe of the finest gentleman-rider of his day?"

"By Jove! no. I keep them, leathers, boots, whip, and all, in a locked-up drawer. My man, Mark, takes them out to set them up and worship sometimes."

"Then you really won't come?"

"No, Jack, I can't. It would break my wife's heart if I did, and she really is very fond of me."

"Very well; I won't press you, old man. But, I say, you think *La Sylphide* will win?"

"It's a dead cert. Have you anything on?"

"All I'm worth, dear boy. Have you?"

"I? Nonsense! I haven't made a bet these two years."

"Then now's your time."

"No, no: I've done with that sort of thing."

"But, personally, you are not flush of money, are you?"

"I? Never was so short in my life."

The doctor laughed. "Seize the chance, then, to make a thou' or two."

"Impossible."

"Nonsense! You say yourself the mare's sure to win."

"Bar accidents, she must."

"Then make your game."

"No; I have no money."

"Why, you said just now that her ladyship had placed four thou' to your credit in her bank."

"For my electioneering exes."

"Bosh! To use. Put on the pot and make it boil. Why, man, you could clear enough on the strength of that coin lying idle to set you up for a couple of years."

"Ye-e-es," said Sir Hilton, who began biting at his nails. "Might, mightn't I?"

"Of course. Why, you would be mad to miss the chance."

"It does sound tempting."

"Tempting? Of course. It isn't as if there was any gambling in it."

"Exactly. There would be no gambling in it?"

"Of course not. If it were some horse whose character you did not know, it would be different. But here you are—your own mare, whom you know down to the ground. Your own jockey, too. Look here, dear boy, *La Sylphide* can't help winning. You'd be mad to miss this chance. I should say, go and see the run, but I give way to your scruples there; but when I see you chucking away a pile of money I begin to kick."

Sir Hilton rose and walked up and down the room, as his old friend and companion continued talking, and ended by coming back to the table and bringing down his fist with a bang.

"Yes," he cried, "it would be madness to miss the chance. By Jove! I'll do it."

"Bravo, old man!"

"I'll put it in your hands, Jack. Get on for me all you can."

"Up to what?"

"All I've got in the bank. Four thou'."

"Do you mean it?"

"Of course."

"Well done, old chap. That's Hilt up to the hilt, like in the old times."

"Pst! Someone coming," said the baronet, dropping into a chair. "We didn't hear the chaise. It's my wife."

Chapter Five.

A Lamentable Case.

Lady Lisle swept into the room, fresh from the pony-carriage, looking rather stern and haughty, her brows knitting at the sight of the breakfast things, and then rising a little as she saw the gallant-looking gentleman who rose and advanced to meet her.

"Dr Granton!"

"At your service, Lady Lisle. I was in the neighbourhood, and rode over to see my dear old friend, but I am just off. I congratulate you. How well he looks!"

"I am glad you think so. But—you have only just come. Will you not stay? My husband must have a good deal to say to you."

"We could talk for hours, my dear madam, but I must be going on."

"You will stay to lunch?"

"Impossible. Most important business in the neighbourhood. Hilton has been most hospitable and refreshed me, and I really must be off—eh, Hilt?"

"Certainly."

"The fact is, Lady Lisle, it is a question of money matters. Business connection with a bank."

Lady Lisle bowed, and looked relieved.

"If you must go, then, Dr Granton—"

"I really must, my dear madam. No, no, Hilton, dear boy, don't ring for the horse; I'll go round by the stables and pick up my hack. Don't you come. Good-morning, Lady Lisle. I hope you will let me call if I am again this way?"

"Certainly, Dr Granton. I am always happy to extend the hospitality of the Denes to my husband's friends."

"Thank you; of course. Once more, good-morning. Morning, Hilton, dear boy. Au revoir!"

He passed out, and the frown on Lady Lisle's brow deepened. "I'm afraid, Hilton," she said, "that Dr Granton's business may have something to do with the races."

"Eh? Indeed! Well, now you say so, I suppose it is possible."

"You have not allowed him to tempt you into going, Hilton?"

"No, my dear," said the baronet; "certainly not."

He spoke out quickly and firmly, the glow of the virtuous who had resisted temptation warming his breast.

"Thank you, dear," she said, laying her hand almost caressingly upon her lord's shoulder. "It could only have meant gambling, risking money to win that of others. Hilton, my love, it is so vile and despicable."

"Think so, Laura?" he said, with the cold chill of his wife's words completely extinguishing the virtuous glow.

"Think so? Oh, yes, Hilton. You cannot imagine how happy you make me by the way you are casting behind you your old weaknesses, and are devoting yourself to Parliamentary study."

"For which I fear I am very unfit," said Sir Hilton; and he turned cold directly after at a horrible thought which seemed to stun him.

Suppose she should say, "Well, give it up," and want to withdraw that balance at the bank! "What an idiot I was to say that!" he thought. But relief—partial relief—came the next minute.

"That is your modesty, my dear," said Lady Lisle. "I flatter myself that I know your capabilities better than you know them yourself. Hilton, I shall devote myself to the task of being your Parliamentary secretary, and I mean that you shall shine."

"Thank you, my dear," said the unhappy man, sadly, as he thought of the daring venture he had set in commission, and began to repent as he walked to the window and looked out.

"I ought not to have risked that money, though. Suppose the mare lost," he mused. "Bah! I know her too well. There isn't a horse can touch her in the straight, and it will regularly set me up. I shan't have to go begging for a cheque, and then have 'What for, darling?' ringing in my ears. Hang it all! It makes a man feel so small. Why, the very servants pity me—I know they do. And as for that old scoundrel Trimmer—oh, if I could only give him something, even if it were only a wife to keep him short!"

"Suppose—" he thought again, and could get no farther than that one word, which, like the nucleus of a comet, sent out behind or before it a tail of enormous proportions—a sort of gaseous mist of horrible probabilities concerning that four thousand pounds.

"If I could get a message to him and stop it all," he muttered, as he watched Jane rapidly clear the table of the tardy breakfast things.

"Yes, my love, Parliament must be the goal of your ambition," said Lady Lisle, with her eyes brightening, as soon as they were alone. "If I had been a man how I should have gloried in addressing the House!"

"Ah! there's a deal of talk goes on there, my dear," replied Sir Hilton.

"And what talk, Hilton! What a study! The proper study of mankind is man. How much better than devoting all your attention to dogs and horses!"

"'How noble a beast is the horse,' dear, it said in my first reading-book."

"Absurd, my love. Pray don't think of horses any more."

Sir Hilton winced, and then watched his lady as she moved in a dignified way to the fireplace to rearrange her headgear.

"Going out again, my dear?" said Sir Hilton, for want of something better to say.

"Yes, love. I have ordered the carriage round, to drive over to Hanby."

"To Hanby, dear?"

"Yes. Mr Browse drove by while I was at the vicarage," said the lady, in a tone of disgust. "That man is in arrear with his rent for the farm. The vicar said he supposed the man was going to the races, and I am going over to see his wife."

"For goodness' sake, don't go and interfere, my dear," cried Sir Hilton, anxiously. "It would get talked about so at the Tilborough Market, and spread in all directions."

"It would not matter, that I see," said her ladyship, haughtily. "But I was not going to interfere. I might, perhaps, say a word or two of condolence to poor Mrs Browse, and point out how much happier she would be if her husband followed the example of mine."

"But, hang it all, Laura, he can't try to enter into Parliament!"

"No, my love, but he could give up horse-racing."

"Surely you are not going over there—to drive all those miles—to say that?"

"No, my love, only to help carry on your election contest, and be in time. Mr Browse is in my—our debt, according to Mr Trimmer's figures, for a whole year's rental of the farm."

"But you mustn't go and dun people."

"Dun, Hilton?"

"Well, collect rents. Leave that to Trimmer."

"Of course I shall, my dear," said her ladyship, with a condescending smile. "I am going over to name that circumstance of their indebtedness to me—us, and to tell her that I shall expect Mr Browse to vote for you. She will compel her husband to do so, and that will ensure one vote."

"The grey mare's the better horse," said Sir Hilton to himself, and he was thinking of the train of circumstances in connection with the race, and planning to rush off and try to forestall the doctor's risking money, as he sat back in his chair, when, slowly slouching along after passing through the swing gate, one of the regular hangers-on of a race-meeting approached the house. His aspect was battered, and the pink hunting-coat—one which had seen very much better days—was rubbed to whiteness here and greased to blackness there. It was frayed and patched, and wore the general aspect of having been used as a sleeping garment on occasion, being decorated with scraps of hay, prickly seed vessels, and the like, in addition to the chalky dust of the road, a good deal of which powdered the round-topped, peaked hunting cap, once of black velvet, now all fibre, with scarcely a trace of nap.

The coat was closely buttoned up to the throat, and a pair of much-worn cord trousers completed the man's costume, all but his boots, which were ornamented with slashings, for the benefit, probably, of bunions, for if intended for effect, after the fashion of an old stuffed doublet, the effort was a mistake.

But there was no mistake about the man's profession. He was hall-marked "tramp" by his bleary eyes and horribly reddened, bulbous nose, and racing-tout by the packet of race-cards peering out of his breast-pocket. But evidently he was a man of much invention, inasmuch as from a desire to do a little trading on his way from racecourse to racecourse, or for an excuse to find his way to houses where he might pick up unconsidered trifles, cadging, filching, and the like, he carried in one hand a fat, white mongrel puppy, with a bit of blue ribbon tied about its neck. As a dog, it was about as bad a specimen as could be met with in a day's march; but it had one advantage over its owner—it was scrupulously clean.

The squire of the Denes was not within the scope of the tramp's view, as he loafed up with his bleary eyes twinkling; and for the moment the shape of the room hid Lady Lisle, till the big Persian cat, the minute before apparently fast asleep, curled up on an ottoman upon which the sun shone warmly, suddenly smelt dog, and sprang to all fours, arching its back, bottle-brushing its tail, and baring its white teeth, as it began to swear loudly.

"Oh, Khan, Khan, what is the matter?" cried Lady Lisle, taking a step or two towards the cat, and then stopping short with "Oh, Hilton, my love, send this dreadful man away!"

"Buy a lovely little dawg, my lady," cried the tramp, now close up to the window, and smiling, whining, and leering in. "Puss, puss, puss! Look at 'em! They'll make friends in a minute."

He reached in a hand and set the puppy down on the Turkey carpet, when the idiotic-looking little object, after the manner of its kind, began slowly to blunder towards the lordly Persian yclept Khan, to the imminent risk of having its eyes scratched out.

"Look at the pretty creetur, my lady," whined the man. "Two guineas is the price, but seeing its you, my lady, and a good home for the little beauty, say one pun, and he's yours."

"Take your dirty whelp up and be off, you scoundrel!" cried Sir Hilton, in a passion, and deftly placing the toe of his boot under the puppy he lifted it and sent it flying through the window, to be fielded cleverly and without pain by its owner.

"What, my noble Capting! What, my noble barrowknight, you here? You are a sight for sore eyes. You ain't forgot Dandy Dinny?"

"Forgotten you? No, you scoundrel!"

"Just your old self again, Sir Rilton. Why, bless me! this is like old times. Here, c'rect card, Sir Rilton; all the names colours, jocks, and starters. Take a dozen, your lordship; you'll want 'em for your lady-friends on the course."

"Be off, sir! How dare you trespass on my premises!"

"Trespass, Sir Rilton? I wouldn't do such a thing. There, I knowed you'd never drop the Turf. Whats yer 'oss's name?"

"Cut!" cried Sir Hilton, fiercely.

"Is it, now? A sharp 'un, then, as'll show the field its four blessed racing plates. A dark 'un, your honour?"

"Will you be off, you scoundrel!"

"Off, your honour, in a jiffy, ready to looff out for you on the course. But you'll buy the little dawg for her lovely ladyship?"

"Take the miserable mongrel away."

"But such a companion for the long-haired tom puss, Sir Rilton."

"Did you hear me tell you to go, sir?"

"Yes, your honour," whispered the man, shuffling his "c'rect cards" back into his pocket with one hand, and leaning forward into the room to whisper: "I'm 'orrid hard up, Sir Rilton. Give us a tip for the cup to help a pore fellow get a honest livin'. You'll do that for your pore old friend as touted for you all these years?"

"Here, catch!" cried Sir Hilton, tossing the man a florin, which, as it went spinning out into the sunshine, was deftly caught, spat upon, and transferred to a pocket.

"Long life to Sir Rilton Lisle, and may his 'osses allus win! But you'll buy the little dawg for her ladyship, your honour?"

Sir Hilton made an angry gesture, and the wretched-looking object slouched off, just as the noise of gravel-grinding was heard, and the Lisles' handsome victoria was driven up to the front door.

"There, Hilton," said the lady, reproachfully, "is it not horrible that you should have come to such a state of degradation as that!"—and she pointed in the direction taken by the tout.

"I—I?" cried her husband, firing up. "Hang it all, Laura, do you compare me to that wretched cad?"

"No, no, my dear. I mean the degradation of being recognised by such a miserable outcast."

"Humph! Poor wretch!"

"And I do object, love, to your indulging in casual relief. Be charitable, of course, but give only to the deserving and good. There," she continued, advancing towards him to lay her hands upon his shoulders and kiss him solemnly, "I'm not angry with you, darling, for you will take these lessons to heart, I'm sure. Good-bye, love. Go and study up your Blue Books, and think out your plan of campaign. I shall be back soon to tell you that you may be sure of Mr Browse's vote."

"Thank you, my dear," said Sir Hilton, responding dreamily to the chilly caress he received, the lady's lips being just on a level with his forehead. "Here, I'll come to the carriage with you."

"No, no, no, love. Get to your Blue Books, and practise your speeches. I'm going to work for and with you, not to be a hindrance. Get to work, I want you to be a modern Cicero or Demosthenes. Good-bye—Good-bye."

Lady Lisle solemnly waved a kiss to her husband, and sailed out of the room, leaving the dapper little baronet deep in thought and biting his nails.

Chapter Six.

The Lady in the Case.

"Blue Books! Blue Books! Confound the Blue Books!" cried Sir Hilton, as he marched up and down the breakfast-room long after he had heard the wheels of the departing victoria and the tramp of the handsome pair of horses die out. "Who's to study Blue Books? Who's to practise speeches with the weight of four thousand pounds on his mind?"

"Speeches!" he cried angrily, after a few minutes, and he waved his hands wildly. "I want no practice, after making such a Speech as I did to Jack Granton. I must have been mad. I can't go to the course without being found out, and if I could it's too late—too late—too late!"

"But is it?" he said, after a few minutes' restless walk like that of the lone wolf up and down its cage at the Zoo.

"Oh, yes," he groaned; "Jack was always like lightning at planking down. He'd ride straight away and get every penny on. There, I'm getting in a regular fever. Out of training. I never used to worry when I stood to lose five times as much, and I won't worry now. I won't think I stand to lose four thou', but only that I stand to win forty, as I must, for with Josh Rowle up, the Sylphide must win in a canter. There's nothing been foaled yet that can touch her in these little races. There, Laura's out, and I'll have a cigar and calm down. Forty thou'! Shell never know—at least, I hope not, and, it will make me independent for a bit. But I won't do it any more. It would be tempting fortune; but with that extra in the bank I can stand my ground a little. Laura's a dear good woman, but too straight-laced. There's too much of this parish twaddle and charity-mongering. She's quite insane upon such matters, and with the independence that money will give me I can afford to stand up for myself. She talks about weaning me, and I've given up the hunting and the racecourse to humour her, so now she must drop some of her fads to favour me. We shall be a deal happier then."

He dropped into a chair, feeling easier in his mind, and went on musing.

"Yes," he said, "there's a lot a fellow ought to do, and the first thing after settling day I mean to attack this stewardship business. I'm about sick of that long, lean, lizardly humbug Trimmer. Hang his white choker and sanctified ways! He's a wolf in sheep's clothing, I'll swear. A hypocritical rascal! I'll swear I saw him leering at our pretty Jane, but if I told Laura she'd take his part. Ha, ha, ha! Capital!" he said half-aloud, as he indulged in a hearty fit of chuckling. "What a splendid idea. I can't quite see my way, but Mark's dead on the little lassie, and if I'm right and the lad can be enlightened, my word, I should like to see the fun! Judging by the way Mark can handle his fives, and the fire such a notion would give him, I shouldn't like to be in Master Trimmer's shoes, to wear the phiz he would have when the lad had done with him. Yes, that would settle Master Trimmer, if, of course, I am right, and he is the confounded mawworm I believe him to be."

"Well, that would be an improvement. Then there's Master Syd. That young dog's gammoning his aunt shamefully, I'm sure. But it's all her own fault. She treats him as if he were a child instead of a lad of eighteen and it isn't natural for a boy to be dragged into these parish meetings, and to be set to read reports of this society and that society, and checked in his natural desire for a bit of honest, manly sport. Why, if that boy could have had his way he'd have been at the races to-day. Going fishing, I suppose. Well, that's not so bad, but I almost wonder he's allowed to do that."

"Hang it all!" he muttered, springing up and going to the window, where he looked out, and carefully cut and lit a cigar, to begin smoking, so that the fumes should pass out into the air, "how that money does keep buzzing in my head. My pulses are going like fun. Ah! there, I won't think about it. La Sylphide is safe to pull it off for us. Do Granton good, too. Make him more independent over his suit with the widow. Ha! There's nothing like a good cigar to pull a man round. I'm better already; but it's miserable work, this having to steal a smoke in one's own house. I feel quite a coward over it, or like a boy learning. Like Syd did when I caught him having a weed in the stables. One of mine, too! He confessed to helping himself to one out of that box in the study cupboard."

"Well, I wasn't very hard on him. Boys will be boys, and they pay pretty dearly for their first smoke."

"Yes, I feel ever so much calmer now. My word! How I should have liked to have the dogcart out and drive Laury tandem to the racecourse! She wouldn't have enjoyed it? Well, the boy, then, to see the Sylph win, and dropped in afterwards at the Arms. Had a chat with old Sam's pretty little lassie. Good idea that of his, to name the little thing after the mare. How proud he is of her, and how proud he was, too, of the mare. Well, no wonder; it was a splendid bit of training. But hang him for an old fox! As big an old scoundrel as ever had a horse pulled in a race. Shocking old ruffian! Wonder what he's doing on the cup race; on heavily with La Sylphide, of course, and no wonder, for she is sure to win."

As he said these words Sir Hilton was sitting on the window-sill sending out his smoke in good, steady, regular puffs, perfectly unconscious of all sounds without and of everything but his own thoughts, till the door was opened suddenly, with strange effect.

For Sir Hilton Lisle, Bart., as his name was written, made a sudden bound off the window-sill, sending his cigar flying, while the guilty blood flushed his face, as he felt that his wife had returned, and he had been caught smoking indoors.

But he turned pale with anger the next moment as he stood facing the little maid, Jane, who was fighting hard to hide a smile which would show, while her bright eyes twinkled with delight, as she said quickly: "Lady Tilborough, sir."

And the next moment the widow of the late nobleman of that name, a round-faced, retroussé-nosed, red-lipped, grey-eyed little woman of exquisite complexion, and looking delightfully enticing in her tall hat and perfectly-fitting riding-habit, which she held up with a pair of prettily-gauntleted hands, hurried into the room.

"There, go away, little girl," she cried, giving Jane a playful tap with her whip, "and tell your Mark to give my pony's mouth a wash out. No corn, mind."

"Yes, my lady," cried Jane, beaming upon the natty little body, and taking in her dress with one glance.

"Here I am, Hilt, dear boy," cried the visitor, as the door closed. "Caught you all alone, for I passed your wife, and she cut me dead. Here I am!"

"Yes, I see you are," groaned Sir Hilton; and then to himself: "Temptation once again, and in its most tempting form."

Chapter Seven.

A Diabolical Business.

If the old writers were right, so was Sir Hilton Lisle, as he drew a chair forward and placed it ready for his attractive visitor, who gave the long folds of her riding-habit a graceful sweep, and then dropped with an elastic plump into the seat.

"Oh, Hilt, dear boy! Oh, Hilt!" she cried, bursting into tears.

"My dear Lady Tilborough!" he cried, catching her hands in his, as she dabbed her whip down on the table with a smart blow; "what is the matter?"

"Don't, don't, don't!" she cried passionately.

"Don't?" said Sir Hilton. "What have I done?"

"Called me Lady Tilborough in that cold, formal way, just as if you were going to refuse before I asked; and us such very, very old friends!"

"Well, Hetty, then. My dear old girl, what is the matter?"

"Ah, that's better, Hilt," said the lady, with a sigh of relief. "We are such old friends, aren't we—even if you have married that dreadfully severe wife who looks upon me as an awfully wicked woman."

"Which you are not, Hetty," said Sir Hilton, warmly.

"Thank ye, Hilt dear. That does me good," she said, drawing away her hands and beginning to wipe her eyes. "I always felt that I could trust to you if I had a spill. Tilborough always used to say: 'If you're in any trouble, go to dear old Hilt, unless it's money matters; and in them don't trust him, for he's a perfect baby.'"

"Did Lord Tilborough say that?" cried Sir Hilton, frowning.

"Yes, old fellow," sighed the lady; "and it's quite true. There, don't look black, Hilty, dear old man. You know you ruined yourself, and so you would anyone else who trusted you with money."

"Lady Tilborough!" cried Sir Hilton, indignantly.

"Stop that, dear boy. No stilt. Be honest. You know it's true. Here, sit down and listen. I want your help."

"Hadn't you better go to some other friend?" said Sir Hilton, sinking back in a chair at some distance, crossing his legs, and kicking the uppermost one up and down angrily. "Dr Granton, for instance."

"You leave Jack Granton out of the case, stupid. He wants to marry me, though he has never said so. He's a thoroughly good fellow; but, of course, I couldn't go to him, even if he could help me, and he can't."

"How can I, Lady Tilborough?"

"Hetty!" said the lady, sternly.

"Well, Hetty, then."

"That's better, Hilt, old man. Here, I'll tell you directly. Look at me."

She paused to fight down a passion of hysterical laughter.

"My dear little woman!" said Sir Hilton, springing up.

"Keep away! Don't touch me!" cried his visitor.

"Have a glass of wine—some brandy?"

"No, no; no, no! I shall be better directly. There, did you ever see such a silly woman? That's got the better of it. If I hadn't let myself go then I believe I should have had a fit."

"Ha! You quite frightened me. Now then, Hetty, old lady, what's the matter?"

"That's our old friend Hilt talking like himself again," said the visitor, with a sigh of relief. "There, I'm better now, ready to take every obstacle that comes in my way. Hilt, old man, a horrible disaster."

"Yes? Yes?" cried Sir Hilton, turning white, as if he already saw the shadow of what was to come.

"Your dear old mare."

"Not dead?" cried Sir Hilton, wildly.

"No, no, no; but it's as bad. She was to run for the cup to-day."

"Yes, yes; I know."

"Thought you had done thinking of such things."

"I have—I haven't—oh, for goodness' sake, woman, go on! She hasn't been got at?"

"Not directly, Hilt, but indirectly."

"But how—how? Go on. I'm in torture."

"Ha!" cried Lady Tilborough, with a sigh of satisfaction. "I knew you would be, Hilt, for your old friend's sake."

"Will you go on, Hetty?"

"Yes, yes. I can't prove it. I daren't say it, but Josh Rowle has been a deal at Sam Simpkins's this last week or two."

"Yes?"

"And I'm as good as sure that the old scoundrel has been at work on him."

"No; you're wrong. Josh is as honest as the day. I always trusted him to ride square, and he always did."

"And so he has for me, Hilt."

"Of course. I tell you I always trusted him."

"But not with a bottle, Hilt."

"Eh? No; drink was his only weakness."

"That's right; and I believe Sam Simpkins—the old villain!—has been at him that way to get him so that he can't ride."

"What!"

"The miserable wretch is down with D.T.—in an awful state, and the local demon can't allay the spirit. To make matters worse, Jack Granton, who might have helped me, can't be found."

"Jack was here just now. Gone on to the course."

"What! Oh, joy! No, no; it's no use. Too late. Nobody could make poor Josh fit to ride to-day."

"But this is diabolical."

"Oh, it's ten times worse than that, Hilty, old man. I had such trust in the mare that I'm on her for nearly every shilling I possess. If she doesn't win I'm a ruined woman."

"Oh!" cried Sir Hilton, getting up and stamping about the room, tearing at his hair, already getting thin on the crown.

"Thank you, Hilt dear, thank you. I always knew you for a sympathetic soul. Can you imagine anything worse?"

"Yes—yes!" cried Sir Hilton; "ten times worse."

"What?"

"I'm on her too!"

"You?"

"Yes, to the tune of four thousand pounds."

"You, Hilt!" cried the lady, with her eyes brightening, and instead of sympathy something like ecstasy in her tones. "I thought you had 'schworred off.'"

"Yes, of course—I had—but the mare—short of money—such faith in her—I put on—lot of my wife's money. Hetty, how could you have managed so badly with Josh Rowle? What have you done? Oh, woman, woman! You always were the ruin of our sex! Why did you come with such horrible news as this? I'm a ruined man."

"Yes, Hilt, and I'm a ruined woman."

"Do you know what it means for me, Hetty?"

"Yes, Hilt, old man—four thou'."

"Of my wife's money? No, it means locking my dressing-room door, and then—"

"Yes? What then?"

"Revolver. No, haven't got one—a razor."

"Tchah!"

"While you, Hetty—"

"Not such a fool," cried the lady. "Life's worth more than four million millions, squared and cubed. Pull yourself together, you dear old gander."

"Pull myself together!" groaned Sir Hilton. "Oh, why did you come with this horrible news?"

"Because I knew you could help me, stupid!"

"I—I—help you?"

"Hold up, Hilt, or you'll break your knees. It's an emergency—no time to lose. La Sylphide must come up to the scratch."

"Oh!" groaned Sir Hilton. "Impossible. Try to put another jock on her, and she'll murder him. You know what she is. There, pray leave me. I must do a bit of writing before I go."

"Hilt!" cried Lady Tilborough, flushing with energy, as she sprang up and snatched her whip from the table, to swish it about and make it whistle through the air. "You make me feel as if I could lash you till you howled. Be a man. Suicide! Bah! You'll have to die quite soon enough. Now then, listen. This is the only chance. In the terrible emergency I've come to you. Now, quick, there isn't a minute to spare. You must help me."

"I? How?"

"Can't you see?"

"I'm stunned."

"Oh, what a man! You must ride the mare yourself."

"And win."

"Impossible!"

"Nonsense. She will be like a lamb with you."

"But my wife; she wouldn't—"

"Oh!" cried Lady Tilborough, stamping, and lashing the air with her whip. "Divorce your wife."

"She'd divorce me."

"And a good job too! You must come and ride the mare."

"I can't—I can't."

"You must, Hilt."

"Out of training. Too heavy."

"Not a bit of it. You're as fine as can be, and will want weight. You look as thin as if you'd been fretting."

"I have been, woman; I have."

"All the better. Come on at once."

"I tell you I daren't. I can't, Hetty. It is madness."

"Yes, to refuse. Do you hear? It is to save your four thousand pounds."

"Oh!" groaned Sir Hilton.

"Your wife's money."

"With which she has trusted me for Parliamentary expenses."

"Ha! Then you must ride and save it."

"No, no, no! My spirit's broken. I should funk everything."

"Nonsense! Come, you will ride?"

"No, no, not even for that money, and to save the shame. I can't—I can't, Hetty."

"Then for your old, old friend. Hilt, dear boy, we were nearly making a match of it once, only you were a fool. I'd have had you."

"Would you?"

"Yes, if you hadn't been so wild. Now then, for the sake of the old days and our old love. Hilt, for my sake. Do you want me to go down upon my knees?"

"No, no, the other way on, if you like. But the race—impossible. I can't—I can't. I don't know, though. She'd never hear of it. But the newspaper. She never reads it, though; calls it a disgustingly low journal. But, no—no, I couldn't—I couldn't. Hetty, old girl, pray, pray don't tempt me."

"It is to save yourself from shame, and me, a weak, helpless woman, from absolute ruin. Don't live to see me sold up, stock, lock, and barrel. Why, Hilt, old man, I shall be as badly off as you. All my poor gee-gees, including the mare, knocked down, and poor me marrying some tyrant who will now and then write me a paltry cheque."

"Ha, yes!" cried Sir Hilton, drawing himself up as rigidly as if he had been struck by a cataleptic seizure, while Lady Tilborough stared at him in horror, and, unseen by either, Sydney, armed with mounted fly-rod and creel, appeared at the window, stopped short, and looked in in astonishment.

"Ha!" ejaculated the baronet, again, drawing a deep breath, as he changed into the little, wiry, alert man, with a regular horsey look coming over his face, and tightening lips. "All right, Hetty," he cried. "I'm on."

"Hurrah!" cried Lady Tilborough, waving her whip about her head, and then stroking it down softly on first one and then on the other side of her old friend, before making believe to hold a pair of reins and work them about, jockey fashion. "Sir Hilton up—he's giving her her head—look at her—away she goes—a neck—half a length—a length—two lengths! Sylphide wins! Sylphide wins—a bad second, and the field nowhere."

"Ha!" breathed Sir Hilton, with his eyes flashing.

"What about your silk and cap?"

"All right."

"Get 'em; come on, then, Hilt. I'll gallop back to the paddock like the wind. There'll be some scene-shifting there by now, and the bookies working the oracle, for the news was flying when I came away that my mare was to be scratched."

"Ha," cried Sir Hilton. "We'll scratch 'em, old girl. She must—she shall win."

"Three cheers for the gentleman-rider!"

"But my wife—my election?"

"What! Win the race, and you'll win the seat, old man. Can't you see?"

"Only the saving of the money we have on."

"What! Not that the popular sporting rider who won the cup will win no end of votes to-day?"

"Ah, to be sure. Yes, of course," cried Sir Hilton, excitedly. "Be off. I'll join you at the hotel. My word! I seem to be coming to life again, Hetty. I can hear the buzzing of the crowd, the beating of the hoofs, the whistling of the wind, and see the swarming mob, and yelling of the thousand voices as the horse sweeps on with her long, elastic stride."

"First past the post, Hilt."

"Yes, first past the post."

"Now, get all you want and drive over at once. I'll go round to the stables, shout for Mark, and tell him the news. Then I'll gallop back at once."

The "at once" came faintly, for Lady Tilborough was already passing through the door.

"Phew!" whistled Sir Hilton. "By George! it sends a thrill through a man again. La Sylphide. My first old love."

He stood motionless, staring after his visitor for a few moments, and then dashed through the opposite door.

The next moment a fishing-rod was thrust in at the window, dropped against the table, and Syd, with a creel hanging from its strap, vaulted lightly through into the room, to give vent to what sounded like the tardy echo of his uncle's whistle.

"Phe-ew!" And then he said softly, with a grin of delight upon his features: "Auntie seems to be very much out. The ball's begun to roll, gentlemen, so make your little game."

Chapter Eight.

The Other Woman in the Case.

Syd Smithers ran to the door through which Lady Tilborough had passed, went through the hall to the other side of the house, and stopped to listen, just as there was the pattering of a pony's feet, and he caught a glimpse of a dark-blue riding-habit, which was gone the next moment.

"Scissors!" he exclaimed. "Here, I must be on in this piece."

He darted back into the hall, to come full butt upon Mark Willows.

"Hallo, Marky! What's up now?"

"Dunno, sir. Message for the guv'nor, I think. Someun must be ill."

"Awfully," said the lad, and he grinned to himself as the man ran through the hall to the back staircase so as to get to his master's dressing-room.

"I'm not such a fool as I look," said Syd, as he entered the breakfast-room and stood in the middle picking up his fly-rod and thinking. "Marky's going to the race. Driving, I bet. Well, I was going to nobble one of the ponies and ride, but I seem to see a seat alongside of the old man on the dogcart if I play my cards right. Oh, scissors!"

He started back for a step or two, and then ran to the window, to gaze out with starting eyes at a handsome-looking youth in a loose, baggy knickerbocker suit, mounted upon a bicycle, which he cleverly manipulated with one hand as he thrust open the swing gate, rode through, and escaped the rebound by pushing onward, riding right up to the window, leaping down with agility, leaning the bicycle against the wall, and, as if in imitation of Syd, vaulting lightly into the room to fling arms round the lad's neck.

"Oh, Syd darling!" came from a pair of rosy lips, in company with a sob.

"Oh, Molly!" cried the boy, excitedly, beginning to repel his visitor, but ending by hugging her tightly in his arms.

"Got you again at last, dear," cried the very boyishly-costumed young lady.

"Yes, but—oh, here's a jolly shine!"

"Yes, dear, awful. But now I am come, don't send me away from you. I feel as if we must part no more."

"What are you talking about, pet?" cried the boy. "You must be off at once."

"Oh, no, I shan't. I've come, never to leave you any more."

"You're mad, Molly. A March hare isn't in it with you. Auntie'll be here directly."

"Gammon! I met her ever so long ago, in the carriage and pair. She looked at me, and turned up her nose and sniffed."

"Did she know you?"

"Not she. I should have been here before, only Lady Tilborough galloped by me on her pony, and I followed and saw her come in, and I've been hiding in the copse till she came away, for I knew she wouldn't stop, as your aunt was out. As soon as she galloped off I came on. If it hadn't been for that I should have been here before. So no fudge; everybody's out, and we can talk. Oh, ain't you jolly ready to get shut of me?"

"But everybody isn't out, pussy. Uncle's at home."

"Is he? Come out, then. Let's get into the woods."

"But I can't, dear."

"Oh, why don't you tell them? You must now."

"I can't, dear. It's impossible yet. Oh, why did you come?"

"Because I wanted to see you pertickler."

"But I was coming over to the races, and you'd have seen me then."

"You got my telegram, then?"

"Telegram? No. What telegram?"

"The one I sent, saying I must see you. Yesterday."

"No telegram came."

"Then it's got stuck, because there's so many racing messages going. I sent one."

"Then you must have been a little fool."

"That I ain't," said the girl, petulantly.

"I told you not to write or send."

"But I was obliged to, I tell you; and as you didn't come to me in my trouble, I jumped on my bike and I've come to you."

"But what for—what trouble?" cried the boy, stamping impatiently.

"Father's got hold of your letters and found out everything, dear. You ought to have told 'em by now."

"But—but—but," stammered Syd, "where—what—what—oh! why did you come?"

"That's what I keep telling you, dear. Dad's half mad, and he's coming over to see your aunt and uncle."

"Coming here?"

"Yes, Syd love. He'd have come before if it hadn't been for the race."

"You must go back at once and stop him from coming here."

"Stop him? Oh, Syd dear, you don't know father."

"Don't know him? Oh, don't I? Why, if he came here—oh, dear, dear, what a horrid mess! Well, I don't know what to do."

"Hadn't I better stop here?"

"Hadn't I better go and jump in the river? I wish you'd stopped at the Orphoean."

"But I couldn't, Syd; they're rebuilding it."

"Coming down here to this quiet place and making eyes at me in church till I didn't know what I was about."

"For shame, sir! It was you made eyes at me. I couldn't help it."

"Yes, you could. You'd got a church at Tilborough, and might have gone there."

"Oh, what a shame, Syd! You know I did, and you went on writing letters to me, saying your aunt kept you at home, and that you couldn't eat or sleep for longing to see my pretty face."

"I didn't."

"You did, sir!" cried the girl, stamping her foot.

"I swear I didn't."

"Oh, you wicked wretch! Why, I've got six letters with it in."

"What! You've kept my letters? I told you to burn 'em all."

"Well, I haven't. I've got 'em all tied up with red ribbon, the colour of my heart's blood, all but those father found."

"Yes, that's it. If you'd done as I told you the old man would never have known."

"Oh, wouldn't he, Syd? Now say, if you dare, that you didn't write to me to come over so that you might see my darling sweet face again."

"Oh, I'm a gentleman, I am. I'm not going to tell any lies. If I said so, I must have been half cracked."

"So you were—with love. I've got four letters that say so when you wanted me to go to London and get married."

"Yes, I must have been mad, Molly. It's been like a nightmare to me ever since. I wish I'd never seen you."

"Oh, oh, oh!" began the pretty little bicyclist, beginning to sob. "Has it come to this so soon?"

"Don't—don't—don't cry. The servants'll hear you."

"I—I—I can't help it, Syd. Oh, dear, dear! You've broke my heart."

"No, I haven't, darling. There, there. Kisses'll mend the place. There—and there—and there."

"But you're sorry you met me, and you don't love me a bit. If I'd known what getting married meant you wouldn't have caught me running off on the sly."

"Don't—don't cry, I tell you," cried the boy, passionately. "I didn't mean it. You know that I love you awfully, only a man can't help saying things when he's in such a mess. You don't know what my aunt is."

"And you don't know what my father is."

"Oh, don't I? An old ruffian," added the boy to himself.

"Your aunt's only a woman, and she got married herself."

"Oh, yes, that's true; but she isn't like other women. She didn't marry for love."

"And I don't wonder at it," said the girl, dismally. "Love ain't, as father says, all beer and skittles."

"Don't cry, I tell you," said Syd, angrily, as the girl rubbed her eyes, boy-fashion, with the cuffs of her jacket, after a vain attempt to find her handkerchief.

"Well, ain't I wiping away the tears, and got no—here, lend us yours, Syd."

She snatched the boy's handkerchief out of his breast-pocket, and had a comfortable wipe.

"You used to kiss my eyes dry once, when father had been rowing me, Syd."

"Yes, and so I will now if you'll go away, darling."

"But I'm afraid, Syd. What with the letters, and the races and the people, and the book he's making on Jim Crow he's in such a temper that I thought he'd beat me."

"What!" cried Syd, furiously, "strike my wife?"

"He didn't, Syd dear; but I thought he would."

"An old wretch! I'd kill him!"

"No, you wouldn't, Syd dear," said the girl, kitting up to him and rubbing her cheek up against his; "but it's so nice of you to say so, and it makes me feel that you do love your little wifey ever so much."

"Of course I do, soft, beautiful little owlet."

"Then had I better stay?"

"What! Here?"

"Yes; I'm sure Lady Lisle'll like me when she sees me. I'll stop, and we'll go down on our knees together, like they do at the Orphoean, and say: 'Forgive us, mother—I mean, aunt dear—and it'll be all right.' 'Bless you, my children.' You know, Syd."

"Look here, don't put me in a passion again, or I shall be saying nastier things than ever."

"But why, dear? What for? I am your little wife, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know, Titty, but it'll make such a horrid upset. Here, I'm expecting uncle down every moment."

"Well, then, let's both go down on our knees to him."

"But he's just off to the races."

"Well, what of that? It wouldn't take long, and it would be like rehearsing our parts ready to appear before your aunt."

"No, no, no. Now, look here, I've got it. Wife must obey her husband. You swore you would."

"Yes, dear, I did, but—"

"But be blowed! You've got to do it, Tit. Now, then, you hop on your bike."

"But, Syd, there you go again."

"Hold your tongue, or how am I to teach you your part?"

"Very well," said the girl, stifling a sob.

"You told me just now that your father's making up a book on Jim Crow."

The girl used the handkerchief, stuffed it back in her boy-husband's pocket, and nodded rather sulkily.

"What's he doing that for?"

"Because the other—La Sylphide's scratched."

"That she isn't. She's going to run."

"No. Josh Rowle's down with D.T."

"That don't matter. She's going to run and win. You've got to go back and dress for the race. You can't go like that. There'd be too much chaff on the course, and I'm not going to have my wife show up like this on the stands."

"No, dear. I've got a new frock—lovely."

"Well, look sharp and run back, and I'll come over in the dogcart with uncle, and come straight to your dad and give

him a tip that will put him in a good temper.”

“You will, Syd?” cried the girl, joyfully. “And confess all?”

“Every jolly bit. Quick! Kiss! Cut.”

La Sylphide, of the Orphoan, Dudley Square, London, was quick as lightning. She kissed like a wife who loved her juvenile lord, and she “cut”. In other words, devoid of slang, she vaulted out of the window, stagily, as she had been taught by a ballet-master, sprang on to her bicycle, and went off like the wind; but rather too late, for the door opened, and Sir Hilton hurried in, closely followed by Mark Willows, bearing a large brown leather Gladstone bag.

Chapter Nine.

Syd Plays Trumps—and Wins.

As Sir Hilton entered, Syd started from the window, whistling loudly to drown the click, click, click, clack of the swing gate, shuffled his creel round to his back, and seized the fly-rod, wincing though, and bracing himself up as he saw his uncle staring after the flying figure.

“Here, you, sir,” he cried; “what chap’s that?”

“Schoolfellow of mine, uncle.”

“You fibbing young dog, how dare you tell me that lie! Why, it’s a girl, and I’ve seen her before somewhere.”

“A girl, uncle, in knickerbockers?”

“Yes, sir, a girl in knickerbockers. None of your sham innocence with me. Here, I know; it’s La Sylphide.”

“La what, uncle?”

“Mary Ann—old Simpkins’s daughter. That Tilborough barmaid girl. Here, speak up. What does this mean? Never mind; I can’t stop to talk to you now, but—go and slip that bag into the dogcart, Mark, and see that it’s ready.”

“All ready, Sir Hilton. I told Jim to be sharp, and I heard the wheels.”

“That’s right. But you saw, Mark. Wasn’t that Miss Simpkins?”

“Didn’t see her face, Sir Hilton; only her back.”

“Well, never mind now, I’ve no time. But look here, sir, I’ll have this over when I come back, and if I find that you—you shrimp of a boy—have been carrying on a flirtation with that saucy music-hall hussy, I’ll wale your jacket with one of the joints of that fishing-rod. A boy like you! What’s that you say?”

“No, you won’t, uncle.”

“What!” roared Sir Hilton.

“If you touch me I’ll tell aunt of the game you’re carrying on with Lady Tilborough.”

Mark said afterwards to Jane that the guv’nor looked as if you could have knocked him down with a feather.

But the baronet recovered himself.

“What!” he cried. “Lady Tilborough? Because that lady happens to call here when your aunt is out, you dare to—to insinuate—you vile young viper—that—that—”

“Here, tit for tat, uncle. I’m not a baby,” said the boy. “I know. Gammon! Lady T. don’t visit with aunt, and I can see your little game.”

“My little game, sir!” stuttered Sir Hilton.

“Yes; you’re carrying on some game with her ladyship about the races. You told aunt you’d given up all racing.”

“Of course, sir!” cried Sir Hilton.

“Yes, and Dr Jack Granton’s been here to take your instructions this morning; Lady Tilborough rides over to see you on the sly as soon as auntie’s out; and Marky’s had orders to get the dogcart ready and pack your traps. Why, uncle,” shouted the boy as a sudden idea glanced through his sharp young mind, “you’re going to ride!”

“Hush!” shouted the guilty man, seizing the boy and clapping a hand over his mouth. “Silence, you wicked young scoundrel!”

Mark rushed out with the bag to hide the guffaw ready to burst forth.

Then there was a short struggle, and the boy got his mouth free and began to roar with laughter, as he gazed merrily in his uncle’s face.

“Here’s a game!” he cried. “Bowled out, nunky. Look here, I won’t split. I want to go to the races too.”

"How dare you say anything about races, sir!"

"There, chuck it up, uncle. I'm a man of the world too. Give me a lift to the race, and shut your eyes and I'll shut mine."

"You treacherous young viper!"

"Oh, no, I'm not. Don't you tell about Molly Simpkins—ahem!—coming here, and I won't say a word to auntie about Lady T. and the races."

"I'll make no such bond with you, you dog!"

"Oh, yes, you will, uncle; and, look here, I haven't done yet. You're going to give me a fiver."

"Money to bribe you? No!" cried Sir Hilton, firmly.

"No, to put on the winning horse. I want the right tip. What is it?"

"I'll make no such infamous contracts with you, sir," cried Sir Hilton, furiously, "and I'm going out on business—business of vital importance."

"Of course, uncle. I understand," said the boy, mockingly.

"And I'm not going to leave you behind to make mischief between me and your aunt. Come along; I shall take you with me in the dogcart I have waiting."

"All right, uncle. I know."

"And as a prisoner, sir."

"That's your sort, uncle."

"You wicked young wretch! Come along, quick!"

"Quick as quicksilver, uncle," cried the boy, grinning, as, evading his uncle's clutch, he thrust his hand through his elder's arm. "Here, I may as well put the pot on as it seems to be something extra good, so you'll have to make it two fivers, uncle, and two make ten."

Sir Hilton uttered a wicked word totally unfitted for the ears of youth standing in such close relationship to him, and a few minutes later the dogcart—with uncle and nephew in front, and Mark grinning to himself as he sat behind pressing the bag so that it could not drop off—spun out of the yard gate, and off and away by the back lanes for the Tilborough road, now pretty lively with vehicles of all sorts, all bound in the same direction.

Fate plays strange pranks!

Chapter Ten.

How Jane Listened and Told.

Just at the same time Lady Lisle's barouche was getting very close to the swing gates and the carriage drive of the Denes, with her ladyship leaning back.

"Was not that a vehicle of some kind leaving the stable yard, Thomas?" she said to the coachman.

"Yes, my lady."

"Could you see what it was?"

"Not quite, my lady, but I think it was ours, with Black Nelly in the sharps, for I heard one of the clicks she gives when she oversteps with her off hind hoof."

Lady Lisle wondered, and started the next minute when she heard another click.

But this time it was the latch of the swing gate, half-drowned by the carriage wheels on the drive leading to the front door.

Then she fell to wondering again, and alighted to enter the house.

Just as she stepped down, a telegraph-boy came up on his bicycle, smiling, and ready to touch his cap, as he held out to her one of the familiar tinted envelopes, with prophetic notions about Christmas-boxes in the future.

"A message!" she said, changing colour for the moment, as thoughts of the possibilities so often hidden beneath one of those official envelopes crossed her mind.

"Yes, m'lady. Any answer?"

As head of the establishment of the Denes, bought and paid for with the money which formed her dowry, she took the message as a matter of course, and opened it without glancing at the direction, dropped the envelope on to the stone steps, and the pleasant breeze whisked it in among the shrubs.

She had turned pale on receiving the telegram. As she read it she turned pink on finding it was a private communication not intended for her eyes, and then scarlet with indignation and wrath.

"Why, this is dated yesterday," she cried angrily.

"Yes, m'lady. We had such a lot o' racing messages, my Gee couldn't get 'em all through. But we've got a special gal on, and it'll be all right now."

"No answer!" said Lady Lisle, sharply, and she hurried into the hall, and from thence into the breakfast-room, to stand with temples throbbing, reading the message again—

"All found out at last. Do pray tell her ladyship. She won't be very hard upon us if you confess everything. Not sorry, after all, for it must have been known soon. Do, do come over, and face it out with me. Pray, pray come.—La Sylphide."

"Oh-h-h-h!" moaned the poor woman, in a quivering sob; and she stood rigid for a few minutes, crushing the message in her hand, suffering agonies from the awakening for the first time in her life of the passion known as jealousy. It filled her, so to speak, and overmastered everything. There could be no other possibility—no doubt—the demon had her in its grasp, and everything now had some bearing upon the message. All passages in her life during the past few months tended towards proving that she had been basely, cruelly deceived.

Hilton had gradually been growing colder and more indifferent; he had grown moody and thoughtful. It had struck her that he was careless about the Parliamentary business, and had not seemed to be grateful when, in a mingled spirit of generosity and vanity, she, the wife to whom he had sworn fidelity, had placed four thousand pounds to his credit in the bank.

Here was the reason.

"Stop!" she cried mentally. "I will not be rash."

She looked at the telegram again, read it, and then noted that the postmark was Tilborough; and she turned it over to examine the envelope, which she had dropped—she did not recall in her half-crazy state when or where.

But it was enough—the boy had given it to her, and it could be for no one else.

"Oh, Hilton, Hilton!" she groaned. "Has it come to this? A liaison with some low-born, base creature. Kept with my money. This is why you have always been so short; this is why you have always been degrading yourself by asking for more. 'All found out at last. Do pray tell her ladyship. She won't be very hard upon us!' Indeed!" she said, half-aloud, and through her hard-set teeth. "Of course not. Oh-h-h! I could have overlooked a relapse into his old gambling vice, but this—this baseness! The villain—the villain!"

"Who is it?" she muttered, reading again, "La Sylphide. Some French creature, dwelling in that nest of infamy, Tilborough. Why! Oh, great heavens! That wretched racing woman—that widow! She must have been coming here to see him this morning when we passed. Oh, I see it all now. The telegram—dated yesterday—he did not join her according to her request, and she had the daring effrontery to come after him here. That is it. 'All found out at last!' What could be all found out at last? Oh—oh—oh!"

Lady Lisle covered her face with her hands, the coloured paper crackling softly as it touched her temples, making her start as if it had stung her burning skin, and dash it down upon the carpet and stamp upon it in disgust.

But it was a proof of her husband's infidelity, she thought, and she stooped and picked it up, wishing her fingers were the tongs, as she smoothed it out, doubled it, and held it ready for the interview about to take place.

"And so I am not to be very hard I am to condone everything. Well," she added, with a bitter laugh which seemed to tear itself from her throbbing breast, "we shall see."

She paused again, with her poor brain seeming to seethe with wildly jealous thoughts, every one garnished with cruel suspicions, and seeming to tell more and more against the culprit, till everything was in a whirl. But all the time she was suffering from the belief that she was seeing more and more clearly as the cruel moments glided on.

"Yes, I see it all now," she cried passionately; "poor, weak, deluded, loving fool that I have been! Vile, treacherous wretch! Horrible creature! Yes, of course. A woman who is said to have refused offer after offer since her poor husband's death. La Sylphide—of course, as if I had not heard that she bought a portion of Hilton's stud when his horses were sold, and one was this Sylphide, whose name she dares to assume in her clandestine communications to him. Oh, how kind to me Fate has been! To think of it! I might have been a trusting victim for years—hoodwinked—blinded to their infamy. Ah! he shall find out what the weak, loving, confiding woman whom he has deceived can be."

There was a very peculiar smile upon Lady Lisle's handsome face as she crossed to the fireplace, to be met by Khan, the Persian cat, who descended from his ottoman, stretched himself, and made ready to give himself a comforting electric rub against his mistress's silk dress, but to his astonishment was—not kicked, but thrust violently aside by a boot, to stand staring, while her ladyship continued her march.

She did not rush, but went to the bell deliberately.

"Yes, I will be firm and calm," she said, half-aloud, and the smile grew more strained and peculiar. It was such a look as Medea of old might have worn when a certain trouble of classic fame had arisen with a gentleman named Jason; but she dragged at the bell-handle in a way which brought Jane in a hurry to the room.

"I will not seek him in his study," muttered the poor woman, tragically. "I will have him fetched to me here."

"Your ladyship rang?" said Jane, looking at her mistress wonderingly.

"Yes. Go and—no, stop. Where is Master Sydney?"

"I think he has gone fishing, my lady. I saw him with his rod and basket. Oh, yes, my lady, I remember, he asked me to cut him some sandwiches."

Jane's tongue wanted to say a few words about the flask and sherry, but she had a sort of sneaking liking for the saucy young rascal, and she suppressed that.

"To be sure, I remember," said Lady Lisle, quite cold and calm now—upon the surface. "Go and ask Sir Hilton to join me here."

"Sir Hilton, my lady?"

"Yes. Did I not speak plainly?" said her ladyship, cuttingly.

"Yes, my lady, but I thought you had forgotten again. Sir Hilton's gone out."

"Gone out?"

This came like a volcanic burst through the calm envelope.

"Yes, my lady."

The eruption was checked, and the calm aspect closed up, as the bright envelope of the sun eliminates a sun-spot at times.

"Has he—er—gone fishing with Master Sydney?"

"No, my lady; I didn't see, for I was doing your room. But he ordered the dogcart, Mark said, and they've gone together."

"Where did Mark say they were going?"

Lady Lisle was losing her calmness at this check to her plans.

Jane was silent.

"Why do you not speak, girl?" came in sternly tragic tones.

"Please, my lady, I'd rather not."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to get a fellow-servant into trouble."

"Speak out at once, girl. No fellow-servant of yours will meet with injustice while I am mistress of the Denes."

"Of course not, my lady."

"Tell me then, at once, what more Sir Hilton's groom and valet said."

"Well, my lady, if I must I must; but it wasn't Mark's fault."

"Certainly not. Go on."

"Mark said he thought they were going over to the races, but he was not sure."

"H'm!" sighed Lady Lisle, and then to herself: "Tilborough—the telegram—an excuse."

Jane backed towards the door, and had already taken the handle, when, after a fierce internal struggle with the jealous rage within her, Lady Lisle said in a slow, would-be careless way: "Did anyone call while I was out?"

"Yes, my lady; Dr Granton."

"That was while I was away with the pony-carriage, Jane. I returned and saw him."

"Of course; so you did, my lady."

"I meant since."

"Yes, my lady; after you'd gone in the b'rouche. Lady Tilborough came on horseback."

"To call on me?"

"She asked for Sir Hilton, my lady."

"Ha!" ejaculated the jealous woman, through the envelope.

"But she said something, my lady," cried Jane, womanlike, grasping her mistress's feelings and eager to put matters right. "Ah, what did she say?" came like lightning.

"She said you wasn't at home, my lady, for she met you in the road."

"The brazen deception!" said Lady Lisle to herself. "A cloak of cunning to try and hide her sin."

"She did not stop very long, my lady, but went off before I could get to the door. I think she wanted to see Dr Granton."

"Of course," cried her mistress, with the calm envelope now rent to tatters, and the agony of passion carrying all before it. "And what then?"

Jane was silent.

"I said what then? Speak out, girl; I command you!"

"I beg pardon, my lady," stammered the girl, growing fluttered before the fierce gaze and losing her presence of mind completely, and wildly misconstruing the stern question.

For maddened by her feelings, Lady Lisle took three or four quick steps towards the girl and caught her by the wrist. "You are keeping something back," she cried. "How dare you! Answer me at once, and tell me all you know."

Jane burst out sobbing. "Don't, my lady; don't," she cried. "You hurt my arm."

"Then speak out—at once."

"But I don't like to, my lady. I'm very sorry for you; I am, indeed, but—but—but pr'aps it mayn't be so bad as you think, and—and—and—I don't like to make mischief."

The girl's genuine suffering had a peculiar effect upon Lady Lisle.

"Thank you, Jane," she said sadly. "I have always tried to be a good mistress to you."

"You have, my lady, though you've always been a bit 'aughty," cried Jane, through her sobs and tears, "and I'd do anything to help you now you're in such grief."

"Tell me, then, all—all, my good girl."

"Well, my lady, I was in the room over here—the blue room, my lady."

"Yes, yes; go on."

"And I happened to be at the window, when I saw, as I thought, a boy come up quick on his bicycle, slip in through the gate, and come up."

"To the front door. Yes, yes, with another telegraphic message?"

"No, my lady; that's what I thought, but he—he only come to the window here, and got in."

"Got in?"

"Yes, my lady; for I reached out and there was the bicycle leaning up against the creepers and the roses, and I could hear voices, and someone sobbing, and—and—"

Jane's mouth shut with a snap.

"Why do you stop?" said Lady Lisle, excitedly.

"I don't—don't like to tell you any more, my lady. I don't—I don't indeed."

"Jane!"

"Pray don't make me tell, my lady," sobbed the girl; "it will hurt you so."

"I must bear it, Jane," said the poor woman, hoarsely. "I must know the truth."

Jane gave a gulp, as if she was swallowing something, and her voice changed almost to a whisper, as she went on: "I could hear whispering, my lady, and—and—and—Oh! don't make me tell, my lady."

"I must know, Jane," cried the quavering questioner, in a tone which completely mastered all further hesitation.

"There was kissing, my lady, quite plain, and she—"

"*She?*"

"Yes, my lady—began sobbing and crying, and him whispering to her not to make such a noise or she'd be heard, and calling her dear and darling, I think, but it was all so low."

Lady Lisle groaned.

"And it went on ever so long, my lady," continued Jane, whose hesitation was turned now in her excitement to volubility; "and then, as I stood there at the window listening, she jumped out, and I drew my head in; but I peeped out once more and she—"

"*She?*" gasped Lady Lisle, again.

"Oh, yes, my lady, it was a she, of course, for I just caught sight of her face as she turned to hold the gate back when she went through on her bicycle. It was a girl in national costume"—Jane meant rational—"and she was very little and very pretty and one side of her hair had come half down."

"Oh!" groaned Lady Lisle, closing her eyes and reeling towards the nearest chair; but she would not have reached it if the girl with clever alertness had not caught her round the waist and saved her from a fall.

"Oh, don't—don't faint, my lady!—Pray—pray hold up!"

"I shall be better directly, Jane," said the poor woman, hoarsely. "Let me sit still a few moments. Ha!" she sighed. "I am coming round. That giddiness is passing away."

"Let me fetch you your salts, my lady."

"No, Jane; I shall not need them. There, I am growing strong again. Yes, I can go on now."

"Go on, my lady?"

"Yes, girl. Go into the hall and ring the coachman's bell."

"Yes, my lady; but oh! please forgive me—what are you going to do?"

"To do, Jane?"

"Yes, my lady. Don't do anything rash."

"Oh, no; I shall do nothing rash, Jane," said the lady, smiling sadly.

"I mean, don't you go and run away to your father, because perhaps it ain't so bad as we think."

"Not so bad as we think, Jane?" said Lady Lisle, drearily.

"No, my lady. You see, it might all be a mistake."

"Yes, Jane," said her mistress, looking desolately in the girl's eyes, while a piteous smile came upon her lips; "as you say, it might all be a mistake. But go now, and do as I bid you."

"Ye-e-es, my lady."

"Ring, and when the coachman comes tell him to bring the carriage round as quickly as he can."

"But, oh, my lady," sobbed Jane, and she caught and kissed her mistress's hands one after the other, "don't, pray don't! You are going to run away and leave him, and my mother said a lady ought never to do that unless he's been very, very bad."

"I am not going away from my home, Jane," said Lady Lisle, growing firmer now. "Tell Thomas I want him to drive me over to Tilborough at once."

"To the races, my lady?"

"No," was the reply, firmly given; and then, as the girl glided out of the door, rubbing her eyes the while, the stricken woman repeated the word aloud: "No," and added thoughtfully: "I have been deceived about Lady Tilborough. Now to trace out my husband and that other wretch!"

Chapter Eleven.

Busy Times at Tilborough.

The Tilborough Arms had, from its position in the famous old racing town, always been a house to be desired by licenced victuallers, who mostly gain their living by supplying a very small amount of victuals, and drink out of all proportion, to guests; but in the hands of Sam—probably christened Samuel, but the complete name had long died out—Sam Simpkins, the inn had become an hotel of goodly proportions, where visitors could be provided with comfortable bedrooms off the gallery and snug breakfasts and dinners in suitable places, always supposing that they were on "the Turf." For Sam Simpkins had prospered, not only with the old inn, but in other ways. He did a bit of farming, bred horses in the meadows where the thick, succulent waterside grasses grew, and always had a decent bit of blood on hand for sale, or to run in some one or another of the small races.

Sam was known, too, as a clever trainer, who had for a long time been in the service of that well-known sportsman, Sir Hilton Lisle. He had transferred his services when Sir Hilton went from the horses to the dogs, and did a good deal of training business for Lady Tilborough, till there was a bit of a tiff—something about money matters, it was said—when her ladyship and he parted company, but remained good friends. Then, to use his own expression, he went on his own hook, where he wriggled a great deal between the crooked and the square. But still he prospered, and grew what his friends called a thoroughly warm party.

The fact was that Sam was a regular gatherer-up of unconsidered trifles, not above taking a great deal of pains to make a pound, and he made it, too, wherever there was no chance of making a hundred or more.

He never lost a chance, though he lost his wife when his daughter was at a dangerous age. And when a well-known sporting member of the Orphoan Music-Hall—I beg its pardon, Temple of Music and the Arts—was staying at Tilborough so as to be present at the races, something was settled one evening over pipes and several glasses of brandy and water.

"Take my word for it, Sammy, old man—I ought to know—there's money in her, and if you'll let her come up to me and the missus we'll put her through. She's a little beauty."

Miss Mary Ann Simpkins, only lately from a finishing school where young ladies were duly taught all accomplishments, was, in her finished state, newly at home, where she was promoted to attending upon, and attracting, the better-class customers in the old-fashioned bar-parlour, where she looked like a rose among the lemons, heard of the old professional friend's proposal, declared that it was just what she would like, and soon after went to the professional and his missus.

There she studied, as it was termed; in other words, she went under professors of singing, dancing and dramatic action, who completely altered her style in a few months, so that she was soon able to make her *début* at the Orphoan, where, to use the theatrical term, she immediately "caught on," and became a popular star, thoroughly proving that the P.F. was right as to there being money in her.

In fact, "all London," of a class, flocked to see her and hear her, and she made so much money for the place of entertainment that its proprietary determined to rebuild, add, and decorate as richly as possible while "La Sylphide," as she was called in the bills, was "resting"; in other words, playing the little hostess of the Tilborough Arms, attracting customers and bringing more money into her father's till. People of all degrees were attracted like moths to flutter round the brilliant little star. All made love, and the most unlikely of all who seized the opportunity of being served by the clever little maiden was believed in and won.

On that busy special day, when the town was crowded and the Tilborough Arms was at its busiest, Sam Simpkins, a heavy, red-faced, bullet-headed, burly, rather brutal-looking personage, a cross between a butcher and prize-fighter, with a rustic, shrewd, farmer-like look thrown in, sat in one of the seats in his fox head, brush, and sporting-print adorned hall, cross-legged so as to make a desk of his right knee, upon which he held a big betting-book, wherein, after a good deal of chewing of the end of a lead-pencil, he kept on making entries, giving some order between the efforts of writing by shouting into the bar-parlour, the kitchen, or through a speaking-tube connected with extensive stables.

It was an attractive-looking, old-fashioned place, that great hall, with its flight of stairs leading up into a gallery showing many chamber-doors, its glazed-in bar-parlour, and its open windows looking out on to the common and racecourse, quite alive on that bright summer's morning with all the tag-rag and bob-tail of a race day, as well as with the many lovers of the race from town and country who had come to enjoy the sport.

"Here, 'Lizabeth," shouted the landlord, reaching back so as to send his hoarse voice well into the bar-parlour, "ain't yer young missus come back yet?"

"Yes, sir, and gone up to dress," came back.

"Humph! Time she had," growled the man, wetting the lead of his pencil. "I dunno what she wanted to go out biking for on a morning like this. I'd ha' biked her, if I'd seen her going."

There was an interval of writing. Then more grumbling—

"Might have attended to the business a bit as she is at home, and me up to my eyes in work. Humph! That's right."

Another entry was made.

"Blest if I can recklect so well as I used. Blow bikes! Why, they'll be wanting to run races with 'em next, and—Mornin', doctor; ain't seen yer for months."

"Morning, Sam. No; I've been away with my regiment. Here, someone, S. and B."

This to the attendants in the bar, where he stopped for a few minutes discussing the cooling drink, while behind the landlord's back he made a few quick entries in his book with a metallic pencil.

"Dear old Hilt," he said to himself. "I was just in time. Got on for him, so that he ought to be pretty warm by to-night. How's the little star, Sam?" he cried, turning back.

"Oh, she's all right, sir, thank ye."

"You ought to be proud of her. She has taken all London by storm."

"So I hear, sir. I am proud on her, for she's as good as she is high."

"That I'm sure she is, Sam; bright, clever, witty, and not a bit of harm in her, I'll swear."

"Right you are, sir. Sleep here to-night, sir?"

"Of course. I wired down."

"I didn't know, sir. Then, of course, it's booked. Dine too, sir?"

"Can't say, Sam. I hope I shall be engaged. If I'm not I shall throw myself on Miss Simpkins's mercy."

"You'll be all right, sir. I've laid in plenty o' grub."

The doctor nodded, and as the landlord went on studying his betting-book he unstrapped and took out his race-glass, wiped the lenses thoughtfully, took a look through, after careful focussing, and put it back in the case.

"Bless her!" he said to himself. "She's the dearest little witch that ever breathed. She ought to have been here by now. They haven't seen her at the paddock, and I can't get a peep at La Sylphide. I believe they haven't brought her up yet. Well, no wonder, considering her temper. Josh Rowle knows what he's about."

He took out his glass again, focussed it, and had a good look through it at the common, alive with horse, foot and artillery, in the shape of carriages laden with ammunition, loaded bottles ready to go off included.

“Does she do it to lead me on?” thought the doctor. “I wish I wasn’t such a coward. But, there, if the Sylph wins I shall feel independent, and can go at her without thinking I’m a money-hunter. Then, if she ask me to dinner, which I think she will, the wine will be in and the wit may be out, but I’ll pop as well as her champagne, and know the worst. By Jove!”

He closed his glass suddenly, for, brightly and fashionably dressed, Lady Tilborough passed close to the window and stopped his view of the common. The next minute she was entering the hall.

Chapter Twelve.

The Floating Cloud.

“Oh, there you are, Simpkins! You must make room for my carriage. Order them to give my coachman a separate stable. Lock up. Ah, Dr Granton, I thought you’d come and see my mare win.”

“I came down on purpose to see you, Lady Tilborough,” was the reply, given with a warm pressure of the hand. “But, of course, I am longing to see your mare carry all before her.”

“Thanks, doctor, thanks,” said the lady, with a meaning smile which made the doctor thrill. “Yes, I mean to win. There are some nice people staying at the Court. I’ll introduce you on the stand, if I have time. But you’ll come over afterwards and dine?”

“Oh, thank you, yes,” cried the doctor, flushing with pleasure. “So good of you. Can I do anything? Let me see that your horses are properly put up.”

“Oh, no, no, no, the coachman will see to that, I could not think of troubling you.”

“Trouble?” said the doctor, with what was intended for an intense gaze full of meaning. “Don’t talk of trouble, Lady Tilborough, when you know.”

“Yes, I know that I am full of anxiety about my mare, and in no humour for listening to nonsense, so hold your tongue. Oh, here’s that dreadful man again.”

For the visitor to the Denes of that morning, minus his little white mongrel, but flourishing his pack of race-cards, suddenly appeared at the window with: “Success to your ladyship, and may yer win every race! You’ll buy a few c’rect cards of Dandy Dinny, the only original purveyor of—”

“Get out, you scoundrel!” cried the doctor, fiercely.

“Cert’ny, my noble doctor; but you’ll buy a c’rect card of—”

He did not finish, for the doctor threw a coin quickly out of the window, and the wretched-looking lout rushed to field it, before he was outpaced.

“Poor wretch!” said Lady Tilborough. “But that was very nice of you. But there, don’t follow me—now.”

She walked off quickly, and the doctor drew a quick breath.

“Bless her! She never spoke to me like that before.”

He turned, full of elation, to find the landlord, with his pencil between his lips, watching him keenly.

“I shan’t dine here, Simpkins,” he said.

“Very good, sir. So I heered.”

“Splendid day for the race.”

“Yes, sir, and the ground’s lovely. Made good book, sir?”

“Oh, yes, capital.”

“Glad to see her ladyship bears it so well.”

“Bears it? Oh, she never gives way to excitement. She’d be cool, even if she felt she would lose.”

“Oh, yes, sir; I know well enough what spirit she has.”

“Rather a big field, though, Sam.”

“Yes, sir; but there’s only one as can stay.”

“Exactly. La Sylphide, of course. By George! I’ll take the liberty of making her namesake a present.”

“Very good of you, sir, but she’s out of it.”

“What?”

"Jim Crow's the horse, sir. First favourite now."

"Bah!" cried the doctor.

"What! Ain't you heard, sir?"

"Heard! Heard what?"

"Lady Tilborough's mare won't run."

"You don't mean it?" cried the doctor, turning pale.

"Fact, sir. I never plays tricks with gents I knows. Honesty's the best policy, sir; and you know as you can trust Sam Simpkins."

"But—but—Good heavens! What does it mean? Lady Tilborough never said a word. Then that's why I couldn't see any sign of her people down by the paddock."

"That's it, sir."

"But why? What's the reason?"

"No jock, sir. Ladyship's man's down—acciden', killed, or ill, or some'at. Anyhow, he can't ride the mare, and as you well know, nobody else can."

"Oh!" groaned the doctor.

"Why, you hain't put anything on her, have you, sir?"

"I have, Sam, heavily, and for a friend as well."

"Then you're in the wrong box, sir, and no mistake. That comes o' gents going on their own hook instead o' taking a honest agent's advice."

"Give me yours now, then, Sam, and I shall be for ever grateful."

"Anything to oblige an old patron, sir.—All right, I'm a-coming," cried the trainer, in answer to a call from one of the servants, who came out of a side door. "What is it?"

"Wanted by one of the men from the stables."

"All right. Here, you look out and hedge all you can, sir. Jim Crow's your game."

"The dark horse," groaned the doctor, wildly; "he must be black. Ah, poor darling, there she is!"

For Lady Tilborough came back, in her quick, eager way. "Ah, doctor, still here?" she cried. "Where's that scoundrel Simpkins? Hallo! What's the matter? Bad news?"

"Yes, horrible, I didn't know. It's ruin for me; but I don't care; I'm in agony about you and the losses it means to you."

"What!" cried the lady, turning pale. "Is there another crux?"

"Yes," cried the doctor, catching her hands, and the genuine tears stood in his eyes.

"Don't shilly-shally, man," she cried angrily. "Out with it, and get it over."

"La Sylphide!"

"What about her? Some accident?"

"Yes. I'd have given anything not to be the bearer of such hideous news."

"Let me have it at once, and I'll bear it like a woman, doctor. I'm not one of your hysterical sort."

"No; the bravest lady I ever met."

"Then let me have it. What has the mare done?"

"Thrown your jockey or something. He's half-killed, I believe."

"Oh, bosh! Stale news. You mean Josh Rowle?"

"Yes. How can you bear it like that?"

"Bear it?" cried the lady. "You should have seen me a couple of hours ago. Mad, doctor, mad."

"While now—"

"Merry as a lark, man; I've got another rider."

"You have? Oh, thank goodness! Thank goodness! Don't take any notice of me, Lady Tilborough. I was quite knocked over."

"On account of my losing?"

"Well, yes. I was heavily on too, for myself and poor Hilt Lisle."

"Oh, you did the business for him then? I knew he was in to the tune of four thou'."

"But your man, Lady Tilborough? Can you trust him to ride the mare?"

"Trust him! Why, it's Hilt himself."

"What! Hilt going to ride the mare?"

"Yes, my dear boy; and he'll save the race."

"Lady Tilborough, you've made me a happy man," cried the doctor.

"Have I?" she said drily, and with a merry look in her eye. "Well, be happy, for I don't think you'll lose, Granton," she said softly. "I can read men pretty well. Long experience. That was real. You were cut up at the thought of my losing."

"Cut up?" he cried earnestly and naturally. "It made me forget poor Hilt and myself."

"Thank you, dear boy," she said quietly. "I never thought you so true a friend before."

She glanced at her watch.

"Time's on the wing," she said. "Hilt Lisle ought to be here by now; he was to meet me at the hotel, but I must have a look at the mare."

"May I go with you?"

"If you wish to," was the reply, and joy began a triumphant dance in the young doctor's brain, for there was a something in the way in which those words were uttered. None of the light badinage, laughter and repartee, for Lady Tilborough seemed to have suddenly turned thoughtful and subdued, as she passed out, unconscious of the fact that the trainer had entered the hall and was watching her keenly.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, following up Granton.

"Oh, bother! Well, what is it?"

"Sorry to see her ladyship so down in the mouth now. You should put her up to a bit of hedging on Jim Crow."

Granton gave him a peculiar look, full of perfect content, and laughed aloud.

"Moonshine!" he cried, and dashed after the sporting countess.

Chapter Thirteen.

"My Daughter and my Son-in-Law."

"Moonshine!" said the trainer, with a puzzled look after the departing doctor. "Laughing like an idiot. Rum how it takes different people. Here's my stepping lady looking as if she meant to take pyson in her five o'clock tea, the doctor regularly off his chump, and I dessay someone'll go home by train to-night, load a revolver, and—click! All over. Well, they shouldn't meddle with what they don't understand. Reg'lar gambling, and they deserve all they get. Hullo! You here again?"

This to the pink-coated tout, who came smiling and cringing up to the door.

"Brought yer a tip. Something good, Mr Simpkins, sir."

"Yah! Rubbish! My book's chock."

"But it's the tippiest tip, sir, as ever was," whispered the man from behind his hand. "Worth a Jew's eye."

"I'm fly, Dinny," said the trainer, with a wink. "Tell it to some one else. I don't trade to-day."

"You'll repent it, Mr Sam, sir," whispered the man, earnestly, and with many nods and jerks of the head, as he kept looking about furtively to see that they were not overheard.

"Of course. All right," said the trainer, contemptuously. "Down on your luck, eh, Dinny?"

"Terrible, sir."

"Want a drink?"

The man smiled, and drew the back of a dirty hand across his cracked and fevered lips.

"Go round to the tap and say I sent you. Here, twist those cards round."

The man obeyed promptly, and after placing the point of his black lead-pencil to his lips the trainer scrawled laboriously: "One drink.—S.S."

"Used to be private bar—once," muttered the man, with an eager, thirsty look in his bleared and bloodshot eyes.

"Thank ye, Mr Sam, sir, and good luck to yer. My word, what a beauty she have growed, sir! Lady T.'s nothing to her."

"Right you are, Dinny," said the trainer, smiling proudly, as his child came tripping down the staircase as light, flowery, and iridescent in colours as a clever, fashionable modiste and milliner could make her, regardless of expense, after being ordered to produce something "spiff" for the races. "She'll take the shine out of some of 'em."

"Shine, sir!" cried the tout, in his genuine admiration of the pretty, rosy-faced, rustic little beauty. "Why, she'll put 'em out like a silver 'stinguisher. Thank ye, Mr Sam, sir," he continued, as in his satisfaction at the praise and the pleasure felt over an anticipated grand coup, the trainer's heart opened, and he slipped a florin into the tout's hand. "You wouldn't buy my tip, sir, but I'll give it to the little gal I've knowed since she was as high as one of your quart pots. Good luck to you, my beauty! You lay gloves or guineas on your pretty namesake—La Sylphide's the winner. You're clippers, both on you, that you are. Tlat!"

The last was a smack of the lips as the tout went from the door on his way to the tap, and in anticipation of the draught that would cool his parching throat.

"Nasty old man!" cried the little bouquet of a body, exhaling scent all round, as she tripped to the trainer's side, raised herself on tiptoe, with her delicate, rose-coloured gloves on his shoulders, and gave him a couple of rapid kisses. "There, dad, shall I do?"

"Oh, yes, you'll do," said the trainer, grimly; "but don't you get putting anything on La Sylphide."

"Not going to, daddy," said the girl, merrily, and making three or four breakdown steps she brought a little foot down on the floor with a light pat. "I've put all on her that she's going to win to-day. Now, say I look fit as a fairy."

"Out and out. There'll be nothing to-day as can touch yer. But—"

"Ah, you mustn't—you shan't!" cried the charming little thing, dashing at her father as he uttered that *but* in a growl. "We've had it out together, and made it up, and kissed, and you shan't scold me any more."

"I dunno 'bout that," said the trainer, walking round his daughter admiringly, while she mockingly and mincingly drew herself up to be inspected, looking as if she were on a London stage, the focus of every eye in an applauding house.

"Ah, it's all very well for you to come kitting round me, my gal, but it warn't square, after what I've done, for you to go courting and marrying on the sly."

"But I had hundreds of offers and heaps of presents from all over London, dad, and I wouldn't take one of them—the offers, I mean."

"Of course; but you took the presents—"

The girl nodded and winked merrily.

"You didn't send them back?"

"Likely!" said the girl. "But lots of 'em were stupid bunches of flowers, bouquets—buckets—and they were all squirmy next day."

"But to go and get married to a little bit of a boy like that!"

"But I was obliged to marry somebody, daddy," cried the girl, petulantly. "And you saw how he used to admire me and be always coming."

"Of course, my gal, but I didn't think it meant any more than lots more did."

"But we just matched so nicely, daddy."

"Humph!" in a regular bearish grunt.

"And we did love one another so."

"Yah! Sweetstuff! Well, it's done, and it can't be undone."

"No, dad. I don't want it to be, and you won't when you get used to Syd. Now you're going to be a good loving old boy and say no more about it."

"I dunno so much about that."

"You'd better, dad."

"Oh, had I?"

"Yes; if you don't kiss me again and be friends I'll cry, and spoil everything I've got on, and won't go to the races."

"You'd better!"

"I will," cried the girl, with her eyes flashing, and her little cupid-bow-like mouth compressed in a look of determination. "No, I won't. I'll go into hysterics, and scream the house down. I'll make such a scene!"

"You be quiet, you saucy hussy. There, it's the races, and I've got a lot of business to see to. But, look here, your place is along with your husband."

"Well, that's where I'm going to be," said the girl, with a merry look. "I went over on my bike this morning and saw him."

"Oh, that's where you were off to?"

"Yes, and Syd's promised to be a good boy, and come over to see you to-day and have it out."

"Oh, is he? Well, that's right, but I don't want him to-day. I'm too busy. Look ye here, though, my gal, I mean to see that you have your rights. You just wait till I get my young gentleman under my thumb. I'll give him the thumbscrew, and —"

"Here he is!" cried the girl, joyfully; and with a frisk like a lamb in a May-field she danced to the boy, who hurried in breathlessly. "Oh, Syd, Syd, Syd!"

The beauty of the dress was forgotten, as a pair of prettily plump arms were thrown round the young husband's neck, while, ignoring the big, ugly, scowling parent, the new arrival did his part in a very loving hug and an interchange of very warm, honey-moony kisses.

The recipients were brought to their senses by a growl. "Well, that's a pretty performance in public, young people."

"Public!" cried the girl. "Pooh! Only you, daddy, and you don't count."

"Public-house," said Syd. "How d'ye do, Mr Simpkins?"

"Never you mind how I do, nor how I don't, young gentleman. You and me's got to have a few words of a sort."

"All right, Mr Simpkins," cried Syd, cheerfully, as he drew back to the full extent of his and his young wife's joined hands to inspect her in front, and, with the girl's aid, behind. "Lovely!" he whispered, and the girl flushed with delight, as she kept on tripping, posturing, and dancing, as if trying to draw her husband on into a pas de deux, or a pas de fascination in a ballet, he being apparently quite willing to join in and finish off with another embrace.

"Drop it, Molly," cried the old man. "Now, sir, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!" cried Syd, without turning his head; but he did the next moment. "I say, Sam, don't she look lovely?"

"Sam, eh? Well, you're a cool 'un, 'pon my soul!"

"Oh, daddy, don't!" cried the girl, pettishly.

"But I shall. Here, he marries you without coming to me first with 'by your leave' or 'with your leave.'"

"But hasn't he come now, daddy? You always used to say you wished you'd got a boy, and now you've got one—a beauty. Ain't you, Syd?"

"Stunner."

"Will you hold your tongue, Molly! You've got a worse clack than your mother had."

"Then do come and do the proper. You kneel down, Syd, and I'll lean on your shoulder. I ain't going to spoil my dress for nobody, not even a cross old dad. That's right. Down on your knees, Syd."

"Shan't. I want to put my arm round you."

"Very well; that'll do. Now then, come on, daddy, and say: 'Bless you, my children!' Curtain."

"What? What d'yer mean by 'curtain?' You hold your tongue, miss. Now, Mr Sydney Smithers. Smithers! There's a name for a respectable girl to want to take!"

"Well, hang it!" cried the boy, "it's better than Simpkins."

"Not it," growled the owner of the latter; but he scratched his head, as if in doubt. "Be quiet, Molly. Now, Mr Smithers, I mean my gal to have her rights."

"Yes, Mr Simpkins."

"Get it over, Syd."

"Yes, sir; I quite agree with you."

"That's right, then, so far; but what I say is that you ought to have come straight to me, as her father, and 'Mr Simpkins,' says you, 'I've took a great fancy to your filly'—daughter, I mean—and I'm going to make proposals for her 'and,' you says."

"Yes, Mr Simpkins; I'm very much attached to your daughter and I've married her."

"No, you didn't, young gentleman," cried the old man, irascibly. "That's just what you ought to have done."

"Yes, exactly, Mr Simpkins; but, I say, what are you doing to-day about the big race?"

"Never you mind about no big race, young fellow. I want to know what you're going to do about the human race. You've married my gal candlestine, as they call it, and I want to know about settlements. You don't expect I'm going to keep you and your wife and family?"

"Well, he won't let me," said Syd, in response to a whisper.

"Of course he won't," said the trainer. "Not likely. You're a gentleman, I suppose. You won't want to do nothing for your living."

"Oh, I don't know," said Syd.

"Well, that means you will. That sounds better. But you won't want to come and live here and help serve behind my bar?"

"No, I'm blest if I do!"

"Oh, dad, drop it," cried the girl.

"No, nor I shan't drop it, miss, till I've seen about your rights. Suppose you mean him to come to London and begin figgering on the stage along with you?"

"I don't, dad."

"Well, I'm glad you've got so much sense in your head, my gal, for, you mark my words, he's the wrong sort. Too short and fat."

"Dad!"

"Well, so he is, my gal. I dunno what you sees in him."

"Oh!" ejaculated the girl, and she turned her back, snatched Syd's tie undone, and began to retie it, as she whispered; "Oh, do finish it all, Syd. I want to get good places on the stand."

"Perhaps," continued the trainer, "I might make you of some use among the 'osses after a bit. But you'd have to train, and get rid of a stone of that fat."

"Fat!" cried Syd, indignantly.

"Oh, dad, what a shame!" cried the young wife, with tears in her eyes. "Never mind what he says, Syd. You're not fat."

"Yes, he is, miss; too fat for a light-weight. But I don't want him to be always quarrelling with. Put it the other way, then. What's your people going to do for you?"

"Don't know," said the boy, taking out his cigarette-case.

"No, o' course you don't; that's what I'm a-saying. You don't. But I do. That's where it is. There, don't get smoking them nasty, rubbishing things in my 'all and making it not fit for a gent as knows what's what to come in. Smoke one of them."

The trainer drew a handful of big dark cigars with gold bands from his breast-pocket, and held them out for the lad to take one, which he did readily.

"Thank ye. Partagas, sir?"

"Oh, you do know something, then?" growled the trainer, biting off the end and proceeding to strike a match, which he held ready, so that he and his son-in-law could join ends, and draw in a friendly way, much to the satisfaction of the young lady, who smiled to herself and said—

"They're coming round."

"Suppose we shake hands now, Mr Simpkins, and say done," cried Syd, blowing a big cloud in his father-in-law's face.

"Don't you be in a hurry, young fellow. As I was a-saying, about your people. Do you think my lady, your aunt, will find you in money to keep house for a trainer's daughter?"

"N-n-no," said Syd, sadly.

"No, it is, young man. If you'd wanted to be secketary to a society for the propergation o' something or another, she'd be all there with a big subscription; but she won't give yer tuppence now."

"No, but uncle will," cried Syd, eagerly. "He's the right sort."

"Him? Tchah! Why, my lady won't let him have enough to pay his own tailor's bills. I know all about that. What about the old man?"

“Grandfather?”

“Yes. S’pose you took Molly down promiscus like, and showed him her paces; he might take a fancy to her, eh?”

“Yes,” cried Molly. “Capital, father! Syd will take me down to see his grandfather. Won’t you, Syd?”

“Take you anywhere, darling; only not to-day.”

“Who said to-day, little stupid? There, now, it’s all right, ain’t it, dad?”

“Don’t you be in such a flurry, my gal; ’tain’t whipping and spurring like mad as gets you first past the post. Steady does it. Now, young gentleman, look here.”

“Oh, dear me, dad, how you do like to talk!” cried the girl, pettishly.

“Do you hear me, sir? Leave the girl alone. You don’t want everyone to know you’re just married—hugging her that how.”

“Yes, I do, all the world and everybody,” cried Syd. “We’re married, but we’re awfully in love with each other still—aren’t we, darling?”

“Awfully, Syd,” cried Molly, hanging to him.

“Well, I s’pose that’s all right,” grumbled the trainer, “and of course what’s done, as I said afore, can’t be undone. But, look here; I mean my gal to have her rights.”

“Of course, sir.”

“And I understand you mean to do the proper thing by her?”

“Yes, dad. To be sure he does, and you’re going to be ever so proud of Syd—proud as I am.”

“Well, I don’t quite know that, but I’ve got something else to think about now, and so, after what you’ve said square and ’andsome, young gen’leman, here’s my ’art and here’s my ’and.”

The trainer illustrated his last words by putting his left hand upon his chest, too low down to satisfy an anatomist, and holding out his right.

“There,” he continued, after the business of shaking hands had been gone through, “all this talking has made me husky, so we’ll have a glass of fizz, son-in-law, in honour of the occasion, just to wash it down.”

“No, no, no, no!” cried the girl. “Syd and I want to get out on the common to see all the races.”

“Bah! You two won’t be thinking about the races, I know. Look here, though, son-in-law. Some day, I’ll give you the right tip;” and then, in a whisper from behind his hand, “Jim Crow—the dark horse.”

“What for?”

“What for?” cried the trainer, contemptuously. “Why, the cup.”

“Nonsense?”

“That’s right, boy.”

“No, no,” cried Syd, giving his young wife’s arm a hug. “La Sylphide.”

“Out of it. Jock in a straight weskit.”

“Out of it be hanged, sir! She runs to win, with Uncle Hilton up.”

“Come along, Syd,” cried Molly, and the pair ran out like a couple of schoolchildren, nearly cannoning against Mark Willows, who was coming up with Sir Hilton’s bag and overcoat, and making him turn to look after them, while Sam Simpkins stood gasping like a great, red-faced carp which had leaped out of the edge of a pond and landed in an element not suited to its nature.

Chapter Fourteen.

The Trainer’s Tips.

“Nonsense!” gasped the trainer, as soon as he could get his breath after the staggerer he had received. “The boy’s in love—mad—don’t know what he’s a-saying of.”

“Well, I’m blest!” said Mark, turning round with a grin on his face. “He’s begun to crow early. Day, Mr Simpkins. I say —”

Mark did not say anything, but winked and jerked his thumb over his right shoulder in the direction the young couple had taken.

“What do you want?” growled the trainer, surlily.

"Room for the gov'nor—Sir Hilton Lisle, Bart—to dress for the race."

"Then it is true," said the trainer to himself, as to hide his face from the groom he turned his back, walked to a bell-handle, and pulled it violently before returning.

"Got a lot on our mare, eh, Mr Simpkins?"

"No!" growled the trainer. "I heered she was not going to run."

"Knowing ones ain't always right, sir."

At that moment the chambermaid appeared.

"Room for Sir Hilton Lisle," cried the trainer, hoarsely. "Put him in number one. Well, this is a facer!" he muttered, as he turned away. "I must have a drop for this," and he hurried into the bar.

"Hullo, my dear," cried Mark. "My word, what a cap! I say, what's the matter with the boss?"

"He's got a sore head," said the chambermaid, sharply. "I never see such a bear."

"He's been backing the wrong horse, I know," said Mark.

"Then you don't know nothing about it, Mr Clever. Here, I've got one for you."

The speaker led the way up the stairs into the open gallery, to pause at the top by the door of the room her master had named, Mark following with the bag and overcoat.

"Well, let's have it," said Mark.

"Why, I should ha' thought you must ha' known."

"Known what—as my gov'nor's going on the Turf again?"

"Bother the Turf! I'm sick of the name. No; master's found out about Miss Molly."

"Eh? What about her?"

"Married! How do you like that?"

"Never tried yet, my dear. But who to?"

"Who to, indeed! A chit of a boy."

"Wha-a-at!" cried Mark, and a light broke upon him as he recalled what he had just seen. "Not our Master Syd?"

"Right first time."

"Oh, here's a game," began Mark. "Quick, here's master, and I haven't put out his duds."

The groom dashed through the door the girl threw open just as Sir Hilton, who had been to the paddock, came up to the porch ready to meet the trainer, who was coming from the bar wiping his lips with the back of his hand.

"It's all up!" he groaned to himself.

"Ah, Sam Simpkins, how are you? Surprised to see me here again, eh?"

"Sur-prised ain't the word for it, Sir Hilton," cried the trainer, making an effort to look landlordly, and speaking in boisterous tones. "Staggered, Sir Hilton. That's nearer the mark; but come in, Sir Hilton. Puts me in mind o' the good old days. My word! Who'd ha' thought it? I jest heered of it. And you're going to ride, Sir Hilton?"

"I am, Sam."

"Your old mare, Sir Hilton?"

"No," said Sir Hilton, frowning. "My old friend Lady Tilborough's mare, in consequence of—"

"Yes, I heered, Sir Hilton; her jockey, Josh Rowle's been on the drink again. Dear, dear! I keep a house, but what I say to people who come to my bar or to the tap is—"

"Yes—yes, I know. My man here?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton. Up in your old room, number one. But, ahem! Beg pardon, Sir Hilton, you can trust me," said the trainer, dropping his voice. "Do you, eh—understand me, Sir Hilton—man who's seen a deal o' business for you—you—you don't ride to win?"

"Why, you—"

"Ah, Hilt, dear boy!" cried Lady Tilborough, hurrying in. "I saw you come up to the porch, but couldn't overtake you. Man of your word."

"I hope so," said Sir Hilton, turning to give the old trainer a withering look.

"Oh, murder!" muttered the man, wiping his brow, now all covered with a heavy dew. "What shall I do? It's a smasher."

"Seen our beauty?" said Lady Tilborough.

"Yes; I've been to look. She's in splendid form."

"Thank you, old man; that does me good."

"A bit too fine, though," continued Sir Hilton, who had been watching the trainer narrowly, and seeing his state and guessing the cause, felt a little compassionate. "What do you say, Sam?"

"Well, Sir Hilton, if you ask me, I say I haven't had her training lately, but I'll give you, an old patron, my honest opinion—not a bit, sir—and if you'll take my advice you'll play a quiet game with the mare. That's the winning card."

"Nonsense!" cried Sir Hilton, contemptuously.

"Just listen to him, my lady. Here has he been out of the game all this time, while I've been watching La Sylphide's work at every race. I asks you, my lady, is there anyone as knows the mare's action, temper and staying powers better than me?"

"He's right there, Hilt," said Lady Tilborough.

"To some extent, yes," said the gentleman addressed.

"Thank ye, Sir Hilton. Then look here; nobody would like to see you come first past the post more than your old trainer."

"Would you, Sam?" said Sir Hilton, with a queer look at the speaker.

"All right, Sir Hilton. I understand yer alloosion. I may've got a bit on Jim Crow, consequent upon the misfortune to Josh Rowle; but," he continued, closing one eye meaningly, "I can put that right easy. You win the race, Sir Hilton, and I'll make a pot of money by it. I know the ropes."

"You do, Sam," said the baronet, laughing.

"And I'm glad of the charnsh to do a good turn to a couple o' noble patrons who have put many a hundred into my pocket. Look here, Sir Hilton, there's plenty of time yet. I am at your service. Just you take me to the mare, and let me have a few minutes with her."

"The mare is not my property, Sam," said Sir Hilton, laughing.

"Of course not, Sir Hilton. I forgot. What do you say, my lady? That there Jim Crow's a good horse, and La Sylphide hasn't the wind she had."

"Indeed!" said Lady Tilborough.

"It's a fact, my lady. What she wants is holding in and a waiting game, *and* just something as—you know, Sir Hilton—for the roosh at the last, as'll take her in a couple o' lengths ahead."

"Yes, I understand," said Sir Hilton, drily.

"You hear, my lady? I want you to win."

"Thank you, Simpkins," said Lady Tilborough, gravely. "I am greatly obliged."

"And I'm to just take the mare in hand for you," said the man, who, in his excitement, could not restrain his eagerness.

"Well, no, thank you, Simpkins," said the lady, quietly. "You were always a very good trainer, and I made a good deal of money in the past, but I have a very trustworthy man now, and he might object to your interference at the eleventh hour."

"Oh, I could soon make it right with him, my lady," said the trainer, quickly.

"No doubt, Sam Simpkins," said the lady, meaningly, "but I should be sorry to have my man's morals assailed."

"I don't understand you, my lady."

"Then I'll speak more plainly, Simpkins. I am not disposed to lay my man open to temptation."

"What! Does your ladyship mean to insinuate that I'd do anything that warn't quite square?"

"I insinuate nothing, Sam Simpkins. I only go so far as to say that you are not my servant now, and that I would not trust you in the least."

"Hark at that now!" cried the trainer, turning up his eyes to the sporting trophies on the walls, and unconsciously letting them rest on the grinning mask of an old fox. Then "Ain't you got a word to say for me, Sir Hilton? I has my faults, I know, but no man living would say I couldn't be trusted. You allus found me right, Sir Hilton."

"Always, Sam, when it suited your book."

"Well, I am!" exclaimed the trainer.

"Yes, Sam, an awful old scamp," said Lady Tilborough, laughing. "Thank you, my man. You've got your favourite, I've got mine, and the man to ride her straight and square as an English gentleman should ride an English horse."

"All right, Sir Hilton. All right, my lady. Sorry I tried to give advice gratis for nothing; only mind this, both of you, if La Sylphide breaks down or Sir Hilton here loses his nerve through being out of training, don't you blame me."

"Don't be alarmed, Simpkins," said Lady Tilborough, in a tone which made the trainer draw back a step or two. "Here, Hilton."

"Yes."

"A horrible thought. What about your weight?" she whispered.

"Went straight to the scales and tried," he replied, in the same lowered tone. "Right to an ounce."

"Ha!" ejaculated Lady Tilborough, with a sigh of relief and a glance back to see if the trainer was out of hearing. "Now then, off to your room and get into your silk. Mind, you must keep cool and you must win."

"I'm trying my best. But I can't help thinking. My wife!"

"Oh! Kiss your wife, man—when you get back. Never mind her now."

"But if by any chance she hears?"

"Let her hear when the race is run. She must hear afterwards, of course. Wives and husbands are out of court now. Remember your four thou'."

"I do," said Sir Hilton, with a groan.

"Ah! would you!" cried Lady Tilborough. "You've got to face the thing anyhow, and listen, here's your position: It's meeting the poor, severe darling with the race lost, or meeting her with it won. Which will you do?"

"Of course," cried Sir Hilton, eagerly. "I see."

"You're yourself again. Now, one more word—that man has backed Jim Crow heavily. You understand?"

"Of course."

"And Jim Crow's rather a dangerous horse; but if you keep cool, and in your old form, the race is ours."

"Yes; I feel it now."

"Then you know. Keep her clear, and let her have her own old way."

"Then I'm off yonder. You'll meet me there. I've a hankering to be at her side, for fear of the possibility of anyone getting at her even now."

"No fear of that. Off with you!"

Lady Tilborough held out her hand, and Granton entered quickly.

"Silk ho!" he cried.

Sir Hilton nodded shortly and ran actively up the stairs.

"Bravo!" said the doctor. "Hilt looks his old self. Cool as a—you know."

"Don't say another word to me, Granton, till the race is over," said the lady, pleadingly.

"I understand," he said, and they went off straight for the paddock, while as soon as the chamber door in the gallery had been shut sharply upon his master by Mark Willows, Simpkins slipped out of the bar entry, looking flushed and strange.

"Too late to do anything now," he groaned to himself. "My head seems to be going—all of a buzz. Hedge heavily or chance it. Which? Which? Oh, what in the name of thunder shall I do?"

Chapter Fifteen.

Mephistopheles at Work.

What the trainer did was to return to the bar and swallow a glass of gin and bitters hastily, before returning to his favourite seat in the hall, when he pulled out betting-book and pencil, threw one swollen leg over the other, and began to chew the lead and try to master the figures which would not stand still to be reckoned up.

"Nice day for the races," said a voice, as the door was darkened. "How are you, Simpkins?"

The trainer looked up angrily, saw that it was an old client and friend, and replied surlily: "Morn'n. They'll attend to

you in the bar. Oh, dear!" he muttered, "I can't hedge now."

The visitor glanced quickly round to see that they were alone, and then pressed up close to the trainer. "Pst! Look here, Sam Simpkins."

"Didn't I tell you they'd see to you in the bar?" growled the trainer.

"Yes; but I want another fifty on Jim Crow, if you can do it."

"Eh? Yes, of course," cried the trainer, completely changing his tone and manner; then, turning over a few leaves, he clumsily made an entry in his book.

"Close on the run," he said apologetically.—"Horrid busy. There you are. Ten fives. All right, Mr Trimmer."

"Not in my way, as a rule, Mr Simpkins," said Lady Lisle's agent, with a weak grin; "but a little flutter, as you call it, is pleasant and exciting—a nice change from the humdrum of business life."

"And very profitable too, eh, Mr Trimmer?"

"Yes; I've not done badly, Sam—thanks to you, old friend."

"No, you haven't; but go and get your glass and be off, please," said the trainer, finishing the deposit of the crisp new banknotes by placing them in a pocket-book, drawing on the tight elastic with a loud snap, buttoning the book up in his breast, and giving the place a slap, which seemed to bring out a sigh of relief.

"I won't drink this morning, thank you, Sam. I'll go out on the common at once. How does Jim Crow look?"

"Splendid; but be off, please. I'm busy," growled the trainer.

"I understand. I shall find you here after the race. Short settlements, eh?"

"Always on spot. Take and give sharp; that's my motto," replied the trainer, bending down over his betting-book again without paying further heed to his client, who nodded, smiled at the chamber maid in the gallery, and went out softly.

"A bit back," muttered the trainer, with the ghost of a grin on his stubbly face, as soon as he was alone. "But like nothing—like nothing," he grumbled. "One drop in a pint pot. But let's see; let's see."

He had not been immersed in his calculations again five minutes when there was a hurried step, and Lady Lisle's agent came in, looking ghastly.

"Oh, there you are, Sam," he said, hurriedly. "I've been on the common and I've changed my mind."

"Eh? What?" said the trainer, looking up fiercely.

"That fifty I put on Jim Crow. I'll put on La Sylphide instead."

"Too late, sir. Bet booked. I never alter my entries. What's the matter?"

"I thought Jim Crow was such a perfectly safe horse, but I hear—"

A gasp stopped the man's utterance. "Well, what have you heered?"

"That—that Lady Tilborough's horse is going to run after all."

"Lady Tilborough's mare's scratched, they say, Mr Trimmer."

"No, no. I have it on the best authority. She's going to run."

"Oh, they say anything in the ring. Don't you take no notice. You've put your money on a good horse, and you've got to chance it, of course. I've a big pot on there."

"So I hear, Mr Simpkins," said the agent; "but I'm a poor man. I only bet on sure things, and I must withdraw this bet."

"Too late, sir; can't be done now."

"But it must; it must I will have it back," cried the agent, fiercely.

"Here, none of that," said the trainer, with a savage growl. "You come to me, sir—made your bet, and I've booked it."

"But I stand to lose five hundred pounds, man," cried the agent, frantically. "Give me my money back."

"Not a cent, sir. Chance it."

"I heard that Josh Rowle was too bad to ride."

"That's true enough, sir."

"I—I don't understand," cried Trimmer; "but I will not stir from here without those notes. Give me my fifty pounds."

He caught the trainer with both hands by the coat. "Steady, my lad," growled Simpkins. "Don't be a fool. This is 'sault and battery, and, if I liked, I could lay you down with an ugly rap between the eyes. Steady!" he continued, with a grim smile overspreading his coarse and brutal face. "I begin to see now how it is. My, how queer! Your guv'nor must be going to ride."

"What! Nonsense! Something to turn me off the scent. I will have my money back."

"You won't, Master Trimmer—not a cent; and look here, if you make that row you'll have Sir Hilton out here to know what's the matter."

"Sir Hilton?" cried the man, staring wildly.

"Yes; he's up there in number one, dressing for the race."

"A lie! An excuse! Give me my money!" and he clutched at the trainer so fiercely that the bar and chamber maids came to the bar door to see.

"Ony a gent a bit upset about a bit o' coin, my dears. Here, Mary, tell Mr Trimmer, here, who's dressing in number one."

"Sir Hilton Lisle, sir," replied the maid, and Trimmer's hands dropped from the trainer's coat. "Anyone with him, my gal?"

"Yes, sir. Mark Willows, Sir Hilton's groom."

The agent dropped into a chair, looking as if he were going to have a fit.

"Gent's a bit poorly. Excitement. That'll do, my gals. Stop, one of you bring him a nip of my gin and bitters."

The two maids, well accustomed to such scenes, retired into the bar, one of them returning with a glass upon a tray, and waiting to be paid, as Trimmer seized the liquor and gulped it down.

"All right, my dear; my treat," said the trainer, and the next minute the two men were alone.

"Then it's true?" faltered the agent, as he set down the glass.

"Yes, all true. Your guv'nor's going to ride La Sylphide, and a hundred to one he wins."

"And you never told me, an old friend," said Trimmer, reproachfully.

"No friendship in betting, sir. I stand to lose a pile over the job, and I must make a bit back. Did I ask you to put your money on Jim Crow?"

"No—but—"

"No, but!" said the trainer, scornfully. "Take it as I do. You don't hear me 'owl."

Trimmer, who was as white as a sheet, sat panting, as he stared hard at the trainer, and then glanced up over his shoulder at the gallery.

"C'rect card, gentlemen—all the runners, sir," came from the outside to break the silence, backed up by the murmur from the course.

"Sam," whispered the agent at last, and he leant towards the trainer, "do you really stand to lose five thou'?"

"Every penny of it," growled the trainer, with a terrible oath, and a look which bespoke his sincerity. "What's your twopenny bet to that? This is your somethinged guv'nor's doing. Confound him! I'd poison him if I could."

"Ha!" sighed Trimmer.

"It was a dead certainty, as you know. They would have scratched La Sylphide at the last moment, for no one could ride her but Josh Rowle, and he's in a strait weskit, with two nurses from the 'sylum. Dead certainty it was, when in comes your guv'nor to spoil as fine a thing as was ever planned."

"But he mayn't win, after all."

"Tchah! I know the mare, don't I? All he's got to do is to sit still in the saddle, give her her head, and talk to her as he always knew how, and she'll romp in past the lot. The game's up, Mr Trimmer, and you must make the best of it. Here, don't bear no malice. Have another drink, and take one of these."

"C'rect card, gents; all the runners!" came again from the outside.

Simpkins's outer breast-pocket formed his cigar-case, and he took out a couple from where they lay loose, and offered them to the agent. But the latter paid no heed, for he glanced up at the gallery and then at the bar, beyond which the two maids could be seen, busy serving.

"Sam," whispered Trimmer at last; "quick, before it's too late. The mare must be got at."

Crack! went a match, and the trainer bit off the cigar end and lit up quickly.

"Here, ketch hold," he growled. "Be sharp, or it'll be out," and he offered the burning match. "You talk like a fool.

How?"

"You know. Such a little thing would do it. What about King Dick?"

"Hold your cursed row," growled the trainer, threateningly.

"I can't," whispered the agent. "I've too much at stake. Get to the mare at once. You, a trainer, can manage that."

"You talk like a fool, I tell you. Close upon the time like this."

"Can't you work it with the guv'nor or Lady T.?"

"No. If I could should I be sitting here jawing? Tried it on, and failed."

"Think of your five thousand pounds."

"I tell you you can't get at the mare."

"C'rect cards, gents," came again from without, in Dandy Dinny's raucous voice. But his cry was unheard within, where Trimmer, with a peculiar Mephistophelian smile upon his face, gave another glance upwards at the gallery, before leaning forward till his lips were quite close to the trainer's great red ear, into which he whispered—

"No, of course not; but you could get at the man."

The trainer started to his feet, the cigar he had just lit falling from his gaping mouth, just as Dandy Dinny passed the window, leering in, and then hurried out of sight with his hawking cry, for there was the sound of carriage wheels approaching the hotel.

Trimmer rose too, and laid his hand softly upon Simpkin's arm, as he gazed hard in his companion's rolling eyes, now directed towards the gallery.

"Eh?" said the trainer at last, as his eyes dropped to gaze in those that were searching his, and he began to pass his big hand over his mouth again and again.

Then he lowered it, still gazing hard at the agent, and lifted it once more to his lips, but now closed as if it were holding a drinking vessel, which he made believe to hold to his lips and drink therefrom.

The look had now become questioning.

A slowly given nod from Trimmer's head was the answer.

The big door-bell was pulled sharply, and gave forth a peal which made the trainer start. "Someone coming," he said, rushing to the window and thrusting out his head, to draw it back sharply.

"The missus!" he whispered.

"Lady Lisle!" gasped Trimmer, excitedly. "She mustn't see me here."

"Come in my office. Quick!"

Simpkins half-thrust his companion quickly through the door in the corner, just as the boots passed through the porch and the barmaid came to her door, and the next minute Lady Lisle was ushered by the boots into the hall.

"I'll tell master, my lady," said the man, and he went to the office, while the barmaid drew back into her highly-glazed shell.

Chapter Sixteen.

Rather Equivocal.

Lady Lisle gave an angry, shuddering look of disgust as she glanced round the sanctuary of the high priest of sport, noting the pictures and hunting trophies, and then holding her highly-scented handkerchief to her delicate nostrils, which were sharply assailed by spirituous exhalations and the fumes of the noxious weed.

"Oh," she mused, "that it should come to this—a publican's daughter, a low-bred wench. Oh, Hilton, Hilton! But—ah! I am determined. I will see it to the end."

She was kept waiting quite five minutes, which she passed standing like a statue in the middle of the hall, till there was a husky cough, and Simpkins came hurrying out, trying with fat, clumsy fingers to thrust a little white, folded paper, very suggestive of "the powder at night" into his waistcoat pocket, where it refused at first to go.

"Beg pardon, my lady," he said, after a quick glance up at the gallery. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Very busy to-day."

"Mr Simpkins?" said the lady, haughtily.

"That's me, my lady; but if you want accommodation I'm afraid we're full."

"My husband—Sir Hilton Lisle. He is here?" said the lady, sternly.

The trainer's jaw dropped, and, like lightning, a thought flashed through his brain.

The wife, to stop the gentleman from mounting the mare! It was salvation.

But the next moment the hope died out. In such an emergency the wife's appeal would be as so much breath. It would be like grasping at a shadow and letting the substance go.

"Do you not understand, my man?" said Lady Lisle, impatiently. "My husband—he is here?"

"Sir Hilton Lisle, Bart.?" said the trainer, who determined to stick to the substance and let the shadow glide. "Oh, no, my lady, he ain't here."

"Where is he, then?"

"I dunno, my lady," replied the man, coolly. "At the races, I should suppose."

"How could I find him in all that crowd?" murmured the unhappy woman. Then, setting her teeth hard to suppress the feeling of passion that was growing fast, she turned to the man again, and her voice was perfectly firm and cold, as she said authoritatively: "You have a daughter, man?"

"That's right, my lady," said the trainer, and he smiled faintly. "Oh," he continued, "I suppose I know what brings your ladyship here."

And once more a thought crossed his mind as to the possibility of stopping Sir Hilton's jockeyship by setting his wife upon his track. But he dismissed it directly, to respond to his visitor's command.

"I suppose you do, sir," she said haughtily. "Send the woman here."

"Woman, eh? Why, she's a mere gal, my lady."

"Don't speak to me like that, man," cried Lady Lisle. "Where is your daughter?"

"On the grand stand, I s'pose, along o' him."

"This is monstrous!" cried Lady Lisle, passionately. "Oh, man, can you stand there with that base effrontery and speak to me like this?"

"Can I, my lady? Yes. Why not? I'm not your paid servant, and I dessay if we totted up together and compared notes, I, Sam Simpkins, trainer, could show as good a hincome as your ladyship. At least, I could yesterday," he muttered.

"Yes, yes, no doubt; but have you no sense of the moral wrong? Are you shameless, or ignorant of your responsibility to your child?"

"Well, you're a-pitching it pretty strong, my lady; but I won't kick, for I dessay you do find it rather a bitter pill to swallow."

"Man, you are shameless!" cried Lady Lisle, and the trainer chuckled.

"Well, my lady, I'm not troubled much with that sort o' thing. Bashfulness is a bit in the way in my trade."

"I'll set it down to ignorance, then."

"That's better, my lady. I never set up as a scholar."

"Let me appeal to you, then. Have you done nothing to stop it?"

"Never knowed a word about it till this blessed morning, my lady," cried the trainer, with a display of indignation. "Saucy young baggage! She kep' it dark enough."

"Ha! Then you have some feeling for your child."

"Feeling, my lady! Course I have; and I'd ha' stopped it if I'd known before it was too late."

Lady Lisle winced as if she had received a blow. "But, now—now," she cried, "you will immediately take proceedings?"

"Bah! What can I do?"

"Oh, think, man, of the wrong it is doing me."

"Tchah! It's of no use to talk now, my lady. Pride's a very nice thing in its way, but they say it must have a fall. Love and natur', my lady, gets the better of us all. You and me understands what it is, and you see now that you couldn't always have him tied to your apron-string."

"Man, have you no feeling?"

"Quite enough for my business, my lady."

"But I insist you shall stop it at once."

"Don't I tell you, my lady," cried the trainer, with a glance up at number one, "that it's too late? She'll be having him

hear her directly," he added to himself. "There, chuck it up, my lady," he continued, "and go home. This place on a race day ain't sootable for you. Take my word, you'll soon get used to it."

"The man is a monster," groaned Lady Lisle, wringing her hands. "Man, man," she cried, "you shock me. If you have no feeling or respect for your child—"

"Me, my lady? Of course, I have. Why," added the trainer, "I like it."

"Wretched man! Such depravity!"

"Depravity be blowed, my lady! Here, I can put up with a good deal, but you're pitching it too strong. Come, I won't get in a temper with you, my lady, though I am horribly tried just now. Come, I'm speaking fair as a man can speak; hadn't you better climb down?"

"Think of the scandal, man."

"My name's Simpkins, my lady, please. If your set may call it a scandal, mine won't mind. As for me, I think it's a very good thing for the girl."

"I can bear no more of this," muttered Lady Lisle, faintly. "It is too much. Oh! man, man, I looked for help and sympathy from you; but in your shameless ignorance you have done nothing but outrage my feelings."

"Very sorry, my lady; but you should have come and met me civil-like, as the father of as pretty a lass as ever stepped. 'Stead o' which you comes in your carriage and walks in on stilts, and begins a-bully-ragging me as if I was still Sir Hilton's servant. Now, look here, my lady, you've kep' on calling me man, man, man, and it's true I am a man, and a man with a temper; but I don't like to be reminded of it over and over again, and in my own house, because them two began making love, as is the nat'ralest thing in natur'."

Lady Lisle felt exhausted, and she made a gesture as if to speak.

"No, you've had your innings, my lady, and I don't keep calling you woman, woman, woman. Now, here's what I've got to say as a fine-ale—the thing's happened, and you've got to make the best of it. My Molly's out yonder with the chap she loves and who loves her. You can't get at 'em, and if you behave sensible you'll get back in your carriage and go straight home, and the sooner the better, or I shall have to show you the door, for I've got something in the way of a big business to do. By and by, when you get cool, you'll see as it's no use to be orty, and if you like to come down off the stilts and ask my Molly to join you at the Denes, well and good."

"Oh!" gasped the visitor in horror.

"Very well, if you don't I shan't fret. I know what you've done long enough, keeping him like at the Denes; but I can afford it, even if I am hard hit to-day. It only means putting an extra knife and fork at my table, where he shall be welcome till you drop the orty and 'old your 'and—Hullo! Feel upset, my lady? That's pride and temper."

"Don't touch me, man!" panted the suffering woman; "it would be pollution. Oh, Hilton, Hilton!" she moaned as she strove to steady herself to the door and managed to walk out of the porch and step feebly into the carriage.

"Home!" she said, in a deep, hollow voice before she sank back, unconscious of the excitement and noise around, and moaned softly. "Home? No; it is home no more."

This giving way to one set of feelings lasted but a few moments, for there rose up before her imagination the figure of her husband seated somewhere with her young and handsome rival, possibly hand in hand, watching the scene before them, and a wave of fierce passion swept all before it. The next minute, to the astonishment and satisfaction of her disappointed coachman, who was longing to see one heat if not more, she stood up in the barouche and prodded him with her parasol.

"Turn back," she said, "and drive to where I can have a good view of the race."

Chapter Seventeen.

La Sylphide's Health.

"Orty, stuck-up popinjay!" growled the trainer, mopping his forehead. "But she's got to come down. And me on pins and needles all the time for fear he should open his door and she see him! I did feel as if it might be right to let her, but his monkey would have been up, and she couldn't have stopped him from riding. Hullo!" he said, as he saw Trimmer at the office-door. "Not gone!"

"No," whispered the agent. "I felt obliged to stay."

"And I feel obliged to kick you out. So cut."

"No, no, Mr Simpkins."

"Look here, sir, if that job's to be done, I can do it. I don't want no complications. You can stand by me if it gets blown and there's a job for the police. As it is, I'll do it or not do it, without your meddling and putting in your spoon. Take your hook, dyer hear, and before he comes."

At that very moment there was the rattle of a door handle in the gallery, and a familiar voice exclaimed: "One moment, Sir Hilton, you've left your whip."

"Give it me; but she'll want no whip."

The trainer made a fierce gesture, and the agent retreated through the office, while the former thrust his fat finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket unconsciously as he advanced towards the foot of the stairs, down which Sir Hilton came carefully, so as not to catch his spurs in the carpet, and closely followed by Mark Willows, bearing a long drab greatcoat. The baronet looked the very pink of a gentleman-rider in his light-blue satin shirt, diagonally crossed over the right shoulder by a broad scarlet scarf-like band, and scarlet jockey cap to match. His breeches and boots fitted to perfection, and as he stepped lightly into the middle of the hall, almost on the very spot which his wife had occupied, there was a keen look in his grey eyes and a slight quivering about his well-cut nostrils, making him seem alert, ready, and quite the man who might be trusted with a race.

"There," he said sharply; "how long have I to spare?"

"Good half-hour, sir," said the trainer, gazing at his guest as if full of pride at his appearance.

"Leave that coat on the chair, there, man, and go and wait for me at the paddock."

Mark touched his hat and passed out, eager to get on to the field of battle, swarming with objects of interest to the groom's eyes, while Simpkins approached his guest, smiling and rubbing his hands.

"Well, Sam," said Sir Hilton, shortly; "do I look all right?"

"All right, Sir Hilton? Splendid!"

The eager admiration seemed to be perfectly real, as the trainer walked round, inspecting carefully.

"Not your old things, are they, Sir Hilton?"

"Oh, yes. Been lying by these three years. Look—creased and soiled?"

"Fresh as a daisy, Sir Hilton. Why, its like old times. Here, hang the business! It may take care of itself to-day. I'm coming to see you ride."

The man spoke back over his shoulder, as, leaving his guest shaking himself down in the unaccustomed garb, he hurried into the office, where a pop was heard, and he returned, bearing a waiter, on which was a foaming champagne bottle and a couple of glasses.

This he placed upon a little marble table, and began to fill the glasses with trembling hands, a little in first one and then in the other, till the cream ceased to threaten flowing over, when he placed the bottle by itself and bore the waiter and its glasses towards the guest. "Hullo! What have you got there, Sam?"

"Irroy, black seal, Sir Hilton."

"I see; but I didn't order it."

"No, Sir Hilton, but you won't mind taking a glass with the old trainer—to La Sylphide, and the winning of the cup?"

"No, no, no, man. Nonsense! Very good of you, but I want a cool head and a steady hand."

"Of course you do, Sir Hilton; but one glass o' dry fizz! Not much harm in that, Sir Hilton. You'll do me the honour, sir, just for luck? Tighten up your nerves, and make you win in a canter."

"Do you want me to win, Sam?" said Sir Hilton, sharply.

"Win, Sir Hilton? Of course. I thought I was going to lose heavily, but I've put it right, and it means a couple of hundred if you sail in first."

"And if I lose?"

"I shall be just about even, Sir Hilton," said the man, with a grin, as he held out the tray.

"Well," said Sir Hilton, whose cheeks were flushed with excitement, "I shall win, Sam."

He took up the clear, foaming glass, from up whose centre the tiny beads were rising fast, like a fountain, to break and add to the sparkling foam. "Here's La Sylphide, Sam."

"Here's La Sylphide, Sir Hilton," cried the trainer, "and thanking my old master for the honour done to his old trainer Simpkins, chrissen Sam."

As he spoke he fixed his eyes full upon those of the gaily-dressed jockey facing him, and, taking his time from his guest, raised the glass to his lips and kept it there till it was drained, before holding out the salver for Sir Hilton's empty glass.

"Bah! Too dry," said Sir Hilton, with a slight grimace. "How long have you had that wine?"

"'Bout seven year, Sir Hilton," replied the man, setting down the waiter and replacing the bottle by the glasses, but so clumsily that he knocked over his guest's glass, which was shattered to atoms on the floor.

"Oh, I beg pardon, Sir Hilton! I'm so excited with the race that my head's all of a shake. Hi, somebody, a clean glass!"

The barmaid ran out with the fresh glass, and she was followed by one of the other maids with a dustpan and brush.

"That's right, my lass; be careful; don't leave any bits."

As he spoke he lifted the little marble table out of the maid's way and filled the glasses again, before raising the waiter to hand it for the second time to his guest.

"No, no, Sam; one's enough."

"What, Sir Hilton! You won't wet the other eye?"

"No, not even if I were not going to ride. That wine's bad."

"Bad, Sir Hilton?" cried the trainer, raising his own glass to the light, sniffing at it, tasting it cautiously, and then looking again at his visitor. "Mouth must be a bit out o' taste with the excitement. Seems to me—" He raised his glass to his lips again, took a good pull, and then drained and set it down. "Beg your pardon, Sir Hilton," he said; "I don't set up for a judge, but I wouldn't wish to taste a better drop o' cham than that."

"Glad you like it," said Sir Hilton, tetchily.

"Try it again, sir. Give your mouth a rinse out with it, and then finish the glass."

"No, thanks; that will do. Bah! I can taste it now," said Sir Hilton, snappishly, and he smacked his lips, and then passed his tongue over them two or three times as he walked hastily up and down, tapping his boot with the gold-mounted whip he held.

Simpkins watched him furtively and moved towards the bar, but turned, and seemed to force himself to his guest's side. "Oh, yes, Sir Hilton," he said, "you'll win; and it'll be, as I said afore, two 'underd in my pocket, while, if you lose, which you won't, it'll bring me within a fiver or so of home."

"Get away! Don't bother," said his victim, sharply.

"Right, Sir Hilton. Course you've a deal on your head now, but, if you wouldn't mind, I think I'll have half a glass more of that wine before it gets flat."

"Bah!" ejaculated the baronet. "Thank ye, Sir Hilton," said the man, refilling his glass, to stand watching his visitor while sipping slowly, and muttering every time he raised his trembling hand something about "good glass of wine."

Suddenly Sir Hilton made a quick turn and walked sharply towards the door, making the trainer set down his glass hurriedly, glance at the bar-window to see if he was observed, and then follow his guest to the door; but, before he reached it, the baronet turned round and walked back, close by the landlord, without appearing to notice him.

"Can't stand it no longer," muttered the man to himself. "Hah! Wonder whether it will come off?"

He glanced at his victim sharply, saw that he was talking softly to himself in the intervals of passing his tongue impatiently over his lips and making a peculiar sound as if tasting.

"Tlat, tlat, tlat! Too dry. Burns and smarts," he said impatiently, and then clapped his hand quickly to his head.

"Why not try another glass, Sir Hilton?" said the trainer; but no heed was taken of his words.

"It's a-working," muttered the man. "Hope I didn't give him too much."

He glanced at the bright blue and scarlet figure again, and then, drawing a deep breath he once more moved towards the door of his office, where he stopped inside watching.

"Why, it's like giving him the jumps," he muttered. "Well, if it do go wrong, I ain't done nothing. It's the drink. He must ha' been having it heavy before he came here; and if that won't do, I'm blest if I'm going to stand the racket all alone."

He stood watching his victim for quite ten minutes, during which time the drug he had administered, one of whose properties as a trainer and veterinary surgeon he was well aware, was working with wonderful rapidity; and this was accelerated suddenly by Sir Hilton's action, for to the trainer's great delight, the poor fellow gave a lurch which brought him near the little table, where he recovered himself, saw the bottle and glass, and seized the former with his left hand.

"Dry—thirsty!" he said hurriedly; and making an effort he poured out another glass of wine, drained it, and was in the act of setting down the glass when Granton came hurrying in, and Simpkins drew back out of sight.

Chapter Eighteen.

How the Bees Swarmed.

"Ah, Hilt, old chap, there you are! Lady T. says you must come at once, and—Hang it, man, don't do that!"

Sir Hilton turned on hearing the familiar voice and stared at the speaker, who snatched the bottle from his hand.

"What are you doing?" he said sharply, as the doctor held the bottle up to the light.

"What am I doing?" cried Granton, in a rage. "Hang it, man, you've never been such a fool as to drink all this?"

"Yes; horrid stuff—dry—horribly dry."

He smacked his lips two or three times over and shook his head, repeating the action, and then turned to walk right across the hall towards the door.

"C'rect cards, gents; all the runners—on'y a shilling!" come from Dandy Dinny, who appeared in the porch, staring in with curious eyes.

"Get out—curse you!" cried Sir Hilton, making a couple of sharp lashes with his whip in the man's direction. "Take the miserable mongrel away. Dogs indeed! Dog! Man don't want dogs who's going to ride a big race."

"No, nor bad cham neither," cried Granton, furiously, catching his old friend by the arm. "Why, Hilt, you must have been mad."

"Eh? Mad? Yes, she makes me very mad sometimes."

"Bah! Mad to go on the drink at a time like this. Here, pull yourself together, man."

"Drink?" said Sir Hilton, sharply, his voice perfectly clear and distinct. "Yes, cursed stuff! Gooseberry wine, I believe. Vintage of France? Pish! Pretty France! Old gooseberry! Don't order any more, Jack. Dry champagne; dry enough to mix with paint. Have S. and B."

"Here, I'm not going to bully you now. Shake yourself up. You must be coming on now."

"Eh? What for? Coming on?"

"Yes!" cried Granton, in a passion. "Hang it, man, you're regularly fuddled!"

"Fuddled? I? Absurd! Only a glass or two. Look at me. Fuddled! You're a fool, Jack! Oh, yes, I remember—the race."

"Then come on," cried Granton. "You look all right."

"Oh, yes, I'm all right. Did you think I was tight?"

"Well, something of the kind. Come along."

"Don't hang on to a man like that," said Sir Hilton, shaking himself free with an angry jerk. "Want to spoil my satin? Hi! Ha! Sh!"

He made a rush, and two or three cuts in the air with his whip, which the trainer, who was standing back in the office watching, took to mean given at him, and slipped behind the door.

Granton did not see him, his attention being taken up by the insane action of his friend, whom he once more caught by the arm.

"What's the matter with you?" he shouted. "Are you going daft?"

"Eh? What?" cried Sir Hilton, looking at him angrily. "Nonsense! Can't you see the little beasts?"

"D.T., by jingo!" muttered the doctor. "Why, he must have been on the drink for a week! I must get him there somehow. Here, Hilt, old man, its saddling up and weighing time. Come on. La Sylphide looks lovely, and Lady T. all anxiety about you. Rouse up, old chap."

"All right. Wait till I've killed a few of these little beasts."

To the horror and astonishment of his friend, Sir Hilton made another dash and rush, darting here and there all over the hall, cutting and swishing about with his heavy riding-whip as if it were a sabre, and he a mounted cavalry man, putting the well-learnt pursuing practice well into effect upon the enemy he seemed to see.

"What the deuce shall I do?" muttered the doctor, breathlessly, after playing the enemy in his efforts to escape a slash.

"That cham, Jack," cried Sir Hilton, catching his friend by the arm. "Sham, and no mistake. Not fizz at all, but that old brewing of honey—mead—metheglin—old Saxon swizzle. There they go again—the bees—swarming—all round and round my head. Yah! Look out—you'll be stung."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Granton, humouring him. "Be cool. Stand still a moment, and let them go."

"Thousands upon thousands of them," cried Sir Hilton. "B-r-r-r-r! Look how they dart about in diamonds, zig-zags, rhomboids—buzz-z!"

"Yes. How queer!" said Granton, taking the speaker's arm again. "Let's walk quietly out into the air. They won't follow us out."

"I don't know," cried the unfortunate man, shaking himself free and holding his hand and whip as if to guard his head. "Buzz! B-r-r-r! How they are going it! Jack, old man, someone ought to get a hive. Rub it with beer and sugar. Take the swarm, you know. Swarm of bees, you know."

"Swarm of bees in May."

"Is worth a load of hay."

"Yes, old man; but we haven't time now. Come along. La Sylphide's waiting. Oh, if I could only get him mounted! He'd ride like the very deuce, thinking that the bees were after him."

"Let me be, you fool!" cried Sir Hilton, angrily. "Take care of yourself, you coward. You'll be getting us both stung. Oh, I see; on the look-out for a job. Cure the patient's stings. Ammonia, eh? I know. Country gentleman picks up a bit."

Here, horrible!" he cried, with a frantic leap aside. "They're settling on me. Swarms—millions—hanging in pockets like they do outside a hive. Buzz-uzz-zz! Here, Jack, old man, I daren't move. Come and sweep 'em off. Steady—softly. Quiet does it. There she is—the queen. Take her gently. She won't sting. That's good; now pop her in the hive, and they'll all follow her. Hah-h-h-h! That's better. Awkward position for a man to have the bees settling upon him and getting into his hair."

"Very, old chap; but they're all gone now."

"Not quite, Jack. Don't you hear the mur-mur-mur-mur—?"

"Oh, yes; quite plain."

"Pooh!" cried Sir Hilton, with a sudden change coming over him. "What a fool I am! I thought it was the bees, and all the time it's only the murmur of the crowd on the racecourse."

"Why, so it is," said the doctor. "I thought it was bees."

"No, the people; and I've got to ride in the big race."

"To be sure, so you have, old chap. Suppose we go and look at the mare."

Sir Hilton was quite quiet now, and looked at him seriously.

"Oh, my poor darling!" groaned the doctor. "Whatever shall I do? If I got him a dose he wouldn't be fit to ride. Coming, Hilt?" he said calmly.

"Yes, directly, Jack. Let's see. I must be quite cool and steady, and not fidget the mare. It's a safe thing, and as soon as I've won this race I'll be tempted no more, Jack, but settle down with the wife—bless her! She means well, Jack. This coup will make me independent, and balance matters. I shall take my position then, you see, and not feel so poverty-stricken—asking one's wife for every sov."

"I see. Come along," said the doctor. "If I could only get him out into the air. I daren't give him more drink."

"Don't hurry me," said Sir Hilton, coolly rearranging his silk and pulling up his breeches. "I want you to understand, Jack. I'm doing this for independence, to save dear Lady T.—bless her! A good woman. Always been like a sister to me. Jolly little widow! And to make a pile for you, old man, so that you can marry her, have two children, and live happy ever after like a good boy."

"Yes, that's it, Hilt, old man," cried the doctor, desperately, for the clanging of a bell on the racecourse came faintly to his ear. "Come along, then, and win. Quick!"

He caught his old friend by the arm to get him out at all hazards; but it was like touching a spring which set free a lid in the poor fellow's brain.

For, with a fierce cry—which brought the perspiration out in great drops over the trainer's face where he listened and watched—Sir Hilton began rushing about the hall again, cutting and slashing furiously.

"Here they are again," he cried; "thousands—millions of them. B-r-r-r-r-r-r! Sets my head on fire. Keep off, you little imps. There, there, and there! Hah!" he cried at last, dropping breathlessly into a chair. "Br! I was too much for them," he said, laughing weakly. "Rather queer, though, for them to choose a race day to swarm. But—I've got to win, and I mean to."

"Here, Hilt, old chap," said Granton, who as a last resource had determined to try a hair of the dog which had bitten his friend, and he drained three-parts of a glass of the champagne into one of the glasses, and was offering it to his friend—"tip this drop off and come on."

The words acted like magic. Sir Hilton started up and dashed the wine aside.

"What!" he cried. "Do you think I'm mad? Drink at a time like this? No, sir!"

"No, dear; wait here," cried Syd, outside. "I'll join you again directly I've found him," and Syd rushed in breathlessly.

"Who's that?" cried Sir Hilton.

"Oh, there you are, uncle! Hooray! You look splendid. The winning colours. Hooray! I've got on that tenner."

"Here, Syd," cried Sir Hilton, catching the boy by the arm and whispering mysteriously, "can you hear the bees?"

"Hear the what?" cried the boy, staring.

"The bees; they're coming back—swarming. Buzz—buzz—buzz! Listen! There they go!"

"Gammon, uncle. It's the crowd on the course—swarming in thousands."

"Yes, that's it, Syd. Take care, you'll get stung, my boy! Ugh! You beast! Would you!" and whish, whish, whish went the whip, as an imaginary insect was beaten down to the floor and followed and stamped on by its slayer. "That has settled you."

"Why, doctor," cried Syd, who had been staring at his uncle, open-mouthed, "don't say he's coxybobus!"

"I wasn't going to, my boy, but he's horribly screwed."

"Screwed? He can't ride. It must be D.T. Here, uncle," cried the boy, seizing him and shaking him violently, "pull yourself together. You've got to ride."

"Yes, all right, my boy; and your aunt must never know. There, don't tear my shirt. Hear them—the bees again? Do you recollect, my little man, 'How doth the little busy bee,' eh?"

At that moment Molly, wondering at the buzz of conversation within, forgot her young husband's orders to wait, and came into the hall, to stare wonderingly.

"Oh, Syd, what is the matter with your uncle?"

"Don't bother. Got 'em. What's to be done, doctor? Here, I know," he said, staring the while at Sir Hilton, who had seized a chair, turned it, and sat down crosswise, to keep on lashing at imaginary bees. "Soda—"

"Water," cried the doctor.

"I'll fetch a bottle," cried Syd.

"Cold, to the head," cried the doctor. "Pump. No; I'll fetch a pail. No; I know, and I'll risk it, for it's our only chance."

As the pair rushed off, the one into the bar, the other through the porch, two of the maids appeared as audience in the gallery, two more in the bar entrance, and the trainer, perspiring profusely, remained in his private box—to wit, the office, watching for the outcome of Trimmer's plan, while his gaily-dressed child approached the stricken man sympathetically.

Chapter Nineteen.

While Time was on the Wing.

"Have you got 'em, Sir Hilton?" said Molly, going close up to his side.

"Round and round and round," said Sir Hilton, "and now zig-zag, zig-zag, zigger, zagger, zag."

He described the imaginary bees' flight with the point of his whip, and seemed not to have heard the words addressed to him.

But all of a sudden he caught sight of the bright colours of the girl's dress, and it took his attention at once.

"Hullo!" he cried, "what colour—what jock's this? Why, it's—what's the matter with my eyes? It's a pretty girl—it's—why it's Syd's little flame."

"Yes, Sir Hilton," said the girl, smiling. "Yes, uncle."

"Quite right, my dear. I'm Syd's uncle. My mouth's horribly dry, my dear, but don't ask me to drink, because I'm going to ride for the cup, and *it* might attract the bees. But they're gone now. I say, I don't wonder at Syd. There, it's nature, I suppose. Boys will be boys; and you're the beautiful La Sylphide, so full of go. La Sylphide—yes, La Sylphide," he repeated excitedly, and he gave a sudden lurch.

"Oh, mind, Sir Hilton!" cried the girl, catching at and supporting him. "He isn't fit to ride. I'll fetch father."

She made an effort to get free, but Sir Hilton clung to her tightly, to rebalance himself in the chair, the name of the mare, the bright colour, and his attitude now combining to switch his mind off from the buzzing bees to the race, which now became dominant in his brain.

"Wo-ho! Holdup, little one," he cried. "Want to break your knees?"

"Of course I don't, Sir Hilton," cried the girl, indignantly. "You shouldn't talk like that."

"Those girths don't seem quite tight enough, my beauty," muttered Sir Hilton. "Never mind; I can keep my balance. Give you more room to breathe. Wo-ho!—How she pulls! Steady! Come, don't show your temper with me."

"Of course not, Sir Hilton. Oh! I do wish Syd would come."

She made an effort to free herself, but as she did so, Sir Hilton snatched at the little figure gliding through his hands, but only caught a couple of long ribbon streamers depending from the back of a flowing robe.

"Oh, my frock—you'll tear it!" cried the girl, half in tears; and she tried to drag herself away, but not vigorously, for fear of damaging the diaphanous fabric to which the ribbons were attached.

"Father! Father!" cried the girl, faintly; but the trainer did not stir, and the maids who looked on only glanced at one another as if saying: "It isn't my place."

All passed very rapidly, as Sir Hilton, in imagination, rode away, talking rapidly the while.

"Steady, my beauty—steady—that's good—bravo, starter—a capital line—now then, flag down—no false start—that black beast Jim Crow—yes, I'll make him jump to another tune. Now then, once more—good—flag down—now—go—well over! Bravo, my darling!" he cried, making play with the ribbons, just as Lady Lisle returned, consequent upon, as the police say, "information received," and stopped short, literally stunned, at the picture before her, while Molly caught sight of her, and tried to get away, but in vain.

"Steady, darling, steady!" cried Sir Hilton, who felt the tugging at the reins. "Don't get in a flurry. We shall win in a canter. Bravo, pet! Easy—easy, beauty!—Don't tug like that—I don't want to hurt your dear, tender mouth. That's better. We're going now like the—Bravo—bravo—that's the way!"

"Oh! Sir Hilton," cried the girl, "don't, pray, don't! Look; can't you see? Please, ma'am—my lady, it ain't my fault."

"That's right," shouted Sir Hilton, through his teeth. "Good—good—splendid—now then—we're nearly level—that's it—level—half a length ahead—now then—we're clear—bravo, little one! There, I've done with you—splendid—cheer away! Oh, if my wife were only here to see!"

It was as if the excitement under which he had laboured were now all discharged, and he dropped the imaginary reins, leaving Molly to rush away up the stairs, just as Lady Lisle, speechless with rage and shame, made a rush at her husband.

Matters in those moments were almost simultaneous.

Lady Lisle advanced, Syd appeared from the bar with a glass of soda-water, and dashed back, regardless of his aunt, who fainted dead away.

Sir Hilton sank forward with his chest over the chair-back, and his arms hanging full length down, and a general aspect of trying to imitate a gaily-dressed Punch in the front of the show.

Then Lady Tilborough rushed in wildly.

"Where is this man?" she cried, in a passion. "Hilt! Hilt!" Then as she saw her gentleman-rider's state of utter collapse she uttered a wild, despairing cry which brought the trainer to his office-door softly rubbing his hands. "All, all is lost!" cried Lady Tilborough, tragically.

"Here, stand aside!" shouted the doctor, dashing in with a medical glass in one hand, and a bottle from the nearest chemist's in the other, the cork giving forth a squeak as he drew it out with his teeth.

"Now then," he cried, "hold him up. Eh, what?" he added, as Lady Tilborough caught him by the arm crying—

"Jack Granton, you're a doctor; do something to pick him up, or the game's all over for us all."

Chapter Twenty.

Where the Moonbeams Played.

The lately risen moon, in its third quarter, shone across the well-kept lawn at the Denes between two great banks of trees, and through the wide French window in a way that left half the drawing-room in darkness, the conservatory full of lights and shadows of grotesque-looking giant plants in pots, and the other half of the handsome salon fairly illuminated. The shutters had not been closed, and the room door was wide open, seeming apparently untenanted, or as if the occupants of Sir Hilton Lisle's residence were all retired to rest.

Everything was still as a rule; but every rule has exceptions, and it was the case here. For, as if coming faintly from a distance, there was a continuous, pleasant chirp, such as might have suggested the early bird about to go in search of the worm; but it was a cricket by the still warm hearth of the kitchen.

There was, too, the distant barking of a dog, varied by a remarkably dismal howl such as a dog will utter on moonlight nights if he has not been fed and furnished with a pleasant padding to dull the points of his ribs when he indulges in his customary curl and sleep.

But there was another sound which broke the silence at rare intervals—a strange, bewildering sound in that drawing-room, such as might have been made by water in a gas pipe. But that was impossible, for there was no illuminant of the nature nearer than Tilborough, the Denes being lit up by crystal oil.

To be brief, in spite of these exceptions, all was very still at the Denes. The horse patrol had gone by, with the horse making noise enough on the hard road to warn any burglarious person of his propinquity, and he had passed three shabby-looking individuals, very drunk, and walking right in the middle of the road as far as two were concerned, talking together about what they had made on Tilborough racecourse the previous day, while the third, being very tired and very tipsy, was—probably from a most virtuous intention of walking off the superabundant spirit he had imbibed—more than doubling the distance between Tilborough and the next town, where there was a fair next day, by carefully walking in zig-zags.

The patrol looked at him, and his horse avoided him, and all went on their way, leaving the tree-bordered country road to its moonlit solitude.

But there was another personage on his way from Tilborough races, having a rest in a mossy piece of woodland half a mile from the Denes. He had his coat very tightly buttoned up over his chest, and over two packets of unsold race-cards, a packet over each breast, where with the fire of a pipe of tobacco they helped to keep the traveller taking his *al fresco* rest nice and warm.

"Bit damp, though," he said, after the horse patrol's movements had died out, and he got up, shook himself, and went his way, to reappear in the form of a silhouette against one of the big panes of glass in the French window of the Denes drawing-room.

Faint moonlight is not good for observing colour. Pink looks black by this illumination, whether it is on a man's nose or forms the tinting of his old hunting-coat. But even faint moonlight delineates well the shape of an old round-topped black velvet cap, and makes it look far blacker than it does by day.

Such a cap is admirable for riding purposes, and must be of a most convenient shape for anyone operating in a very tradesmanlike way upon the drawing-room window by which the figure stood, with a putty-knife, though an observer would probably have thought the hour unseasonable.

Still, when a window has been broken upon the ground floor, people in the country are only too glad to get the repairing done at any time that the glazier thinks proper to work, so that the weak spot in the domestic defences may as soon as possible be repaired.

But in this case the stout plate glass window was not broken, and the peculiarly handy knife being used was not called upon to spread putty, but was being inserted cleverly away from the glass and causing a clicking noise, thus showing, in connection with a wonderful degree of elasticity, that it was dealing with metal.

While its owner was at his busiest another noise arose, something between a whine and a squeak, the effect of which was to make the operator leave off his task, take two or three steps, and kneel down beneath a bush, to whisper words to something alive connected with its liver—words which produced silence—and return to the window.

The faint clicking began again, and the extremely thin putty-knife did its work in the skilled hands so well that in a very short time the doorlike window yielded and uttered a ghost of a groan as it turned upon its hinges.

“Poor thing, then! Did ‘um disturb it in the middle of the night?” said the tradesman to himself, stepping softly in. “Just like ‘em! Plenty to eat, plenty to drink, plenty o’ soft beds to sleep in, and too lazy to hyle a hinge. When I keep servants I’ll—Here, let’s just shut you.”

He carefully closed the window, before standing listening for a few moments and looking about till his eyes rested upon a softly-quilted couch, half-covered with a satin-lined Polar bearskin, bathed, as a poet would say, in the lambent rays of the moon, which in this instance came through the conservatory.

Towards this the man stepped in the dark, and, to his intense disgust, kicked heavily against a hassock.

The words he uttered were unprintable, save the latter portion, which were something about the tradesman’s “wussest corn.” The next minute it appeared as if he was about to examine the damage done, for his figure blotted out a portion of the sofa’s shape, and it, too, was bathed in the lambent light, as he busily unlaced and drew off, not only one, but two extremely big, ugly hunting boots, with star-like cuts in them, evidently to ease the “wussest” and other corns.

But, oddly enough, the night bird did not examine his injury, but placed the boots as if ready for cleaning—of which they were very much in need—in the very lightest spot he could find; that is to say, full in the aforesaid lambent light.

Then he began to muse.

“Soft as a hair cushin in a horsepittle,” he muttered. “Now, I could jest lie down, kiver myself with this here soft counterpin, and do my doss like a prince. Nobody at home but the servants and them gals. The two ladies gone off with the doctor in one kerridge, t’other one waiting at the Talbot, and the boss and the young squire sleepin’ it off at Sam Simpkins’s. The on’y one I’m in doubt about is Marky Willers, and that there black-looking crockydile in the white choker.

“Ha!” he sighed, taking out a steel tobacco-box and knife, and cutting off a bit of pigtail. “Mustn’t smoke,” he mused, “and I mustn’t sleep, for it’s ten to one I shouldn’t wake till someun found me, and there’d be a squawk and a ‘Dear me! I on’y come in by mistake, thinking it was my own room.’ Well, that’s the beauty o’ a bit o’ pigtail. Now then, I s’pose I’d better get to work. That’s the beauty o’ my profession. Down to a race here and a race there, and a call or two on the way to do a bit o’ trade with a dawg, and a look round for any bit or two o’ rubbish that wants clearing away. Don’t want anything heavier than a silver inkstand, say. Clocks is so gallus cornery, and a racing cup or anything o’ that sort won’t lie flat without you hammer one side in, and that’s a pity, and it’s half-round even then. Presentation inkstand’s my fav’rite, for one can button it up in front or behind, while you can leave the bottles in case the people wants to write.

“Nice bit o’ plate here, I’ll bet,” said the man, with a yawn, his jaws grinding slowly away at the quid, “but I’m not on plate, thank ye. Now then, where’s that there flat, old-fashioned inkstand? Let’s see; but if that there blessed dawg howls there won’t be no dawg when I gets out.”

The man rose in the moonlight, fumbled for and drew out a matchbox, opened it, and was in the act of striking a match when a clock in the hall performed a musical chime loudly four times, with every bell sounding silvery and clear, and then paused.

“What a ghastly row!” muttered the man; and then he raised the match again, when—

Boom! boom! boom! three heavy strokes deliberately given upon a deep-toned spring, produced a wonderful effect.

There was a sharp ejaculation, a loud rustling sound, and a bump as of someone springing to his feet, while in the moonlight something like a hugely thick short serpent crawled over the couch and turned on reaching the floor into a quadruped, which crept silently into the conservatory and disappeared.

“Well!” exclaimed a voice. “Think o’ me sleeping like that! Three o’clock—lamp gone out—nobody come home even now. What a shame! This is going to the races, this is, and leaving us poor, unprotected women all alone in this big place, and not a man near but the gardeners, and them so far off that you might squeal the house down before they’d hear. Well, I shall go to bed. Ugh! I feel quite shivery, and the place looks horrid in the dark. I don’t like to go into the pantry for a light. I know; her ladyship’s writing-table.”

Jane Gee stepped quickly into the moonlight, caught sight of something on the carpet, and uttered a fearful shriek, just as a figure passed the French window, turned back, stopped short, and began to tap.

Chapter Twenty One.

The Coming Home.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the girl; "it's Mark—it's Mark! Oh, oh, oh!" she kept on in a peculiar sob. But she tottered to the window and undid the brass latch with trembling hands, when Mark pressed the glass door open, sprang in, closed the leaf, fastened it, and, flinging one arm round the sobbing girl, clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Hold your row, you silly fool! Couldn't you see it was me?"

"Ye-ye-yes, Mark. Oh, I'm so glad you've come."

"Seems like it—squealing everybody else out of bed to come and ketch me."

"Oh, oh, oh, Mark dear!" sobbed the girl. "Take care," and she clung to him.

"Why, of course I will," whispered the groom. "My word! I didn't know you could come hysterics like that," and as he spoke he tried to comfort the trembling girl, succeeding to some extent, while another singular thing took place in that certainly unhaunted room.

For the big ugly pair of boots began, not to walk according to their nature when set in motion, but to glide in a singular way in the moonlight, following their tightened strings, passing round the head of the quilted couch and into the conservatory, but without a sound.

"Oh, oh, Mark!" sobbed the girl, with a shudder.

"What, beginning again? What a little silly it is!"

"But come away."

"Well, I'm coming away. Come on."

"No, no; not that way. Oh!"

"Be quiet, or you'll be waking someone," whispered Mark.

"I can't help it," sobbed Jane. "It wasn't you that frightened me, Mark dear, it was the burglars."

"The what? Where?"

"Oh, I'd dropped asleep, Mark, and the lamp burnt out, and the clock woke me up, and then I saw it. Oh, horrid!"

"Be quiet, I tell you. What did you see?"

"That great big pair of boots in the moonlight there."

"Where?" cried Mark, doubtfully.

"Down there by the blue couch."

"Stuff! There ain't no boots—old boots nor any other boots."

"Ain't there, Mark? Oh, there was, there was."

"Bosh! You've been dreaming."

"Have I?" said the girl, after a long stare about the moonlit carpet. "I thought I saw them." Then, with a quick change: "Wherever have you been?"

"Oh, only to the races with the guv'nor."

"But you ain't been racing till this time o' night?" cried the girl, suspiciously.

"Well, not quite. Some on 'em—bookies and jocks—got up a bit o' dinner."

"I don't believe it. What for?"

"All along o' settling up, and that sort of thing."

"Settling up? What's that—paying up?"

"Yes, my gal."

"I know what that means. Now then, out with it."

"Wait till the morning," said Mark, grinning.

"How much was it? No keeping it back. If you do, it's all off, and I'll never speak to you again. Now then, let this be a lesson to you. I will know. How much have you lost?"

"Guess."

"I won't guess. It's too serious a matter."

"So it is, my lass; so it is, and I'll make a clean breast of it, Jenny."

"Yes, you'd better."

"I've won!" he cried, catching the girl in his arms.

"What! I don't believe it."

"I have, and enough, with what the brewers would advance, to take a nice little country pub—one we can make into a hotel."

"Ah, well," said Jane, primly, "it ain't no time to be talking about no hotels nor publicns in the middle o' the night like this."

"Why not?"

"Because it ain't proper. Look here; is Mr Trimmer coming home?"

"What, ain't he at home neither?"

"No, nobody's come back but you. What about master? Is he along with her ladyship?"

"No; he was took bad just afore the race, but Dr Granton give him a pick-me-up that kep' him going till he'd won the race."

"Her ladyship had give him a talking-to, I suppose?"

Mark grinned, winked, and lifted his elbow in a peculiar way, suggestive of drinking.

"Oh-h-h!" exclaimed Jane, in a half-whisper. "What a shame!"

"Sh!" whispered the groom. "Not a word. Don't say a word to a soul. I wouldn't have trusted anyone else with it, Jenny. I believe it was on'y a glass or two of fizz on the top of a bucketful of excitement because he was going to ride."

"But there it is, you see, Mark! horses and racing leads to drinking, and I mean to think twice before I tie myself to anyone who drinks and gambles. Is master with her ladyship now?"

"No, I tell you; he's badly, and stopping at Simpkins's, with Master Syd taking care of him; and her ladyship was took bad too, after a rumpus at the hotel."

"Oh, how disgraceful!" interrupted Jane. "Her ladyship stooping to do that, and master getting tipsy and running races. I shall give notice, Mark. I've got a character to lose."

"You'd better! You don't leave here till—you know."

"Oh, no, I don't; and now I'm going to bed. But tell me, where did you say her ladyship was?"

"How many more times?" cried the groom, impatiently. "I've told you five or six times."

"You haven't, Mark."

"I have. Her ladyship was took bad at the hotel when she found the guv'nor looking quite tight afore he went off to win the race, and only just in time to get up to the scratch. Then as soon as it was over the doctor has to physic him and see to her ladyship, and the doctor and Lady Tilborough takes her to Oakleigh."

"Why didn't they bring her home?" said Jane, sharply.

"How should I know? Because Lady Tilborough thought perhaps that master would join 'em there and make it up. But I dunno. Had too much business of my own to 'tend to."

"What business?" said Jane, suspiciously. "Getting along with a bad set of touts, drinking, I suppose."

"Get out! I was making sure of the money I'd won while I could. That's right; hang away from a fellow! Just like a woman! Think you're going to ketch something?"

"That will do," said the girl, coldly. "You smell horrid of beer and smoke. Oh, Mark!" she whispered; and he had no room for complaints of a want of warmth, for the girl flung her arms about him, clinging tightly, and placed her lips closely to his ear. "There," she cried, in an agitated way; "hark! Is that fancy? There are burglars in the house."

Mark drew the girl more into the shade near the fireplace, and softly picked up the brightly-polished poker from where it lay. For he had distinctly heard a soft rattle as if of a latchkey, the opening and closing of the hall door, and then as he stood listening there was the scratch of a match which faintly lit up the hall as far as they could see through the drawing-room door.

Directly after there was a click, as of a candlestick being removed, an augmentation of the light which approached, and in the full intention of—to use the groom's own words—"letting 'em have it," Mark thrust the girl behind him, and made ready to bring the poker down heavily upon the burglar's head.

But he did not, for the head and face, looking yellow and ghastly by the light of a chamber candle, were those of Lady Lisle's agent and confidential man.

Possibly from weariness, there was no spasmodic start, Trimmer staring glassy-eyed and strange, and with his black felt hat looking battered and soiled, while in their revulsion of feeling Jane and Mark found no words to say.

“What are you two doing here?” said Trimmer at last, speaking in rather a tongue-tied fashion, but as if in full possession of his faculties.

“Waiting up to let you in, sir,” said Jane, sharply.

“It is not true,” said the agent. “You must have known I could let myself in. You two are holding a disgraceful clandestine meeting; and I shall consider it my duty to report these proceedings when her ladyship sees me after breakfast. I am called away for a few hours to London, and upon my return the whole house is in disorder.”

“Thank ye, sir; then I shall speak to her ladyship myself as soon as she comes home,” said Jane, pertly.

“What! Her ladyship not returned yet?”

“No, sir; and I’ve got to sit up till she do.”

“Er—where has she gone? Someone ill?”

“Haw, haw, haw! Hark at that, Jane! He didn’t see her ladyship’s carriage at the races. Oh, no! He didn’t go and see old Sam Simpkins, the trainer, and make a bet or two; not him! And I wasn’t close behind him in the crowd when the gov’nor came in a winner, and I didn’t see him bang his hat down on the ground and stamp on it. Oh, no! You give me that hat, Mr Trimmer, sir, and I’ll brush and sponge it and iron it into shape so that it’ll look as good as new.”

The agent’s countenance went through several changes before it settled down into a ghastly smile.

“Well, well,” he said, “I must confess to being attracted to seeing the big race, but I did not know you would be there, Mark. But you surprise me. Sir Hilton and her ladyship not returned? A great surprise, though, Mark—Jane. You know, of course? Sir Hilton returning to the old evil ways.”

“Yah? Chuck it up, Mr Trimmer, sir,” said Mark, in a tone of disgust; “and when you tell her ladyship you caught me and Jane here talking after she let me in, just you tell her how much you won on the race.”

“Won—won—won, my lad?” said the agent, with loud, louder, loudest in his utterance of the word. “I’ve lost; I’m nearly ruined. Oh, it has been a horrible day. Here, I’m ill. I must have a little brandy, I’m ready to faint.”

“Sorry for you, sir,” said Mark, as the ghastly-looking man turned to go back across the hall.

“Same here, sir,” said Jane, with a grave curtsey; “but I don’t see as it’ll do you any good now you’re ruined to try and ruin us.”

“And if I was you, sir, I wouldn’t touch another drop, sir,” put in Mark. “I’ve seen chaps in your state before after a race—chaps who have lost every penny—go and fly to the drink.”

Trimmer gazed vacantly at the speaker, passed his tongue over his parched lips, and said feebly—

“Do I—do I look as if I had been drinking, Mark?”

“That’s so, sir; and as if, seeing what a stew you’re in over your losses, it hadn’t took a bit of effect upon you.”

“No, no,” said the agent, slowly. “I don’t feel as if I had had more than a glass.”

“And all the time, sir, as the conductors say, you’re ‘full up’; and if you put any more on it you’ll soon find it out, and come on with a fit of the horrors, same as some poor beggars have before there’s an inquest.”

The agent shuddered, and unconsciously began to play with the extinguisher of the plated candlestick, lifting it off the cone upon which it rested, putting it back, and ending by lifting it off quickly, and, as if to illustrate the groom’s meaning, putting out the light.

“Pst! Hark! What’s that?” cried Jane, excitedly. “Here they are!”

Trimmer started violently. “Oh,” he cried, “I can’t meet anybody now. Mark—Jane—don’t say that I have been out I shall not—tell her ladyship—a word.”

“Thank ye for nothing,” said Mark, mockingly, as the door closed upon the departing agent. “How the dickens did he do that?” he added, for a flower-pot in the conservatory fell with a crash upon the encaustic tiled floor, and Jane uttered a gasp.

But the next instant the front door-bell was rung violently.

“Come with me, Mark,” whispered the girl, and they both hurried into the hall, the groom to open the door, and Jane to busy herself with trembling hands striking matches to light a couple of the chamber candlesticks standing ready upon the slab.

Chapter Twenty Two.

In the Fog.

“Murder! Now for a row,” thought the groom, as, to his horror, he saw in the moonlight, instead of the barouche and

pair with Lady Lisle inside, the dogcart, down from which Sir Hilton was stepping, helped by Syd, while a second dogcart was coming up the drive with a lady on the seat and a big heavy man leading the horse, and the gate clicking loudly as it swung to and fro.

"Beg pardon, Sir Hilton," cried Mark, eagerly. "Didn't know you meant to come back to-night. Thought I'd run over and see if all was right at home."

"Humph!" grunted the baronet, entering the porch and reeling slightly as he raised one hand to his head.

"Steady, uncle!" cried Syd. "Mind the cob, Mark. Lead him away, but come back and take Mr Simpkins's nag too."

The boy turned to meet the big, burly man, who drew his vehicle up to the door and stopped to look back.

"Can you help her down, youngster—my boy, I mean?"

"Yes, all right, sir."

"I can jump down, dad," cried the occupant of the seat. "Now, Syd, catch me; look out!"

The boy's intentions were admirable, and the young lady light; but, as Mark afterwards said to Jane, with a chuckle, when he knew all, "Master Syd wasn't up to her weight." For, as the young wife alighted, she was caught, but the catcher staggered back, and would have fallen but for the lady's agility, for she not only saved herself but clung to the boy's hands, so that he only sat down on the steps.

"Houp-la!" she cried, striking a little attitude.

"Hullo! Hurt?" growled Simpkins.

"No, he's all right, dad. Ain't you, Syd dear?"

"Hurt, no," cried the boy. "But those stones are hard. Come along in."

"Wait a moment, my gal," growled the trainer, and he drew his child aside.

"What's the matter, dad?"

"Nothing. I'm going round to see the mare put up and fed. I shall be in directly. But look here, don't you commit yourself before I come."

"Who's going to?" said the girl, merrily, as she seemed to take the nocturnal excursion as a capital bit of fun.

"Well, I only warn you, my gal. Mind, you're as good as they are. Don't you let 'em begin sitting upon you because you've got a fine chance."

"All right, dad. I'm to be a different sort of furniture from that."

"I dunno what you mean, my gal—some of your larks, I suppose. But just you mind; don't put it in these here words, but when my orty fine lady begins on you, just you say to her, ses you, 'None o' that! I'm as good as you.'"

"What's he saying, darling?" cried Syd, impatiently.

"Not much, young gentleman; only telling her to mind now you have brought her home as she has her rights."

Syd caught his young wife's hands and hurried her into the hall, and from thence into the drawing-room, where he found his uncle impatiently walking up and down.

"Oh, it's you, Syd," said the baronet, impatiently. "Call Jane, there's a confounded cat in the conservatory. Just knocked down one of the pots."

"All right, uncle," said the boy. "You sit down there, Molly," he whispered, "and look here, you must help me when your father comes in. He would drive over, and kept on insisting to me that he couldn't let me come alone with uncle; but it was only to show off before auntie."

"Yes, I know; he's been preaching to me. Where is she?"

"Sitting up for us somewhere, pet," said Syd. "Here she comes. Back me up, and be nice," he whispered, "and then make your guv'nor take you home. You know how."

"Yes, Syd dear," whispered the girl; "but I'm awful tired, you know."

"Pst! Oh, it's you, Jane."

"Yes, sir. I'll light that lamp if you'll stand aside."

"Oh, yes, do. It's beastly dark."

Jane began lighting up and stealing glances full of admiration as she handled match after match slowly, every glance affording her satisfaction, especially when the hood of the cloak Molly wore was thrown back and the girl gave her a pleasant, admiring smile, and showed a pair of laughing eyes and a set of pearly teeth.

"Why, it's master's biking young lady," said Jane to herself, in astonishment. "There'll be a row after this."

"Where's auntie, Jane?" said Syd, suddenly.

"Not come back from Tilborough yet, sir," replied the girl, snappishly.

Sir Hilton, who was still walking up and down, turned sharply at the words "auntie" and "Tilborough"; but he said nothing, only passed his hand in a fidgety way over his forehead and continued his wild-beast-like walk, muttering every now and then to himself, till he stopped suddenly close to the young couple, who were whispering together.

"Tackle him directly he comes in, pet," Syd was saying.

"But dad's so obstinate, Syd. You give him a good talking-to. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not—not a bit; but I don't want to have a row just at present."

"But it's got to be done, Syd dear. You have a good go at dad. Tell him it's of no use for him to kick, and he must make the best of it."

"Yes, yes, I will, pet; but in the middle of the night like this? I want to get uncle to bed. He's very queer yet."

"Yes, he does look groggy," said the girl, innocently; "but you needn't be in such a hurry to get rid of me now I am here."

"I am not, darling. I should like to keep you here—always; only uncle isn't fit to talk to yet."

"He does look dazy. I say, Syd, he does understand that we are married?"

"No, pet, he hasn't an idea."

"What a shame!" cried the girl. "You said you'd tell him at once."

"Look at him! What's the good of telling him now, when every word would roll off him like water from a duck's back, and not one go in?"

"I don't know; try. If you don't, I shall. There, I will," cried the girl, and starting up before Syd could stop her, she planted herself theatrically before Sir Hilton, and with an arch look, and her eyes twinkling, she laid a hand upon the baronet's arm, saying—

"Please, Sir Hilton, shall I do?"

He stared at her wonderingly for some moments.

"Eh?" he said. "Do? Who is it?"

"Miss Simpkins, Sir Hilton. You know—La Sylphide."

Sir Hilton laid his left hand upon his forehead, and gazed at the girl thoughtfully.

"La Sylphide?" he said at last. "Did she win?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton, by three lengths," cried the girl, eagerly; "but, please, don't you know me?"

"No," said Sir Hilton, shaking his head. "No."

"There, I told you so," whispered Syd. "He's quite off his nut."

"But I'm your niece, Sir Hilton," persisted the girl, pressing up to him, as if asking for an avuncular kiss; "and I'm Mrs Sydney Smithers."

"Yes," said Sir Hilton, thoughtfully, as Syd took his young wife's announcement as his cue to rise, and stood by her ready to receive a share of the coming blessing—or the other thing.

"Thank you, yes," said Sir Hilton, dreamily. "Yes, I know you now. La Sylphide, the mare, won, and you are La Sylphide too, the pretty little girl at the big music-hall who called herself after my mare. Thank you, Miss Simpkins. I hope you won a pair of gloves."

"Oh, dear!" cried the girl, pouting; "he don't understand a bit. I suppose, Syd, we must wait till he comes round. But do you think it was our champagne that made him so ill? Oh, here's dad. Daddy dear, Sir Hilton's quite off his head still."

"Yes, my gal, I know."

"But do you think our champagne was bad enough to make him as queer as this?"

"What!" roared the trainer, with his face turning mottled. "No, cert'n'y not. Hold your tongue! Well, Sir Hilton, how are you now?"

"Never better, Sam! never better. A little thick in the head only. You need not trouble any more about me."

"Oh, but I do, Sir Hilton."

"Nonsense, man!" said the baronet, drawing himself up. "I'm quite right. I can't understand how it was you persisted in coming, and bringing your charming daughter with you all this way, and at so late an hour. Why, it must be getting on

for ten."

"For ten, Sir Hilton?" cried Simpkins, with a chuckle, and, to the baronet's surprise, he dropped into a lounge.

"Don't scold father, uncle," said the girl, with a little emphasis on the last word, whose effect was to make the gentleman addressed lay his fidgety left hand once more upon his forehead. "I wanted to come, you know."

"Eh? Very good of you," said Sir Hilton, politely; "and I shall make a point of telling Lady Lisle how kind and attentive you were at your house during my little indisposition. It was the sun, I feel sure."

"Ay, you've hit it now, Sir Hilton. That's what it was—the sun."

"Yes, the sun," assented Sir Hilton, before turning again smilingly to Molly. "Yes," he repeated, "I feel sure that Lady Lisle will be most grateful, and that she will call upon you to express her gratitude for the kindness of La Sylphide."

"Oh! Sir Hilton—" began Molly; but she stopped, for he went off, wandering strangely again at the mention of that word, but only to be brought up short by the trainer.

"There, what did I say, Sir Hilton? You were not fit to go, but you would insist upon coming home."

"Ah, yes," cried the baronet, recollecting himself again. "I remember now—I was ill—in bed—there was the doctor—I grew better, and wanted to come home, and the landlord insisted upon bringing his little nurse."

"That's right, Sir Hilton."

"But I didn't want him, and I don't want the little nurse; do I, Syd?"

"No, uncle, of course not. But I do, darling," whispered the boy, nudging his wife.

"Quite right, my boy. So now, Mr Simpkins, I thank you once more. Will you have the goodness to take your daughter and go?"

"No, Sir Hilton, with all due respect to you," said the trainer, drawing himself up; "seeing how things has happened, and what it all means to me and mine now, I say as you ain't fit to be left. Is he, my dear?"

"No, dad. I think he looks very ill."

"That's right, my dear," whispered the trainer. "Here you are, and here you're going to stop."

Sir Hilton had turned angrily away at the trainer's reply, and went out into the hall, followed by Syd.

"What impudence! Not ill a bit now, only a little thick in the head. Hang him! Let him stop, Syd; but what about that girl? I don't know what your aunt will say."

"No, uncle; no more do I."

Sir Hilton pulled out his watch and glanced at it. "Here, confound it! My watch has stopped. What time—"

Before he could finish his question the clock began to answer by chiming twice.

"Half-past what?" cried Sir Hilton, staring at the clock-face, and then passing his hand over his eyes impatiently. "I say, here, Syd, my eyes are not clear to-night. What time is it?"

"Half-past three, uncle."

"Half-past what? Here, I'm getting mixed. Why is it half-past three? What has the clock been gaining like that for? Here, Syd, why don't you answer, sir? I can't remember. What does it all mean?"

"I think it's because your head's a bit wrong, uncle," said the boy, shrinking.

"I think it's because you're an impudent young rascal, sir," cried Sir Hilton in a passion. "Ah! I remember now; I promised you a good thrashing for—for—"

He stopped short, and looked vacantly at his nephew for some seconds. Then—

"Here, what the deuce did I promise you a good thrashing for, sir?"

"A thrashing, uncle? Let me see—"

"Bah!" cried Sir Hilton, turning angrily away and making for the drawing-room again, to find the trainer mopping his forehead where he sat, and Molly leaning back in the corner of the quilted couch dropping off to sleep, but ready to start up at his coming.

"Here, you," he cried, "that boy Syd's an idiot."

"That I'm sure he's not," cried the girl, indignantly, "and you oughtn't to call him so, even if you are his uncle. Syd!"

"You tell me, then," said Sir Hilton. "What did I—Oh, hang it all!" he cried, "I can't remember a bit."

"That you can't, Sir Hilton," said the trainer, nervously, as Sir Hilton stared at him blankly, pressing his hands to his head. "It's just what I told you, Sir Hilton. What you want is a good night's rest, and you'll feel better in the morning."

"But I feel better now—ever so much. What should I want to go to bed for? Why, I've only just got up."

"Oh, dear!" groaned the trainer to himself. "I give it him too strong; I give it him too strong, and it was nothing like what one might ha' give a horse."

"Look here," cried Sir Hilton, making as if to fix his visitor with a pointing finger, which he kept in motion following imaginary movements on the part of Simpkins. "I wish to goodness you'd sit still. What the dickens do you keep bobbing about like that for? What did you say—go to bed?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

"But why—why? Didn't I just get up?"

"'Bout 'nour ago, Sir Hilton. You see, we've driv' over here since. You would get up and come."

"Of course! Home—to my wife. That's right; I can see that quite plain, and—Here you two on the sofa, what are you doing? You, Syd, let that young lady alone, sir. Sit up, my dear. It isn't delicate for you to be going to sleep on his shoulder like that."

"Yes, it is—now," whimpered the girl, half crying. "I can't help it. I'm so dreadfully sleepy."

"Of course you are, of course. Poor little thing! Half-past three! Why, you ought to have been in bed hours ago. It was shameful of your father to bring you here. But—but—but," cried the unfortunate man, staring and gesticulating fiercely, "why doesn't someone tell me?"

"I did tell yer, Sir Hilton. The hosses was put in the dogcarts when you would come, and I've seen you safe. Can't you understand now?"

"No, no; not a bit. Here, Syd!"

"Yes, uncle."

"Come here."

"Yes, uncle. There, lean your head back, Molly, if you will go to sleep."

"I can't help it, Syd dear; and I'm so cold."

"Here, pull that over you, then," whispered the boy hastily, and, as the poor girl sank back, he seized and gave the great silk-lined skin a hasty twitch which swept it right over his young wife. "Did you call me, uncle?"

"Yes, of course. I want Mark and that girl."

"What girl, uncle?" cried the lad, indignantly.

"What girl, sir? Jane, the maid. Where are they?"

"Gone to the pantry, I s'pose, uncle," said Syd, giving a glance in the direction of the couch and seeing nothing now but the hump of white, woolly skin. "Gone to bed, p'raps. I say, uncle; do go too. You'll be able to think better when you wake up."

"Wake up!" said Sir Hilton, musingly—"remember? Yes; something about a boy—no, a girl on a bicycle. I did, didn't I?—talk to a girl—or see one on a bicycle—no, it was in pale blue and scarlet I did, didn't I, Sam?"

"Yes, sir; I think you did—to my gal there."

Sir Hilton looked in the direction in which the trainer pointed, and saw the Polar bear skin; nothing more.

"Where?" he said vacantly, as he turned his eyes back upon the trainer, who was wiping the drops again from his steaming face. "Your girl—Mary Ann Simpkins—La Sylphide?"

"Oh, pore chap, he's quite off his head!" groaned the trainer. "It means a 'sylum, and if old Trimmer splits—"

"Ha!" cried Sir Hilton, in a tone which made the trainer spring to his feet, staring wildly at the speaker.

"Here, uncle, don't go on like that," said Syd, soothingly. "I wish old Granton were here with a straight waistcoat. Here, Sam Simpkins help me! It's all your fault. Don't seize a fellow like that, uncle? Help, Sam! He's got 'em horrid, and it must be with the stuff he had in your place."

"Now, don't you go and say such a thing as that, young gen'leman," cried the trainer, fiercely, as he tried to take hold of Sir Hilton's arm. "Here, let's get him to bed, and you'd better send for your doctor."

"Be quiet, both of you," cried Sir Hilton, shaking himself free. "My head's clear now, but I must have been ill; my head has been horribly mixed up. Yes, I recollect now; but speak low. Don't make a noise, or you'll be having her ladyship down."

"I believe she has been listening all the time. Oh, uncle, there will be such a scene in the morning."

"Yes, my boy," said Sir Hilton, nervously; "but we must hush it up. Yes, that's it; I promised Lady Tilborough I'd ride her mare."

"Yes, uncle; that's right."

"And somehow I couldn't get to the saddling paddock."

"Why, you're going back again now, uncle."

"No, my boy. I can see it all clearly enough now. I couldn't get there after that champagne—"

Simpkins had hard work to suppress a groan.

"Some little syren of a girl got hold of me and kept me back so that I lost the race, Lady Tilborough's money, and my four thousand pounds."

"Don't, uncle! Pull yourself together. You're sliding back again."

"Yes; stop him," cried the trainer, seizing his victim and shaking him hard. "Don't go back, Sir Hilton; if you don't come round now, see what it means for me and my pore gal."

"Oh, uncle, you're going off again," said Syd, excitedly. "Do hold on to something, and don't keep sliding back. Try—try. Now give your head a good shake to make it work. Here, Sam Simpkins, don't you think we might give him a dose of spirits to wind him up?"

"No, no," cried the trainer, excitedly. "With a head like this there is no knowing what might happen to him."

"But I can't let him stop like this. There, don't waggle your head any more, uncle; try if you can remember now."

"No; nothing but the bees, my boy."

"The bees?"

"Yes, my boy, and the rushing after the poll. Oh, yes, I'm beginning to recollect now. The election, and the race against Watcombe, the brewer."

"Race?" cried Syd. "That's the right clue, uncle. Now you're beginning to go again. That shaking did it. Now hold tight to the 'race.'"

"Yes, my boy; I remember all right now; heading the poll and leaving the brewer nowhere."

"No, no; the race, uncle—the race."

"Of course, my boy. It's all coming back now. That bad champagne and the buzzing of the bees."

"Oh, dear!" groaned the trainer; "he don't forget that, and he's off again."

"To be sure," cried Sir Hilton, eagerly. "I recollect. It was ever so long ago, and the speaker was—"

"No, no, uncle; you're getting mixed again. The starter."

"No, my boy, the speaker in the chair, and the bell was ringing."

"That's right, uncle, to clear the course. Now you're all right!"

"Yes, now I'm all right, my boy. I was in and there was a division. I rushed through the Lobby, and out into the fresh air. The mare was ready. Someone gave me a leg-up, and I was all excitement for the race."

"That's your sort, uncle," cried Syd, as with his eyes fixed on one of the moonlit windows, Sir Hilton stopped, panting as if out of breath. "Bravo! Stick to the rage. He's coming round fast now, Sam."

"No, no; look at him. He's as mad as a hatter."

"Yes," cried Sir Hilton; "then, before I knew where we were, and without waiting for the starter, away we went. Parliament Street was passed in a stride—the mob scattered right and left. Charing Cross and the lions—Cockspur Street—Pall Mall—whirr—buzz—away we went, with the bees swarming round my head. Just at the corner by the clubs I wrenched her head round, and she bounded up Saint James's Street. A drag to the left, and we were in Piccadilly. A road-car was in the way, but she cleared it in a bound. Cabs strewed the earth, for the strike was over; but she took them all in her stride as we dashed on, just catching a glimpse of the houses to the right—the Green Park to the left. Then, clearing a penny 'bus at Hyde Park Corner, we nearly rushed into the hospital doors. Again I wrenched her head, turning in my saddle in time to see a passenger on the knifeboard pick up his hat. Then down Constitution Hill we swept as if gliding along a chute. In my wild excitement, as we darted by the Palace, I yelled out, 'God save the King!' But he was not at home, and we were urging on our wild career past the barracks, along the Bird-cage Walk. The ducks whirred up from the pool, the people shrieked, as we scattered perambulators, nursemaids, and children, flying like leaves upon the wind. Storey's Gate was closed, but the mare laughed—a loud, weird laugh—as she cleared it, and we dropped in Great George Street, where a newsboy yelled 'winners!' with the Parliament House in sight. 'We win—we win!' I cried, for it was the goal. 'Give her her head!' the people yelled, but the mare took it. She stretched her neck right into infinite space, my silk swelled out like a bubble, and feeling that I must steer now I drew on the reins, hand over hand—hand over hand—to feel her head; but it was half a mile away. At last I got a bite. She took the bait—the bit in her teeth, and I struck, turned her, and we dashed through Palace Yard again, straight for the great Hall doors. 'M.P. mustn't pass!' shouted an inspector, throwing out his arms. 'Head of the poll!' I yelled, and the mare went through him like a flash, as we reached the Lobby once more. There was the straight run in, and holding her well in hand I lifted her over the gangway and settled down to win. How they cheered! Opposition to right of me, Government to left of me, and the Speaker ahead of me, waving me on. 'The Ayes have it! The Noes! The Ayes! The Noes! They volleyed, they thundered. 'Vide—'vide—'vide—'vide!' and the mare 'vided them as we still tore on, nearer and nearer, till the curls in the Speaker's wig grew clear, and then the whites of his eyes. Nearer and nearer in the mad excitement of the race, till with one final rush we passed the Mace, the Irish

party rising as one man, and ran past the winning-post right into Parliament to the roaring of their wild hurroo!"

"Bravo! Hurroo!" shouted Syd, as his uncle stopped, panting heavily again. "That was how you did it. You won; only you've got it a bit mixed. But you're coming round. I say, you feel ever so much better, don't you, for getting rid of that?"

"Oh, it's all over, my lad," cried the trainer. "Did you ever hear the like?"

"It's only excitement," said Syd. "Look at him; he's calming down now beautifully. You see, he'd got two things on his brain—the race and the election—and having been a bit screwed with the bad stuff you let him have, he naturally got himself a bit mixed."

"Mixed?" said Sir Hilton, turning upon the boy sharply. "Wasn't I talking about something just now? But look, look at that man Simpkins rolling his eyes about. Is he going mad?"

"Not a bit o' it, Sir Hilton; it's you as is mad. Ain't it enough as I've lost what I have?"

"You lost too?"

"Yes, uncle," cried Syd, shaking him; "but you haven't. You won—for all of us. I turned that ten you gave me into a century."

"I—won?" stammered Sir Hilton, with his hands pressing his temples.

"To be sure you did. You were sitting all of a jelly, and the game was nearly up; but Dr Jack Granton gave you a drench, just as if you'd been a horse. Then we got you into the air, and you came round directly, and ran between us to the saddling paddock, where we set you on to the mare just in time, and you led the field from the beginning. You won in a canter. Can't you recollect?"

"No, nothing."

"Don't you remember nearly tumbling off the horse after you'd passed the post?"

"No."

"Nor getting into the scales, saddle and bridle and all?"

"No; nothing whatever."

"Oh, Sam Simpkins, you must have given him a dose!"

"Yes, I remember that—that champagne. It did taste very queer and strange," cried Sir Hilton, turning upon the trainer, whose red face looked piebald with sickly white, so strangely was it mottled.

"I'd had it a long time, Sir Hilton," stammered the man. "P'raps it was a bit off."

"Oh, hang that!" cried Sir Hilton. "Tell me again, Syd, my boy; did I win?"

"In a canter, I tell you, uncle," cried the boy.

"Ha!" sighed Sir Hilton, with a look of intense relief. "But it must be kept from your aunt. She has such—"

"Kept from auntie?" cried Syd, staring. "Why, she knows all."

"Knows all? You've told her?"

"No-o-o-o. Don't you remember? No, you recollect nothing. She got to know you were off to ride somehow, and came after us to the hotel."

"What?"

"That's right, uncle. Lady Lisle came and saw him, didn't she, Sam?"

"Yes, sir," growled Sam, still mopping his face.

"But not dressed—not in my silk and boots?"

"Oh, yes, uncle. Didn't she, Sam?"

"Yes, sir; that's right enough."

"Horror!" groaned Sir Hilton. "She'll never forgive me."

"Worse than that, uncle. She saw that you were tight."

"You young villain, it's not true!" roared Sir Hilton. "How dare you say that!"

"Because it's true," cried Syd, lightly. "Isn't it, Sam?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the man. "Wery screwed indeed."

"Tell me the rest," groaned Sir Hilton in despair.

"Fainted away, uncle; but I didn't stop to see. I had to look to you and the race. But afterwards Dr Jack Granton went back to the hotel and physicked her. Didn't he, Sam?"

"Yes, sir, 'long o' Lady Tilborough; and they took her away in her ladyship's carriage to Oakleigh."

"And then brought her home?"

"I s'pose so, uncle. I dunno. I stuck to you. So did Sam."

"Thank you, my boy—thank you, Simpkins. I'll talk to you another time. But, you see, I'm quite clear and well now."

"Yes, Sir Hilton—thank goodness!" said the trainer, hoarsely.

"Then, now, you had better have a glass of something and drive—What's that?"

"Wheels, uncle. There goes the gate."

The click, click, click came very plainly, and the next minute there were the steps of Jane and Mark in the hall.

"Stop a moment," cried Sir Hilton. "What is it? Who is it come?"

"Her ladyship, I think, Sir Hilton," cried Jane.

"What! I thought she was at home."

"No, sir. She went to Tilborough after you."

"Uncle," cried Syd, "whatever shall we say?"

He shrank back with his uncle into the drawing-room, and the door swung to, while the next moment they heard the front door open and Lady Lisle's voice.

"Has Sir Hilton returned?"

"Yes, my lady," replied Jane.

"Ha!"

Lady Lisle hurried into the drawing-room with stately stride, but she looked round in vain, and faced Lady Tilborough and Doctor Granton, who had followed her in, for the late occupants of the room had disappeared.

So vast is woman's power over man.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Further In.

The sound of his wife's voice had a wonderful effect upon Sir Hilton for the moment, and, turning sharply, he rushed out of the drawing-room and down the passage leading to the servants' portion of the house.

"Here, Sam," cried Syd, "come on and stop him. He's going into another fit."

The boy dashed after his uncle, closely followed by the trainer, and they overtook him in the pale light of the kitchen, whose window faced the east, standing, panting hard, with his hand upon the table, where he was collared by one on each side.

"What are you doing that for?" he cried.

"Never you mind, Sir Hilton. You've got to stop here."

"That's right, uncle. Come, steady! No larks."

"Larks, sir? Let go. I insist. Let go, I tell you. I'm going to meet your aunt, Syd. I must have some explanation with her about all this."

"Well, if you come to that, Sir Hilton, that's what I want too about my gal. If it's all the same, I'll go back first."

"That you don't," cried Syd, shifting his hold from uncle to father-in-law. "There'll be row enough without having that in the mess. Hark! Can't you hear talking?" he whispered. "Aunt's having it over with Molly. Let them settle it before we go in."

"Look here, don't you talk like that, my boy, to one old enough to be your grandfather," protested the trainer. "You're not standing up for my gal's rights as you should do, and if you don't I must."

"But one thing at a time, old man. Let's get uncle quieted down first."

"Quieted down?" cried Sir Hilton. "What do you mean? Here, Syd, my throat's on fire. Fill that jug at the tap."

"Won't hurt him, will it?" whispered Syd.

"I d'know, my lad; I'd charnsh it now."

The jug was filled at the tap over the sink and handed to Sir Hilton, who drank long and deeply, setting it down with a loud "Ha!" just as a familiar voice rang out loudly—

"Hilton! Hilton! Are you there?"

For as the pair dashed out after Sir Hilton the door through which they passed closed with a dull, jarring thud, which seemed to bring down another flower-pot in the conservatory; but this was not heard by Lady Lisle, who entered the drawing-room excitedly, closely followed by Lady Tilborough and the doctor, all looking pallid and all-nightish in the yellow light of the candles mingled with the pale grey dawn stealing in.

"Now, pray listen to me, my dear Lady Lisle," said Lady Tilborough, in a soothing voice. "Do be reasonable."

"I will not listen to you, madam," cried Lady Lisle, passionately.

"Pray do now. For your own sake as well as your husband's."

"He is no husband of mine," cried Lady Lisle, excitedly.

"Be reasonable. Come, think, my dear madam. You cannot wish to have a scandal. Your servants are in the hall. You cannot want them to hear."

"They must hear—the whole world will hear. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!"

"Say a word to her, for heaven's sake, Jack!" whispered Lady Tilborough; and the doctor stepped forward.

"Yes, Lady Lisle," he said firmly, "I am bound to speak—as, temporarily, your medical attendant."

"Wretched man, why did you not let me die?" cried Lady Lisle, pacing up and down and wringing her hands.

"Because I wished to save an estimable lady for a reconciliation with an old friend; for really, my dear madam, when you calm down, you will see that you have been most unreasonable."

"Unreasonable? Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the unhappy woman, hysterically.

"Yes, my dear madam; most unreasonable. First in insisting upon leaving Oakleigh at this extremely early hour in the morning, after you had been suffering from a congeries of hysterical fits. Recollect what you promised me."

"I recollect nothing but my wrongs," cried Lady Lisle.

"Then as your medical attendant, called in upon this emergency by my friend, Lady Tilborough, it is my duty to tell you that you gave me your word that you would be calm if I allowed you to return."

"Yes," said the suffering woman, bitterly. "I promised because I could not bear to stay longer in that hateful woman's house."

"It seemed to me, madam, that the lady whom you so wrong, behaved in a very loving and sisterly way to you in an emergency."

"Yes; brought about by her machinations."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Lady Tilborough. "What an unreasonable darling it is! Machinations! Why, I only asked a dear old friend to help me and save me from ruin, and he responded nobly."

"Ruin? You helped to ruin him by luring him back to the diabolical horrors of the Turf."

"There, there, my dear; I won't argue with you, certainly not quarrel. Pray, pray try and calm yourself, or you'll be having another of those terrible hysterical fits."

"Yes," said Granton, "and worse than the last."

"I am glad. It will be my last. Infamous woman, why did you drag me to your house?"

"Because, my dear, I didn't like to see a lady in your position ill and suffering in such a place as the Tilborough Arms."

"And because, my dear madam, when I found how bad you were I begged Lady Tilborough to save you from a long hour's drive home when your coachman was not to be found."

"But you lured my husband away, woman."

"Well, I have confessed to that, my dear madam, and I am sorry that you should look upon it with different eyes from mine. I don't think I have been such a terrible sinner, do you, doctor?" she added, with a look which made the gentleman addressed flutter as regarded his nerves.

But he had the medical man's command over self, and he said quietly: "I think when Lady Lisle has grown calmer she will look a little more leniently upon her neighbour's actions. Now, pray, my dear madam, let me beg of you to—Ah! that's better. Don't try to restrain your tears. They are the greatest anodyne for an overwrought mind. Now, remember your promise. Let me ring for your maid. A cup of tea and a good long sleep, and the racing escapade will wear a different aspect by the light of noon."

"Oh, doctor, doctor!" sobbed the poor woman, passionately, as she yielded to Granton's pressure, and sank into a lounge; "you do not know—you do not know!"

"Yes, yes, yes, I know; but pray think. I grant that racing is gambling, but I really believe my dear old friend Hilton Lisle will for the future yield to your wishes and fight shy—I beg your pardon—religiously abstain from attending Turf meetings."

"Oh, oh, oh, doctor!" sobbed the patient, who was at her weakest in the weakest hour of the twenty-four. "You do not know all. I could have forgiven that; but when I discovered the base disloyalty of the man in whom I had always the most perfect faith—"

"Dear me! Ahem!" coughed the doctor. "I—" and he glanced at Lady Tilborough.

"Oh, hang it, no!" cried the latter, firing up. "Surely, madam, you don't think that! Oh, absurd! Poor old Hilton! Oh, nonsense, nonsense! Why, the woman is jealous of me!"

"No, no, no!" cried Lady Lisle, excitedly. "I did not think—Oh, no, Lady Tilborough, I do not think that."

"Ha! That's some comfort," sighed the lady addressed; but she frowned angrily, and the look she darted at the doctor was by no means like the last, though his was of the most abject, imploring kind.

"I can't explain—I can't explain," sobbed Lady Lisle in her handkerchief. "I would sooner die, for it is all over now."

The others exchanged looks and a whisper or two, as they drew aside from the weeping woman.

"Oh, I don't believe it of poor old Hilt," said Lady Tilborough.

"Neither do I," cried the doctor.

"There is no one," said Lady Tilborough. "Unless—" she added, as a sudden thought struck her. "No, no, no; he's too loyal to go running after a pretty little commonplace doll like that, Jack."

"I hope so," said the doctor, shaking his head. "Well, here he is to answer for himself," he added quickly, for the farther door was opened, and, clad in slippers and dressing-gown, and carrying a flat candlestick, whose light was not wanted, and looking quite himself mentally, but ghastly pale, Sir Hilton briskly entered the room.

"What's the meaning of this?" he cried, stopping short, and looking from one to the other.

"Oh-h-h-h!" exclaimed Lady Lisle, in a long-drawn utterance expressive of her anger and disgust.

"Why, Hilt, old fellow," cried Granton, "I thought you were ill in bed?"

"What brings you here, sir?" cried Sir Hilton. "But stop; I'll talk to you afterwards," he added fiercely. "Now, madam, will you have the goodness to explain what this means?"

"Oh-h-h-h!" ejaculated Lady Lisle again, in tones more long-drawn and suggestive of the rage boiling up within, her darting and flashing eyes telling their own tale of the storm about to burst.

"Oh, indeed, madam!" cried Sir Hilton, mockingly. "Really, I am very sorry to have to make a display of the soiled laundry of our establishment before our visitors, but I must demand an explanation. Here am I, called suddenly away upon very important business respecting monetary matters, and I return home late, to find that you have taken advantage of my absence to—to—to—to—there, I will not give utterance to my thoughts, but ask you, madam, to explain why I find you away, even at midnight, and not putting in an appearance till nearly four in the morning—four in the morning, and in a state that—Good heavens, madam! have you looked at yourself in the glass?"

Lady Lisle had not looked at herself in the glass, and her husband's words came so aptly, rousing such a feeling of wonder in her that she involuntarily turned sharply to glance in one of the long mirrors and see a reflection in the crossed light of the artificial and the real coming from candle and break of day, that she felt horrified, and once more ejaculated "Oh!"

"Yes. Oh, indeed!" cried Sir Hilton, grasping at his advantage. "Pray, madam, will you be good enough to explain."

Lady Tilborough, who had drawn back behind the couch to give the principals in this domestic scene room to develop their quarrel, exchanged mirthful glances with the doctor.

"Taking the bull by the horns," whispered Granton.

"Cow!" whispered back Lady Tilborough, correctively, and she laid her hands upon the piled-up Polar bear skin to support herself, but snatched them away with a look of alarm at the doctor, one which changed to a glance full of inquiry, his answer from a yard or so away being a gesture with the hands which, being interpreted, meant, Haven't the least idea. But he moved a little nearer, touched the skin, and then whispered the one word: "Dog!"

Lady Tilborough felt comforted, nodded her head and turned her eyes from the doctor to watch the domestic scene, and then felt uncomfortable, for she found that Lady Lisle's attention had been drawn to what was going on between her and the doctor concerning the strangely piled-up hill of white fur, and her dark eyes were now fixed upon her uninvited visitor with a furious look of suspiciously jealous rage.

Lady Lisle saw in all this a means of making a counter attack upon her husband's desperate assault, and she seized upon the weapon proffered by fate at once.

"Don't add insult to injury before these friends of yours, sir," she cried, fully equipped now for the counter attack; "and pray do not imagine that you have blinded me by this contemptible dust you are trying to throw in my eyes."

"Dust, madam?" cried Sir Hilton, some what staggered by the reaction that had taken place.

"Yes, sir—dust. You forget that I was a witness to your appearance in that den of infamy."

"Den of infamy, madam?"

"Yes, sir; den of infamy—disgracefully inebriated."

"Oh, poor old Hilton!" whispered Granton. "I must—"

"Silence!" cried Lady Lisle, turning upon the speaker, in the tones and with the air of a tragedy queen, her eyes flashing again as she saw a peculiar movement beneath the Polar bear skin, from the bottom of which there was the sudden protrusion of a very prettily-booted little foot.

"Yes, Sir Hilton," continued Lady Lisle, pressing her hands upon her heaving bosom to keep down the seething passion. "I repeat, disgracefully inebriated, dressed in the low, flaunting guise of a jockey."

"Oh, dear," groaned Sir Hilton, completely taken aback.

"And forgetting the wife who rescued you from ruin—home—position—even yourself, as a man bearing an honoured title in the country, stooping to toy and play with that—abandoned creature."

"What!"

"Whom you have had the audacity to bring with you into this—my house."

"My dear madam!" cried Lady Tilborough, indignantly.

"Silence, woman!" shouted the furious wife. "Do you think me blind? Did I not see you and your confederate plotting together just now to try and hide his shame?"

"No," cried Granton; "nothing of the kind."

"Laura!" roared Sir Hilton. "You must be mad!"

"Mad? Ha, ha!" cried Lady Lisle, hysterically, and covering three yards in a gliding rush that would have been a triumph upon the stage she seized the Polar bear skin with both hands, whisked it off, and displayed the sleeping figure of poor little Molly, flushed, dishevelled, not to say touzled, by the heavy covering from which she had been freed, and just aroused sufficiently to open a pair of pretty red lips and say drowsily—

"Kiss me, dear."

"Ha!" ejaculated Lady Lisle, with her eyes darting daggers, and her fingers playing instinctively the part of a savage barbarian-woman face to face with the rival who has supplanted her with the man she loved—they crooked themselves into claws.

"Well, I am blown!" exclaimed Sir Hilton, with a puzzled look of horror and despair so wildly comical, aided as it was by his making a drag with both hands at his already too thin hair.

"Now, sir," cried Lady Lisle, "what have you to say to that?"

Crash!

Chapter Twenty Four.

The Tout's Final.

That crash was not a human utterance proceeding from the lips of Sir Hilton Lisle, but a sudden shivering of glass, followed closely by the falling of big flower-pots in the conservatory, amidst the breaking of woodwork and rustling twigs and leaves.

But a human utterance followed in an angry, raucous voice which shouted—

"Oh, murder! I've done it now; I've broke my blooming leg."

While faintly heard from somewhere outside there was the yelping, barking, howling whine of a dog.

The effect was magical.

The ladies shrieked, the sleeper awakened, and sat up, frightened and wondering, rubbing her eyes, and, as the two gentlemen rushed into the conservatory, the two doors of the drawing-room were thrown open, for Mark and Jane to enter by one, Syd and Sam Simpkins by the other.

"Oh, Syd!" sobbed Molly, holding out her arms.

"Oh, dear!" sighed the boy, after a glance at the great skin upon the floor; "the cat's out of the bag now."

"Yes, reg'lar," growled the trainer. "There, don't you squeal, my gal. There's enough to do the high strikes without you, and I'm going to see as you have your rights."

"Syd, my darling, come here," cried Lady Lisle. "What does all this mean?"

The boy was saved from answering by the action of Mark, who had darted into the conservatory, dog-like, on hearing a scuffle going on, and more breaking of glass, so as to be in the fight, and he now backed in, dragging at the dilapidated legs of the race-tout, helped by Sir Hilton and Granton, each of whom had hold of an arm, as they deposited their capture on the carpet. "Gently, Marky Willows," said the prisoner, coolly; "one of them legs is broke."

"Broken! Which?" cried the doctor, the natural instinct of his craft rising above the feeling of triumph over the capture. In an instant he was upon one knee, feeling for the fracture, "Why, they're both right enough."

"Air they?" said the tout, coolly. "A blooming good job too! I thought one was gone. Here, Marky, would you mind getting me my boots?"

"Your boots?" cried the groom, looking with disgust, in the broadening daylight, at a pair of very dirty, stockingless feet.

"Yes, lad; they're jus' behind that there spiky plant in the big tub."

"There, Mark!" cried Jane, triumphantly. "Burglars! What did I say?"

"Burglars, be hanged!"

"You scoundrel!" cried Sir Hilton. "What were you doing there?" and, as if answering, the piteous wailing of a dog came from outside.

"Trying to get out to my poor little dawg, Sir Rilton, on'y my foot slipped just as I was opening that top light. You oughter be ashamed of yourself, you ought!"

"Well, of all the effrontery!" cried Granton.

"So he oughter, doctor. That there flower-stand's painted up ter rights, but it's rotten as touchwood."

"You ruffian! You broke in, and have been hidden there all the time."

"Broke in, Sir Rilton. Nay, I wouldn't do sech a thing. I come in at that glass door right and proper enough, to try and see her ladyship about that pretty little dawg, but she and you was so busy having a row over the family washing that I says to myself, 'The best thing you can do, Dinny's to call again,' and I was going to call again, as I says, when that beggarly rotten old flower-stand give way. Hark at the pretty little dear asking for his master."

For the puppy whined again.

"Well, you're a pretty scoundrel!" cried the doctor. "You dirty brute! Here, Hilt, old fellow, I should have him locked-up in a horse-box while you send for the police."

"What!" shouted the tout, struggling up into a sitting position. "What for?"

"Burgling," cried Sir Hilton.

"Not me, sir. I ain't no burglar. Where's my jemmies and dark lanthorns, and where's the swag? I swear I ain't touched a thing."

"You may swear that if you like when you're brought up before the Bench, where I'm chairman, as it happens."

"Me—police—brought up before the Bench? You won't do it, Sir Rilton. I knows too much."

"What!" cried Sir Hilton and the doctor together, while the ladies exchanged glances.

"You don't want the dirty linen washed in public," said the tout, with a chuckle. "Her ladyship there said so."

"Enough of this," cried Lady Lisle, who had recovered herself. "Let this man be taken away and secured till the police come."

The imperious words had their effect upon one who was present, Mark collaring the tout.

"And you—man," continued Lady Lisle, "are that—person's father." She uttered the word "person" in a tone, innocent as the appellation was, so acid that it made, the trainer bristly and Syd more of a man.

"Yes, I'm her father, my lady, but it's no use to cut up rough."

"Silence, man!" cried Lady Lisle, indignantly; "take the creature away."

"Shan't!" roared the trainer, starting. "She's my gal, and she shall have her rights."

"Syd!" cried poor Molly, in a passionate burst of tears, and she turned and flung her arms round the boy's neck.

"Syd, my child!" wailed Lady Lisle, passionately. "You too? Has it come to this?"

"Yes," sobbed and wailed the poor, pretty, childish-looking thing, turning now upon Lady Lisle and throwing up her dishevelled head, "of course it has; and he ain't yours now—he's mine, ain't you, Syd dear, and you won't let your poor little wife be abused like that, will you?"

"No," cried the boy, stoutly, as Lady Lisle clapped her hands to her temples, and stared as if she could not believe her eyes and ears.

"Yes, auntie dear, it's all right; this is my darling little wife, and we love one another like—Here, what's the matter with you?"

This was to the doctor, who suddenly threw up his hands, spun round with his face to Lady Tilborough, and began stamping about, laughing hysterically, seeming moment by moment as if he would choke.

"Here, Lady Tilborough—Hetty darling," he half sobbed, "take me away. I shall have a fit!"

"Be quiet, dear," she whispered, catching him by the arm. "I shall break down too. Listen—pray listen! The whitewashing of poor old Hilt."

Poor old Hilt had also clapped his hands to his head, and looked for a moment as if his horrible fit of semi-delirium was returning and the drug he had taken about to resume its sway.

"Here—water!" he cried. "No—no, I think I understand. Here, Syd, my boy, is this all true?"

"Yes, uncle, it's true enough; and I'm proud of her."

"So am I, Syd—so am I. Hooray! Bless you, my boy! Bless you, too, my pretty little darling!" he cried, catching Molly in his arms and kissing her roundly again and again, while the pretty, childish-looking little thing clasped him round the neck, smiled in his face, and replied with a sharp, chirruping smack.

"Hilton!" cried Lady Lisle.

"But it's Syd's wife, my dear."

"Yes, my lady," cried the trainer, "and she's got her rights."

"Rights? Right," corrected Sir Hilton, taking Molly's hand, and tucking it under his arm, to drag her shivering before the fierce-looking sharer of his joys.

"Can't you see, my dear, that it's all right? Now then, tell the poor little girl that you're ashamed of what you said."

Lady Lisle drew herself up, and seemed to be swallowing something that forced its way into her throat. Then, coldly—

"Yes," she said, "I retract everything that I said—to—Syd's—Oh, the horror of it!" she gasped. "Syd's wife. But as for you, sir—yes, I wronged you, too, by those terrible thoughts; but all is at an end between us."

"Eh?" ejaculated Sir Hilton.

"All is at an end between us. Never can I take the hand of man again who could stoop to playing the part of a common jockey."

"But it was for the best, my dear."

"Yes, Lady Lisle," cried Lady Tilborough, "and to save two very old friends from ruin and despair."

"Yes, Lady Lisle; that is a fact," cried Granton.

"Possibly," said Lady Lisle, coldly.

"And I'll never do so any more, Laura."

"Perhaps not," said the lady, half-hysterically, for something was dragging her hard in her heaving bosom; "but I cannot trust the word of a man who has degraded himself as you did with drink."

"Haw, haw, haw!" cried Dandy Dinny, in his most raucous tones.

"You hold your row," said Mark, giving his prisoner a shake.

"Shee—ahn't!" growled the man.

"Ah, Mr Trimmer, you are there," cried Lady Lisle, as the door opened and the agent, looking pale, but particularly neat in his dark Oxford mixture suit and white, much-starched cravat, entered, to look wonderingly round at the strange scene, and wince as he caught the trainer's eyes; but Lady Lisle's look fascinated him, and he could not retreat.

"Yes, my lady," he said in his blandest tones. "I heard the noise of breaking glass, and I hurriedly dressed and came down."

"Come here. I want your assistance badly. I am glad to have someone in whom I can place trust."

She took a step towards the agent, and raised her hand as if to place it upon Trimmer's arm, and her lips parted to ask him to lead her from the room, when Dandy Dinny shouted coarsely to Trimmer—

"What, my lovely Methody P.! How much did you lose on the race?"

"Lose—race?" cried Lady Lisle, shrinking away, with white circles seeming to form round her dark, dilating eyes. "Surely, Mr Trimmer, *you* were not there?"

"Why, of course he was, auntie," cried Syd. "I saw the old humbug twice."

"What!" half shrieked Lady Lisle, "is there no one in whom I can trust?"

"Yes, my lady," cried the tout, harshly. "You trust to me, and buy that little white dawg—no, I'll make yer a present of it, if you'll cry quits about me being here. No, you don't, Marky; I'm going to speak. I'm a-going to give her ladyship the right tip, and my tips are the real square right 'uns."

There was a bit of a struggle, which was checked by Sir Hilton, who, as if inspired by his thoughts, interfered.

"Yes, my dear," he said; "hear what the man says."

"Right you are, Sir Rilton. You always was a gent as I respected. Look here, my lady, don't you be so hard on a gent as likes to go in for a bit of the real true old English sport. I know, my lady—yes, I've jest done, and then I'll put on my boots. Pricked my foot, I did, with that there spiky plahnt. Here, don't you think anything o' that drop o' fizz he had. Sir Rilton didn't have enough to make him tight."

"No—on my soul I didn't, Laura," cried Sir Hilton. "The man's right."

"Right I am, Sir Rilton," cried the tout. "No, you don't, my white-chokered herb!" he shouted, making a dash at Trimmer, who was quietly making for the door. "Got him! You, Mark Willows, you collar old Sam Simpkins. He's t'other customer in that little game."

"Here, what do you mean, sir?" said Sir Hilton, sternly.

"Mean, Sir Rilton—mean, Lady Lisle, and my Lady Tilborough—and Heaven bless my lady and the noble man of your chice—why, I mean this, as I see with these here eyes, going about and in and out selling my c'rect cards, all the starters, anceterer—No, you don't; down you goes on your marrow-bones and makes confession to the lot."

The tout had tightly hold of Trimmer's collar as he spoke, and now, by a clever kick, he sent his legs from under him and pressed him down upon his knees, shivering, helpless, and whiter than ever.

"Now, my lady—now, all of you, here's the real true tip: Sir Rilton here warn't tight. He was hocused with a dose o' powder, so as he shouldn't be able to ride La Sylphidey, and them's the two as done it. That's my tip."

"A lie! You scoundrel! A lie!"

"I don't understand him," panted Lady Lisle.

"Hocused him instead of the horse, my lady," said the trainer, coolly. "You see, I couldn't get at the mare to save myself from a heavy pull. Yes, my lady; yes, doctor, I mixed the dose, and I can assure you, Sir Hilton, that cham was real good."

"But oh, daddy," cried poor Molly, bursting into tears, "don't say you did a thing like that!"

"Bliged to, my gal; but I should never ha' thought on it if it had not been for that smooth-tongued Trimmer. There, Sir Hilton. I'm very sorry, but I throw up the sponge."

"Now, Laura," cried Sir Hilton; "can't you forgive me now?"

L'Envoi.

The troubles never even got into the gossip column of the *Tilborough County Despatch*, in connection with the busy candidature of the popular sporting baronet for the vacant seat, and the retirement of Watcombe, the brewer, who was reported to have been beaten by his opponent "hands down." For it was considered to be easier to let bygones be bygones, especially as Trimmer, the trustworthy agent of the Lisle estate, was reported to have resigned—the notice might have said disappeared—and in course of time, under the careful guidance of Lady Lisle, Mrs Sydney Smithers did not make such a very unpresentable little lady after all.

It took time, though, for Syd's pretty wife was in the habit of making slangy slips redolent of the music-hall, as, for instance, when she made Lady Tilborough and the doctor, who both petted her and Syd, laugh till they wiped their eyes, by saying of Lady Lisle—

"Oh, yes, she's ever so good to me, and I love her down to the ground; but she's such a caution, don'tcherknow!"

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