Title: Capricious Caroline

Author: Effie Adelaide Rowlands

Release Date: October 30, 2010 [EBook #34166]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Andrew Sly and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at https://www.pgdp.net, produced from scans provided by Al Haines.

CAPRICIOUS CAROLINE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Susannah and One Other
Love and Louisa
Peter a Parasite
The Blunder of an Innocent

CAPRICIOUS CAROLINE

BY

E. MARIA ALBANESI

"GOD HAS A FEW OF US WHOM
HE WHISPERS IN THE EAR"
BROWNING

SECOND EDITION

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

First Published . . . September, 1904
Second Edition . . . May, 1905

This story originally appeared in the Weekly Edition of *The Times*, and is now issued in book form by arrangement with the proprietors of that journal.

TO
THE LADY AILEEN WYNDHAM-QUIN

CAPRICIOUS CAROLINE

CHAPTER 1

As the large motor swung along with the easy velocity and assurance of some enormous bird, Camilla Lancing nestled more cosily into the warmth of her fur wraps.

Rupert Haverford was driving, and he looked back every now and then to see if his guest was comfortable.

"Is this too quick for you?" he asked once; and Mrs. Lancing only shook her head with a smile.

"It is too delightful," she answered.

The little town where they had been lunching lay far, far away in the distance now, its ugliness softened by the mingling of sun and haze, and the country through which they were passing was very open; in a degree bleak. On one hand marshland and rough common ground, and on the other the beach inland, then stretches of wet sand, and then the restless, murmuring sea, bearing on its shimmering surface the cold embrace of the setting November sun.

Mrs. Lancing sighed involuntarily as she looked dreamily away to where the sky and sea seemed to meet, but her sigh was an unconscious tribute to the graciousness of the circumstances in which she found herself.

The smooth swinging movement of the car fascinated her. As she now and then closed her eyes, she felt as if she were being carried away from all that constituted life to her at other times; from excitement and pleasure and anxiety, from sordid and obtrusive care; even from the fever of hope and the illusive charm of chance. It was a delightful sensation.

Sometimes as the road curved the car seemed almost to approach the water, and the white-crested waves broke within a few yards of it with a boom; the rushing of the incoming and receding water making a musical accompaniment to the humming sound of the motor. Then they passed from the coastline, and the road began to wind upwards. The sea was shut from view by a wall of chalky hillocks covered with stubbly grass, and only the country outlook remained.

Just before, for a brief while, the world had worn a soft, an almost rosy tint; but as the sun vanished this warmth went also, and now the landscape stretched into the distance grey, unsympathetic, and monotonous.

The speed of the car lessened as the ascent grew steeper; a thin mist began to gather ahead

of them. To Mrs. Lancing's imaginative eye this mist took the form of a flock of fleecy white birds just hovering before winging flight.

Haverford pulled up here and, relinquishing his place to the chauffeur, climbed into the body of the car.

"Are you very cold?" he asked anxiously; "do you know, I am very much afraid, Mrs. Lancing, that this road will put us back an hour or so. It was foolish of me to come this way, for the country is new to me, and the road is certainly about the worst we have struck lately."

He occupied himself in tucking the big fur rug more securely about his guest, despite her protestations that she was quite warm enough, and quite comfortable.

The road was certainly very bad, and though the car disposed of the rough ground with an air of superb indifference, a certain amount of jolting was inevitable.

Camilla Lancing only laughed, however, as she was tossed up and down occasionally by the elastic movement of the springs.

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me what time we arrive home," she said. "That is the effect motoring has on me! It engenders a heavenly sensation of irresponsibility. I simply don't care a pin what happens. My one conscious desire is to go on, and on, and on."

Rupert Haverford sat down in the other seat and looked at her with the sincerest pleasure; she was so delightful to look at. The tone of her garb was a rich brown; she had on a long coat of some rough fur, but round her throat and shoulders she wore a stole of the softest sables; there was a small cap of sables on her brown hair, and she had tied the brown gauze veil she wore in a cunning bow under her chin. A knot of white flowers that Rupert Haverford had given her at luncheon was tucked in among the fur at her breast, and was the only break in the harmonious whole. She turned to him as she spoke lightly; she had a bird-like trick of moving her small head that was very characteristic and very pretty.

"But of course this sounds horribly selfish. So like me. Shall we be very late? I am so sorry if you are sorry, otherwise I don't think it matters. Agnes said she would expect us when she saw us. Fortunately"—Mrs. Lancing laughed—"dinner is a movable feast at Yelverton, or indeed anywhere where Agnes Brenton presides."

Haverford answered this very frankly.

"I am afraid I am not troubling in the very least about Mrs. Brenton or her dinner, I am thinking entirely of you. This is the first time you have entrusted yourself to my care, you know, and I want everything to go smoothly."

"Can anything go crookedly with you?" asked Camilla Lancing; there was the faintest tinge of envy in her voice.

Haverford laughed.

"Oh! I suppose so," he said. "I have certainly had more than my share of luck up to now, but one never knows what is waiting for one round the corner." Then he half rose and looked ahead. "What a mist!" he said. "I hope we are not in for a sea fog. I hate fog of any sort."

They drove on in silence for a few moments, and the mist gathered increasingly about them; the flock of birds had melted away, and the white velvety film floated about them like smoke. Everything became indistinct; even the broad outline of the chauffeur was veiled and vague.

Camilla Lancing spoke first.

"Now, please don't worry about me," she said, half-petulantly, translating his silence adroitly. "I am absolutely comfortable. Naturally"—she added with a laugh—"I know that if I had done my duty I should have insisted on driving back with Agnes, though she declared she did not want me; but it is so nice *not* to do one's duty every now and then. Did you ever hear of the little boy who always asked to be allowed some wickedness on Sundays, as he had to be so good all the days of the week? I share the sentiments of that little boy, Mr. Haverford."

The car pulled up here again, and the chauffeur got down and lit the powerful lamps. By now they had passed completely into the embrace of the white fog; the air was raw, and the damp cold very penetrating.

"But perhaps you mean you wanted me to go back with the others," Mrs. Lancing murmured softly, as they moved onwards again.

Haverford just looked into her eyes, that even through the mist and her veil shone brilliantly.

"You know perfectly well I was not likely to do that," he answered bluntly, and yet there was a kind of restraint in his voice. Mrs. Lancing caught that restraint, and with a sudden impatient contraction of her brows moved almost imperceptibly nearer to him; she arranged her veil with her small, white-gloved hand, and then left it lying for an instant on the outside of the rug. It was

very close to his; but Rupert Haverford did not touch the hand, nor enfold it as he might so easily have done protectingly in his large, brown, strong one.

Mrs. Lancing bit her lip.

"There is no mistake, we *are* in for a fog," she said jerkily, and she slipped her hand as she spoke back into the warmth of her big sable muff. It was not the first time that this man had unconsciously repulsed her; there were times when, in her irritation, she called him a prig. But she misjudged him; Rupert Haverford was not a prig, he was only a very straightforward, practical, in a sense, simple-minded man, who, like an explorer, was advancing step by step into an unknown world, meeting and mingling every day with elements that were not only new to him, but that belonged to a range of things about which he had never had occasion to think hitherto. Camilla herself was prominent amongst these new sensations; she at once was a bewilderment and a fascination. There had been no woman of this class in his life up to a couple of years before; indeed, women of any kind had played but a nominal part in the busy, uneventful, and certainly unpicturesque existence that had been his lot since early boyhood.

Mrs. Lancing, of course, knew briefly the outlines of the story of this working man and his sudden and unexpected accession to wealth, and recognized clearly enough that Haverford was as far removed in thought and social education from the various men who fluttered in and out of her life as the sun is from the earth; but she had little discrimination. With her it was never a question of character or quality; fundamentally she decreed all men were alike, strong in prejudice, weak in temptation, selfish, and even tyrannical; vain and sentimental, uncomfortably moral at times, but amazingly loyal, and, as a rule, sensitively moved by the potent charm of a woman of her temperament and attractions.

She liked men very much, she had many men friends, and few women friends, although the spontaneous effervescing sympathy, which was perhaps her most marked characteristic, made her very attractive to women, and accounted for her wide popularity; there was something so disarming, so delightful about Camilla Lancing. Beauty alone would never have given her a quarter the power she possessed; it was her ready interest (absolutely genuine for the moment), her quickness in associating herself with those things that were paramount with the persons who approached her, that made her irresistible to all sorts and kinds of people.

She had the tact of a delicately fashioned nature, and a vast amount of endurance.

But she was not patient, and the more she saw of Rupert Haverford, the more necessary he became to her, the less patience she had.

He puzzled her; he piqued her; he annoyed her; he made her nervous.

What were his feelings towards herself?

"He is so horribly slow," she mused now fretfully, "he ponders every word he says. I suppose he is terribly afraid of making a mistake. I am sure his money oppresses him. He must have been ever so much nicer when he was working as a foreman, or drayman, or whatever he was before all this money came to him."

She kept her eyes turned resolutely away from Haverford. For perversely enough, though he was so slow, so silent, so dull, he was exceedingly good to look at. Old-fashioned, or rather out of the fashion, he might be, but his manners were irreproachable, and his speech cultured, and he dressed very well.

It came to Camilla as an inspiration, as the car moved on cautiously through the cold white fog, that he was only shy and perhaps stupid.

Rupert Haverford had certainly a good amount of diffidence in his disposition, but at the present moment it was the most exquisite, and the most real sense of hospitality that tinged even his protective courtesy with restraint.

When their hostess had deserted the motor after luncheon, and had insisted in making her way homeward in a hired carriage, Haverford had been delighted because Mrs. Lancing had elected to return with him. But this very fact—the fact that this woman, who had been charming herself into his inmost thoughts of late, was alone with him, charged him with a sense of responsibility, and he steeled himself carefully against even a suggestion of the delicious intimacy with which the situation was fraught.

"The fog is lifting," he said, after a little while; "if we can only get off this road and turn inland, we shall drive out of it altogether."

Mrs. Lancing had her muff in front of her face; the fog made everything damp; her veil was clinging to her face uncomfortably.

"We are going downhill now," she said indistinctly.

Haverford was really a little anxious; they were certainly on a downward grade, and the progress was not pleasant; the road appeared to be rougher than it had been.

He sat forward, trying to scan what lay around and ahead, but the white gloom baffled him.

And then all at once the machine grated sharply; they shook in their seats, and Mrs. Lancing gave a little exclamation of alarm; then the car stood still, and the chauffeur got out hastily.

"We're done for now, sir," he said; and Rupert Haverford swallowed a word or two.

If it had not been for Mrs. Lancing he would not have cared two pins. Time was of no importance to him, and a breakdown rather interested him, as he had commenced to make a study of the mechanism of his various cars, and knew pretty well how to put them right when things went wrong, but this accident was most inopportune and annoying under the circumstances.

Fortunately the cold, thick mist seemed to part a little at this moment. With a reassuring word to his guest, Mr. Haverford got out and joined the chauffeur in his investigations.

It was very, very cold sitting in that raw, damp atmosphere, and Mrs. Lancing began to wish heartily enough that she had done her duty and gone back to Yelverton in the carriage with Mrs. Brenton.

She felt tired now, and even a little cross. All the pleasure vanished; that spell of delicious forgetfulness was swept away, and the morrow, with its wearying demands, confronted her like a phantom.

After a sharp conference with the chauffeur, Mr. Haverford approached his guest.

He spoke as cheerily as he could.

"Something has gone wrong with the works," he said, "we can't see what it is exactly in this gloom. I wonder if you would mind sitting here a little while I go and find out where we are? There may be somebody on hand who can help us to get along a bit."

Mrs. Lancing shook aside the rug.

"Do let me come with you?" she pleaded. "Really, I would much rather go, a walk will warm me up, and I shall feel so lonely without you. I believe I am frightened. May I come?"

Her pretty helplessness touched him, of course. And as he helped her to alight, Rupert Haverford felt his heart stir a little. So he supposed other men felt when they ministered to a wife or some one who had a tender claim on them.

They set off at a brisk pace down the hill.

Decidedly the fog was less thick, the bewildering effect on the eyes was passing, but it was still sufficiently cold and raw to make them shiver, though they were so warmly clad. Indeed, Mrs. Lancing was rather overweighted with her long coat, and her small feet stumbled every now and then.

Rupert Haverford drew her arm more closely through his.

He was conscious of a very tangible sense of pleasure in the near proximity of this pretty, womanly creature. The unconscious claim that she made upon his strength and protection moved him to tenderness, and her delightful affectation of indifference to any discomfort awakened his very real admiration.

"I have not the least idea where we are, but there must be a station somewhere near, I suppose," he said. "And if we can only borrow a trap, perhaps we shall be able to get back to Yelverton in time for dinner, after all. It must be somewhere about half-past four now. I am afraid you will never come out with me again, Mrs. Lancing. You see things *can* go crookedly with me at times! I am certainly out of luck to-day."

"I don't call this unlucky," Camilla said softly; and she nestled a little closer to him. She was meeting him on familiar ground at last.

They came after a while upon a kind of village, in which the lights of the one shop—a post office and general stores combined—shone hospitably.

The keeper of the stores, a portly, good-natured man, could suggest no better help for the motor than to borrow a couple of horses from the nearest farm and tow the car away from the road. He amiably consented to lend his trap to drive Mrs. Lancing to the nearest station, distant about three miles, and when this was arranged, Mrs. Lancing remained at the stores, where a cup of tea was forthcoming, whilst Haverford went back into the mist to set matters right with his chauffeur.

Divested of his heavy coat, the man had crawled under the body of the car, from whence he emerged very red in the face and very greasy.

"Found it all right, sir," he said. "One of the nuts has sheered in the differential shaft." He

declared his ability, however, to set the whole thing right in the course of the next few hours. Agreeing with Mr. Haverford that it would be a good thing to get the car off the road, as it was an obstruction, Haverford did not leave the village till he had arranged to give his man all the assistance possible. This done, he lifted Camilla Lancing into the tall cart that was used to dispense the goods from the stores, and they started for the station. To exchange the luxurious armchair of the motor for a hard, slippery seat where balance was most difficult, over a rough country road, was not the most delightful experience in the world; but Camilla laughed at all discomfort. Her good nature was really marvellous. Most women would have been tired and cross and difficult. Mrs. Lancing, however, made the best of everything. Even when the station was reached, and they found they would have some time to wait, and then change trains before reaching the nearest point to Yelverton, Camilla accepted the discomfort philosophically.

"I know you are dying to smoke. Leave me here; this is quite a cosy place; perhaps I will go to sleep," she said, as she passed into the waiting-room.

He obeyed her reluctantly.

She looked so pretty, so pathetic, with the pallor of fatigue robbing her cheeks of their usual delicate bloom. He stood looking at her with a kind of frown on his face for a moment, but he said nothing, and, to get rid of him, she closed her eyes and leaned her head against the hard wooden wall.

Her lips trembled as he went out and closed the door.

She was a creature who lived absolutely from moment to moment; who had the knack of separating herself from the most tenacious trouble to bask in the warmth and glitter of a passing gaiety. Naturally these delightful moments were followed by spells of reaction, when her volatile spirit would sink to such depths of depression that all energy, all hope, would appear to be swamped. But she had the optimism of a gambler; let chance only give her the smallest opportunity, and she revived again.

Agnes Brenton (the woman with whom she was staying and a very old friend) had once likened her to an indiarubber ball.

"Camilla is an enchanting creature, a dear, sweet, womanly soul, but you can never make a lasting impression on her," she had said. "However hardly she is flung about, however sharply she may seem dented, she is bound to come smoothly to the surface again, and show no trace of what has happened."

She was being sharply dented now. In this hour of fatigue and disappointment memory forced open the door she had held closed so resolutely all the day.

On the morrow her visit to Yelverton would end, and she must go back to town—back to the practically impossible task of clearing her daily path of one or two hideous obstacles.

There were some things awaiting that had to be met that sent a shiver of dread through her now as she recalled them. She opened her eyes after a time and sat watching Haverford's tall, long-coated figure pass the window of the waiting-room every now and then.

"And with a scratch of a pen," she said to herself wearily, "he could put all my difficulties straight. Why *does* he not speak? Sometimes I feel he cares for me more than I have ever been cared for before, then the next moment he chills me; he almost frightens me. He is so reserved, so deliberate. I believe he must be hard. Of course"—her lip curled—"he is cautious, and no doubt he is mean; he is far too rich to be generous."

She repressed her tears with difficulty. She was so truly sorry for herself. Other women (so she pondered) had such ease in their lives; she knew of no other woman who was so lonely as herself, so burdened, so troubled.

She got up impatiently, and, pulling a chair forward, sat down and stared into the fire with wet eyelashes. Her face hardened a little as her mind drifted away from fretful generalities to the practical outlook, to the immutable fact that two and two made four for most people, but in her case required six to be satisfactorily disposed of. Little by little, however, she began, as was her custom, to make a possible pathway for herself out of the tangle of vexatious care that awaited her.

She was amazingly skilful in this sort of thing; no matter how hopelessly involved the future might seem, she usually found some loophole of escape, some tiny thread which, with the ingenuous ingenuity of a child, would be weaved, before she had done with it, into something substantial, on which she could just stand comfortably for a little time.

Rupert Haverford paused by the window about this time. He watched her awhile as she sat thinking so intently, then flung away his cigar and opened the door.

"The train is just due," he said, "and the sea fog is creeping its way here. I shall be very glad to get you home, Mrs. Lancing; I am sure you must be thoroughly tired out. If I might prescribe for you," he added, as they passed out on to the platform, "I should suggest dinner in your room

to-night and early bed."

Camilla answered with quick impatience—

"Oh! I couldn't do that, I never go to bed early; and besides, we are going to play bridge to-night. You never play," she said the next moment. "Why, I wonder? Don't you care about the game?"

"I don't care about cards at all," he answered; "a question of habit, I suppose. There was no time for games of any sort in my old life."

"But there is nothing to prevent you enjoying heaps of things now," Mrs. Lancing said restlessly, almost crossly. Then her tone changed. "Let me teach you bridge, it would be such fun! And I don't play half badly for a woman. You shall have your first lesson to-morrow," she decided quite gaily.

Haverford only shook his head.

"I cannot let you waste your time. I shall never play cards."

Camilla felt the warmth and sparkle fade out of her thoughts again.

"Oh," she said, "of course, I remember now! Somebody was telling me only the other day how good you were, that you would never speculate, or bet, or gamble in any shape or form. Lucky man, to be able to take so firm a stand!"

He looked at her quickly; her sneer was unmistakable; he felt uncomfortable and pained, and he suddenly remembered how, as he had sat apart and watched her as she had been playing cards the night before, the expression of her delicately pretty face had given him a sense of trouble, even of uneasiness. Now her words, or rather the tone in which they were said, angered him a little.

They drifted into a silence till the train came, and spoke very little during the journey to the junction, where they were to alight and pick up the London train.

Mrs. Lancing bought a book and some papers at the bookstall. There were any amount of papers at Yelverton, but she never could deny herself the joy of spending.

"I believe I downright hate him," she said to herself fretfully; "he is a real 'bourgeois.' Why does such a man come amongst us if he does not like our ways?"

When the London train steamed in there was only one first-class compartment, and, as Haverford opened the door for Mrs. Lancing to enter, the only occupant, a young man, glanced up casually.

Camilla Lancing drew back imperceptibly for an instant as she caught sight of him, but if she had intended to retreat, this intention was frustrated, for the young man flung aside his newspaper and started to his feet.

"Hallo, there!" he exclaimed. "Hallo! Hallo! *Hallo!* Here's luck! Who'd have thought of meeting you, Mrs. Lancing? I'm just home from Yankee land, and am toddling down to Yelverton for the night. Any chance of your being there?"

Mrs. Lancing laughingly explained the situation, and introduced the two men.

Sir Samuel Broxbourne looked keenly at Haverford.

"So that's the factory Johnny who came into all that tin the other day, is it? Stuck up sort of chap! Might be a parson, or an actor."

Rupert Haverford subsided into a corner and let the other two talk. He was seeing Camilla now in another phase, and one that was not charming to him.

Instead of resenting Broxbourne's rough, slangy jargon she seemed to enjoy it. Her eyes grew brighter, and the colour stole back into her cheeks.

They had so much to talk about. She even used some slang herself, though it sounded almost pretty coming from her lips.

Having disposed of that first moment of awkwardness, even of alarm, which the unexpected meeting with Broxbourne signified to her, she responded instantly to the excitement of the moment; her good temper was completely restored.

When they left the train, however, and Broxbourne had gone on ahead, she slipped her hand confidently for a moment in Mr. Haverford's arm.

"He is such a bore, isn't he?" she whispered. "I wonder why Agnes asked him? She said nothing to me about his coming. I have known him all my life, we are sort of cousins," she added;

and then she laughed. "Well, after all, it is lucky Sir Samuel is here, for, do you know, we quite forgot to wire for a carriage? I only hope they have sent a big brougham."

"I am going to walk," Haverford said at once; but this she vetoed. In fact, she had no desire to drive *tête-à-tête* with the other man.

"Oh, *please* don't," she said. "I beg you will not leave me. And you must not forget I am in your charge to-day."

And Haverford had to yield to this argument as a matter of course.

The drive was not a pleasant one, however. They were rather crowded in the brougham.

Camilla laughed at this discomfort as she had laughed at all the rest, but her voice had a shrill tone; or perhaps Rupert Haverford noticed this for the first time.

As soon as they passed into the big hall, he left Mrs. Lancing and Sir Samuel chatting with the others and went to his room.

He suddenly felt nervous and bad tempered, and he wanted to be alone. It was a relief not to find his man waiting.

Some letters were lying on the table, and he took them up and glanced at them mechanically, then he threw them down and strolled to and fro in the room in the same preoccupied way as he had paced the platform.

When his servant came hurrying in, after a while, Haverford was staring into the fire with a rather grim look on his face.

"Have everything packed early to-morrow, Harper," he said; "I shall go to town by the first available train in the morning."

Then he roused himself and took up his letters again. The first he opened was written on shabby paper in handwriting that was small and curiously formed.

It was dated the day before, and had been forwarded from town.

"DEAR SIR," it ran,

"If you please, will you come and see your mother as soon as you return from the country? There was a little accident yesterday when she was out driving, and she was much alarmed. I am glad to say she was not hurt, but her doctor has ordered her to keep very quiet for a day or two.

"Yours faithfully,
"CAROLINE GRANIGER.

"P.S. I have asked that this letter shall be forwarded to you."

CHAPTER II

When Mrs. Lancing went upstairs her hostess went with her.

"So the dear motor did go wrong, after all," observed Mrs. Brenton, a trifle triumphantly. "I think I had the best of it in my despised one-horse shay."

Camilla threw off her furs with a sigh.

"Dear Agnes," she said, "I hate making you conceited, but truth compels me to admit that for once you are right. A motor is a beautiful thing if it goes smoothly, but when it goes wrong it is just the other kind of thing."

"Of course I am right," said Mrs. Brenton, as she stirred the fire briskly.

She was a plain woman with a hard-riding figure and grey hair neatly plaited, but she had a pair of handsome and kind eyes, and a delightful voice.

"Give me horses," she said. "By-and-by, when I am in my little grave, I have no doubt folk will be switchbacked to America and home again; but I hate experiments—I am a little too old for them—and the best car that is made is only a thing on trial, you know."

She helped Camilla to slip out of the big coat.

"Fortunately, you were well wrapped up," she said. "But *what* a weight this coat is, Camilla! How can you walk in it at all? When did you get it? I have not seen it before!"

"Oh, haven't you?" queried Mrs. Lancing, in a tone of very real astonishment. "Why, I have had it *ages*; got it at a Veronique sale. It was absurdly cheap."

She told these various untruths quite glibly, and then made haste to get away from the subject.

She was not a little afraid of Mrs. Brenton at times, although, indeed, she would have been singularly ungrateful—and Camilla was never ungrateful—if she had not realized that in this old friend—one who had known her when she was a mere child—she had a staunch and a loving ally—a friend who in sickness and in health gave her almost an anxious affection, and whose curiosity to know what was passing with her arose from the best motives. But Camilla always dreaded being compelled to answer questions, or having to give an account of herself; she was so weary of having good advice given her.

Of what use, so she argued to herself, would it be to let Agnes know how worried she was, and into what a hopeless muddle her pretty feet had strayed?

"Agnes cannot help me," she said to herself; "and she would only worry and think the end of all things had come if I were to tell her how I stand just now. And then she would scold, and talk about the future solemnly, and oh! I know I should scream if she started the old discussion to-night; my nerves are all on wires! If she *could* help me it would be another matter, but I suppose a five-pound note would be about the utmost poor old Agnes could produce in an emergency." And Camilla shrugged her shoulders. Just before leaving town for Yelverton she had spent her last available five pounds at a hair-dresser's, while, at the same time, a writ for the sables she had worn so becomingly that day had been sent to her by registered post that morning.

She threw off her hat and veil.

"I am rather anxious, Agnes," she said. "I have had no letter from nurse to-day."

Mrs. Brenton took the bait instantly.

"Anxious? What about? There is no need to fuss yourself; nurse never does write freely."

"She promised faithfully to send me word every day," said Mrs. Lancing, half fretfully.

"Well, look here, I'll go and telephone through for you," said the other woman; "with just a little luck I shall find the line clear. The rush is off about this time, as a rule."

Mrs. Lancing had slipped from her outdoor clothes into a very pretty dressing-gown by the time the telephone conversation was at an end.

"Everything is all right," Mrs. Brenton announced cheerily. "The children are just gone to bed. They have been very good, and are quite well."

"I miss them dreadfully," said Camilla, and her voice broke a little. Turning, she picked up two photographs that were on the dressing-table and kissed them passionately.

"Miss them!" said Mrs. Brenton in her brisk way, "I should think you did! Dear little souls, I can't think why on earth you didn't bring them with you; there is heaps of room, and children are never a bother to me, as you know. Well, now I'll trot away again. I expect you feel thoroughly tired out, Camilla. Dinner will be half an hour late, so you can take it easy. Why don't you have forty winks? That is a heavenly chair for a snooze."

Mrs. Lancing was already crouched up in the luxurious depths of the chintz-covered chair. She yawned as she cuddled into the cushions.

"Fancy Sammy Broxbourne turning up so suddenly. Why didn't you tell me he was coming, Agnes?" she asked, a little jerkily.

"Because I did not know it myself. He wired this morning to ask if he could run down for a day or two, and as I was not here Dick answered for me, saying, of course, he could come. I can't say that I think he is much improved, and he has put on a lot of flesh. He used to be rather a pretty boy, and now he is only a commonplace and very vulgar young man. By the way, how did he and Rupert Haverford get on?" inquired Mrs. Brenton, a little abruptly. She had made a move towards the door, and now turned back again.

Camilla Lancing shrugged her shoulders.

"A very clear case of hatred at first sight! The moral Haverford sat in a corner and scowled in silence, and, of course, Sammy used all the swear words he knows just on purpose to make things pleasant."

Mrs. Brenton compressed her lips; there was definite disappointment in her eyes.

She stood a moment as if she had something more she would have liked to say; then with an imperceptible shrug of her shoulders she turned away, and, with another command to Camilla to rest went out of the room.

Mrs. Lancing nestled herself more closely into the big chair and shut her eyes. Just as the maid was stealing softly away she called the woman back.

"Don't go downstairs, Dennis," she said, "but stay in the dressing-room. I am going to try and sleep, but I may want you."

It was a relief that Agnes Brenton had gone, but she was almost afraid of being left quite alone.

Her maid took her sewing into the dressing-room, but Mrs. Lancing had no intention of going to sleep. She lay with closed eyes, however, and after awhile some tears escaped from the thick lashes and rolled down her cheeks.

"I never thought he would come back so soon," she said to herself so wearily, so miserably; "he said he would be away for ages and ages, and ... and I had almost forgotten." She turned her face on the cushions, and bit them as if a sudden physical pang had shot through her, and so she lay, breathing in a sobbing fashion for some little time; then she lifted her head and pressed her hands to her brow and to her hot eyes.

"And of *course* this must come," she said, with fretful passion, "when I am so worried I don't know which way to turn! Oh, how tired I am of living, sometimes! Why didn't he write to some one, then I should have heard he was coming, and I should have been prepared!"

She unpinned her hair, thick, short, brown hair, and lay back again on the cushions.

"Why doesn't Rupert Haverford speak?" she asked herself in the same fretful way, I "simply can't go on struggling and fighting in this weary way. I was never meant to struggle and fight; and is it my fault that I make mistakes? How *can* I be different? I was brought up to be what I am. When other children were given twopence a week to put into a money-box, I was given a five-pound note to spend on dolls or make into kites. Of course I am extravagant! Of course I get into holes! I should be a living wonder if I didn't!"

She pushed the thick hair back from her brows, and, slipping from the chair, bunched herself on the hearth-rug, holding her hands before her face to shield it from the blaze.

"I won't believe he doesn't care," she said to herself, her thoughts reverting to Haverford again. "He *does* care, only he won't speak. And he makes me so nervous. I feel as if he were looking at me through a microscope. I am sure Agnes thinks he cares!" She sighed, and shut her eyes for a moment; then her mind worked into an easier groove. "I do believe Sammy was glad to see me!" was her next thought. "He wasn't a bit changed. Perhaps I am worrying myself for nothing!" Her face lightened; the lips, the eyes grew eager. As was inevitable with her, despair began to give way slowly but surely before the invulnerable optimism of her nature. She pinned up her hair, and sat gazing into the fire, humming to herself softly while her mind pieced together a dozen different possibilities, and carried her gradually but surely away from doubt and definite fear. When the clock chimed eight she sprang to her feet.

"My black gown, Dennis," she said. She had convinced herself that Rupert Haverford would like his wife to wear black and sober colours. In the same way she assured herself that he would read family prayers every morning. If she married him she determined that she would always breakfast in her room.

A little packet was lying on the dressing-table, and she opened it with a smile on her lips and pleasure in her eyes.

"Look, Dennis, what Mr. Haverford bought for the children! This is for Betty, and this for baby! Is it too late to send them to-night?... Won't they be pleased? No," she decided; "I don't think I will send them. Darling hearts, they will expect me to bring them something to-morrow. Can't you see them waiting for me, Dennis?"

"They'll be in a rare state of excitement, I expect," said the maid, with a smile.

Camilla Lancing fingered the trinkets as she sat and had her hair dressed.

"He is really kind," she said to herself.

Contrasted with the other man, he had a new and great charm for her to-night—a value he had not had before.

"And though he is dull, he is certainly not vulgar," she mused on; "it is extraordinary that he should be as he is, and that Sammy should be such a vulgarian; and yet the one is a professedly middle-class man, and the other is connected with any amount of big people. I wish I understood him a little better! But he puzzles me, and he worries me;" she sighed here fretfully. "Of course I

must marry him if he asks me; yet the mere thought of living all day long in such a starchy atmosphere takes the life out of me! I thought he would have been so easy to manage when we first met! And instead of accepting our views he imposes his own. No wonder he is not popular! I only wish," said Camilla, sighing again as she got up, and looked at her pretty head critically in the mirror, "I only wish he were twenty years older, and then I would put all my troubles before him, and ask him to help me. He would help me now. I know that perfectly well, but I should lose him if I told him the truth. And I don't want to lose him. I can't lose him," she said a little feverishly, "especially now, especially now,' she whispered.

Mrs. Lancing was one of the last down that evening—in fact, she kept the rest of the party waiting for dinner, but when she did come she was so charming and so apologetic and looked so fascinating that every one forgave her.

Sir Samuel Broxbourne took her in to dinner, and she sat where she could not see Haverford.

She could hear a little of the conversation, however, that passed at the other end of the table, and she changed colour when she heard him tell Mrs. Brenton that he was going to town by the first train in the morning.

She translated this to mean a sudden retreat on his part. For there had been a half arrangement that he should take her back to London in his motor, and as the chauffeur had promised that the car would be at Yelverton either late that night or very early the next morning, there was no reason why this engagement should be broken. She ate the rest of her dinner in a subdued manner, and as she followed the other women out of the room she paused a moment by Haverford's side.

"So you won't motor back to-morrow?" she said hurriedly. "I am quite disappointed.... I was looking forward to it."

His face flushed.

"I am sorry," he answered, "but I must go up quite early; my mother is not well," he explained.

"Oh!" said Camilla; she was at once reassured "I am *so* sorry. I hope you are not very anxious? But you must tell me about it a little later." And gathering her clinging black draperies in her hand she smiled up at him and then fluttered through the doorway and vanished.

Whilst the other women were talking together, Mrs. Brenton found herself alone with Camilla.

"I want to say something to you," she said in a low voice.

"Is it anything nice?" asked Camilla, with a faint smile.

Mrs. Brenton touched the black chiffon that bordered Camilla's beautiful shoulders with a caressing hand.

"I don't want you to play for such heavy points to-night, darling," she said; "it is all very well if the money comes back to you, but I am afraid you have been losing rather heavily since you came down here, haven't you? Sometimes I feel tempted," Mrs. Brenton went on, "to impose a *maximum* sum for points here, but I suppose I should get myself well hated if I did! People would say it is a free country, and they ought to do what they like with their own."

"That is why you are scolding me," said Camilla, with her pretty smile.

Mrs. Brenton shook her head.

"You are not other people to me, and I do hate to see you risking too much, Camilla."

Camilla turned and just lightly kissed Mrs. Brenton's hand.

"Oh, we must risk something sometimes!" she said impatiently; then she added, "Don't worry about me, dear old thing, I really haven't lost very much, and I dare say I shall get it all back to-night. I feel in luck. Look"—she held out her wrist—"isn't this a sweet thing? Sammy has just given it to me to wear as a charm. He brought it from some weird place in America, and declares it is a magic stone, and that I shall have everything I want now that I wear it. I must go and show it to Ena Bayliss," Camilla said, with a wicked smile. "She will be *so* jealous! She rather affects Sammy, you know...."

When the men came there was no opportunity for a little chat between Mrs. Lancing and Haverford, for the card-players seated themselves immediately at the tables.

Mrs. Brenton, who was not a bridge fanatic, beckoned to Rupert Haverford to come and sit with her in her pet corner.

She teased him heartily for a little while about his breakdown that afternoon.

"You will never get *me* in that magnificent car of yours again," she said. "Why don't you have horses? You look just the sort of man who would have good animals, and know how to treat them well."

"I have a few horses," Haverford answered; "you must come and see them one day, if you will, Mrs. Brenton. I don't quite know why I took to motoring, except that I have a leaning towards engineering, and the mechanism of the cars interests me, and then I like rushing about. I have not yet got used to my idle life," he said, a little restlessly. "Old habits are very strong with me; I wake every morning of my life at five o'clock, Mrs. Brenton, and I can't lie in bed a moment afterwards. You see, for nearly seventeen years I was accustomed to be out and at work by six o'clock every day."

Mrs. Brenton had taken up some knitting, and her fingers were moving briskly, though her eyes were fixed on her companion.

"I should so like to know all about those days," she said; "I dare say lots of people would not believe you if you were to say it, Mr. Haverford," she added half lightly, "but I came to a conclusion about you a long time ago, and that conclusion is, that you are the sort of man who is only happy when he is working—working seriously, I mean, from morning to night. But you are not always idle now, are you?"

Haverford laughed.

"I don't think I do an hour's work in a week," he said. "Very often the old call is so strong that I turn my back on all my greatness, and I steal away to the north, to the dirty, smoky, dull old town where I lived so long. But"—he laughed again, this time half sadly—"there is nothing for me to do; another man fills my old post and fills it well. However, I am planning a different future; I have certain pet schemes of my own which I have not yet put into working order. When I have started them they will help at least to pass some of my time more profitably than I pass it now."

"What sort of schemes?" asked Mrs. Brenton. He did not answer her at once; he was looking at the card-players, at Camilla's dainty figure. The lines of her throat and shoulders were exquisite, framed in the black of her gown. She was laughing; he loved to hear her laugh, it was such young laughter.

"Oh!" he said, rousing himself, "they are just some fancies that have come to me; I will tell you about them, Mrs. Brenton, when I have them more planned out—I am going to travel," he added a little abruptly. "Ever since I was a boy I have longed to see the other side of the world! I don't quite know why I have not gone long ago." He was smoking at Mrs. Brenton's wish, and he broke off some of the cigar ash into a silver tray.

"I got my first love of wandering when I was a very little lad," he said in his rather abrupt way. "My father brought me up on travel books and books of adventure. He had so longed to know other countries and other people, but this was denied him——If he had lived——!" He broke off sharply. Agnes Brenton looked at him; he was frowning, and he was staring into the fire; he seemed to have drifted far, far away in his thoughts from the light and warmth and cosy charm of his actual surroundings.

Suddenly he turned and looked at her; his eyes were very bright.

"My father was a hero," he said—there was something in his voice that made Mrs. Brenton bite her lip nervously—"he was a doctor—a man who worked all day and sometimes all night in that crowded, tragically poor factory town where I spent so many years of my life. I worshipped my father, Mrs. Brenton; he was an enthusiast, a dreamer, a saint. He died in harness, sacrificed to the poverty and misery of the people, who were his first thought. There was a fearful outbreak of fever and diphtheria, and he did superhuman work." Haverford shrugged his shoulders; he was trying to speak evenly. "Every man's endurance has a limit, and my father paid the natural, the inevitable penalty. That was a great many years ago, but he lives with me almost as clearly as though he were really in existence now! I have only one reproach against his memory"—the young man got up restlessly. His cigar had gone out, he found a box of matches, and lit it again. "He sent me away to avoid the infection," he said In a low voice, "and he died before I could get to him! That was hard! He could never have realized how hard that was to me, or surely he would not have done it."

Mrs. Brenton's eyes were wet. It was not alone his story, the strained tones of his voice that moved her; the man himself appealed to her sharply, and for the first time. She marvelled as she listened, as she looked at him now, how she could have so misunderstood him. It had become the fashion with most people to call Rupert Haverford hard names, to find him mean, selfish, and ungenerous; Mrs. Brenton had never gone so far as that. She had, in truth, judged him leniently, recognizing in his blunt fashion of speaking, in his straightforward manner, and rather deliberate methods, only the natural influence of his former circumstances; indeed, it had always seemed to her remarkable that any man who had toiled as Haverford had done, whose life had been set for so long in one narrow groove, should have taken his new place so quietly, and have moved with such unconscious dignity in the new world which revolved about him to-day. He was distinctly out of the fashion, it was true, in many ways, but he was never uncouth, and though there was at times a North Country burr in his voice, he spoke with refinement. In physique he was refined

too, and no one could find fault with the way he dressed.

Mrs. Brenton had not gushed over him, but she had always liked him. Nevertheless, there had been moments when he had chilled her; moments in which the possibility of mingling Camilla Lancing's future with his (a scheme which she cherished warmly) had seemed almost preposterous; when he had made her both impatient and angry, and she had almost longed to shake him out of his grave, stolid ways and practical outlook.

To-night all this was changed; he was a new man to her to-night; she felt drawn to him very closely. She tried to say something in answer to his last speech, but even as the words trembled on her lips Haverford spoke on in his usual quiet way.

"When I do start on my travels I think I shall bequeath the care of my motors to you, Mrs. Brenton. Though you hate them, I know you are too tender-hearted to ill-treat them."

She laughed, falling in with his change of mood.

"I will take care of them if you will promise to come back. You must come back," she said, "and marry, and go into Parliament, and generally settle down."

"Yes, I suppose I shall marry some day," Haverford answered. He had passed away entirely from that touch of emotion; indeed, his eyes twinkled. "Marriage is about the one occupation that my change of fortune has suggested to me from the very commencement. But I am not in a hurry," he added. "Do you know why I like you, Mrs. Brenton?" he said all at once.

She shook her head.

"I am only too glad that you do like me," she answered, with a smile. "I don't seek to know the cause."

"Well, you appeal to me for many reasons," said Rupert Haverford, "but particularly because you are about the only woman I know who has not insisted on finding me a wife. It is such an absurd idea if one stops to think about it," he said lightly; "one chooses one's own servants, one does not go running about to one's friends to ask them if a particular man is likely to be a good coachman or butler or gardener; but in the matter of a wife everybody seems to consider that he or she has a right to choose for another person."

Mrs. Brenton smiled, but only faintly.

"I believe I am just as bad at match-making as most people," she said; "you must not endow me with unknown qualities."

They drifted into silence after this.

It was pleasant to Rupert Haverford to sit and watch Mrs. Brenton's comely hands busying themselves with the knitting.

She wore a few good rings, but for the rest her gown was old-fashioned, not to say shabby, and she had no other jewellery except an insignificant brooch or two.

He was quite in earnest when he said that she was the one person out of all his new acquaintances whom he liked the best.

There was something so thorough about her. He could quite believe the stories of her prowess as a sportswoman and a hard rider to hounds; and yet she was very womanly.

It gave him an extraordinary sense of pleasure to-night to realize that she was Camilla Lancing's friend, and that she had a tender and even an anxious interest in the woman about whom he was struggling with himself; the woman who at once tempted and repelled him.

He smoked his cigar through, and then after a little desultory conversation he rose and said "Good night."

"Pray tell Mrs. Lancing that my motor is at her disposal if she cares to use it to-morrow," he said, "I don't think she need fear another breakdown."

"You won't use it yourself?" Mrs. Brenton asked.

"No, it will take me too long to get to town. I must see my mother before going into the City. I shall not say 'Good-bye,'" Rupert added, as he held her hand in his, "for you are coming up to town almost directly, are you not? And you have promised to dine with me, you know."

"I am longing to see your house," Agnes Brenton said. "I hear it is full of beautiful things. Camilla has raved to me about it."

"It is beautiful," he agreed, and then he just smiled; "you see, I can say that because I have had very little to do with putting it together. I inherited nearly all my treasures."

He was gone before Mrs. Lancing, in a pause of the game, realized that he was nowhere near. She got up from the card-table suddenly; there was a patch of hot colour on her cheeks.

"Give me a cigarette, Agnes," she said; "now that Mr. Bogie has gone, I can smoke in peace."

"Mr. 'Bogie,' as you call him," Mrs. Brenton said evenly, "is leaving us very early to-morrow morning. But he wants you to use his motor if you care about doing so."

"Thanks, no," said Mrs. Lancing; "I think I have had enough of a motor-car for a day or two. What have you been talking about, you two?" she asked suddenly, after a little pause. She threw away the cigarette as she spoke; smoking with her was only a pretence.

"I don't know," said Agnes Brenton, "nothing in particular. He is the sort of man one need never try to make conversation with. I mean to see as much of him as I possibly can; I like him very much."

Camilla made a *moue* at her.

"You are well matched—just two dear preachy people together," she said. "He ought to have been a schoolmaster. I know I shock him awfully, don't I?"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Brenton, "Mr. Haverford has not confided in me, but if I speak the truth I don't think he troubles himself about you much one way or the other."

Camilla Lancing was amazed and sharply hurt.

"Oh! *don't* you?" she said. "Oh! that is quite a new idea! As a matter of fact, I had a sort of notion he was thinking about me a great deal."

"You are a vain little person," said Mrs. Brenton, in the same even way; "but there, trot along; they are calling for you. Sammy has finished dealing."

No one was stirring when Rupert Haverford descended the stairs the next morning. He breakfasted alone; but just as he was about to get into the brougham and drive away, one of the maids brought him a little note. It was from Camilla.

"Thank you so much," she wrote, "for wishing me to use your motor, but I don't care to go in it without you. Do let me know how your mother is. I hope with all my heart that you will find her better. Don't forget you have promised to have tea with the children next week!

"Sincerely your friend,
"C. L."

He slipped the note into his pocket-book. It was pleasant to have that little remembrance from her.

Passing the corner of the house he bent forward unconsciously to look at the windows of the room where she was, but the blinds were drawn; in fact, as he took out the little note and read it again, he saw that it was dated at three o'clock that morning. She must have scribbled it before going to bed. He knew she had gone to her room very late, for he had sat waiting for the sound of her voice and the swish of her gown. Their rooms had been on the same landing.

He slipped his pocket-book back with a sigh, and as he drove rapidly away he found himself wishing with every turn of the wheels that he was going back again; that was the curious part of this charm which Camilla exercised over him.

When he was near to her she vexed him, she troubled him; when he was away he only felt the appealing claim of her beauty, of that simplicity, that "insouciance" that was so apart from and yet, with her, so much a part of her womanliness.

She was such a curious mixture, pre-eminently womanly, tender, sympathetic, and, at the same time, tainted unmistakably with pronounced worldliness. Much as he had studied her, he felt quite unequal to gauging her character.

Once he had heard some woman declare that Camilla was "insincere." He had felt a wholly unreasonable amount of anger against that woman. And yet he was quite unprepared to defend her this morning against such an accusation.

He had suffered, really suffered, when he had seen her with Broxbourne. It was inconceivable to him that a woman so delicately fashioned as she mentally (though not supremely intelligent, her mind had a tendency to poetry and charm evinced unconsciously a score of times) could find pleasure in the society of this young man with his rough voice, his sporting look, his peculiar manners. Nevertheless, she had laughed and sparkled and met Sir Samuel with all the ease and intimacy of a comrade.

"It is because she is alone, because she has no one to lead her," he said to himself as he sat in the train whirling to town. But ponder as he might, he could offer to himself nothing convincing or satisfying where Camilla Lancing was concerned. All he knew was that no matter how his mind might busy itself with other thoughts, it always circled back to Camilla in some fashion or other.

As he drew nearer to the smoke and the fog of the great city he closed his eyes and dreamed of the day before—of that wide expanse of restless, sun-kissed sea, with the sky fading in the distance into a glorious sweep of gold and purple and grey.

In his imagination he could hear again the break of the waves on the wet beach mingling with the musical hum of the car, and he could feel once again that sense of delight, almost of possessive delight, as he had looked back ever and anon and had met the smile of Camilla's sweet eyes and pensive lips.

She seemed to be cut away from him altogether by this darkness and heavy atmosphere.

The yellow gloom fell like a pall on all that was bright and beautiful and desirable.

He longed to go back to the country; above all, he longed to see her again, and quickly.

CHAPTER III

When he reached his mother's house in Kensington, Rupert Haverford was met with the information that Mrs. Baynhurst had left town the preceding day.

The house was all shut up, and the servant who opened the door to him wore no apron or cap.

He passed into the hall thoroughly vexed.

Of course by this time he ought to have been well prepared for any startling move on the part of his mother, who never by any chance did those things that were expected of her, or, indeed, anything that she had announced she intended doing.

He put the parlourmaid through a cross-examination.

"I came up from the country on purpose," he said to her, naturally irritated. "I understood from a letter that was sent on from my house that my mother had had an accident, and that she was anything but well!"

"No more she is, sir," said the maid. "Dr. Mortlock, he was quite angry when he come here this morning and found Mrs. Baynhurst gone; but there was a letter come yesterday from Mr. Cuthbert, saying as he was ill in Paris, and the mistress she fussed herself into a fever, and wouldn't rest satisfied, so she left last night. She wasn't no more fit to travel than this doormat, sir. You see, there was all but a smash up with the brougham."

Rupert Haverford was frowning sharply.

"Who is with my mother?" he asked.

"She's took Stebbings, her maid that is, sir, but not Miss Graniger. Most probable she'll have to join Mrs. Baynhurst in a day or two."

The maid rambled on loquaciously, and Rupert Haverford quickly gathered that his mother must have had a nasty shock, as her carriage had apparently just escaped collision with a runaway cab. She was not a nervous or a timid woman, far from it; but of late she had been in anything but good health, and this journey to Paris appeared to Haverford not merely an altogether needless fatigue, but a very foolish undertaking on her part.

In all probability his half-brother's serious illness would signify nothing more than an ordinary cold.

It was so typical of Cuthbert Baynhurst to write in a sensational way about himself; equally typical of their mother to take immediate alarm when any such news reached her.

It relieved Rupert Haverford to be angry with his half-brother now. He had made it a principle never to be angry with his mother. It was so useless. She was a strange creature was Rupert's mother. In a sense they were nothing more than acquaintances, for she had left his father when he had been a baby of a few months.

Octavia Marling had married John Haverford in a hurry, and had regretted the haste almost immediately.

Their life together had been unsupportable. It would, however, have been a very unusual kind of man who would have found life possible with a woman of her peculiar temperament and mental attributes, even in the most easy-going circumstances, and when such a woman was boxed down into the narrow limits of a struggling existence passed in a dull, smoke-grimed, small provincial town, the result was inevitable.

Rupert's father had adored his wife, but he could not live with her.

She was a brilliant woman, a woman with the brains, the will, the tenacious strength of a man, a woman who made rules for herself, and quietly and firmly rebelled against the position which tradition and nature had allotted to her sex.

When she had borne a child she had felt humiliated; motherhood was a natural evil, she admitted so much, but there were women created specially for the purpose, and she was assuredly not one of those women. She put the baby away from her as she put other objectionable things, and fell back on her work with new and deeper intentions.

She had been engaged, at the time when poor little Rupert came into the world, on an historical work of some magnitude, a work which entailed a considerable amount of research—indeed, which demanded that she should move about from one country to another, untrammelled by ties of any sort.

Perhaps the kindest letter she ever wrote to her husband was the one he received after she had left him. She was so unutterably glad to be free; to put the factory town, with its troops of working men and women clattering on the rough stones past the window where she worked, far, far behind her; to be liberated from the fretting duties and small events in her husband's professional life; to feel that miles and miles stretched between her and the clang of the factory bell and the ever-whirring noise of the restless machinery....

She only saw Rupert at a few odd times during the years that stretched between his birth and his father's death. And she was abroad when John Haverford died.

By his father's will the boy was left to the joint care of his mother and of a man called Matthew Woolgar.

No one knew where to find Mrs. Haverford, so the charge of the lad passed into the hands of this Woolgar, who accepted the trust in a very grudging spirit.

He was an ignorant, churlish man who had worked his way up from the gutter to the command of enormous wealth; a man whose very name was a curse in the ears of the men who served him; a man who was both feared and hated, and credited truly with being the hardest taskmaster in the world. It was asserted by many that the foundation of Woolgar's fortune lay in usury—money lent to his fellow-workers at an enormous rate of interest—but whether this was true or not no one knew. All that was certain was that he owned more than half the town and ruled with the hand of a tyrant.

John Haverford had written down his wishes as to his boy's education and profession, but Matthew Woolgar sneered these wishes into thin air.

A pauper had no right to the training of a prince.

Without waiting to consult Octavia Haverford, he took matters into his own hands, and sent the boy into the factory.

Rupert Haverford wore the common clothes as the others did, he ate the same common food, he lived and moved and slept among these people who adored his father, and for whose children his father had lost his life. There was nothing outwardly to tell the difference between Rupert Haverford and any of the others, except when Matthew Woolgar paid one of his surprise visitations (as he was fond of doing) to the works, when he would be certain to single out "t' poor doctor's lad" for some sharp reproof or snarling word.

Then the mother had flashed into existence again.

She wrote from America, announcing that she was married a second time, and peremptorily commanding Rupert to join her.

Matthew Woolgar quietly and grimly refused to permit this.

In truth, Rupert himself had no desire to go. His mother was nothing to him, hardly a name. The passion, the intense love, of his childhood and boyhood had been given to his father; even to live in the place where his father had lived and died signified a sort of happiness to Rupert. It was because he felt he was doing what John Haverford had wished him to do that he gave his strange guardian such unquestioning obedience, and it was certainly the loved memory of his father that sustained him, that made life possible. Every day he toiled eight to nine hours in the factory; every night he sat for hours studying, teaching himself. He had dreams of his own. He would get promotion, earn more, save money, and even yet follow that career which his father had desired for him.

It was a task of incredible difficulty, but he was his mother's child, and the will that spurred her on to such questionable lengths ran like a steady fire in Rupert's veins. The very work that to some would have seemed so paralyzing, so harmful, served to urge the boy on; it gave him grit; it taught him more than books can teach.

And he got on.

Against all odds he advanced.

He was about eighteen, a tall, raw youth with a thin resolute face, when his mother and he met.

Mrs. Baynhurst was a widow for the second time. This was apparently not a matter of great sorrow to her, but she was a changed woman.

For a second time also she had become a mother, a second son had been born to her—a little, delicate, neurotic child, whose birth was not, as Rupert's had been, merely a physical and a detestable fact, but whose frail little existence brought to her the knowledge of those things which neither logic, nor erudition, nor philosophy had ever vouchsafed to her.

With the coming of this second child (the offspring of a brief, a miserable passion), the flood of those natural yearnings which make the sum of most women's lives had broken its barriers at last. Rupert had been an amazement and a humiliation; Cuthbert was a delight, a happiness so illimitable, so wondrous, that the woman trembled even at the realization of it.

The meeting between Rupert and his mother had led to nothing. They were as far apart as the two poles.

Mrs. Baynhurst had misunderstood the boy's attitude; she supposed that he resented her second marriage, and in her turn she resented his right to do this.

But Rupert was quite indifferent to anything his mother had done. Had she had any tangible existence for him in the beginning, things, of course, would have been different, but he had never known a mother, he had never missed a mother; whereas even then, when at times he went to kneel at his father's grave, his heart would contract with that old incredulous anguish which had lived with him for so many black days after he knew he would never see that father again.... Nevertheless, though they parted so coldly, quietly, and indifferently, something in the boy's bearing, in his calm submission to his fate, had struck a reproach in the woman's heart.

She never wrote to Rupert, but she wrote very frequently to Matthew Woolgar, who never troubled to send her a word in reply.

She began to fidget and to fret.

It was monstrous, so she declared, that her son should be working in a factory. Such a circumstance stung her pride.

Rupert must go to a tutor's. She knew that John Haverford had left a small sum of money, and she declared that this money should be used for Rupert's education.

Matthew Woolgar took absolutely no notice of her wishes, and after a time she grew tired, and left Rupert to his fate.

The care, the anxious, engrossing care that her second boy demanded of her filled her every thought.

And so a few years rolled on, marked only for Rupert by the knowledge that he was slowly but surely moving upwards, and sweetened by the fact that he was following those lines which his father had laid down for him as far as he could.

Half his wages went in books and to pay for tuition. He had put himself into the hands of one of the masters of a school situated just outside the town, and with this man he had worked in every spare hour he had.

His craving for knowledge amounted to greediness.

Perhaps once in a while he met Woolgar, who had grown into a surly and suffering man; there was nothing, however, in this old man's treatment of him to indicate even in the faintest degree the wonderful future which awaited him.

When he was twenty-six Rupert was in a post of authority at the factory; when he was thirty he was master of all that Matthew Woolgar possessed—a fortune so large that no one quite knew its limits; a young man with the world before him, and a certain section of the world at his feet.

It was he, then, who had sought his mother.

A year or so back, when he had arrived at manhood, and had inherited the money his father had left (which in Woolgar's hands had accumulated to a decent sum), Rupert had made it his

business to inquire into his mother's financial position, and finding, as he had imagined, that her circumstances were very poor, he had without hesitation immediately passed over to her his small inheritance.

And Octavia Baynhurst had taken the money.

"Not for myself," she had written to him, "but for Cuthbert. He is so delicate; he needs so much care, and he is so gifted! If he is properly trained he can attain to anything, but he *must* be in the proper environment."

Since that bygone day when his mother had sought him with that frail, pathetically small baby in her arms, Rupert had not met his half-brother till the day when he reached London, after he had followed Matthew Woolgar to the grave.

There was not the faintest possibility of sympathy or even friendship between Octavia Baynhurst's two sons.

A portrait of Cuthbert Baynhurst was hanging over the fireplace in the hall, and Rupert glanced up at it now as he turned to leave his mother's house and go out into the fog again, and as he glanced he frowned unconsciously.

There were portraits of Cuthbert all over the house. Young Baynhurst affected the society, and in a degree the calling, of artistic life, and was a favourite subject with most of the artists he knew; but not one of these portraits did justice in the mother's eyes to that strange, almost womanish beauty which the young fellow possessed. She was blind to any defect in Cuthbert either mentally or physically. Love, when it had come to her, had come in a wild, a primitive kind of way; she who had carped and analyzed and sought to find the cause and origin of all things, fell at the feet of this one creature, who claimed her heart and accepted her destiny unquestioningly.

The fact that Cuthbert was lazy, selfish, callous, never dawned in her comprehension. She had fashioned him out of the purest, the best of herself. She required nothing of him, and lived merely to pour out her love on him.

Just as he was passing out of the door Haverford looked back.

"I shall be obliged if you will ask Miss Graniger to let me have my mother's address as soon as she gets it," he said.

He got into the cab that was waiting, and his thoughts lingered about Cuthbert.

"Paris," he said; "I thought he was going to stay in town and work all this winter."

Then he shrugged his shoulders.

He made it his business not to inquire too closely into anything that Cuthbert did, in which he showed himself to be unlike the majority of those people who give to others; and assuredly he was generous enough to his half-brother. For Cuthbert, of course, had the major portion of anything their mother had, and Rupert's first action (when he had realized that he had the command of so much money) had been to put his mother out of the reach of difficulty.

He bought her the house in which she now lived, she had her own carriage, and a very comfortable income. He gave her, in fact, exactly the sum equivalent to that which he spent on himself.

Matthew Woolgar had left him the money unreservedly—everything save a legacy to his sister, an old, crippled, and humble woman, had passed "To the son of the best man I ever knew." But Rupert himself had certain theories. He felt convinced that this money would never have come to him if Woolgar had not seen in him the proper medium through which this immense wealth could be handled judiciously, and it was his one desire, his one anxiety, that he should prove worthy of the immense trust which had been placed in his hands.

The schemes about which he had spoken to Agnes Brenton the night before were no paltry things; they were planned on the most generous lines.

There was scarcely a public charity to which Haverford did not already subscribe largely, and his private expenditure of this kind was almost without limit, but he intended to do more, much more. And his keenest, his most living sympathy was with those people among whom he worked so long; it was on these toilers and out of them that this great wealth had been gleaned in the first instance, and Rupert resolved to give back to them in full measure. Nothing was too large or too important that dealt with their welfare and the good of their rising generation.

Already there had sprung up in that smoke-grimed factory town a monument dedicated to the memory of the man who had enriched him and the man who had given birth to him. It took the form of a large institution designated for the practical education and the physical and moral uplifting of his old comrades.

Life in the factory served to stunt the growth and stultify the intellect of those who did not

possess, like himself, that piercing, that vitalizing determination to keep looking upwards. It was to such as these that Haverford determined the major part of Matthew Woolgar's money should go.

After leaving Kensington he went back to the city, where he had an office, and it was late in the afternoon before he reached the house that was perhaps the sole reason why he had elected to make London his head-quarters.

Matthew Woolgar had raised up to himself a veritable palace. Money had been lavished on this house like water. The art experts of the various great Continental centres had been busy for months and months finding treasures with which to garnish this lordly dwelling-place.

But Rupert Haverford's benefactor had never lived in the house. His real home had been the shabby worker's cottage, where he had dwelt in those far-off years before his wife and son had died, and when greatness had not even dawned on the horizon of his future.

When first Rupert Haverford had passed through room after room of that magnificent house which Matthew Woolgar had raised up for himself, his feeling had been one of oppression and, in a sense, pain. Everything was so beautiful, everything was so cold. That element of desolation, of heart loneliness, which must have driven the wealth-burdened man to sit and smoke in his old wooden armchair by the broken down fireplace in that humble north-country cottage made itself felt to Rupert almost too sharply.

That had been more than two years ago, and his influence and the crowded, and to him wonderful, circumstances in those two years had made a change in everything—in himself and in all that surrounded him. Still, though the world had fluttered in and out of these rooms very often, this wonderful house remained only a house; it was never a home. That element of solitude, that deadness, as it were, that clings about the atmosphere of museums and other treasure storehouses, continued to oppress Rupert.

It was too big for one person.

And to-day, coming freshly from the cheery, sociable influence of Yelverton, Rupert was sensibly affected by this sense of solitude, this mockery of empty grandeur.

Happily, a vast amount of correspondence awaited him, and he set himself at the task at once.

Letters bombarded him wherever he went—the world seemed peopled with beggars.

It was a matter requiring great tact and discrimination, this giving to those who asked. Naturally there were other letters. Invitations poured in upon Rupert Haverford. There was scarcely a great house which had not thrown open its doors to him.

Already his small dinners had taken to themselves a *cachet*. If he had responded to all the invitations that were poured upon him he would scarcely have had a moment to himself. As it was, he felt that he was drifting more swiftly into the stream of society than he had any desire or intention of doing.

Not once, but a dozen times he had told himself of late that he must change this.

Life for him had a serious meaning. It was full of serious projects.

Sometimes when he was a guest at the table of some illustrious personage, or sometimes when he would be standing in a ballroom watching the dancers and listening to the strains of softest music, he would lose himself, as it were; he would go back in his imagination to those days when he had stood working with the humblest of the factory hands, working and dreaming for the time when he should be free. Working, not for this bubbling gaiety, but for those big, those noble ambitions which his father had set before him as his ideals when he had been a child of only a few years.

He threw aside the letters now, and leaned back in his chair.

It was perhaps the first time he had let himself challenge himself.

With one of those curious tricks that imagination plays us at times he was suddenly wafted from the cosy warmth of his room to that cold, damp mist of the day before. He was walking through the white fog with Camilla Lancing nestling close to him.

If he were to turn his back on London, on society, on that life which had been circling about him of late, he must turn his back on this woman, for she, and she alone, was the magnet that held him so tenaciously.

He caught his breath suddenly, like one who fights for a cold, keen wind, and got up. It had grown to be the dominant influence of his present life, this struggle with himself on the subject of Camilla Lancing. How would it end?

His man came into his room at that moment, bringing a note.

It was written in pencil, and came from Camilla.

"I am waiting outside," she had scribbled. "I wonder if you would see me? I want to see you *very* much. I have a great favour to ask you. Could you spare me ten minutes?"

Rupert Haverford read the note two or three times; he wanted to calm himself and steady his voice.

"Please ask Mrs. Lancing if she will come in, Harper," he said.

She came in almost directly.

Yesterday she had been a brown fairy; to-day she seemed to be a living violet. He never knew in detail what she wore; he was only conscious of the exquisite effect she always made. Her near approach was heralded by the sweetest, faintest whisper of the flowers she personified.

She had thrown back her veil. He noticed that though she was smiling she looked pale and tired.

"How good of you to see me!" she said.

"How good of you to come!" he answered in his usual grave way—the way she called "stodgy."

He pushed forward a chair for her near the fire, but she chose to sit away from it in the shadows.

"Thanks. No, I won't have tea. I have had some already—two cups, and I must not stay more than two minutes. I have some news for you," she announced. "Agnes has come up with me; I simply refused to leave Yelverton without her. And she only wanted an excuse to come." Camilla laughed as she sank into a chair. "You have not an idea what a scene of excitement there was at my house when we arrived! My children simply adore Agnes, and she adores them. And oh, Mr. Haverford, I am charged with all sorts of messages to you! Betty and Baby are enchanted with your lockets and intend wearing them always, but, please, you must give them a picture of yourself to put inside; that is what they say."

There was a little pause.

Camilla let her sables slip from her shoulders on to her arms. She had come there with a distinct purpose, a purpose that was bound about with the iron of most pressing fear and necessity.

True to her nature, she was not going to speak frankly.

"I can't," she said to herself; "I absolutely can't!"

Haverford was standing by the fire.

The scent of her violets, the bewildering entrancement of her presence, made him dreamy.

How changed the room was!

The house was full of treasures—pictures, tapestries, bronzes, inanimate things which had cost thousands—but everything was as nothing compared with this living, breathing, beautiful woman.

How far more beautiful than all the rest she was!

"I shall be photographed on purpose," he roused himself to say; and then he pulled himself together with a great effort. "You want me?" he queried. "I am only too delighted to do any little thing for you, Mrs. Lancing. Pray let me know what I can do!"

Camilla got up and moved about a little aimlessly.

"It ... it's rather a big favour, really quite an enormous one," she said. "I ... I feel nervous...." Indeed, her voice broke a little.

"Don't be afraid," said Haverford.

She caught her breath, and then she steadied her voice.

"Well, I have come to you because a dear friend of mine is in great trouble, Mr. Haverford," she said. "When I got home this afternoon I found a letter waiting for me. You would not know if I were to tell you her name. She lives in the country, and oh! she has had such a hard life. We ... we are old, old friends, and I suppose that is why she has turned to me now and asked me to help her.... I only wish I could..." she broke off with a sharp sigh; "it is so hateful to feel one cannot do things of this sort for people who really need help..." she said half impatiently, half wearily.

He stood quietly by the fireplace looking at her; he was barely conscious of what she was

saying. The fragrance that floated about her—her clear voice with its pretty enunciation—the realization that she was so close, made a curious effect upon him: he felt stupid, dazed, burningly hot one instant, strangely cold the next.

Camilla hurried on nervously.

"When I read that letter, Mr. Haverford, I thought immediately of you. I know I have no earthly right to bother you with things that belong to a stranger ... indeed"—she laughed faintly—"I am *quite* prepared to hear you say that you are surprised; that you did not think that I should do anything of this sort I—I have come even expecting you to refuse."

He left the fireplace and went nearer to her.

The dream dropped away from him.

"Some friend of yours is in trouble?" he asked. He smiled at her. "You were quite right to come to me. I am only too glad to do anything for any one in trouble, but more especially I am glad to do anything for any one who is dear to you."

Camilla bit her lip, and moved a little away from him, approaching the fire in her turn.

"How good you are!" she said. The words were wrung from her involuntarily, and there were tears in her eyes and tears in her voice. Indeed, he moved her sharply at this moment.

There was such an element of simplicity about him and yet no weakness. He accepted her story without question. The flimsy fabrication she had just given him was merely the truth to him, essentially so because it was she who spoke. No other man she knew would have been deceived by this story of a friend in the country, but Rupert was not like all these other men. He was very far removed from being a fool, but he was a long, long way from grasping the meaning of life as it was lived by most of the men and women who circled about him now.

Why, he was in many things a child compared to herself!...

Haverford had set down to his writing-table.

"In any matter of this kind," he said, "I beg you will use me in every way that may seem good to you, Mrs. Lancing. I gather that your friend needs immediate help; pray do not let her be troubled an hour longer than is possible."

He signed a blank cheque, and slipped it into an envelope.

As he turned and held this out to her, Camilla Lancing gave a little shiver. She looked at him without taking the envelope.

"Oh!" she murmured, "I ... am half afraid to take this! I came ... on ... on the impulse of the moment, not because you have so much ... but because I ... felt ... I feel you are so glad to—to help any one but...."

"Why should there be any 'but'?" he asked, not very steadily; "by this time I hope you know that I hold it one of my greatest pleasures, as it is certainly an honour, to serve you whenever you will permit me to do so. Will you remember this always?..."

Camilla bit her lip again, and then put out her hand.

Haverford bent over it and kissed it. Her hand was kissed at least once or twice a day on the average but Rupert Haverford had never before permitted himself this old-fashioned and gracious sign of homage. It was with him an expression of something far, far deeper than mere courtesy to a very delightful and very pretty woman. She divined this instantly, and her heart began to beat nervously. As he released her hand she pulled her sables about her and prepared to go. She wanted to be away from him. The expression of his face troubled her. She had chafed almost angrily at his silence, his self-repression, yet now that she knew he would speak she dreaded to hear his words.

A thousand jarring feelings thrilled her.

Though there had been many moments recently when he had appealed to her physically, when, indeed, she had frankly admired him, in this moment she felt almost as though she hated him.

It was a sensation which she could not define which she would have found practically impossible to explain to another person, but it was very real, very oppressive.

She crushed the envelope he had given her in her hand, and hid it in her big muff; then she began speaking gaily.

"What are you doing to-night?" she asked. "You are engaged? Oh, I am so sorry! I thought that perhaps you would have taken Agnes and me to dinner somewhere. We have no engagement; but never mind, we can do that another night."

"Will you dine with me to-morrow?" he asked. He, too, was nervous. He had not her gift of slipping into a seeming indifference. Her easy, everyday manner separated them once again, brought back with a rush the old uncertainty, the old unrest.

She laughed.

"Oh! delightful! And let us dine here, do, please. I simply adore this house, and I want Agnes to see it. You know, you have always happened to be away when she has been up in town. How enchanting everything is! No matter where one looks one sees something that is perfect of its kind ... and that is not what one can say of every magnificent house, you know!" said Camilla. She had moved to the door, and he opened it. They passed out into the wide corridor. "The fact is a man's taste is always so much better than a woman's," she chattered on restlessly, "it is really a most absurd idea to suppose that a house must have a woman in it.... For the best of us will persist in filling our rooms with rubbish. Do you know, to this day I have the greatest difficulty in denying myself the joys of Japanese fans on the walls, and art muslin draperies and curtains? Oh!" she said suddenly, "I quite forgot to ask you; how is your mother? I hope she is better."

"I hope she is," said Rupert, "but I have not seen her. She has gone to Paris. My half-brother is ill."

He went with her to the entrance door, and himself put her into the cab that was waiting.

She stretched out her hand just before starting.

"I must *try* and say thank you," she said nervously, "but it is not easy to say. I shall send ... this ... on to my friend at once. You will have the consciousness of knowing you have made one person very happy to-night, Mr. Haverford! *A demain!* May we dine late?... I have such a full day to-morrow.... Good night...."

He held her hand very, very closely, and let it go reluctantly.

The light of the cab-lamp was shining on him fully. He looked very handsome as he stood there against the dark, foggy background, a man to make gladness to the eyes and heart of any woman. But as she rolled away swiftly, Camilla Lancing leaned back and flung up her veil, sighing rapidly and impatiently.

"After all, he does mean to speak ... and soon," she said to herself, "and when he does I *must* agree; I must say 'Yes'! How can I possibly refuse? It would be madness. He would do everything so well there would be no more anxiety about the children, and I should have everything I want, no more horrible bills, no more difficulties, and an end to the hideous dependence on Ned's father...." She pulled aside the sable almost roughly from about her throat. The night was bitterly cold, but she felt as if she were stifling.

"But what a life!... I don't believe I shall be able to stand it for even a month.... I shall feel like a caged animal. My very thoughts will not be my own.... I wanted him to love me, but not like this. He loves me too much. He will exact too much. I shall have to give up everything I like. No more bridge, no more freedom, no more fun. Oh, my God!" said Camilla with fierceness, though she was crying, "I *know* I shall never be able to do it! I don't want that sort of man," she said, "I don't want to stagnate and grow old, and good.... I want to live ... to live!... And I did live before Ned left me!... How can I marry a man like this after I have been Ned's wife? Oh, Ned, Ned, if only you had not died!... If only I could feel you were somewhere in the world, even though there were twenty women between us ... it ... it would be all so different!..."

She cried unceasingly for a few moments as the cab swayed and jerked over the greasy pavement, and then she pulled herself together.

"Oh! what an ass I am! If Agnes sees red eyes, she will want to know all there is to know. I can imagine her expression if I were to explain I had been crying about Ned!... that blackguard Ned!" She laughed in an impatient stifled way. "We must go somewhere to-night," she said a moment later; "I shall die boxed up at home. Why shouldn't we dine somewhere and then go on to a music-hall!"

As she got out of the cab she dropped the envelope Haverford had given her. She picked it up hurriedly, and her train of thought was changed swiftly; a sudden sense of delicious independence thrilled her. The man whom she feared, and the man who had shown her such chivalrous generosity, and the man she had married and lost, passed from her thoughts. She felt as if she were in sunshine. The cheque was blank! She had not expected that; there were no limits to her intentions.

"I shall give Veronique something on account; that will stop the writ," she said as she passed into the house. "And the children shall have new coats, dear souls; they have been looking *so* shabby lately. Then I shall get out my pearls and some of my rings and things first thing to-morrow...."

In the hall there were some cards, a splendid basket of flowers, and a square, white-coated packet. Camilla loved to find white packages and letters and flowers waiting for her.

She shivered as she remembered the cold perfection of the hall she had just left.

Sir Samuel's card was attached to the basket and the box of bonbons, and he had left a note. Camilla read this and ran upstairs quickly.

"Agnes," she called gaily, putting her head in at the door of the drawing-room, "Sammy wants us to dine with him and go afterwards to the play. We shall just have time to change. What a bother you have to go out to dress! Why not let me send for your things?"

Mrs. Brenton shook her head.

"Oh no. I will trot round to my rooms. As a matter of fact, I was just going. Will you call for me, Camilla? The children are just asleep. They tried to keep awake till you came, but they were too tired...."

Camilla threw off her furs and cloak in her room, and then stole upstairs softly till she reached the nursery. All was still. The two small bodies in the two small cots never stirred as she approached.

Mrs. Lancing bent over each child and lightly laid a hand as in benediction on each little head. Then she paused a moment before Betty's small altar. The child had arranged it carefully before going to bed, there were white flowers in the tiny brass vases, and the red light burning before the statue of the Virgin was the only light in the room.

Camilla shut her eyes. She never remembered any prayers; but Betty had just knelt there, and the child's prayers had hallowed the place; they seemed to carry the mother's soul with them —just a little way.

As the nurse came into the room, Mrs. Lancing turned and, with her finger on her lip, went noiselessly from the room.

She dressed for dinner in a happy mood.

Haverford's cheque was locked up in her dressing case. She had not settled yet what sum she would inscribe on it. Certainly a small sum would be useless. So she mused as she ordered her maid to bring her the flowers Sir Samuel had sent, and she chose a few to wear as a breast-knot.

"What is a thousand to him, or, for the matter of that, two?" she queried. "And even two will not go very far. Well, that is for to-morrow."

She pinned the flowers in her bodice and smiled at her reflection.

It was delightful not to spend a dull evening at home, and really she was just in the mood for a good dinner!

CHAPTER IV

Though he had had short notice, Haverford managed to get together a few interesting men for dinner the following evening.

The greater part of the large house was not open, but enough was seen to impress and delight Mrs. Brenton.

She admired everything.

"I am full of envy," she said to him.

"So am I," said Camilla. "I want everything I see here, your servants especially. How *do* you bachelor people always manage to get such good servants? That man of yours, Harper, is a perfect treasure. He is a sort of Monte Cristo—nothing seems difficult or impossible to him. I believe if I were to call him now and say to him, 'Harper, will you please give me the Earth?' he would answer in that quiet way of his, 'I have just put it in your carriage, madam.'"

She was all in white to-night, and looked languid and pensive. Rupert Haverford asked her once if she were tired; she nodded her head.

"Just a little; but that is my own fault. I have been skating at Prince's all the afternoon," she explained. "I wondered if you would come there by any chance. You must promise to go with me one day. It is really rather fun, and it gives one some exercise."

She was sitting in the place of honour. Mrs. Brenton and she were the only ladies.

"Don't send us away," said Camilla, when coffee was brought in; "please smoke, all of you. Agnes doesn't mind—do you, Agnes? and I love it."

As the liqueurs were being handed to him, Haverford's man addressed him confidentially.

"Could I speak to you, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Haverford looked upwards; the request was unusual; then he just nodded his head.

"All right, I'll come to you in a minute."

He waited a little while, and then, when the conversation was general, and there was a movement from the dining-room, with a murmured excuse to his two women guests, he left them.

Harper was waiting for him.

"What is the matter, Harper?" he asked impatiently enough.

"I'm sorry to bring you away, sir," said the man, "but there's a young person that wants to see you, sir. I told her that you'd friends to dinner, but she wouldn't be sent away. Says she must see you. She came quite a hour ago. I put her in your study. She's come from Mrs. Baynhurst, I think, sir," the man added. "I asked her to tell me what she wanted, but she wouldn't do it. Insisted that she must speak to you yourself, sir."

Rupert Haverford gave a few orders to the man about having certain rooms lit up for Mrs. Brenton to see, and then went along the broad passage to the room where he usually sat and smoked and worked.

The girl who awaited him was standing by the fire. She turned as the door opened.

He had seen her once before, and recognized her as his mother's secretary.

Naturally his thoughts flew at once to his mother.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked. "Have you news from Paris? Do you want me?"

Caroline Graniger looked at him steadily.

She was a tall slip of a girl, with a thin, colourless face, and very large, impressive eyes.

Her dress was shabby and meagre; she looked, indeed, as if she had scarcely enough on for such a cold, raw night.

"I don't know whether I ought to have come to you, Mr. Haverford," she said, "but I'm in great trouble, and as I've no one to whom I can go, and I don't quite know what to do, I thought of you."

She spoke in a staccato kind of way. The voice was rather disagreeable to Haverford.

"I shall be very glad to help you if I can," he said coldly; and then he waited for her to say more.

"Mrs. Baynhurst has sent me away," the girl said; she spoke still in that same sharp, stiff way. "A letter came from Paris this morning by a midday post, but as I have been out all day I did not get it till late this afternoon. I have brought it with me so that you can read it."

Mr. Haverford looked annoyed.

He objected strongly to interfere in anything which concerned his mother.

"I am afraid it is not possible for me to go into this matter with you," he said. "I have nothing whatever to do with Mrs. Baynhurst's affairs."

The girl answered him sharply, authoritatively.

"Some one *must* listen to me, and as you are her son, I consider it your duty to do so."

At this he wheeled round.

This kind of tone was a new experience to him in these latter days, when every one who approached him had a soft word on their lips, and a subservient suggestion in their manner.

"I think you have made a mistake," he said, thoroughly annoyed now; "if my mother has seen fit to dispense with your services she has, no doubt, the very best reason for doing so. You must apply to her. As I have just said, this is a matter in which I could not possibly interfere at any time. And now——"

"And now," said Caroline Graniger, with a short laugh, "you want to go back to your guests; to your dinner!" She shrugged her shoulders. "Then go. I was a fool to come."

She left the fireplace and walked past him to the door, but before she could get there Rupert Haverford made a move forward.

"Wait," he said. He had suddenly caught a glimpse of her face; it wore an expression that was eloquent enough to him.

She paused, and stood biting her lip and blinking her eyes to keep back her agitation. Young as she was, she suggested an element of strength.

"I have not very much time at my disposal," said Rupert quickly, "but tell me exactly what has happened. If I can help you I will."

She did not answer him immediately. When she did, that sharp, almost pert, tone had gone from her voice.

"I know quite well I have not given Mrs. Baynhurst satisfaction," she said, "though I have tried my very best to fall in with her ways. But she is not very easy. She does not make allowances. If it were only that I should not complain...." She bit her lip again, "if I am not good enough for her as a secretary she is quite right to get some one else; but she ought to have prepared me, not dismiss me in this way. I did not go to her of my own accord. She took me away from the school where I have been living for so many years. I was given to understand that she was my guardian, but I suppose that cannot be true, or she would not write to me as she has written now," she broke off abruptly.

"What are my mother's orders?" asked Haverford very quietly.

"She says I am to go away at once, as she has no further use for me. In her letter she writes that as she intends to remain in Paris for some time, the house in Kensington is to be shut up immediately. In fact"—the girl gave a shrug of her thin shoulders—"this is already done. I find that some one has been good enough to pack my few things in a box, and the only maid who remains informed me that she, too, had heard from Mrs. Baynhurst, and that by her mistress's orders I was to leave at once...."

She looked at Rupert very steadily, and there was something of contempt in the expression of her dark eyes.

"Your mother is proverbially careless, Mr. Haverford," she said drily; "she never troubles herself about those small things that are called duties by other people, so I suppose it has not even dawned on her that by cutting me adrift in this way she puts me in a very awkward position. And yet I don't know why I should suppose her in ignorance of this," Caroline Graniger added the next moment, "for our life together has been so miserably uncomfortable that I dare say she is glad to have such a good opportunity of getting rid of me. You see," she smiled faintly, "I cannot possibly annoy her when she is so far away. She knows, of course, that I should have not merely required, but demanded, an explanation if she had dismissed me herself, but she hopes, no doubt, that I shall accept the inevitable if she remains out of reach for some time; or," with a shrug of her shoulders, "she may possibly hope that some good chance, such as destitution, may take me out of her way altogether. I have not a penny in the world," the girl said in that same harsh, sharp way, "and no one to whom I can turn for advice or help. Please understand that this is my only excuse for coming to you."

Then, before Mr. Haverford had time to speak, she went on eagerly—

"Above all things, I want to know something about myself. It is no new thing for me to feel lonely. I have always been one by myself. Perhaps I should have gone on accepting everything that came and asked no questions if this had not happened, but to-night I feel so ... so lost, so bewildered to know what to do: to understand...." She cleared her throat and looked pleadingly at Rupert Haverford. "As you belong to Mrs. Baynhurst, perhaps you can answer my questions, perhaps you can tell me why she took me away from the school where I have lived ever since I can remember, why I was told she had the right to take me away?"

Haverford had moved to the fireplace, and was standing there looking at her with contracted brows.

He listened with a sense of the greatest discomfort, and even uneasiness.

"Believe me," he said when he spoke, "if I could answer those questions I would do so most gladly, but I am an absolute stranger to all that passes in my mother's life. I know you were her secretary, but she has had a number of secretaries, and in this, as in other things, she acts for herself absolutely. She has never spoken to me about you." Here he paused. "If it is true that she called herself your guardian, this is a matter about which I know nothing. I am sorry," he finished abruptly. "Sit down," he said all at once, "you must be tired."

She had turned very white, and she sat down in the chair. For an instant her eyes closed, and in that spell of silence he saw how young she was, scarcely more than a child.

He was accustomed by this time to come in contact with all sorts of trouble, with the sordid misery of the very poor, the hopeless, pathetic endurance of those who have to keep a brave front

to the world whilst they are literally starving. Sorrow was a well-worn study, and there was no mistake about the story written on that young, white face.

She opened her eyes almost directly.

"I—I beg that you will not let me detain you," she said in that sharp, proud way; then more proudly still she added, "I am sorry now that I came."

"On the contrary," said Rupert Haverford, "I am glad that you came. You did quite rightly. Though I have made it a principle never to mix in my mother's affairs, this appears to me to be a matter which requires investigation. As you have just said yourself, she acts with no conventional basis, doubtless she does not in the least grasp the meaning of your real position. You must permit me to charge myself with the care of you till we have communicated with Mrs. Baynhurst."

The girl did not answer him immediately; the gaze of her dark eyes had gone beyond him and was resting on the blaze of the fire.

"I don't want to be a trouble to anybody," she said, "I am really very independent, and very strong. I would not have come to you to-night," she added, "if I had been able to go to the school where I lived for so many years; but this is lost to me now. That is where I have been to-day. The black fog choked me, and as I knew I was not wanted, that there was nothing for me to do, I determined to have a little holiday. I borrowed a few shillings from the parlourmaid, and I went down into the country. There was no fog there. It was cold, but it was fresh and beautiful. I walked ever so far. It was silly, but I lost my way. I did not expect to be very warmly welcomed, for I believe I was kept out of charity for a great number of years, but I thought perhaps *somebody* might be glad to see me. However, when I got to the old familiar house it was empty. There was a board saying that it was to let. It looked so desolate!..." She sighed faintly. "It took me a long time to get back to Kensington, and when I did arrive it was to find my box packed in the hall, and nothing before me but the doorstep."

"Come nearer the fire," said Rupert "I am going to send you in some dinner. I really must leave you for a little while, but I will come back again. Won't you make yourself comfortable? You had better take off your coat and hat...."

She got up at once and he helped her to remove the coat. She was painfully thin. When her hat was off he saw that she had masses of dark hair. But he scarcely realized what her appearance was, her story had surprised and troubled him sharply. He pushed a cosy chair near the fire, and gave her some papers to look at, and then hurried away.

His guests were scattered about the house.

On his way to join them Mr. Haverford paused to give Harper orders to take in some food at once to Miss Graniger.

"See that she has everything that she wants," he said.

By his tone the manservant understood that the girl who had come so unexpectedly was to be treated with the utmost courtesy.

This done, Haverford made his way up the stairs.

Mrs. Brenton was waiting for him almost impatiently.

"I shall come here every day whilst I am in town," she declared, "and even then I am sure I shall always find something fresh to admire! I congratulate you, Mr. Haverford; you have a beautiful home!"

"My house is beautiful," he corrected; "I sometimes feel I have no home. All my tastes are for small and simple things. This is so large, so much too splendid for me. It always feel so empty...."

"Oh! but you are going to change all that," Agnes Brenton said with a little laugh.

He took her to look at the portrait of Matthew Woolgar, the work of one of the greatest of modern painters, a *chef d'œuvre* in its way.

"It's a living portrait," Haverford said. "Just fancy, Mrs. Brenton, I knew that man all my life, and I don't think he ever said a kind word to me. There was not the slightest sign of any sort to let me feel that he troubled himself about me one way or other." He was speaking with an effort, for all the time his thoughts were busy with the girl whom he had left in the study below. Naturally it was not a great astonishment to him to hear that his mother should be careless and indifferent to the welfare of others. The woman who could turn her back as she had done on her own little child, could not be blessed with too much sympathy or womanly thought; still, if this girl's story was true—and he saw no reason to doubt it—his mother was now guilty of a definitely cruel act, for which he failed in this moment to find any possible explanation.

"Have you a portrait of your father?" Mrs. Brenton asked, after a little while, as they wandered round.

"Yes, but not here," answered Rupert Haverford. "I have a few old photographs, but those are in my bedroom, and there is a sketch of him in water-colours in my study—that is a room downstairs," he added.

"May I see that room?" Mrs. Brenton asked.

He paused imperceptibly, and then he said in his frank way—

"I will show it to you another time. I have some one in it now."

Then all at once there flashed across him a suggestion that here was a woman who could possibly help him out of the difficulty of the moment.

That Caroline Graniger should remain in his house was, of course, impossible; but it was equally impossible that this young creature could be turned outside to find some lodging for herself at this late hour of the night. He knew Mrs. Brenton to be a practical woman, a woman of resource, and this was essentially a matter for a woman to deal with.

Briefly he explained to her that his mother's secretary had come to him in trouble.

"By some curious mistake," he said, "the house has been shut up, and, as far as I can understand, she is unable to sleep there to-night. The question is, Where can she go? Apparently, from what she tells me, my mother intends staying in Paris for some time. I have no news from her of any sort, so I know nothing of her plans; but the girl has come to me for advice, and I am not sure what to do with her. I have not a single woman in my household. My cook is a man, and Harper has only men under him. I suppose she had better go to an hotel."

"Oh, poor girl!" said Mrs. Brenton quickly; "she must be very much upset" She paused an instant, and then said briskly, "The best thing she can do is to come back with me. Dick is not coming up for a day or two, and there is a bed in his dressing-room. We never go to an hotel," she explained, "we have always gone to these rooms. Practically we keep them on during the winter. They have several advantages, the greatest being in my eyes the fact that I am really almost next door to Camilla. Suppose I go and speak to this young lady. What is her name?"

"Graniger," Rupert Haverford said; "but really, Mrs. Brenton," he protested, "I hardly like to bother you to such an extent. I am almost sorry I mentioned this. No doubt if we leave the matter to Harper he will arrange something. You know, according to Mrs. Lancing, he is the most marvellous man in the world."

"Oh! but this is not a case for Harper," objected Mrs. Brenton immediately. She felt a woman's sympathy for the probably well-bred young woman who had been so roughly treated.

"If you will tell me how I shall find my way to your study, I will go to her at once and fix up things."

She was gone almost directly, pausing only on her way to admire the almost priceless tapestry which lined the walls of the passage which led to the staircase.

Harper was in the study, arranging a dainty little dinner table, and Caroline Graniger was sitting in the chair, looking thoroughly tired out. She turned, and then rose quickly as Mrs. Brenton advanced with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Miss Graniger?" said Agnes Brenton. "May I come in and chat with you a little while? Mr. Haverford is 'on duty,' you know. I must introduce myself," she added, as they were alone. "I am Mrs. Brenton, a friend of Mr. Haverford's."

This kindly, warm greeting startled Caroline. It was something so new, she hardly knew how to respond to it. She took Mrs. Brenton's hand, but she said nothing, and the other woman was very sorry for her.

"Poor child," she thought, "she looks scared and half starved. Why, she cannot be more than seventeen or eighteen. Fancy sending a child like that out of the house at this time of night. It is monstrous!"

Her easy bearing made the situation almost natural.

"Now you must eat some dinner," she said, "and I will sit here, if you will let me. Mr. Haverford has been telling me that you are alone by yourself just now," Mrs. Brenton chattered on, "and as you don't seem to know where to go, I have suggested that you should come home with me, at any rate for to-night. There is a small bed in a room close to mine. It is clean and comfortable, and that is about all that can be said of it."

"You are very kind," said Caroline Graniger; she spoke shyly, nervously; in the presence of this womanly sympathy she lost her self-reliance a little; she almost felt inclined to cry. Only a long time ago she had taught herself the futility of tears.

"I can't eat anything," she said rather abruptly the next moment; "it is a pity to give so much trouble, for I am not a bit hungry."

"Oh! that is because you are over-tired," said Agnes Brenton. "I should have some soup and a little fish. You won't sleep if you don't eat something."

The girl sat down in the chair that was put for her, and as the soup was put before her she ate it obediently.

Harper had gone, but one of his subordinates waited upon her with great importance. Mrs. Brenton talked on pleasantly and brightly, and her thoughts were busy.

"She looks awfully thin," she said to herself; "if she had a little more flesh on her bones she would be rather pretty. As it is, she is decidedly interesting. Poor little soul! She makes my heart ache, and she is only a type after all, one of thousands who have to go out and fight the world when they have only just left their cradle, as it were. I should imagine she has been having a pretty rough time with Mrs. Baynhurst. A genius is a delightful thing in its way, but not a very comfortable thing to live with."

"Now when you have had some sweets," Mrs. Brenton announced, "I am going to get Harper to put you in a cab, and you shall go to my rooms. I will give you a little note to take with you." She sat down at Haverford's writing-table and scribbled a few words, explaining that Miss Graniger was her guest, and desiring that the dressing-room should be made ready for her.

"Please light a fire," she wrote at the end.

"When you go in, ask for my maid, and give that to her," she said, "then you will find everything all right." And then Mrs. Brenton stood up and looked about her.

"This is Mr. Haverford's favourite room, I am sure," she said, "it looks so cosy, and that must be his father." She advanced and looked up at a portrait on the wall. "Yes, I can see a strong likeness to him, can't you?"

"I think he is very like his mother," Caroline Graniger said, "only," she added, "his is a much better face. He ought to have been the woman...."

"Oh! do you think so? I think him such a splendid man," said Mrs. Brenton warmly, "there is not the slightest trace of effeminacy in him."

"I did not mean that," said the girl. "I mean that his mother has no right to be a woman. Do you know her?" the girl asked abruptly.

Mrs. Brenton shook her head.

"No, I don't know her personally, but of course I know of her. As Octavia Haverford she made a great name for herself."

"She may be a wonderful woman," said Caroline Graniger, "but she is a very cruel one!"

"Well now," said Mrs. Brenton, "I think you had better get on your hat and coat. I should go straight to bed. You look so tired. Ask my maid to give you anything you want. I won't disturb you when I come home, as you may be asleep, and I am sure to be a little late. We will have a chat in the morning."

Harper was waiting in the passage outside, and to his care Mrs. Brenton confided Miss Graniger.

"You are not afraid to go alone, are you?" she asked, and Caroline Graniger only smiled as they shook hands.

"I am not afraid," she said; then she tried to say some words of gratitude, but Agnes Brenton would not listen.

"Please don't thank me.... I am only too glad that I am able to be of some use."

Camilla floated across one of the big rooms when Mrs. Brenton reappeared upstairs.

"Where *have* you been?" she asked half petulantly, as she slipped her hand through Mrs. Brenton's arm. "Haven't you finished admiring yet? It is all very beautiful and wonderful, and everything has cost a mint of money, of course ... but oh! isn't it dull?... Agnes, I am ever so tired!... All this sense of money is so oppressive. Suppose we go home."

But at this moment one of the men sat at the piano, and began to play softly. Camilla looked round, and her eyes lit up.

"Sing something, Mr. Amherst," she commanded; and then she changed this, "No, play a waltz." She slipped her hand from Agnes Brenton's arm. "This will make a heavenly ballroom," she said. She paused, looking about her, tapping the floor with her foot. Then she gathered her white skirts in her hand, and fluttered up to Rupert Haverford.

"Listen..." she said, "this is a waltz.... I am dying to dance.... Will you dance with me?"

Rupert looked into the laughing, radiant face, into the large blue eyes that could be so dreamy, so full of sadness at times, but which now had a touch of fire in them ... a look to bewilder and fascinate.

"Alas," he said, "I cannot dance, Mrs. Lancing."

Camilla struck him lightly on the arm with her fan.

"Oh! you tiresome person! You do nothing! You won't play cards ... you can't dance; you! ... What *can* you do?" With one of her bird-like movements she turned to a man standing beside him. "I know *you* can dance," she said, "come along."

They slipped away, and Rupert Haverford stood looking after her with his heart beating uncomfortably quickly.

He was conscious of a rush of sharp, resentful anger, and of course he was mortified. Camilla could sting very surely when she liked.

She was laughing and chatting away to the man whom she had annexed so calmly; he was neither young nor handsome, but he made no sort of incongruous figure. He danced as a matter of course, as a habit.

At all times dancing as a social custom was something that startled Rupert Haverford; now, as he saw Camilla held ever so lightly in the arms of another man, he felt choked, hurt, almost outraged.

His face was so stern, so angry that Camilla was satisfied.

"A pity our host is so puritanical," she said to her partner; "he is looking at us now as if he would like to annihilate us both, and all because we are dancing! I love shocking him! He is such a nice old maid."

"A real good sort, though, all the same," answered the man, "one of the best...."

"I begin to hate good people, they are so wet-blankety," Camilla said impatiently. "Isn't this a splendid floor?" she said the next moment. "I could waltz all night. Tell me when you have had enough."

Mrs. Brenton moved across to where Rupert was standing.

"I love to see Camilla dance," she said, "she is all grace, and she dances with the heart of a child. Indeed, to me she always remains a child.... Sometimes when I see her with her babies I cannot realize that she is their mother, or that she has gone through more dark experiences as Ned Lancing's wife than happily one woman in a hundred is called upon to endure." Mrs. Brenton was silent a moment. Then she turned. "I think I have made things comfortable for Miss Graniger," she said; "she looked so tired, poor child. She is an interesting-looking child. I wonder if she is purely English?"

Rupert Haverford did not answer. He had of course warmly thanked her, but now he scarcely heard her words. He was watching Camilla intently.

Now and then she seemed to circle so closely to him he could have touched her floating draperies; then she was swept away from him swiftly—far, far away. Her small white feet appeared scarcely to touch the ground; to his jealous fancy she leaned too intimately on the arm that embraced her.

Her blue eyes mocked him at one moment, and pleaded the next.

Sometimes she ceased laughing, and then her lips would take the pensive expression that was so pathetic, and which moved him so.

When the music ceased, Camilla came slowly towards them—she was panting a little.

"You must really give a ball, Mr. Haverford," she said; then, restlessly, "Is it time to go, Agnes? I am sure it is. You look as though you were longing to be in your little bi-bi."

They did not go immediately, however, but she kept all the men hovering about her, and adroitly avoided being alone with Haverford for an instant.

"Did I hear you make an assignation for to-morrow with that dear, dull person?" she queried listlessly as Mrs. Brenton and she were swept fleetly homewards in Haverford's electric carriage.

"Yes; he is coming to see me in the morning, or rather to see somebody else." And then Mrs. Brenton explained further.

"I fancy his mother must be a cat," said Camilla, yawning; "they don't seem to meet very often. I am sure I am not surprised, for he is a very dreary person, you know, Agnes, my dear."

"Since when?" Mrs. Brenton spoke with some irritation. "I thought you liked him so much?"

"Oh, I change my mind occasionally!" She yawned again. "The fact is, I do like him sometimes, but then again I dislike him more often. You see, he bores me, and life is much—much too short to be bored...."

Mrs. Brenton sat silent a moment; then she said—

"Camilla, I want to..."

"No," said Camilla, "don't! I know so exactly what you want to say. I know it all by heart. He cares for me; he is *such* a good man; it will be such a *splendid* thing for me! Don't you suppose I can hear everybody saying this? Well, of course, it would be a splendid thing. I am not denying that; but oh! Agnes, he depresses me so horribly. When he talks to me I feel as though I were being prepared for confirmation, and he has a way of sitting and looking at me that is positively unbearable. If he only had a spice of the devil in him...."

"Like Sammy, I suppose!" said Agnes Brenton drily.

"Yes"—impatiently—"like Sammy or any other man who lives, and moves, and is not always up in the clouds contemplating the road to Heaven. My dear Agnes, there is no getting away from the fact that Rupert Haverford is a bore, a distinct and definite bore!"

"Well," said Mrs. Brenton, "if that is your opinion of the man, I should not bother about him so much."

"Now you are cross with me," said Camilla, "dear sweet old thing! Don't you know I always speak out my thoughts with you? Oh, here we are at your lodgings already! Look here, Agnes, you must let me help you with this girl. Poor soul! she must feel pretty miserable, I expect. Why not bring her in to luncheon to-morrow?"

Mrs. Brenton kissed the speaker.

"Why will you always try and make me believe you are what you are not?" she asked, half lightly, half sadly.

"Silly Agnes," said Camilla, laughingly, "it is all your own fault; you are so anxious to make me a saint, and all the time I am very much the other thing. Good night, darling!"

Mrs. Lancing's maid was waiting for her mistress, and there were some letters and a note from Sir Samuel Broxbourne.

Camilla opened the note first.

It was merely a reminder that she had promised to ride with him the following morning if the weather was good.

Sir Samuel was, of course, lending Mrs. Lancing a horse.

"I am deadly tired, but I don't believe I shall sleep a wink, Dennis. You had better give me some bromide," Camilla said, as she was made ready for bed.

"If I could only be sure," she said to herself when the maid was gone; "he *seems* just the same, and yet now and then he looks at me in rather an odd way." She caught her breath. "Sammy can be so hard! All the world knows that."

She sat crouched up looking into the fire for a long time, then she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, if ever the worst were to happen, and he should turn nasty, I have the money now." She got up, and stood looking into the fire once again "Only if," she said slowly, "he will not be satisfied with money, if he...."

She shivered, not once, but several times, and hurriedly taking up the sleeping draught her maid had prepared, she swallowed it, and then got into bed; where she lay staring at the shadows on the walls and ceiling made by the dancing flames of the fire, till her eyes closed at last unconsciously in the sleep she had commanded.

CHAPTER V

Another person lay in bed that night watching the fireglow light up the room and make fantastic patterns and shadows on the walls.

Caroline had been thoroughly tired out when Mrs. Brenton's maid had arranged everything and she had been left alone. But she was too tired to sleep.

The strangeness of her surroundings, and the strangeness of her position generally, filled her with a kind of excitement. She had not very much in front of her of a pleasurable nature, and yet the morrow had for her a certain glamour.

As the first sensation of alarm and indignation provoked naturally by the treatment she had received, by the abruptness with which her life of dependence had been ended, died away, Caroline became conscious that there was an undoubted charm about her present situation. A day before, the future (when she had thought about it) had stretched before her in a grey, a monotonous, an almost desolate fashion. Now all things were possible, and hope began almost immediately to shed a glow on her thoughts.

It was an amazingly delightful sensation to feel that she owned no master.

Indeed, she felt a little irritated now with herself that she should have supported so much with such an unquestioning docility, or that having given so much obedience she should never have tried to satisfy herself why this should have been exacted.

At school, of course, it had been the outcome of rules, of a *régime* which had existed ever since she could remember, but when the school life had ended, and she had gone to Mrs. Baynhurst, there really had been no occasion, so she told herself now, to have accepted the laws laid down for her with the same old obedience.

"Only she really never gave me the chance to speak," the girl mused to herself, "and then I was such a little idiot when I first met her that she frightened me! I expect she will be furious because I went to Mr. Haverford. Now that I have seen him and spoken with him, it is easy enough to understand why his mother prefers to see him only on rare occasions. He has a blunt, straightforward way about him which must be an abomination to her. He was not too amiable to me. Still, I must do him justice," Caroline admitted here readily; "he saw at once that I had a sort of claim on him, and duty with him evidently counts for a good deal."

She turned comfortably on the soft pillow.

It was her first experience of a really luxurious bed, for she had been better housed and better fed at school than as a dependant in Mrs. Baynhurst's household.

She ought really to have gone to sleep, but whenever she closed her eyes some new thought of the morrow and of all the other morrows would make them spring open again.

The events of the last few hours had been so new that they had left her startled out of her usual quiet acquiescence. Mrs. Brenton's warm sympathy seemed to Caroline a heaven-sent gift. She had never realized the lack of this sympathy in her life till now, nor, in truth, all the many other things that she had lacked—those trivial everyday things which stock the lives of most young creatures. Her childish joys had all been secondhand ones. She had never had holidays, never any excitement; there had been no Christmas or birthday presents for her, no books or work-baskets, lace collars or ribbons. As a matter of fact, she did not even know on what date she had been born, and except for her school friends, and the little children whom she had taught the last two years, she had never been kissed. Yet for all this she had been a happy child and a happy girl.

Her orphanhood had cast no blight upon her, and she had made pleasures for herself out of her very unpromising surroundings, as most healthy young creatures will do.

Perhaps her greatest trial since she had lived with Octavia Baynhurst had been the fact that she had never once left London, and the call of the country to her nature at times had been so pressing that she had felt like a wild flower cribbed and confined in a world of bricks and mortar.

There had not even been a green leaf on which she could look. Mrs. Baynhurst did not care for flowers. Neither did she consider it necessary that anybody required exercise or fresh air.

Caroline had been rather a plump girl when she had said "good-bye" to her school, but she had wasted woefully in the last ten months. Though she had called herself strong when she had been speaking to Rupert Haverford, she possessed at this moment very little of her normal physical strength, but she had the force of a powerful will (although up to the present she had had scant opportunity of exercising this) and great courage, and to this she added the blessed gift of a cheerful spirit.

With the very smallest encouragement Caroline Graniger would be happy. There was nothing lachrymose about her or subservient. She had gone to Mrs. Baynhurst's primed with good intentions and eager to give of her very best to the woman who had claimed her.

Her schoolmistress had evidently been relieved to pass on the responsibility of Caroline to some other person, and, at the same time, had been rather flattered that one of her pupils should have been called upon to fill an important post with a person of such mental eminence.

Reflecting now on the events of the day just gone, Caroline came to the conclusion that she was rather glad there had been no opportunity of speaking with her first guardian, the mistress of the school.

"She would have put me through a cross-examination, and then I should have told her the truth, and then she would have been cross with me. I wonder where she has gone to? I feel sorry I have not written all these months. Perhaps she thinks me very ungrateful, for I firmly believe she kept me for a long time without any money."

This brought her back to the thought of what lay in the immediate future.

"I wish I knew a little more," she said restlessly to herself, "I am really very ignorant. No wonder that Mrs. Baynhurst found me useless! How she would sneer if she could know I have been trying to teach myself a little all these months!... Having made up her mind to the fact that I am a fool, she would strongly object to have to acknowledge that she had made a mistake, and I am *not* a fool," said Caroline to herself, with half a sigh and half a smile.

Really the bed was very comfortable, and the room was so cosy and pleasant. She would have liked the night to have lasted much, much longer than its proper span of hours.

"No, I am not a fool," she determined firmly, "and I shall demonstrate this by informing Mr. Haverford to-morrow that, whatever comes, I don't intend to go back to his mother's house. If she *is* my guardian, she has proved that she is not fit for the post, and as she has practically turned me out of doors, it is not likely that I shall go back and ask for re-admittance. I should like to go to school again, but not here in London, somewhere where I can breathe, where I can run if I feel I want to. No doubt," she mused, half wearily, a little later, "Mr. Haverford will have some suggestions to offer. I dare say he will want me to go into one of his charity institutions. Perhaps he will send me to the workhouse."

She laughed at this, and so, thinking and pondering, she grew drowsy by degrees, and sleep came to her just as the day (a clear, bright frosty day) began to creep into existence.

It had been arranged between Mrs. Brenton and Haverford that Caroline Graniger should go to him early in the morning, but when her maid brought the news that Caroline was still sleeping, Mrs. Brenton sent him a telegram, asking him to call that afternoon instead.

It was nearly half-past nine before Caroline Graniger joined Mrs. Brenton at breakfast. The girl was greatly upset.

"I never slept late in my life before," she said. "I am generally awake about six, and I always get I up soon after I wake."

"You're like me, I expect," said Mrs. Brenton. "I never sleep very well the first part of the night when I am in a strange place, and then, of course, I am drowsy in the morning."

"I was so excited," said Caroline, "I could not go to sleep. It was so strange and so delightful to be in such a nice room. I am not used to luxury. I think I know now how the children feel on Christmas Eve, when they hang up their stockings, or when they expect a birthday. I kept my eye on the chimney, almost expecting Santa Claus to appear every other moment."

She laughed as she warmed her hands by the fire.

"Perhaps he did come, after all," Agnes Brenton said, "and there is something nice waiting for you to-day."

Caroline Graniger turned and looked at the speaker.

"You have already filled my stocking," she said, her thin face full of colour. Mrs. Brenton noticed that her eyes were not black, but dark, very dark blue. "It was your goodness to me last night that made everything so wonderful, so delightful. I never knew that any one could be so kind as you are. I have a much better opinion of the world this morning...."

"Let us talk about yourself," said Mrs. Brenton, as she poured out the coffee. "Of course, you are not going back to Mrs. Baynhurst?"

"No," said Caroline; she was silent a moment, and then she said "No" a second time. "But," she added, "I don't quite know what I *am* going to do." She stirred her coffee, and coloured. When she had that colour in her face she looked much younger, and rather attractive. "I have been wondering if you would advise me," she said, with some hesitation. "I don't think I have the right to ask you, especially as you are so wonderfully kind to me; but people who are kind always have to pay some penalty. I found out that much when I was a very tiny child."

"How old are you?" asked Mrs. Brenton.

Caroline knitted her brows.

"I believe I am about nineteen. But I don't really know. I only go by what Miss Beamish told me. That is the woman who kept the school where I lived for such a long time," she explained;

"and she always said that I was about four when I first went to her."

"Four years old," said Agnes Brenton quickly. She felt a sharp pang of pity for that little forlorn four-year-old child of the past. "That was starting life early with a vengeance."

"Yes," said Caroline Graniger, "but we all have to begin some time or another, and as, apparently, there was no one to object, I began at four." She spoke quite cheerfully. Then she smiled. "Miss Beamish has often told me that I was a very difficult child. They could not get me to eat anything. She declares that very often she had to sit up half the night and nurse me because I would not go to sleep in a bed." The smile rippled into laughter. "I have often tried to imagine Miss Beamish nursing me," she said. "If you knew her you would realize how funny it sounds."

"Funny!" said Agnes Brenton to herself.

She busied herself attending to the material comfort of her guest for a minute or two. Then she said—

"Of course I will advise you, Miss Graniger, and I shall be only too glad to help you if I can. Just tell me what you think you could do. What would you like to do?" Mrs. Brenton asked, going straight to the point in her practical way.

"It is difficult," said Caroline Graniger, "for I don't quite know what I can do. I have no accomplishments. I adore music, but I was never taught a note. Music was an extra, and I was a charity girl. I can read and write, and do a little arithmetic; I can sew, and I can dig," she finished with another smile. "I am really quite a good gardener," she said. "Whatever I do, I want, if possible, to be somewhere where there is a garden, or at any rate where I can see grass and some trees. The oppression of bricks and mortar is a great sufferance to me! Mrs. Baynhurst's house is built in by other houses; the rooms are so dreary. There is no air, and the windows are never open, and I never got out. I used to drive with her occasionally, but I never walked."

Agnes Brenton fretted her brows into a slight frown.

"Do you like children?" she asked, after a little pause.

The thin, sallow face lit up.

"Children, yes, I love children. I was a pupil-teacher two years before I left school. There were some quite tiny tots with Miss Beamish. She had a large Indian connection, and also children from all parts of the world. When I left there were two dear little souls there from Barbados. I cried at leaving them," she sighed, "and I don't often cry," she said.

Mrs. Brenton went on eating her breakfast, and Caroline Graniger relapsed into silence for a moment. Then, with a rush of colour to her cheeks, she said—

"But please don't let me bother you in any way, Mrs. Brenton. You have been already much too good. I dare say Mr. Haverford will arrange something for me."

Agnes Brenton was about to answer this with some kindly words when they were startled by a sharp rap with a stick on the door, and then the door was opened and Camilla presented herself.

She was in a riding-habit, and looked slim and boyish and radiant, and extraordinarily pretty and young.

"Oh, you lazy Agnes," she said, "not finished breakfast yet! Look at the time—nearly ten minutes past ten, and I have been out since half-past eight." She bent to kiss Mrs. Brenton, and then gave Caroline a smile and a little nod, as Agnes Brenton hurriedly introduced them.

"Give me something to eat, for the Lord's sake! I am positively famished," she declared. She threw off her riding-gloves and tossed them, with her stick and her hat, on to the couch.

"Didn't you have anything before you went out?" asked Mrs. Brenton.

"Good heavens, no!" said Camilla.

She stood in front of the looking-glass and ruffled her hair becomingly.

"Sammy sent word at eight o'clock that he was coming at half-past eight. He made Dennis wake me up. There was no time for anything except a bath, and how I tumbled into these things *I* don't know."

She sat down opposite to Caroline, and began to eat with real enjoyment.

"I am rather glad you are breakfasting late; it is a bit of luck for me. You have no idea how lovely it was in the Park, Agnes," she said. "There was not a scrap of fog. Thank goodness for that! Those two dear chickies of mine will be able to get out to-day. And oh! Agnes, another blow! Nurse came to me this morning, just as I was going out, with a doleful story about her father, or her mother, or somebody being dreadfully ill, and asking me if she might go and nurse the sick

person. Isn't it too tiresome? She had only been with me a few months, but really she seemed quite a likely person. Those poor children! They do get such chopping and changing. Oh, by the way!" said Camilla, "I think I had better send the horse away; I can go home in a hansom. May I ring the bell?"

She half rose from the table, but Caroline Graniger was quicker.

"May I take your message?" she asked. She spoke shyly. This young and very pretty woman was a new experience to her. She felt a little out of the atmosphere, and imagining swiftly that Mrs. Brenton and Mrs. Lancing might have something to say to one another, she seized the chance of leaving them together.

"Oh, thank you!" said Camilla; "you are very kind. Just say to the groom that Mrs. Lancing will not ride any more to-day.—Poor little soul," said Camilla, sympathetically as the door closed, "how miserably thin she is; she looks as if she had not had enough to eat, and you are in your proper quarter, Agnes, playing the part of the good Samaritan. Well, now you must help *me*, my dear, because nurse is in earnest. I quite expect to find that she has gone when I get back. Why on earth do servants have parents and relations? I believe they exist on purpose to have the most mysterious diseases at the most inconvenient moments. Did you ever know a cook whose mother had not a bad leg, whatever that may be? Oh, how I hate housekeeping! I feel half inclined to live in an hotel."

"You ought to take the children into the country," said Mrs. Brenton in her quiet way.

Camilla ate a very good breakfast, and then looked up at her friend with a quizzical expression.

"Well, Agnes," she said, and paused.

Mrs. Brenton just smiled.

"Well, Camilla?" she answered.

Mrs. Lancing laughed as she spread some butter on some toast.

"When you look straight down your nose in that fashion it means the wind is in a bad quarter for somebody, and I fancy that somebody is me just now."

Agnes Brenton laughed, but only slightly, and, getting up, moved to the fireplace.

"My dear child," she said, "I wish you would not do these sort of things."

"What sort of things?" asked Camilla.

Mrs. Brenton took up the poker and stirred the fire vigorously.

"You know quite well what I mean," she said a little impatiently, "and I confess I don't understand you, Camilla. I thought you really disliked Sammy Broxbourne. You used to be always running him down, I remember."

"Oh! it's Sammy you object to, is it?" said Camilla. "My dear, dear soul, I do assure you there wasn't a creature about this morning! That is why I enjoyed the ride. We flew through the Park as if we had been a couple of birds."

"You have such a heap of people that you can go about with," said Mrs. Brenton, half impatiently; "why choose the one man that is likely to do you harm?"

"Oh, you know that is all rubbish, Agnes!" Mrs. Lancing said a little impatiently in her turn. "Sammy is not a hero, but he is no worse than any other man; and then we are connected, you know, and that goes a long way."

"He is a second cousin of your late husband's," said Mrs. Brenton; "that is no kind of relationship. However," she added, "I suppose you know your own business best, and I have no right to interfere as long as you are happy, my dear child. Happiness is the one great thing, after all."

Camilla finished the toast, and then got up.

She sighed a quick, impatient sigh.

"If I sit here I shall eat all there is on the table, and I have driven that girl away," she said; "she looks rather nice, Agnes. What is she going to do?"

"I was just talking things over with her," said Mrs. Brenton, "though I suppose really this is a matter for Mr. Haverford to settle. But she interests me, and I feel so sorry for her. She will not go back to his mother, that is very sure. I think she will try and get a place as nursery governess or something of that sort. She seems devoted to children."

"Perhaps she would do for me," said Camilla in her impulsive way.

Mrs. Brenton only smiled.

"We must go into matters a little bit more," she said, "before we can come to any conclusion."

"Well, you are going to bring her to lunch, aren't you?"

At this moment a maid came in and handed a telegram to Mrs. Brenton.

It was from Rupert Haverford, announcing that he would be with her directly, as in the afternoon he was unfortunately engaged.

Camilla picked up her hat and gloves in a great hurry.

"Oh, let me get away!" she said. "I don't think I will bother to have a cab, it is such a short distance, and I can walk that far. Don't forget lunch, one-thirty."

As she passed out, Camilla met Caroline Graniger on the stairs.

"Mrs. Brenton is going to bring you to lunch with me to-day," she said. "I hear you like children, I am sure you will like mine. They are two such sweethearts."

She nodded brightly, and ran down the staircase.

Mrs. Brenton handed Haverford's telegram to Caroline when the girl joined her.

"Perhaps it is as well that he should come over early," she said, "then we can have the rest of the day to ourselves." They chatted a little more on the subject of Caroline's future. Mrs. Brenton wanted the girl to have some definite scheme to propose to Haverford when he came. While they talked she apprised Caroline's different points, and found many things that she liked.

Caroline spoke very well. It was not the pretty, careless method of speech which Camilla affected. She seemed to be chary of her words, as a rule. When "no" sufficed, she said "no," and nothing more. She walked well, and her manners were those of a lady.

"Such a girl," said Agnes Brenton to herself, "must have patience in her bones. Not patience by nature, but by education. I am not at all sure that she would not be the very person for Camilla's children. They want a refined influence about them; education and all the rest can wait a year or two; but Betty ought not to be so constantly with uncultivated people. Camilla hardly seems to realize that the child is no longer a baby."

When Haverford arrived, Mrs. Brenton left Miss Graniger and he together.

"I telegraphed to my mother first thing this morning," said Rupert Haverford, breaking a slightly awkward pause as the door closed behind Mrs. Brenton. "I hope to have some communication from her during the day."

"Yes," said Caroline Graniger. She had fallen back into her stiff attitude of the night before.

"I have asked her for an explanation. Meanwhile," Rupert added, "I want to arrange something for you. Mrs. Brenton has been extremely kind, but I feel sure you will not like to encroach on that kindness." He put some bank-notes on the table. "I have brought you twenty pounds," he said; "with that I dare say you can manage for a little while, and I know of a place where you can stop till we have heard satisfactorily from my mother."

"I don't think it matters very much what your mother writes," Caroline Graniger said shortly; "she may have explanations to give you, and I shall certainly require such explanations later, but I have determined to cut myself adrift from Mrs. Baynhurst for good and all." She paused an instant, and then, colouring vividly, she said, "I—I will borrow five pounds, Mr. Haverford, it will be quite enough, and I shall be very glad to stay at this place you speak of till I get some kind of work."

"I advise you to take the twenty pounds," said Haverford a little drily, "you may want to buy things. You can always repay me at some future date. This is the address of the lady who will be very glad to give you house room for a little while. She is a woman who does a great deal of work for me, and, as she is in contact with all kinds and conditions of people, she may be able to find you employment."

There was another pause, and then he addressed her rather abruptly.

"Has my mother never told you anything about yourself at all?"

She shook her head.

"And you have no recollection beyond the school where you lived?"

Again she shook her head, and then hurriedly she said—

"Sometimes a vague memory comes to me. If I shut my eyes I can imagine myself being carried in some one's arms, hearing a voice singing to me, and the sound of the sea in the near distance. It is none of it very clear, but I have always imagined that I must have been on board a ship at some time when I was a tiny child, because I recollect seeing the dark sky with stars in it, and then some ropes and a tall, straight piece of wood like a tree, that I know now must have been a mast. I am rather fond of that old memory," Caroline Graniger said. She spoke dreamily, as if to herself.

He looked at her sharply, and he pitied her.

She must have had a very unlovely existence in his mother's house.

Mrs. Brenton came back at that moment, and Haverford told her what he had arranged.

"Well, I dare say that will be all right, but I cannot part with Miss Graniger till to-morrow, or perhaps a day or so later," said Mrs. Brenton in her brisk, pleasant manner. "As a matter of fact, I have some ideas of my own which I should like to discuss with her. You won't mind staying with me a little while longer, will you?" she said, turning with a smile to Caroline. The girl did not answer; she bit her lip sharply.

The tears that would never come for harshness or even for sorrow rushed to her eyes now. She turned away and stood looking out of the window while Mrs. Brenton chatted on lightly to Mr. Haverford, and in a few minutes he took his leave.

"Now I must write some letters," Agnes Brenton said briskly. "My dear, do ring that bell, and we will have that table cleared, and after that we must go out, it is a shame to lose this bright morning. Just make yourself cosy by the fire, and look at these papers. Camilla sent them. She buys every newspaper going, and when she reads them is a mystery."

Caroline took the papers, but they lay in her lap untouched.

She sat looking at the roofs of the houses opposite. They were powdered with the white of a hoar frost, and the red, red sun shone from behind and made the frost a network of jewels.

A slight mist hung in the air like a veil. The sense of unreality, the delightful excitement that had held Caroline as in a spell throughout the night had sway with her again now; nothing was very tangible or distinct. Rupert Haverford had brought her spirit to earth and hard facts for a few moments, but as he had left the house the range of resentful feeling he had roused had gone with him. She even passed away from the vexation of having to be temporarily obliged to him. As she rested back in the comfortable chair, looking at the glory of the winter sky, she felt that she and happiness had really met for the first time.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Brenton, "my letter to Dick is written. A very long time ago I spoiled my husband," she said, looking back over her shoulder; "whenever we were apart I promised to write to him every day, and now he holds me to this bargain. I really do owe him a letter this morning, however," said Agnes Brenton, "for I came away in such a hurry with her. Mrs. Lancing insisted on bringing me up to town, and I had scarcely time to explain things, or arrange my household affairs. Happily, Dick is an old hand at housekeeping...." She broke off, and turned again in her chair.

From the staircase beyond there came all at once the sound of an important approach; there was a great stamping of feet, accompanied by observations in clear, high-pitched little voices.

"Camilla's children!" said Mrs. Brenton.

As she put down her pen and rose the door was opened very widely, and two small persons entered hand-in-hand.

Caroline had never seen two prettier little mortals, or two so daintily attired.

They flung themselves on Mrs. Brenton, and hugged her with enthusiasm.

"Good morning, Auntie Brenny," said Betty, the eldest, and she settled her ruffled plumage as she spoke. "How is you this morning, darling? Aren't you very pleased to see us? We comed because we have brought you this letter from mother, and because we promised to come." She advanced to Caroline and took her little sister with her. "Good morning," she said; "how d-ye-do? Say 'Good morning', Baby."

Baby put out a tiny hand in a white woollen glove with fingers that were much too large.

"Dormez bien!" she said, with an angelic smile and a doubtful accent.

She cuddled up to Caroline to be kissed, and then, detaching herself from her sister, went and seated herself at the table, while Betty administered correction.

"'Dormez bien' is not 'good morning,' Baby; it's 'good night,'" she said; then she looked at Caroline and shrugged her shoulders. "Baby does say such extra-ninary things," she observed.

"I want somefing to eat," said Baby in a very determined voice.

Dennis, the maid who was in charge of the children, and was speaking to Mrs. Brenton, advanced quickly.

"Oh no, Miss Baby, dear, you *can't* want anything to eat, I am sure! Please ma'am," appealing to Mrs. Brenton, "don't give her anything."

But Miss Baby had her own views on this subject.

"I want some 'oney and some 'am," she said, tearing off her pretty grey fur cap and removing her gloves. "Nasty Dennis, go away! I'm awful 'ungry!"

Betty was making great friends with Caroline.

"I like you," she said candidly; "why have I never met you before? What is your name?" Then she whispered, "I'm going to have a birthday in March; but don't tell Baby, she'll want it too, and she does fuss so when she wants things. How old are you?" Caroline knelt down the better to study the child's brilliantly lovely little face.

Betty Lancing at six had all the charm and distinction of her mother. Already she commanded homage.

"I was only born yesterday," Caroline answered the child, and her voice was not quite steady.

"Oh!" said Betty. She stared at Caroline thoughtfully. "You look very big for a baby," she said, "I've seen littler babies than you. Mrs. Bates, that's the lady that cleans our kitchen sometimes, has a tiny, tiddy little baby, and it is three months—that's older than you, a lot. Your eyes are wet," said Betty pointedly; "are you crying? What for? Has any one smacked you?"

Fortunately at this moment Betty was awakened to a sense of her responsibilities, for she turned and saw her sister regaling herself at the table.

"Baby!" she exclaimed. She darted forward and vigorously shook the shoulder of the small person devouring bread and honey.

"Oh! you greedy greed. And you had such a lot of breakfast! I never knowed such a child in all my life," commented Betty severely; then, shrugging her shoulders, she turned to Mrs. Brenton. "I can't do nothing with her!" she said.

This remark provoked a scene in which Baby amply demonstrated that honey was excellent for strengthening the vocal cords.

Finally she consented to sit on Caroline's knee whilst her hands and little person generally were made clean, and then—Betty having eaten several biscuits meanwhile—the time for halting was declared at an end.

"If we don't go now we shall get no walk; and Miss Betty, please promise to hold my hand," pleaded Dennis the maid. "She do play such pranks, ma'am, she makes my heart fair jump, that she do."

But Betty and Baby were hanging on to Caroline.

"We want you to come out with us," was their cry; and Betty added magniloquently, "We'll be most awful good if you'll come too."

Mrs. Brenton smiled into Caroline's eyes.

"Put on your things and have a good run with them," she said.

A few moments later three persons attempted to go down a very narrow staircase abreast. It was a difficult occupation, and Caroline in the centre was quite wedged in. Useless was the voice of remonstrance from Dennis in the background, Betty and Baby refused to be separated from their new companion.

"It must be managed some way," said Caroline, who had a resourceful mind; and, picking up both small grey-coated figures, she carried them down the stairs under her arms like parcels.

The result was most satisfactory.

"Do it again," said Baby delightedly. But Betty came to the rescue.

"No, no, Baby," she said, "it's cruel; can't you hear her blowing? And just look how red she is!"

Outside in the street, Betty scanned Caroline closely and critically.

"Nurse has a jacket like that, but it's new, and she wears awful smart gloves. She's a lot smarter than you...."

Dennis intervened piteously.

"Miss Betty ... my dear!"

But Caroline only laughed, and off they started down the street—a little grey fairy hooked on to either arm—so quickly that Dennis had almost to run to keep up with them.

Mrs. Brenton stood at the window and watched them with a smile till they were out of sight, then sat down to her writing again.

"It might be the very thing both for the girl and the children," she mused.

Then she opened the little note Betty had brought her from her mother.

Camilla wrote in a hurry.

"Such a fearful bore!... I have just had a telegram from Violet Lancing, inviting herself to luncheon.... I know what this means! the old story of prying and questioning, all done under a pretence of love for 'poor Ned's children.' Don't, for Heaven's sake, fail to come. I shall feel a little better if you are with me. Oh, how tired I am of being overlooked by these Lancing people! Really, I do think I shall have to do something that will make me free of this worry, at all events. Don't the children look sweet in their new coats?

"Ever yours,
"CAMILLA."

"P.S.—Of course nurse has gone. Honestly, I should like to try this girl who is with you. She looks capable, and if she has had such a bad time with that Baynhurst woman, I dare say she would manage to rub along here. If you don't think she will do, then, darling, *do* try and find some one else."

Another postscript:

"I have half a mind to tell Violet that Miss Graniger is the children's new governess; she is sure to pull a long face if she hears that they are without a nurse. And it would not be *quite* untrue. What do you think?"

CHAPTER VI

Out in the Park Caroline found a land of veritable enchantment. The red sun had mounted higher into a clear, cloudless sky, and it endowed the earth with a ruddy suggestion of warmth, but it was merely a suggestion; the keen cold of the air held its own, and the grey bloom of the hoar-frost lay like a veil on the grass.

Dennis was left far behind. She had a pinched look, and her nose was red.

"Keep on the path, please, Miss Betty," she feebly protested every now and then.

But her voice was thin and weak; in any case Betty had no ears for her.

She danced, and she sang, and she curveted gracefully on the frost-covered grass.

"Isn't it lovely? I want to roll in it!" she declared, as she paused at last and panted for breath.

Baby looked up at Caroline with half-shut eyes.

"I want a bun," she said plaintively.

"A bun!" cried Caroline.... "What *is* a bun?"

Both children exclaimed at this, and then proceeded to volunteer explanations.

"You see," Betty said to Baby, and she stooped her flower-like face confidentially to the smaller one, "she can't know as much as me and you, 'cause she was only borned yesterday, and I don't suppose she's ever eated a bun."

"Oh!" said Baby, looking at Caroline meditatively.

She had such an adorable air, standing with her little head on one side, and her eyes black as sloes, full of mysterious thought, that Caroline was obliged to hug her.

After that they had races, and Dennis watched them with pleasure and some envy as she stood shivering in the cold wind.

"You're the proper sort to be with children, miss," she remarked to Caroline, when at last they turned homewards. "Now I never do know what to do with 'em, and Miss Betty she does ask such queer questions too."

Caroline returned from her walk flushed and dishevelled, but happy-eyed.

It was almost impossible to recognize in her the thin, white-faced, rather defiant girl of the night before.

"What dear little loves!" she exclaimed, as she and Mrs. Brenton met. She had accompanied the children back to their home, and was rather late in making her appearance.

Another note had come from Camilla, in which Mrs. Brenton was urged to be with Mrs. Lancing at least a quarter of an hour before lunch-time.

"Then we can have five minutes to ourselves," Camilla scribbled, "and I shall feel fortified to meet all the catty things Violet means to say!"

Caroline rather drew back from the thought of accepting Mrs. Lancing's invitation.

"She is really very, very kind," she said earnestly, "but still I don't know that I ought to go to lunch."

Agnes Brenton answered this promptly.

"Of course, you must come with me. Camilla is the most hospitable person in the world, and I know she will be very disappointed if you don't go. She has taken a fancy to you."

Mrs. Brenton did not think it desirable to add more than this. She knew Camilla so well.

It would be unkind to put false hopes into the girl's mind; in all probability the suggestion Camilla had made about Miss Graniger would have passed already from her thoughts.

So it was settled, and Caroline made her modest toilet. That is to say, she arranged her hair carefully and put on her shabby hat and coat with more consideration than she had ever worn them before.

When they reached Mrs. Lancing's small house, Camilla, who had evidently been waiting for them, pounced on them both, and drew them into the dining-room.

"Violet arrived at a quarter to one," she announced, "Isn't it like her? I know she thought to have a good time alone with my writing-table, but I was a little too sharp for her! I locked up everything. She pretends she is very glad to meet you, Agnes. She has got a cold," said Camilla, the next moment, "and looks more like a poached egg than ever. By the way, you are going to have a wretched lunch, my dear friends, so I warn you!... I did intend giving you something nice, and Violet loves good things to eat, but she would sniff at a sole if she saw it on my table, and faint if we had a pheasant, and all the Lancing family would shake with horror at the extravagance of a sweet and cheese at the same time! Never mind!" Camilla added, with a sparkle in her eyes, "you shall have a lovely tea to make up for everything. Agnes, do go up and speak to her, there's a dear."

As Mrs. Brenton obediently went up the stairs, Camilla slipped her hand through Caroline's arm.

"The children are quite mad about you, Miss Graniger," she said, "and they have been entreating me to let you stay with them. I wish you would! I am so tired of having ignorant and unsympathetic people about them. Agnes was telling me this morning that you would like to be with children. Why shouldn't you be with mine?"

Caroline did not find it very easy to speak.

Mrs. Lancing's manner charmed and yet startled her; it was so new, too, and so pleasant to be addressed in this semi-familiar, easy fashion.

When she found her voice it was to make a protest.

"I do love children," she said, "and it would be a great happiness to me to be with yours.... But you don't know anything about me. I am sure you would want some one cleverer and better than I am, and then"—Caroline paused an instant.... "Mrs. Baynhurst is sure to give me a very bad character," she added hurriedly.

Camilla snapped her fingers.

"I am not going to trouble about Mrs. Baynhurst," she said. "Everybody knows that she is a crank. Look here, we'll settle all sorts of things afterwards. Now I must go upstairs, or I shall

have my dear sister-in-law crawling down to see what I am doing. Betty will come down to lunch," Camilla added, "and it would be so sweet of you if you would just keep an eye on her; she shall sit next to you. Would you like to go up to the nursery and come down with her?"—this was suggested with the air of one who has a sudden and happy inspiration. "You can leave your hat and coat in my bedroom."

Caroline followed Mrs. Lancing up the stairs.

She was fascinated into compliance. Camilla's pretty ways won her heart very much as the children had won it. There was something magnetic in the sympathy that pervaded her.

Caroline felt bewildered, and moved, and excited, but only in a pleasurable sense.

When they reached the drawing-room door, Mrs. Lancing smiled and whispered.

"My room is on the floor above this," she said, "and the nursery is above that again. Do, like a dear, see that Betty has her hair done, and that her face and hands are washed. Her aunt always examines her as if she were a curious insect or a mineral specimen. Babsy will have her dinner with Dennis, and come down later."

Camilla gave a little sigh of contentment as Caroline Graniger passed up the stairs, and she glanced at herself in a long mirror that was placed at a convenient angle to make the staircase seem bigger.

Her appearance satisfied her. Dennis had picked out the oldest gown she possessed, and she had carefully denuded herself of all the little jewelry that she was accustomed to wear. But a shabby gown could not dim the real radiance of her beauty.

Mrs. Horace Lancing was sitting bolt upright by the fire, talking to Agnes Brenton; she was rather plump, with masses of yellowish hair, had short-sighted eyes, and a dull white skin. She always used long, blue-tinted glasses, and turned them on Camilla now.

It was evident that the drawing-room had been arranged for her coming. Like Camilla's own charming person, the room had been swept of innumerable little prettinesses, and it looked bare and almost shabby.

Sir Samuel's flowers had been carefully concealed.

"Dear Violet," Camilla said, "won't you really take off your hat? It looks as if you were going to rush away so soon, dear, and, of course, you are going to stay the afternoon."

Mrs. Horace Lancing shook her head stiffly.

"I have to meet Horace at the stores at three," she said, "we are going back by the three-fifty train, so I must leave you early. Aren't the children in yet, Camilla?"

"Betty is being made ready for luncheon, and Baby will come down by-and-by. You have no idea, Agnes, how much I like Miss Graniger ... the children's new governess," Camilla explained to her sister-in-law.

Mrs. Brenton half frowned and half smiled. She had not supposed that matters would have gone so far in so short a time, and resented the prevarication on Caroline's account and on her own. But she said nothing.

"Isn't that a new photograph of you, Camilla?" asked Mrs. Lancing, getting up and peering at a frame on the piano.

"A snapshot," said Camilla, lightly. She moved near to Mrs. Brenton for an instant, and said in a low tone, "Don't glare at me so fiercely, Agnes.... I have arranged everything; she is enchanted, and I know she will be just the very girl for me...."

Mrs. Horace Lancing put down the portrait.

"Extremely well done for a snapshot," she said coldly. "I did not know you went in motors; those furs are new to me."

Camilla laughed.

"I am a fraud," she cried, "dressed up in other people's possessions. Ah! here is lunch at last! I hope you can eat leg of mutton, Violet? I confess I am not very fond of it, but," with a sigh, "everything nice is so dear. Don't you think life costs more and more every day?"

Out on the staircase Betty was standing with her arm entwined in Caroline's. She allowed herself to be kissed with reluctance by her aunt, but clung about her mother's neck ecstatically for a moment.

Camilla had done well to warn her guests; it was a very depressing luncheon; the mutton was underdone, the greens were gritty, and the potatoes full of water. Camilla made a few apologies.

"A good cook is quite beyond my means, you know," she said plaintively.

Mrs. Brenton tried hard not to laugh as she remembered the dainty fare Camilla's cook usually provided.

She made the best of everything, but Mrs. Horace Lancing, who was very hungry, looked annoyed.

"I never have cheap food," she observed, "it is not an economy."

At this Camilla opened her eyes.

"Do you really think that?" she asked; "and I am always trying to be so very cheap."

Conversation lagged. Betty at the lower end of the table, had a good deal to say to Caroline, but it was all said in whispers.

When, however, the suet pudding with treacle had made its round the child demanded some dessert, and her mother, forgetful for the moment, gave her permission to carry round a silver basket from the sideboard, in which grapes and pears and other delightful fruits were clustered together in picturesque fashion.

"She is learning to be useful, you see, Violet," Camilla observed plaintively.

But Mrs. Horace Lancing was looking at the dessert through her blue-tinted glasses.

"Peaches!" she said, her tone a mixture of satisfaction and hostile criticism.

Camilla bit her lips, and was thankful that she had locked away her tradesmen's books with her letters and intimate papers.

"Take care, Betty, my sweetheart," she said, and then she explained as the child cautiously carried her burden from one to another. "A present," she said, "Mr. Haverford often sends me fruit; it is so good of him; such things are much appreciated by us."

"Mr. Haverford," repeated her sister-in-law, "who is he? I don't know his name."

"He's a dear," Betty responded before her mother could speak. "I 'dore Mr. Haverford! I wish he lived with us.... I tell you what," continued Betty, her eyes glistening, her little voice clear and high, "I wish he'd come and sleep with us, mumsy ... that would be really, really fun! I'm sure he wouldn't snore like nurse does, and I know he'd tell us a lot of stories. Oh, here is Baby! Come along, ducksie, and have a bit of Betty's appy...." Betty was always maternal with her little sister.

After luncheon the two children were ranged in front of Mrs. Horace Lancing, who interrogated them with a nervous manner and in the unnatural voice that some people think necessary to affect with children. Betty resented her questions and was mute, and she in her turn resented, as she always did, the little creatures' dainty appearance.

They only wore overalls of brown holland, but no home scissors had cut the holland, and, like their mother, they had already attained the art of giving distinction to the most ordinary garments.

Mrs. Brenton had discreetly withdrawn, and Caroline would have gone too, but a pleading look from Camilla restrained her.

She stood in the background, feeling amused rather than uncomfortable as Mrs. Horace, failing in conversational efforts, scanned the two small figures critically through her glasses.

"Don't you think you ought to have Marian's hair cut?" she queried. "It is so bad for little children to have such long hair. And I think Elizabeth is looking very thin," was her verdict on Betty. "Camilla, do you give her maltine or anything nourishing?"

Camilla knelt down and took both her children in her arms; surreptitiously she kissed her baby's bright curls.

"Now, darlings, kiss Aunt Violet, and run away. Miss Graniger, I think it must be another walk, it is such a lovely day, but please come in quite early."

The two little persons disappeared with a right good will, and as the sisters-in-law were left alone they heard sounds of laughter and singing, signs of joy at freedom, from the staircase beyond.

"I am very lucky to have such a nice governess," Camilla said.

Mrs. Horace said—

"Yes; but I always think these sort of persons want such a lot of looking after. I never would have a governess. Mabel went to school very early. I suppose you have good references with that girl? To me she looks too young," she said the next moment; "and Elizabeth needs to be in such

careful hands. She is intelligent, of course, but her manner is rather pert.... But then I suppose you never attempt to correct her, Camilla?"

"I was never slapped when I was a child, so I don't know how to slap other people," said Camilla.

She drew up a stool in front of the fire, and sat down on it.

She was perfectly well aware that something disagreeable was coming, and she ranged herself to meet it with resignation.

"I have no doubt," she added, with a little laugh, "that it would have been an excellent thing for me if daddy had spanked me now and then; but, dear old soul, he couldn't hurt any living creature, much less me. When I was naughty he gave me chocolates instead of the whip; but, on the whole, I was a fairly good child. I have a theory, you know, Violet, that sympathy can do far more than punishment. If Betty sees me unhappy when she is naughty, it makes her wretched; that is just how I was with daddy. Ah! well, if I had no slaps in those old days, I have plenty now!"

"I don't think you have much to grumble at," said Violet Lancing.

Camilla looked up at her and frowned slightly, then she smiled.

"Let us get it over," she said. "I can see that you have come here to scold to-day."

"Horace has been waiting to hear from you as you promised," said Mrs. Horace, stiffly. "You had your quarter's allowance quite six weeks ago, and you have never written."

Camilla frowned again, this time sharply; she was shielding her face with her two hands. She had expected the usual tirade; not this. So Horace had given her away! How mean of him! She had never supposed that he would have confided in Violet.

"I am so sorry," she began, and then she stopped with a quick sigh. She was so weary, so unutterably weary of this kind of thing! There came upon her a reckless sort of feeling to speak out frankly, and send this woman to the uttermost ends of the earth, or to perdition; the latter for choice.

"I don't think you know what it means to us," said Violet Lancing, getting agitated. "If Horace had told me about your letter when it came in the summer, I should never have permitted him to lend you that money. I only found it out by chance the other day, and I must say I am surprised, Camilla, that you should have gone to Horace for help. You know perfectly well that we have the hardest work to get along on what we have. I suppose you think grandpa does a lot for us," ... here the speaker laughed shortly. "As he almost ruined himself over Ned, you see, he has no money to give to any of the rest of the family!"

"And naturally Ned's widow and children are eating him out of house and home," Camilla said. She had grown pale. Except on occasions like this she never spoke her dead husband's name.

"I am not grumbling about that, Camilla. You have a right to be provided for, especially as Ned treated you so badly. But you ought to manage better, and I can only repeat that you have no right to borrow from us. Horace advanced you a hundred pounds last August, and you promised *faithfully* to give it back to him when grandpa sent you your quarter's cheque. A hundred pounds is not a hundred pence," said Mrs. Horace, sententiously; "it isn't to be picked up every day."

Camilla got up and kicked the stool away.

"I am horribly sorry, Violet. I give you my word of honour I intended to send Horace the money, but you don't know how pressed I was in September. I have an awfully hard time to make ends meet. Of course, Ned's father is very good to allow me what he does, but the fact is it is practically impossible to live on what I have."

"Yes, as you live, certainly," agreed Mrs. Horace Lancing; "but you could manage splendidly if you did what you ought to do—cut down expenses in every direction, and go into the country. You ought never to have kept on this house."

Camilla moved about the room.

"Oh, that old, old story again!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Don't you know how we threshed out all the ways and means when...?" She hurried on, "Colonel Lancing himself decided that it was best for me to stay on here, and so if you want to quarrel with any one, go to him, Violet; it is no use coming to me...."

Mrs. Horace Lancing got a little red in the face. "I don't want to interfere with you or your arrangements, Heaven knows," she said; "I only want you to be just with us, for, whatever you may say, you know as well as I do that you ought to have paid Horace back as you arranged." There was a little pause. "I shall be very much obliged if you will let me know what you are going to do about this, Camilla. We are not in a position to wait indefinitely. I really came here to-day," Mrs. Horace Lancing said, firmly, "to ask you to let me have some of the money at once."

Camilla stood by the window flicking the long curtains.

This subject, and the recrimination it provoked, made every nerve in her body tingle; in such a moment the sordidness of this perpetual difficulty with money, the ugliness of money itself, settled on her spirit, crushing it down as by some actual physical effort.

The spell of ease and relief that Haverford's generosity had signified had been very brief. After a good deal of deliberation, she had filled in the blank cheque for a thousand pounds.

Her inclination and her necessity had both urged her to make it three times that sum, but she had been temperate, feeling the need of caution. The cheque had gone to her bank the day before, and already she had drawn very largely against it. She dared not drain the money in its entirety, otherwise she would leave herself unprotected should the evil she feared (to meet which she had borrowed this sum) fall upon her.

In casting up her position, she had dealt only with those things that were disagreeably prominent ... and she had absolutely forgotten her obligation to her brother-in-law. She regretted now, impatiently enough, that she had not drawn upon Haverford for a much larger amount. If she were to give Violet even a portion of this debt, she would leave herself without a penny of ready money once more.

Mrs. Horace Lancing was continuing to press the matter home in an aggravating way; she enumerated the many necessities her life lacked, and all that she would have done during the last few months if only her husband had cultivated prudence instead of generosity.

It suddenly dawned upon Camilla that her brother-in-law must have passed through an exceedingly unpleasant time.

"Poor Horace!" she said to herself. He was the only member of her husband's family who had shown her a particle of sympathy, and she felt honestly sorry in this moment that she should have trespassed so heavily on that sympathy.

She let the curtain slip from her fingers.

"Look here, Violet, I can't possibly do anything now, really I can't; but at Christmas I promise faithfully."

Mrs. Horace laughed.

"At Christmas! Oh yes! And when Christmas comes it will be, 'Violet dear, I am so very sorry, but can't you possibly wait till Easter?' Oh, I know ... I know!"

There were two bright patches of unbecoming colour on her cheeks; she was adjusting her veil with hands that trembled.

"You have no right to say that sort of thing!" said Camilla, hotly; "it is very unjust and very untrue."

"And you have no right to go behind my back and borrow from my husband," said Violet Lancing. Her pale eyes looked very angry. "If you wanted money so badly you might have asked grandpa, I think, or somebody else. I consider it was awfully mean of you to go to Horace, and not to let me know a word about it. We have all sorts of worries ourselves, and the boys cost us no end of money; but you are just Ned all over again, Camilla! Everything you want you must have without considering any one or anything but yourself. I used to think all the old trouble was Ned's fault, and I was awfully sorry when you were left to fight for yourself, but now I know better!"

"Is all this necessary?" Camilla asked in a low voice.

But Mrs. Horace was wound up.

"I can't help it. You've brought it on yourself, and you ought to hear the truth now and again. You're not only horribly selfish, you're as deceitful as you can be.... You can't pretend so easily with me, Camilla! I know perfectly well that your life isn't dull and miserable as you try to make us believe, and I know, too, why you never want any of us to come here unawares." She jerked her veil down over her chin and tore it. "I am not a fool!" she finished, with a hard laugh, "though you may think I am."

"You are very angry with me, and you are talking a lot of nonsense," said Camilla.

She looked away from the other woman.

"I am very sorry you are vexed simply because when I was in trouble I turned to Ned's brother. It seemed the most natural thing to do. I know if Horace had asked Ned ... to help him in the old days he would have done it, and gladly, too!" She caught her breath, and for a moment she could not speak; then in a low voice she said, "I shall send this money back before Christmas; on that you may rely."

Mrs. Horace Lancing made a curious expression with her mouth, and rose to go. Instantly Camilla's manner changed.

"I am sorry you won't stay to tea.... You had such a horrid lunch. Give Horace my love, and tell him I am extremely hurt with him because he did not come here and fetch you. Will you have a cab?"

Violet Lancing shook her head, she picked up her tweed coat and squeezed herself into it with an effort. Her gloves took some time to put on. To make conversation and relieve the strained atmosphere, Camilla asked after the health of all the people she detested. She was particularly anxious to know how matters were passing with Mrs. Horace's own household, but she avoided all mention of her father-in-law a fact Mrs. Horace quickly made a note of.

"I didn't tell grandpa I was coming here," she observed, as she buttoned the last glove-button; it was evident she had more to say, and she said it. "I think it only friendly to let you know, Camilla, that grandpa is not very nice about you just now," she said. "Though you never see him, he seems to know all that is going on. The other night when you were being discussed at dinner-time, he was quite angry."

"He has always been nasty with me. That is nothing new," said Camilla, quickly.

Mrs. Horace Lancing looked at her in a sly kind of way.

"Well, of course, it is none of my business, but I do think you are foolish not to try and make friends with him. Have you ever thought what would happen if he were to stop your allowance? I have heard him threaten this more than once. And then he complains bitterly that you never take the children to see him. It would help things a lot for you if you were to do this now and then. He is an old man, you know, and old people like to be remembered sometimes."

Camilla's eyes were bright.

"I am sorry, but the suburbs make me ill. If Colonel Lancing wants to see the children he must come here...."

There was almost a frightened expression for an instant on the other woman's face; evidently "grandpa" was no joking matter to her.

"Well, you can't say I haven't warned you," she said, and then she laughed. "The suburbs have their uses all the same sometimes, haven't they?" she observed. "Let me see. I think I left my umbrella downstairs."

Camilla accompanied her departing guest to the door.

"Are you sure you won't have a cab; it is getting late, you know."

There was a package lying on the hall table beside Mrs. Lancing's umbrella.

"Do you mind taking that to Mabel?" asked Camilla. "It is some chocolate, it won't do her any harm; it came from Paris."

When she was alone she mounted the stairs slowly and sat down once more on the stool in front of the fire. With a sigh, she clasped her hands round one knee, and swayed backwards and forwards, shutting her eyes, and Agnes Brenton, coming in rather softly, found her like this.

Mrs. Brenton paused a moment before advancing, and then she went forward and put her hand gently on Camilla's shoulder.

"What is it, dear? Did she scratch you very badly?"

Camilla turned and laughed faintly.

"She always manages to upset me, and as she came on purpose to be disagreeable, her visit has been most successful."

Mrs. Brenton pulled forward a chair, and sat down. She had left her knitting on one of the small tables the day before, and she took it up now mechanically, and began to move the needles to and fro.

Camilla watched her in a dreamy sort of way. Vaguely she wondered to herself how many hundred pairs of socks Agnes had made in her life.

"I must be a horribly wicked woman," she said suddenly, "otherwise I could not possibly have been given such a scourge as being compelled to take bread from these people."

"I thought a long time ago," said Mrs. Brenton, in her calm, quiet way, "you had realized what to expect from Violet Lancing. Dear child, it is hardly possible that she should be sympathetic to you."

"I don't care two figs about her," said Camilla, "and, as a matter of fact, I am rather sorry for her. Did you see the cut of her skirt? And tea at the stores is the only gaiety she ever has, poor soul. If she would only give me half a chance," Camilla added, "I should be awfully kind to her."

After a moment's pause Camilla said—

"It's the old man whom I really hate. Ned always said his father was an old devil, and so he is! It appears he is extra furious with me because I never take the children to see him.... How can I? If he forgets all the horrible things he did and said to me, I have unfortunately a much better memory!"

Agnes Brenton took this matter up quickly.

"You have never understood Colonel Lancing," she said, "just as he could never be expected to understand you. That he is a hard man I know well; but I am convinced he is not so hard as you imagine. He set his face against your marriage with Ned, not because he objected to you personally; that would have been ridiculous," interpolated Mrs. Brenton with a smile; "but because he knew it was going to be a miserable business for you." Agnes Brenton paused half a moment, and then said in a low voice, "And the result justified that belief pretty surely."

Camilla spread out her two small hands to shield her face from the fire.

"Don't deceive yourself, Agnes; there is nothing good about him; he is hard, he is cruel, he is horrid." She moved restlessly. "I wish I could cut them all out of my life, especially the old man. What a difference to my daddy. Oh, Agnes, if I only had daddy with me now! Dear, good, loving heart, why did you die?"

She bent forward suddenly and rang the bell.

"I must have the room arranged again," she said. Her pretty voice sounded a little husky. "It looks too hideous for words, and then, dearest, you shall have something to eat. On second thoughts, I am not sorry that Violet had a bad lunch. I hate every one who belongs to that old wolf! Oh, Agnes, let us talk about that girl Caroline—what's her name?"

Mrs. Brenton turned the heel of the sock, and her needles clicked musically for a few moments. Then she said—

"Well, I don't think you ought to do anything without consulting Mr. Haverford."

"Good Heavens! why not?" exclaimed Camilla. "Bring back the flowers," she ordered to the maid who appeared at the door at this moment. She got up and began to arrange the room in a restless fashion, unlocking drawers, and taking out all the things she had hidden. "I really don't see what Mr. Haverford has to do with it," she said irritably, after a while.

"Don't you?" queried Mrs. Brenton, with a smile. "You must remember that Miss Graniger went to him last night for advice and help."

Camilla moved impatiently.

"Oh! he will take a month to deliberate. He is so slow. Really it is very ridiculous. You know I must have some one for the children, and Miss Graniger wants work. Why on earth should she not come to me?"

"I don't like things done in a great hurry," said Mrs. Brenton. And then she added again, "It may annoy Mr. Haverford."

"And what do I care if it does?" exclaimed Camilla. She was nervous, and it did her good to speak sharply. "Anyhow, I can't very well draw back now. I have practically engaged the girl, and I settled that we would discuss terms and other things this afternoon. I like her, Agnes. She is a lady, and I think she is just the very person we want for Betty."

As the flowers were brought in and placed, Mrs. Lancing ordered tea.

"Tell cook to send up all sorts of things," she said. "I am ravenous. How much do you think I ought to give her, Agnes?" was her next question. "Fifty pounds a year?"

"My dear child!" said Mrs. Brenton, and then she sighed. "When will you learn the value of money?"

"Well, look here," said Camilla, sitting down on the stool, and putting a pleading note in her voice, "will you arrange all this for me? I don't want to let this girl slip through my fingers."

She looked over her shoulder at this juncture; the door was half open, and they caught the sound of the children returning.

"Well, have you been good little people?" she called aloud, and she got up briskly and went to the door. "I hope you are not tired, Miss Graniger? Oh, my dear! What are you doing? You must not carry that big, big, little lump!"

Baby had climbed up into Caroline's arms, and had her arms about the girl's neck, her head was cuddled on Caroline's shoulder.

"I is so awful tired, mammy," she said plaintively. Then Betty chimed in—

"I telled her a heap of times she was not to ask poor Caroline to carry her, but"—with a shrug of her shoulders—"you know what Baby is. The most onstinant creature in the world."

But Baby only smiled, and kissed Caroline.

Even when her mother tried to entice her away, she clung to the girl affectionately. So Camilla went up to the nursery, also scolding tenderly as she went.

She wanted to take Miss Graniger down to have tea with her, but the children opposed this so strenuously that she had to give way.

She did not leave them till she saw them seated at the table luxuriating in all sorts of delicacies.

"Don't let them worry you," Camilla said to Caroline. "Dennis will take them off your hands."

However, it seemed that Caroline had no intention of calling Dennis to the rescue, so Mrs. Lancing went downstairs, and wore a very triumphant expression as she entered the drawing-room.

"Believe it or not, just as you like, but it is a fact that that girl is absolutely happy with the children," she declared. "You ought to be pleased, Agnes. You pretended you were sorry for her. Can't you imagine the sort of existence that she has had in Mrs. Baynhurst's house. Well, here at least she will be treated like a human being." Then abruptly Camilla crossed the room, and sat down at her writing-table. "I am going to write to Mr. Haverford," she said, "and then I hope you will be satisfied, you dear old fidgety frump."

The note written, she had it despatched by a cab, and requested that an answer might be sent back.

"I don't see what earthly objection he can have," Camilla said, "but if he has any—well, now let him speak, or for ever hold his peace."

The cab came back in a very little while, bringing the information that Mr. Haverford had been called to the north unexpectedly. Further, it appeared that the butler had added that Mr. Haverford intended going to Paris when he came down from the north.

Mrs. Brenton smiled as she sipped her tea.

"That means he intends to see his mother, and go thoroughly into this Graniger business. There are no half measures with him."

Camilla moved petulantly.

"Oh! we all know by this time that you think him a paragon of perfection.... He is just your pet idea of what a man should be—solid, stodgy, prosaic. A creature as flat, and as level, and as enduring, and as uninteresting as a Roman road."

"Well," said Mrs. Brenton, picking up her knitting again, "there is a good deal to be said in favour of a smooth road, whether it is Roman or otherwise."

Camilla ate a cake, then some sandwiches, and then another piece of cake.

"The only thing worth having in life, except food when one is hungry, is the thing that comes unexpectedly. You can keep all your smooth roads to yourself, Agnes; give me Piccadilly when the wood pavement is simply honeycombed with holes, and one stands the chance of being jerked out of a cab, and perhaps out of existence, too, every other moment. Anyhow," she determined, brightly, "this settles matters so far as I am concerned. Miss Graniger will now stay, and if Mr. Haverford does not like this arrangement—well, he can lump it! Have some more tea? No? Well, then, let us go up to the children."

CHAPTER VII

For a second time Caroline Graniger lay awake late into the night, watching the fire-glow glint the walls and throw fantastic shadows on the ceiling.

She had been sent to bed very early.

"You look so tired, you poor thing," Camilla had said as they had sat at dinner.

She herself was going out to a bridge party, but she had insisted on Agnes Brenton and Caroline sharing a dainty little dinner with her.

Of course it was at her suggestion that Miss Graniger was sleeping with the children.

"As you are going to stay with me," she had said, when she tarried a little while in the nursery after Mrs. Brenton had gone downstairs, "I think we had better start as we intend to go on. Agnes, I know, wants to carry you home again with her to-night, but Betty and Babsy want you—don't you, darlings?"

Caroline asked for nothing better, except, indeed, that she was divided in her desire to show deference to both these women who were so extraordinarily kind to her.

"I only hope I shall do," she said earnestly.

Camilla had laughed at this.

Her baby had climbed on her knee, and was cuddling her very tightly.

"This is not what frightens me," she said. "I am only afraid you won't stand our ways. This is a very funny sort of household—isn't it, Betty?"

The child nodded her head wisely. She looked so pretty with her bright hair screwed up in curl rags.

It was Caroline who introduced the subject of Rupert Haverford.

"I fancy Mrs. Brenton thinks I ought to have referred things to Mr. Haverford," she had said, a little hesitatingly.

"I know," Mrs. Lancing had answered quickly, "but I don't in the least see that. Of course you went to Mr. Haverford last night because you did not know what else to do. But surely that does not entitle him to order all your ways? I shall be awfully disappointed if you don't stay with me," she finished; and Caroline had laughed softly at this.

"Then you shall not be disappointed," she had answered.

And so everything had been arranged, and when Mrs. Lancing had whisked away for a long—and a late—evening at cards, Mrs. Brenton had kissed the girl, and told her to go to rest.

"Camilla is right; you do look very tired," she said.

"Oh, I am always pale, but I am not really tired—I am only happy. I don't think I could explain to you exactly how I feel. Just a little while ago I seemed to have nothing given to me, that nothing was possible; and now I feel almost as if I had found everything that had been lacking all these years!"

"Only because you have settled to be the governess to two children who are bound to be naughty and tiresome sometimes, you know?"

"No, not entirely because of that," Caroline answered.

There was something familiar to her to find herself occupying a small bed in a room with children, but this was the only element that was familiar; all the rest was so new and so sweet.

As she lay on the pillows and looked from one little sleeping form to the other her eyes filled, and she had a fluttering sensation at her heart.

After so many barren years these last few hours seemed over full with sympathy and kindness, and with that recognition from others that almost amounted to kinship.

She found herself endowed with a personality all at once.

It was very strange to realize that she had some defined standing; now that the oppression of dependence had been lifted she marvelled that she could have endured the burden so long.

"But it is too good to last," she said to herself once or twice. "I *know* something will happen, and I shall go out into the cold again."

Of course she could not sleep; she thought of a dozen things at the same time.

The spell of Camilla's magnetic personality, the calm strength and womanliness of Agnes Brenton, the charm and prattle of the children, held her in sway alternatively, and kept alive that new sense of warmth that had been kindled in her heart.

Every now and then, too, Rupert Haverford would come into her thoughts.

A note had been sent round from Mrs. Brenton's lodgings addressed to herself, and given to her just as she was going upstairs. In this Haverford had written that he regretted that he was called north on very important matters, but that he had spoken to the lady of whom he had told her, and that a home was arranged for her until she could make other plans.

"My absence may delay the explanation you desire from my mother," Rupert had written, "but in the event of your requiring any reference, you will of course use my name."

It was a brief and very businesslike letter, but Caroline felt grateful to him all the same.

Assuredly he must have troubled himself about her even to have made such arrangements.

Once indeed she felt a little qualm.

"Perhaps Mrs. Brenton was right, and I ought to have asked his advice." The next moment, however, she dismissed this. "It cannot matter to him how I earn my bread."

"I shall send him back the greater portion of the money he lent me," she determined at another moment. "I must get myself a few things to wear. I cannot go about with the children quite so shabby as I was to-day. But I shall not require more than half the money he lent me, and I shall pay the other off as quickly as I can get my salary."

When she remembered his mother she laughed.

"Explanation! ... It is very evident that he does not know her as well as I do."

It was very late before Caroline's eyes closed drowsily, and then she had slept scarcely an hour when she was awakened with a start.

Little hands were pulling her, and a little voice was whispering out of the darkness.

"Caloline! ... Caloline! ... may I come into your bed?"

Instantly the girl was awake.... She sat up and held out her arms.

Dennis had warned her—

"If Miss Baby wants to rouse you and creep in with you, don't you let her, miss," she had said; "you'll want all the rest you can get, and children shouldn't never be encouraged in such goings on."

But Caroline forgot to be sensible; rules and regulations went down before the sweetness, the delight of holding that warm little bundle in her arms so closely.

Baby kissed her many times, whispered sleepily for a few minutes, and then lay quite still, one little loving hand linked in Caroline's.

* * * * *

Mrs. Brenton went back to the country the next day.

It had been arranged that her husband would follow her to town; but instead of doing this, he managed to contract a very bad cold, and as he was not the strongest man in the world, his wife took alarm, and departed in a hurry for Yelverton, notwithstanding all Camilla's entreaties.

"But remember," Mrs. Brenton said as she went, "you have promised to come to me for Christmas; that is understood, Camilla. It will be delightful to have the children, and we must have a Christmas-tree and a jolly time altogether."

"I am not sure that I shall know you in the future," replied Camilla; then she laughed. "I don't know why I want you so much, because you are always scolding me—aren't you? But I *do* want you, and I think it is horrid of you to go rushing back now, just because Dick has happened to sneeze twice. If he had come up to town, we could have all nursed him."

Caroline saw the children's mother only intermittently during the next two or three days.

Camilla always seemed to be in a tremendous hurry. Except for breakfast, she did not have a single meal in the house.

Nevertheless, the atmosphere was charged with a certain sort of excitement. The telephone bell was always ringing; so was the door-bell.

Mrs. Lancing's friends seemed to employ an army of telegraph boys, and she herself would dash home in cabs every now and then in a violent hurry apparently. Though she might neglect or postpone other duties, she never forgot a flying visit to the nursery at bath-time.

The clamour of the children, however, and the nonsense and the kisses, precluded anything further than the interchange of smiles and a few words between Mrs. Lancing and her new governess.

It was Dennis who reported that Miss Graniger had settled down to her work admirably; that she was a decided acquisition.

"You've never had any one near so nice, ma'am," was Dennis's opinion, given emphatically. "She doesn't give herself airs, and isn't above doing all sorts of little things that nurse would never have dreamed of doing; and the way she understands children—well, there, it gets over me! Miss Betty was in one of her tantrums this morning, but Miss Graniger, she soon set things right. I'd 'ope, ma'am," Dennis added, "that there'll be no change this time...."

"I never want to change, you know that," Camilla's answer was to this.

She found time to scribble a few words, conveying what Dennis had told her, to Agnes Brenton, and added—

"As the great Mogul has never taken any notice of us since you left town, we are left conjecturing whether he is indifferent or annoyed."

Just when she was closing this letter Camilla took out the paper again and wrote a postscript.

"Violet Lancing scratched to some purpose the other day! I have had a letter from the old man *commanding* me to take the children to spend Christmas with him. I have not answered him, but I mean to tell him to go to ..."—she made a great dash—"church on Christmas morning," she finished. "As I am promised to you, I cannot go to the Lancings, can I?" she wrote underneath.

Caroline was far too busy in these the first days of new occupation to give much heed to the fact that Rupert Haverford had sent no answer to the letter she had written to him.

Naturally the life was not so golden-hued in these after days as it had seemed that first day.

She found the children, if not exactly spoilt, certainly not trained as they should have been trained.

With the elder one, indeed, a good many difficulties threatened, but Caroline was resolved to find nothing too hard or difficult, and her long experience of school discipline came into splendid prominence now.

Her starting task was to try and put a little organization into the life of the nursery.

She did not mind what she did herself to bring about some method to regulate the hours, but she quickly let the servants know that they must meet her halfway.

She found it necessary to change any number of accepted habits. When she learned how irregular had been the nursery arrangements, she marvelled that her little charges were so healthy or so tractable.

Dennis gave her great assistance.

"You keep things down, my dear. Don't you be afraid of having your own way. The mistress won't interfere. She trusts every one. That's why she gets done so often."

Another time Dennis introduces the question of expense.

"The way money is just thrown away in this house! ... There's not a one, barrin' myself, to give a thought to the one as has to pay. Why, many's the time I've seen nurse pitch away a bottle of special milk what couldn't be used; and d'ye think that stopped her in the orderin'? Not it!"

That there had been waste and extravagance to an almost criminal degree Caroline had quickly discovered for herself. Dennis had told her that the children possessed more feathers and frills, more lace frocks than any other two children in the United Kingdom, and this was no exaggeration. In all things that were practical and necessary, however, they were as shabby and as ragged as any little beggar in the street.

Every night Caroline devoted herself to overlooking the children's wardrobe.

She mended what could be mended, and arranged all as far as she could, but she could not spin stockings or weave warm under garments out of thin air.

For a day or two the girl hesitated as to whether she should approach Mrs. Lancing on this subject. She was really unwilling to do so, but finally decided it was better that she should go straight to the point in this and in all other matters connected with the children and her care of them.

And so one evening, as Camilla was dressing for an early dinner engagement, there came a knock at her door, and Dennis asked if she would see Miss Graniger.

Mrs. Lancing was sitting in front of her looking-glass, her short, wavy hair was loose on her shoulders.

At sight of Caroline she took alarm, and, turning round, waved her hair-brush protestingly.

"Don't tell me that you have come to give me notice," she said forcibly, "because I won't take it!"

Caroline laughed.

"I am still marvelling at my good fortune at being with you," she said. She looked admiringly at Camilla. How pretty! how very pretty this woman was! Each time that she saw Mrs. Lancing she seemed to see her in a more attractive way.

Now, in her white flowing gown, with her curly hair falling about her face, she looked hardly older than little Betty herself.

There was an unconscious wistfulness in Camilla Lancing's eyes that waked a strong rush of tenderness and protective affection in Caroline's heart whenever she looked into them.

Brief as had been her stay in the house, she had been long enough to know from other sources than Dennis's confidences that trouble stalked side by side with the gaiety; long enough to have grasped with that intuition which was one of her strongest gifts that this charming, childlike, happy-go-lucky mistress of the house would always buy her sunshine very dearly, with a heavy shadow threatening it.

Camilla heaved a sigh of relief.

"I breathe again," she said; "sit down and let me look at you. Well, you are better, I think; you have a nice little bit of colour, but you must get much, much fatter. Are the chickies asleep? Dear child, I must congratulate you! You are a marvellous person. We have never had such peace in the house as we have had since you have been here—have we, Dennis? And you are such a child yourself! How is this sort of thing done? I suppose it comes naturally to you."

"I am so glad you are satisfied with me," Caroline said. She sat down and looked about her curiously, and yet with pleasure. The dainty appointments, the rosebud chintz, the lace-covered bed, upon which was spread the gown Mrs. Lancing was going to wear, the crystal-topped toilet table with its burden of brushes, and jars, and scent-bottles, and nicknacks, the cosy chairs, the soft carpet, all made a picture of prettiness, luxury, and comfort such as had not even visioned itself in her imagination, busy as that had been at times. Portraits of the children abounded, and in the middle of the mantelshelf Caroline noticed a large cabinet photograph of Edward Lancing. The children had a smaller one like it in the nursery.

Betty kissed it every night after she had said her prayers, and Baby, of course, always clamoured for daddy's picture to do the same thing. Although, as Betty said frequently, "You never knowed him, so he isn't properly your daddy."

Caroline brought her wandering attention to order sharply.

"I have come to bother you," she said.

Dennis had begun to comb out the brown curls and arrange them in a loose and a graceful manner, fastening them here and there with a sparkling pin.

"I have brought a list of the things that the children want."

"Do they want anything? They had new coats and hats the day you came," said Mrs. Lancing.

She took the paper that Caroline handed her, and read it aloud.

"Stockings, nightgowns, flannels, shoes. Dear child! of course they shall have these things. But are they so badly off?"

Caroline nodded her head.

"Yes; I have put everything together for you to see," she said. "I have only written down what is absolutely necessary."

"Now, isn't that shocking, Dennis?" said Camilla, with a note of desperation in her voice. "Doesn't it make you want to *shake* nurse? ... What did she do with the things? She must have eaten them."

"I've gone carefully through every drawer and every box," said Caroline, "and I cannot find any good clothes put away."

"Let me think." Mrs. Lancing sat and puckered her brows. Dennis had put on an expression that said as plainly as words that these things would have been set right a long time ago if only she had been given the authority to attend to them.

"You had better go to ... No!" said Camilla, checking herself without mentioning the name, "you can't go there. I owe them quite a lot already, and that other shop in Regent Street, they,

too, are rather nasty about their bill. I'll tell you what, I will give you some ready money, and then you had better go and buy just what is actually required. What do you suppose these will all come to? Dennis, you are good at this sort of thing, you might help Miss Graniger. Dear sweethearts, fancy not having a stocking, or a decent petticoat." She caught her breath with a sigh. "I am afraid I am not a very good mother."

"I'm sure you pay enough, ma'am," said Dennis. "Why, the money has just been poured out for the nursery this last year."

"Well, money is not everything, we all know that," her mistress said, as she took up her hand-glass and looked at the back of her head critically.

Caroline for herself proposed a second time that Mrs. Lancing should see how matters stood, but Mrs. Lancing refused.

"No, no," she said; "I don't want to see for myself. Do you think I doubt you? I know only too well you have not exaggerated a single thing."

Here the sound of a cab stopping reached her ears.

"Oh! my goodness," said Camilla, "that must be Sammy, and, of course, I am late! Dennis, get me into my gown quickly ... quickly!"

Caroline moved to the door.

"Good night," she said. "I hope you are going to enjoy yourself."

Camilla called her back.

"Do one thing for me like a darling, will you?" she asked. "Just run down and tell Sir Samuel that I shall be with him directly. I promised faithfully to be in time, and he does so hate to be kept waiting."

Some one was being shown up into the drawing-room as Caroline left Mrs. Lancing's bedroom.

She paused a moment, and then went down the stairs.

"It's Sir Samuel Broxbourne, miss," the parlourmaid said.

Caroline nodded her head.

"Yes; Mrs. Lancing knows. I have a message for him."

Caroline's first impression as she opened the drawing-room door was that the young man standing with his back to the fireplace was much too big for the room.

Sir Samuel had not troubled to remove his overcoat, and the heavy fur collar on this coat accentuated the squareness and breadth of his shoulders.

He always looked red, as if he had just come out of a bath, or had been running; his hair, too, had a touch of red in it.

Caroline took all this in at one glance, and she decided right away that he was a very ugly young man.

"Mrs. Lancing begs me to say she will be down directly," she said, but she did not advance into the room.

Sir Samuel whipped his single eyeglass into what he called his "off" eye, and took a step forward. As Caroline was withdrawing, and the door was half closed, he spoke to her.

"Here, I say," he said, "can you ... I mean is there any one in the house who can glue this button on for me?"

He pulled off one of his white gloves as he spoke, and held it out to her.

With a little frown Caroline turned, paused an instant, and then advanced and took the glove from him.

"It's a beastly nuisance when the buttons come off," said Sir Samuel; "the Johnnies that sell gloves ought to do the stitching themselves—eh?..."

He was studying Caroline attentively, wondering the while who the deuce she was. He thought he had sampled all the inmates of Mrs. Lancing's small house. Those he had seen he had found very unexciting; but this girl was different.

"I think this button is quite firm, it will not come off just yet," said Caroline, and she gave him back the glove.

Before he could speak again she had vanished, and the door was shut behind her.

Sir Samuel pulled the glove on with a jerk.

"D——d fine eyes," he said, "but she knows all about that, and puts frills on in consequence."

Mrs. Lancing's door was widely open, and she herself arrayed in all her glory as Caroline mounted the stairs and paused on the landing.

"Is he very furious?" asked Mrs. Lancing.

"May I admire you?" asked Caroline in reply. "This sort of thing is all so new to me. I have never seen any one in evening dress before, except once, and that was in a fashion paper." Her eyes had a glow in them as she scanned Camilla, over whose white clinging gown Dennis was just slipping a theatre wrap of pink chiffon and chinchilla. "How Betty would love to see you as you are now. She imagines you go to a fairy-world every night, and if she saw you she would believe in her dreams."

"I feel as if I were coming to pieces," Camilla laughed. "But I simply detest being hurried! Dennis, put a safety-pin in here, and you need not sit up. I have my key."

As she was passing out Mrs. Lancing paused by Caroline and kissed her lightly.

"You are a nice thing," she said affectionately, "and I wish you were coming with me. I shall take you to the play one night." Then gathering up her skirts, she rustled softly on to the landing and disappeared.

Sir Samuel's patience had evidently evaporated; he had emerged from the drawing-room, and was now expostulating.

"Don't swear too audibly," Caroline heard Mrs. Lancing say, with her rippling laugh, "or you will wake the babies, and then everybody will call you a monster!"

The girl's delicate brows met in a frown. Even in this far-off way she felt the arrogant familiarity of this man's manner towards Mrs. Lancing, and resented it, just as she had resented his attempt at impertinent familiarity with herself. She supposed, however, as Sir Samuel seemed to be so intimate, that he must be a connection, probably a near relative. Later on, however, when Dennis came up from her supper, and they went together through a minute examination of the children's belongings, Caroline learned casually, from the maid's chatter, that Sir Samuel Broxbourne was not really a relation—only a friend; and she found herself wondering a little why so refined and dainty a woman as Camilla should care for friendship with such a man.

This was not the only matter that seemed strange and even inexplicable where Mrs. Lancing was concerned. Naturally Caroline was a novice in life as it was lived in the world in which the children's mother occupied a prominent place; she was, indeed, to a great extent ignorant of the ways and doings of everyday people (since at school she had known nothing of what passed beyond the school boundaries, and in Octavia Baynhurst's house her outlook had been even more circumscribed), so that it was no great matter for surprise if she found herself unable to understand all that passed about and around her now. But what she lacked in actual experience, in definite knowledge, was filled in by natural wit and sympathy and intuition. It needed no deep study to grasp the best and sweetest traits of so human a being as Camilla, nor was it necessary for worldly knowledge to open her eyes to the glaring faults, the amazing contrasts in this woman's character.

The first time she had heard Mrs. Lancing tell a lie—quite pleasantly, and without the slightest effort or hesitation—Caroline had winced; it had been such a trivial, such a petty untruth; but what had given it importance in Caroline's eyes, accentuating the unworthiness of the act, had been the fact that both the children had been present, and that Betty had laughed at her mother's cleverness as at an excellent joke.

To doubt the woman's anxious, deep-rooted love for her children was to doubt the light of the sun itself; but Caroline summed it up as a love without discrimination or any sense of real responsibility.

Camilla Lancing would have been aghast if any one had told her this; for there would be no sacrifice too great—of this the girl was convinced—for the mother to undertake on behalf of her children, if circumstances should demand it of her.

Caroline, however, was judging her by her everyday attitude, when life was running on ordinary and not heroic lines, and she drew her conclusions from those unconscious signs and uncounted actions that reveal the personality far more truthfully than any deliberate or analytical study can ever do.

Dennis, who was a garrulous person, was fond of dilating on her mistress's little ways; but she was loyal. It was soon made evident that she was very fond of Mrs. Lancing.

"She never had no proper chance," she said this night to Caroline as they made notes and

agreed to buy only what was absolutely necessary. "Started out, she did, with everything that money can give. My sister was a second housemaid in her old home. That was before her father lost everything and they come down to next to nothing. Miss Camilla was only a bit of a child then, and if Sir Edmund had done the proper thing by her he would have let his sister take her. You see his wife died when Miss Camilla was born. But he wouldn't part with her—and so they went wandering about goodness knows where, never staying more nor a month in any place. How I came to know so much was because I took service with Sir Edmund's sister, Lady Settlewood, and a hard place I had with her too; a little bit different to what I get now! Her ladyship was for ever wantin' to have Miss Camilla to live with her, she'd no children of her own. She declared as it was a sin and a crime that the girl should grow up any-hows, with no chance of schooling; but there, she just talked to deaf ears! For if even the father would have given her up, Miss Camilla wouldn't have left him neither. There's a picture of Sir Edmund hanging beside Mrs. Lancing's bed," said Dennis. "You look at it when you go in her room next time, and you'll see what a nice face he had. Many's the time he's given me a sovereign when I know he'd none too many to spare!"

Caroline interposed here a little gently.

"Perhaps Mrs. Lancing would rather not have these things talked about, Dennis?"

But Dennis, who was folding up the clothes and putting them away, only shrugged her shoulders.

"She knows there'll be nothing told bad if it's told by me," she said; "besides," added the woman, "I'm telling you this because you're the first person as has come into this house as I'd care to see stay in, and that's the truth. My dear," said the maid, straightening herself for a minute, "she wants a friend awful badly. Some one different to me. There's things she could talk to you about which she couldn't talk to me. I'd like you to know, now you're starting out, just what she is, and why things seem to go so crookedly. How do you expect her to keep account of pennies when she was brought up in the way she was? I always 'oped her ladyship was going to stand by Miss Camilla, and so I think she would have done if only there hadn't been that miserable marriage!"

Dennis was silent for a while, then she said—

"Poor Sir Edmund, he just broke his heart when Miss Camilla run off with Captain Lancing. I'll never forget his look the day he came to her ladyship's house and asked if we could any of us give him news of his girl!" Dennis was running her hand into a pile of stockings all riddled with holes. "You see he'd never taken any heed of the fact, as Miss Camilla was a beauty." She talked on. "He'd always laughed when her ladyship kept on as he ought to have a governess or somebody about with Miss Camilla. He looked on her as no more nor a child. And so she was a child," said Dennis, hotly, as if she were suddenly defending her mistress against some accuser, and she flung the stockings on to the table viciously. "How could *she* know what she was doing? Wasn't he handsome enough to turn the head of any girl? Who was to think that he'd be such a blackguard, and he coming of such a sanctimonious church-going lot? People as turn their noses up at everybody who hasn't got the Lord's Prayer printed on their backs! If them sort of folk is saints, give me sinners, I say!"

"I think four pairs of stockings each will do for the winter," Caroline said here.

She was fascinated, even excited by this story of Camilla Lancing's early history; at the same time, she shrank from hearing these things unknown to Camilla. But when Dennis was started on this subject it was hard to stop her.

"Well, she came to know the truth, poor dear, when it was too late; when her father was in his grave, and her ladyship wouldn't hear her name spoke. Oh, some folk is hard and no mistake. There was a woman with a comfortable three thousand a year, and not a soul to leave it to but Miss Camilla, and if you believe me, when she went there wasn't not even the name of the poor child mentioned in the will! That's what's forced her to turn round and let these Lancings do for her. Her father had left her what he had, but, bless you, that went noway with the captain having the handling of it! ... I think, my dear," Dennis said here, "as we'd best put down a yard or two of blue serge. I'll run up a couple of dark overalls for the house. That'll make a big difference in the washing bill."

"It would be so nice of you if you would give me a few lessons in dressmaking, Dennis," Caroline said; "it seems a pity that the children should have such costly clothes. They only grow out of them. Look at all these lace frocks. They must have cost any amount of money, and they are all torn to ribbons. Perhaps we can use them up in the summer in some way or other."

"It's thrift that's wanted here," said Dennis; "just a little thought, just a little care. Of course, I do what I can, but I hate to go vexing her when there's such a lot of other people ready to worrit, and, bless you, you can't put it into the servants' heads. What is it to them when the books run on for months; whose to check 'em? Ah, my dear. There's a sight, of things you could do if you only would!"

The parlourmaid brought up a letter for Caroline at this moment, and she put it on one side

till she was alone.

When everything was thoroughly well arranged Dennis said "good night!"

"I'll make time to go along with you in the morning, and the children will enjoy it. Bless you, Miss Betty she loves shoppin' and getting new clothes just as if she was growed up."

Caroline opened her letter when she was undressed.

It was from Rupert Haverford—a tardy answer to the few lines she had sent him. Nothing could have been colder than this letter.

Though he made no definite expression of objection, Caroline felt that he was sharply annoyed at what she had done. This fact annoyed her in its turn.

"So Mrs. Brenton was right," she said to herself, "and he *is* angry. It is very unreasonable and rather absurd! I suppose he expects everybody to give him the obedience of slaves, that any sort of independence is objectionable to him. Well, he is mistaken as far as I am concerned. It is my business to be independent, to think and act for myself, and I am assuredly not going to throw up this work just to please Mr. Haverford."

She read the letter through twice.

"He makes no mention of his mother this time," she mused, and her look took a smile that was half a sneer. "Perhaps it vexes him that I should be with one of his friends," was her next thought. "After all, he is Octavia Baynhurst's son, so there must be a good deal of objectionable element in his composition."

She made up the fire quietly, and then sat staring into it till a late hour.

This letter not only annoyed her, it disquieted her. She realized in this moment that she was changing, that the innumerable new sensations through which she was passing had taken from her altogether that kind of sullenness, that apathy that had fallen upon her like a cloak during her stay with Mrs. Baynhurst.

As a school-girl she had been very high-spirited, and even intolerant of restriction; it was wonderful, all things considered, that she had not been called upon to suffer for her strong will, her hot temper, and her defiant spirit. She was very grateful now to the woman who had guarded her and trained her all those years.

True, there had been no pretence of affection, softness, or gentle thought, but equally there had been no unnecessary repression, no hardship.

Caroline had been allowed freedom up to a certain point; her love of fields, and trees, and flowers, and young animals had never been curbed. In that deserted old school garden (that now gave her a pang to remember) there would be found a plot that had belonged entirely to herself, and where, with seeds and plants begged from the gardener, she had reared to herself a little world of flowers, as dear to her as human beings.

The change from this simple and health-giving life, to the unnatural confinement, the irritating atmosphere of Mrs. Baynhurst's house, had worked great ill to Caroline.

Unfitted and utterly unprepared to carry out the work Mrs. Baynhurst expected of her, she had shivered like a whipped slave beneath the bitter, biting sarcasm of her employer's tongue; she had been scourged all the time by the sense of her own imperfections; another year of such a life and Caroline would have broken down in mind and body.

She was nervous in these days, but only in a purely sympathetic way.

The generous affection of these little creatures, who were already as it were dependent on her, brought from the depths of her heart a hot flood of womanly tenderness; awakened with joy the knowledge that it was given to her to be blessed with love, to be permitted to give protective love in return; a wondrously beautiful gift to one who had never known love in any degree!

Then, again, contact with Camilla's charming personality was, like her brief intercourse with Mrs. Brenton, an awakening influence.

To have been treated as she had been treated by these two women, sympathetically, courteously; to realize that they recognized in her an equal, that friendship with her was not only possible, but desirable, endowed life for her in this moment with an indescribable grace.

After Dennis had left her this night she had sat thinking over the story she had heard; as she pondered it she felt she had drawn perceptibly nearer to comprehension of Camilla Lancing and her complex character, and the suggestion that it was in her power to be helpful and comforting to the children's mother had made her heart thrill.

Haverford's cold words of annoyance came most inopportunely.

It was only natural, perhaps, that she should misunderstand him.

"Perhaps he thinks that I asked for this work," she said to herself, and she flushed hotly with humiliation as the thought came. "I wish I had not gone to him! And yet," was her next quick thought, "if I had not gone I should not be here. Well! when I have paid him back the money he lent me there will be no need to trouble about him any more."

She laughed a little shortly to herself.

"If I had refused this work that would have been wrong!"

It was growing late, so she turned the light low, and then went to bed. There she lay thinking the matter over and over again.

"I think I will send this letter on to Mrs. Brenton," she decided, "and I will ask her to advise me what I ought to do." As the heat died out of her feeling and she grew calmer her mood changed a little. She began to judge Haverford less sharply. "Certainly he was kind to me in his own peculiar way, and there was no need really for him to have done anything at all. I suppose I ought to have consulted him!" She sighed several times. "I knew it was all too pleasant to last," she said wearily, "I knew something disagreeable would happen."

It was very strange, but a decided feeling of regret came in place of annoyance the more she thought over the situation.

She had grown accustomed to hear Rupert Haverford discussed and denounced in the bitterest fashion by his mother. Just for this very reason she had determined that it was probable that this man would be rich in those qualities that were so lacking in his mother. Indeed, it was the conviction that he was just and honest and straightforward that had driven her towards him when she had found herself so greatly in need of help. And he had not belied this belief in him. When he had convinced himself that she had an undoubted claim on his mother, he had without hesitation stepped into the breach and taken upon himself the right to protect and to provide for her. And viewing the matter in this quiet, practical way, it did not take Caroline very long to assure herself that she had not done exactly what she ought to have done.

"I shall write to him to-morrow, and I shall try and let him feel that I am sorry. Very probably he won't trouble himself any more about the matter; still, I shall write all the same."

And soothed by this determination, Caroline nestled down into the pillows and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

Camilla came home very late that night.

She had dined firstly with Sir Samuel and another couple at one of the big restaurants. After that she had gone to the play, and lastly she had gone back to supper at the house of a certain woman who affected a great regard for her, and there she had played cards with her usual disastrous luck.

She had driven home alone, tired, depressed, and yet conscious of an enormous relief.

For Broxbourne had spoken that night of going out of town immediately. This he had said when they had been alone, and the conversation had so tended that had he been prepared to bring forward the subject she so dreaded to hear, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to have done so.

Indeed, Camilla had held her breath for a moment, preparing herself to meet the black moment that had haunted her in anticipation ever since she had met him so unexpectedly that evening in the railway carriage.

But Sir Samuel had said nothing. Evidently he was still unaware that he had it in his power to make her suffer.

"And if he does go," Camilla said to herself wearily, as she alighted at her own door and passed into the silent house, "that means that I can breathe again. Oh, I wish he would go! I am not afraid of him as I was in the old days, but I loathe him just as much. He is more hateful than ever. He was always coarse and hateful, but now he is worse. Nothing can be beautiful in life when such a man is close to one." She smiled faintly. "If Agnes Brenton could hear me," she said to herself, "I suppose she would think that I was a little madder than usual, since I fought her the other day when she was trying to say this very same thing about Sammy. But, then, I should be sorry to be obliged to let Agnes understand why I seem to encourage this man. How Ned hated

him! To-night when we were at supper all that Ned used to say about Sammy came back to me with a rush.... And to think that I have made it possible for such a brute to have the whip hand over me! Oh, sometimes I think it is a good thing to die even as Ned died! There can at least be no chance of being a miserable fool when one is in one's little grave."

Some letters were lying for her on the table. She gathered them together without looking at them, turned out the light, and mounted the stairs quietly.

It seemed an incongruous thing for this woman, so exquisitely arrayed, to be doing little menial duties. But Camilla was very thoughtful in lots of things. She never permitted any one of the maids to sit up for her.

Late as it was, a bright fire was still burning in the grate, and her room was warm and cosy.

She sat down in the big easy-chair in front of the fire.

Her thoughts still hovered about Broxbourne. When she was tired, and there was no excitement, she was ripe for remorse, for self-recrimination. And now it seemed to her overstrained nerves that she was tainted with the very coarseness, the vulgarity of the man she hated so much.

"If he will only go away," she said feverishly, "I shall feel free to breathe again: free of one horrible burden at all events! and he spoke very definitely of going to-night. Now I am sure," she said the next moment, "he can know nothing. If he had, he *must* have let me realize this in some way or other. We have been so much together. I have wanted to be with him as much as I could, just on purpose to watch him! And if he does not know now, why should he ever know? If I could only set the matter right unknown to him!" She gave a long sigh, and shut her eyes for a moment. "What a lot of things there are to set right! What a fearful lot!"...

She sat with her eyes closed for a little while, and then she roused herself and began to draw off her long gloves slowly. As she did so a little scrap of paper fell from the palm of one. She picked it up. It had scribbled on it the amount she had lost that night at bridge.

This swept her thoughts sharply into the old, the well-worn channel.

"Forty-seven pounds!" she said to herself. "Oh, Lord, what a fool I am! Why can't I play like other people do? I shall have to settle this to-morrow. Ena will be round here with the milk to get her money. How I hate losing to women."

She got up with a jerk, and her letters were scattered on the ground. As she stooped and picked them up she glanced at the writing on each.

One was from Agnes Brenton, the others looked like bills, with the exception of one that was addressed in a handwriting she knew and feared only too well.

It was a letter from Colonel Lancing, her husband's father.

Camilla bit her lip sharply and trembled. She flung off her beautiful theatre wrap, and stood deliberating with the letter unopened in her hand. Then with a sort of grim shadow on her face she took the plunge, and tore open the envelope.

The very look of the letter, with its straight, hard characters had an accusing tone about it. It started without any courteous beginning.

It was a horrible letter for Camilla Lancing to read. Clearly, coldly, uncompromisingly the writer put before her his knowledge of all those many facts that she had worked so hard to keep concealed from him.

Her life of debt and difficulty, her extravagances, her gambling, her friends, and her follies were denounced in hard, deliberate terms.

She was judged without mercy, without a chance of defence; and her sentence was written in the same hard, merciless way.

Colonel Lancing announced that the allowance he had made her since his son's death was taken from her; her independence was to cease at once.

"My son's children have been left too long in the miserable atmosphere of the life you affect; they are no longer infants, and I claim them. They will come to my home, and be reared in the way they should be reared, and if you conform to my commands you may live with them. But let us understand one another clearly. Here there will be permitted no reckless folly, no sinful waste; none of those things that have brought you to where you are. You will be given a place with my daughters, because you are the children's mother, and for no other reason; your life will be ordered entirely by me, and in accordance with what I hold to be proper and fit for a woman in your position. Refuse this, and I wash my hands of you; you may sink to what depth you like. But the children shall not sink. I have been patient too long, hoped too long. I now see that there is no good in you, and I mean to stand between these children and the harm you would do them."

Camilla stood like one transfixed.

The letter fluttered from her hand and lay on the floor.

The strong light of the electric light that was placed above her long mirror fell mercilessly upon her.

Her radiant charm seemed blotted out in this moment. She was like a woman blanched with some acute physical suffering.

This blow had fallen so suddenly, so unexpectedly. She had always known that she was an object of dislike, even of hatred, to her husband's people, that her claim upon them was recognized grudgingly; but she had quickly taught herself to think about them as little as possible. Her dependence only angered her when it had seemed to demand something of her. Even now it was not the hurt to herself that sent the blood running like ice in her veins; it was this stern revelation of authority, this demand for her children and the knowledge that, placed as she was, defiance to that authority was out of the question.

She put out her hand and steadied herself by the toilette-table; but she trembled and swayed as she stood, and once her eyes turned to the door in a hunted way, as though she could fashion out of the shadows on the landing the figure of the stern old man, who denounced her in words she dared not repeat to herself, who claimed from her the dearest possession life held for her.

The silent emptiness of the room came upon her all at once as the clock on the mantelpiece chimed three. Four hours of solitude stretched before her. Four hours before she could expect Dennis to knock at her door! Four hours of heart degradation and anguish, and deadly sickening fear! She put up one cold hand and pushed her hair back from her brow.

It seemed to her as if already she were alone; already she had been robbed of those little lives that made everything sweet, even the darkest hour.

"I am frightened," she said to herself, "I am frightened! frightened!... What shall I do?"

She began to pace the room, averting her eyes from the letter that lay on the floor. Once she said with her pale lips—

"Violet has done this!"

Another time she almost cried aloud as if with a sudden pain. Then all at once she stood still. Her expression changed. Her face flamed with colour, and she commenced with cold, feeble fingers to get out of her beautiful gown.

A feverish intention born of that sudden thought began to run like wildfire in her veins. She tore at the hooks, she had no thought for the delicacy of the lace, or the fragility of the material. She almost spurned the gown with her foot as it slipped from her, and she veritably threw aside the jewelry she had worn.

On her way to the door she only paused to fold herself in her warm dressing-gown and to shed her high-heeled satin shoes. Then softly, and with that same curious fever urging her on, she mounted the stairs cautiously till she stood outside the room where her children slept.

Caroline was a light sleeper. She started up in bed nervously as she heard the door open and some one move softly into the room.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Who is there? Is it you, Dennis? Has anything happened?"

Camilla came to the foot of the bed. She could not speak; she was breathing hardly, with difficulty. At first the girl could not distinguish her clearly, the light was so dim; but almost immediately she recognized that it was not Dennis who had come, and, slipping in haste from the bed, she went at once to the bowed figure that sat rocking itself to and fro, breathing in that painful fashion, as if struggling with some great suffering.

"You are ill; what can I do for you? Tell me. Oh, please tell me!" Caroline said, her nerves all ajar.

Camilla caught at her two hands.

"I ... I have had a shock," she said, when she could speak, "and I am frightened ... very frightened. I cannot stay alone. I want to be near the children. I *must* have the children with me.... I have come to take them downstairs."

To her suffering, distorted, mental vision in this moment Caroline looked like some spirit, tall and straight in her long, white nightgown, with her dark hair falling in two heavy plaits from her small, smooth head.

The girl was more than a little frightened herself, but she calmed herself with an effort.

It was, of course, impossible for her even to guess at what had happened; nor did she wish to,

she only wanted to help, to comfort, if possible, for she realized that she had to minister to one who was passing through no ordinary ordeal.

Putting her finger on her lip as a gesture of silence, she drew Camilla to her feet.

"I will go down with you," she whispered, and they passed together out of the room, but Camilla's mind dwelt on the children.

"Don't separate me from them," she said; her voice was so changed, so dull, so hoarse. "Don't stand between me and the children," she said almost passionately.

"If you will go downstairs," said Caroline, quietly and gently, "I will bring the children down. I don't think they will wake. Make the bed ready and turn the lights low. I think we will put them into the blankets, they will not feel the cold that way."

At first she had been on the point of suggesting that Camilla should stay in the nursery and take her bed, but she quickly felt that it would be a wise thing to occupy the other woman a little, for even to her untutored eye there were unmistakable signs of acute and dangerous mental tension about Camilla at this moment.

"If you will go and make everything ready and come up again, you might carry Baby down," she whispered.

It made her heart ache sharply to see the pitiful eagerness with which Camilla did her bidding.

When the mother came back again she had divested herself of her silk underskirt, so that there should be as little noise as possible.

"Give me Betty," she whispered; then she pushed Caroline gently on one side. "I can lift her myself," she said, "I have done it before."

She almost staggered under the burden of the sleeping child as she took it out of the bed; but the colour came back to her face, and her eyes lost that wild look as she held Betty to her heart.

Caroline tucked a cot blanket securely about the little feet, and went down closely behind.

"Now I will bring Baby," she whispered.

Both journeys were accomplished satisfactorily; neither child woke, though Baby for a moment opened her sleepy eyes as though she would have questioned what was passing with her.

When they were both laid in Camilla's luxurious bed (and by the sound of their breathing the two listeners had assured themselves that the rest was unbroken) the mother went up to Caroline and kissed her, and then she put her arms round the girl and clung to her.

"Don't think me mad," she said hoarsely; "to-morrow I will tell you all."

"You are so cold," said Caroline, unevenly; "won't you have something? Let me get you a little brandy?"

"It is you who ought to be cold," said Camilla; "how selfish I am, dragging you out of your bed like this."

They spoke in hushed tones.

"I am not a bit cold," Caroline said.

Indeed, she had found time to slip on something about her shoulders, though her feet were bare.

She insisted upon putting Mrs. Lancing in the chair in front of the fire, and then she went down to the dining-room and brought back a little brandy.

Camilla thanked her with a wan smile, and urged the girl a second time to go back to her bed. But Caroline would not leave her at once.

She was a little alarmed at Mrs. Lancing's look, and she knelt down, chafing first the cold, slender hands, and then the small, cold feet.

"It is a long time since I carried Betty," Camilla said after a little while. "Dear heart, she has grown so much she is no longer a baby, alas! alas!"

The stimulant had already commenced to put a little sign of warmth and life into her; the misery in her expression was breaking a little.

"She was my first baby, you know," she said, "and her father thought her the most wonderful thing in the world. He used to walk up and down with her for hours at a time, and the old nurse I had was *so* angry with him!... She said it was such a bad habit. But I loved to see him with that

little creature in his arms; he was so gentle with it.... And then to think that he could forget her, turn away and leave her!... It does not seem so bad that he should have forgotten me," she said. She spoke dreamily.

There was a long pause. Caroline still chafed the small feet.

"You wonder, perhaps, why I asked for Betty," Camilla said in a low voice. "I love them both just the same, but Betty belonged to the beginning. Her father never saw Baby; poor little Baby! I wonder would he have stayed if he had seen her?"

"You are warm now," said Caroline, brightly; "do let me help you into bed. You will feel so much better there, and the children will keep you warm. Won't they be surprised when they wake up and find themselves in your bed?"

The smile that came into Mrs. Lancing's eyes was very pleasant to the girl kneeling beside her to see.

Her heart began to beat a little less nervously. The fear and the uneasiness began to slip from her. When she would have got up Camilla held her back a moment.

"You have been so good to me," she said in a broken way, "and you give me such a sense of strength, of comfort. How angry nurse would have been if I had disturbed her as I have disturbed you! Dennis is right. I have never had any one about me like you before."

Caroline smiled. There was a great sweetness in her face.

To the woman looking at her she had still that spiritual touch about her, and yet she was human, human in the most exquisite meaning of the word.

"Do let me help you to undress.... I am sure you ought to be in bed," she urged.

She got her way, and a little later, after she had tended Camilla as if she had been a tired child, she stood and looked at the mother nestling down in the bed between those two small slumbering forms, and the sight brought tears to her eyes.

"I am going to stay a little while in case you want me," she whispered.

Camilla heard her as in a dream.

The hot agony had passed from her heart and a sense of exhaustion fell upon her; she lay with a hand touching each of her children, and Caroline moved about the room softly, putting it tidy.

She picked up the lace gown from the floor; she laid it and the magnificent wrap on the couch.

The fire lit up the room with a warm, ruddy glow. Caroline put some more coals on noiselessly. By the firelight she saw the scattered jewels and gathered them together; then she put the letters in a pile, with Colonel Lancing's at the bottom.

When all was done she paused and listened quite a long time.

Mrs. Lancing never moved; she had fallen asleep.

"Poor creature!" said Caroline to herself.

She stole softly away, but the room upstairs had such a desolate look, she could not stay in it; so, as sleep was impossible now, she dressed quickly, and went back to Mrs. Lancing's room still in the same soft way.

"I may be of some use," she said.

She sat in the chair by the fire and she watched the bed. It gave her a sense of extraordinary gladness to see those three so closely together; in this moment she seemed to share in their union; she ceased to be a stranger.

CHAPTER IX

Although he had both telegraphed and written to ask for some statement concerning Caroline Graniger from his mother, Rupert Haverford, of course, never expected to receive a prompt answer; indeed, he was quite prepared to have no answer at all.

He left orders that all his letters were to be forwarded to him whilst he was in the north, and Caroline's little epistle travelled thither with the rest of his enormous correspondence.

It would have been very difficult for Haverford to have described why he objected to the arrangement that had been entered into between Mrs. Lancing and Caroline Graniger. The girl's own argument to herself in favour of what she had done was a very sound one. Indeed, under the circumstances, most people would have regarded the matter as being both lucky and satisfactory.

But Rupert shared Mrs. Brenton's view about things done in haste; that for the first point; the second was that, as he had put himself out in a certain measure to make arrangements for Miss Graniger, he considered that he should have been consulted before she had made any definite plans.

To find, therefore, that she had already assumed an independent attitude, and had taken herself and her immediate future out of his hands, annoyed him.

There are very few men who really appreciate the spirit of independence in women, and Rupert Haverford was very much behind the times in his views concerning the way in which women were swarming into the world as bread-winners and wage-earners.

He made no haste to reply to Caroline's letter. As usual, he found much to occupy him when he arrived at that dirty, smoky, northern town.

He confessed to himself that he was glad to be away from London again even for a little while; glad to dissociate his thoughts from that element of his life that belonged to the world in which Camilla Lancing lived. Not that he expected to be able to put her out of his thoughts altogether, for even in the dull, prosaic, unlovely surroundings of the factory, remembrance of this woman haunted him in so tangible a way that at times he could almost have imagined she was close beside him. And on this occasion he carried with him new matter for thought where Camilla was concerned.

A new element had crept into his heart.

If he shut his eyes he could see with painful distinctness Camilla floating round that large room held in the arms of another man.

He knew perfectly well that this other man was no more to her than the floor on which she danced, but that did not affect the situation as far as he was concerned.

He winced and turned hot as he sat alone in the railway carriage whirling away from town, just as he had winced and grown hot the other night, when, like some graceful white leaf borne on a wayward wind, she had lightly skimmed past him, brushing him with her soft, clinging skirts.

Her laughing, petulant reproach when he had refused to dance because he could not dance had left a little wound.

She had made him feel clumsy; suddenly she had seemed to recede from him.

It was the first time that he had ever felt awkward, and at the mere suggestion that he could look foolish in the eyes of this woman Rupert Haverford discovered that he was very like other men, some of whom perhaps he had judged hardly, and some contemptuously.

He had no definite intention in his mind as to how he should act. Indeed, it seemed to him that the future was not held in restraint by his hand or his power, and he laughed once to himself a little bitterly, as he recalled how he had gone round and round this subject of late, thinking entirely of his own feelings, and of how far the bewitchment that this woman had cast upon him was to be permitted to order his life.

In the lightest way possible Camilla had shown him that he made too much of his own importance.

It was not exactly his fault that he had grown critical and reserved where women were concerned.

If he had met Camilla when he had been a man struggling every hour to work himself into independence, he would never have questioned her right, never have sought to analyze what went to form her brilliant personality. He would have given her unquestioning devotion, seeing in her that spirit of grace and delicacy and beauty which had always been placed in his dreams: a gift at once necessary and unattainable.

But the burden of his great wealth had changed in a certain measure Rupert's nature; it had made him cautious, it had made him doubtful, and he was so imbued with that weighty sense of responsibility that he never took a step in any direction without great deliberation, and forecasting as far as he could the probable results that would accrue from any act.

Mrs. Lancing was not the only woman who fluttered in and out of his life in these days, who charmed him momentarily and pressed upon him eagerly sympathy and friendship and delicately

insinuated homage.

He would have been blind indeed if he had not realized that his marriage was a matter of importance and hope to many women; that any choice indeed was possible to him.

He was a little impatient with himself at times that it should be this one particular woman who held him; even now, when she had left him smarting and uncomfortable, he was falling back into that old train of anxious thought about her.

Of course, he knew her history as the world knew it. Most people were kind about Camilla. There had been nothing subtle in the way in which her husband had wronged her.

It was the knowledge of this wrong done to her that drew Haverford to her so surely. He longed to give her protection, to build up barriers between her and all those things that had been legacies of her married life.

And, of course, there was only one way in which he could do this.

All at once he realized that he had ceased to doubt or speculate as to the future of such a marriage; hope became deliberate intention. And still the path was not clear. He knew his own heart, but what about Camilla's heart?

Metaphorically, he stretched out his hands to catch that dancing, laughing, white-robed figure, only to feel that the soft, filmy draperies slipped from his grasp, and that Camilla was dancing away far, far out of his reach.

When he alighted at the familiar station he almost yielded to the temptation to put himself in the train again and go back to London.

As the doubt and uncertainty dropped out of his heart, something new came in their place.

Now he was jealous. He wanted to be sure of her. He wanted to hold her in his arms as that other man had held her. He wanted to lock her to him, to feel that she belonged to him.

"I shall go back to-morrow," he settled.

But he did not go south on the morrow. He found himself plunged into a mass of business, confronted with difficulties, some of which were as unexpected as they were bitter.

During the past year Haverford had been making enormous improvements in his northern property. He had introduced a quantity of new plant, the old factories were in process of being replaced by new buildings that, when finished, would cost a small fortune. Old Matthew Woolgar would not have known the place could he have seen it now.

In his determination to give this world of workers every possible chance, Rupert Haverford had left nothing undone that could militate to the benefit of their lives, both at work and in their homes.

And yet such is the trend of human nature that, notwithstanding all that he had done and was doing, he met with no gratitude. On the contrary, he was most unpopular. It was a fact known to every one but himself that these people, who occupied the first thought in his mind, had long since begun to regard him with suspicion and jealousy; some added contempt, and some—a great number—grudging hate.

He had been summoned urgently on this occasion because it appeared that there had been a good deal of friction in the works, and of late certain cases of incendiarism had occurred, culminating in a dastardly attempt to burn down the fine building which he had built and dedicated to the use of the factory hands as a place of mental and bodily education and refreshment.

It went very hard with Haverford to be forced to realize that this destruction of his property, this spirit of unrest and rebellion, found its rise in sullen animosity to himself.

At first, indeed, when he was told that there was a strong wave of bad feeling against himself he refused to believe it. The injustice of the ignorant is always hard to recognize and to accept.

He had never wanted gratitude; he had only wanted comradeship. He had wanted to share his good fortune, not to buy a kingdom.

He had been loyal to this old place, to these people, and his father before him had been loyal, even unto death.

"They have bad memories," he said to one of his managers. "My father gave his life working among these people; for his sake they might have met me fairly."

The other man shrugged his shoulders.

"You have done too much, sir," he said. "These sort of folk want the whip, not benevolence."

And Haverford said no more.

To speak further of his great hopes now lost, his numerous schemes, his almost passionate intentions for helping the people among whom he had worked and lived so long was to touch on a dead and sacred subject.

Yet he lingered in the north. He wanted to satisfy himself that he had made a mistake. He wanted to grow accustomed to his disappointment, to the humiliation of feeling that these people made a mockery of him and his generous intentions. Once he had grasped this in its fulness, and the matter would be closed. Henceforward they should have from him duty, nothing more.

He knew perfectly well that the men who served him and who held posts of importance had long since regarded him as a crank. Well, there should be no more quixotic weakness, no more sentiment. He had bared his heart to these people, stretched out his hand and called them his brethren, and his reward had been a stone at his heart and an evil word, coupled with a curse.

He did not go south till the lads who had been instrumental in trying to burn down his property had been caught and taken before the magistrate.

"If I am wanted, send for me," he said to his head-manager the day he left, "and report as usual."

He had telegraphed for his motor. He felt in need of a little spell of relief, of fresh influences, of something to divert his thoughts.

"I will go abroad for Christmas," he said to himself.

He dawdled on his way, putting up at various uninteresting places, where the chauffeur found the hours pass pretty slowly. But as he drew nearer to London he became nervous.

It seemed to him that he could not get on enough speed to satisfy a certain restless excitement that urged him southward.

When he finally reached town he found news of his mother. Mrs. Baynhurst had not written herself, but there was a letter from his half-brother.

Cuthbert Baynhurst announced that he had brought their mother home, and added that if Rupert had any business he wished to discuss it would be desirable if that business should be held over for a little while.

"I made her see a specialist in Paris, and he reported very indifferently about her. Of course she had no business to rush across the other day. If she will do these sort of stupid things, she is bound to suffer for it. She is a good bit annoyed about Miss Graniger, so I think if you don't mind it would be as well not to worry her more than you can help."

To this letter Rupert made no direct reply, but he scribbled a few words to his mother, saying that he would call on her the following day if she cared to see him.

"That will give her the opportunity of shirking me if she does not want me," he said to himself, with a faint smile.

He was obliged to give an hour or two to his secretary, and to make appointments that would occupy him nearly the whole of the next day. But he purposely kept the afternoon free; he wanted to see Camilla.

His cab had just pulled up at Mrs. Lancing's door when it was opened, and the two children passed out, with Caroline Graniger in attendance.

No sooner did they see Rupert Haverford than Betty and Baby ran to him and flung themselves upon him. They made quite a commotion in the streets.

Miss Graniger stood in the background, smiling faintly, yet conscious of a little awkwardness.

Mr. Haverford was so occupied with the children that he could not for the moment address a single word to her.

When his right hand was free, however, he lifted his hat and gave her a smile; then he stretched out his hand, and Caroline put hers into it.

"Do you wish to see Mrs. Lancing?" she asked. "She is at home, but not very well."

"But she will see you," Betty chimed in. "Do go and see her. Poor mummy! she is *so* white, and her eyes look red, just like mine do when I have been crying."

"Perhaps I had better not go in," Mr. Haverford said.

But the children were urging him towards the door. Betty gave him all sorts of injunctions.

"Don't make too much noise," she said. "You mustn't jump about, or scream on the stairs.

Baby *always* screams when mummy's got a bad head."

Caroline had to come to the rescue here; behind a good firm barrier Baby felt that she might hurl recrimination on her sister with impunity. It took some time to pacify her.

"I really don't think I ought to go in," Haverford repeated earnestly.

But Caroline had unlocked the door with a latchkey.

"I think Mrs. Lancing would like to see you," she said. She spoke stiffly; she did not feel quite at her ease with him. "Shall I go up and tell her you are here?"

"Yes; go," said Betty. "Mr. Haverford will take care of us; he's a very us-a-ful man. We'll play that he's a new nurse. Come on, Babsy!"

As she passed up the stairs Caroline said to herself—

"He did not say anything disagreeable, and he did not look very cross. I am rather glad."

Mrs. Lancing was sitting in front of the fire leaning back in a chair; a book lay open upon her knees. It was the day following the midnight raid on the nursery.

She looked very ill, and was very languid, and utterly unlike herself.

Dennis and Caroline had combined to keep Mrs. Lancing in bed all the morning, and if Dennis could have had her way she would have called a doctor; but Camilla prohibited this.

She looked round now with a start as the door opened and Caroline reappeared.

"I hear the children speaking to some one," she said, in a nervous sort of way. "Who is it? Why have you left them? After all, I don't think I will let them go out, Caroline."

"Mr. Haverford is downstairs. I told him you were not well. I think he would like to see you."

Mrs. Lancing leaned forward suddenly. The book slipped from her knees and fell to the floor. She had turned suddenly very hot, and her face was scarlet for the moment.

"No," she said in a jerky sort of way, and then, just as quickly, she changed her mind. "Yes ... yes, I *will* see him! He may cheer me up. I feel half dead this afternoon. I am sure I must look an object, don't I?" She stood up for an instant and peered at herself in the glass over the fireplace.

"That depends what an object is like," said Miss Graniger, with a little laugh; "you are looking very pale, but extremely interesting, and that gown is lovely."

Camilla tried to laugh.

"That is all right," she said; "are you going now? Well, don't forget what I told you, keep both the children by the hand. I—I am so nervous about them to-day."

Caroline promised to bring the children back with all safety, and then she turned to go. But Mrs. Lancing called her again.

"Oh! I very nearly forgot. Will you take this letter to the post for me? I want it sent by express messenger. Sir Samuel is leaving town to-night, and I should like him to get it before he goes. I had a letter from him this morning," said Camilla, she laughed faintly; "it was very kind of him; he saw that I was upset last night when I lost so much money at bridge, and he wrote to ask if he could be of any assistance. This is to say, 'No, thank you,' in as pretty a fashion as possible. So, you see, I want him to get it; if you don't know where the post-office is, Betty will take you there. Where are the children now, by the way?"

"Mr. Haverford is taking care of them," said Caroline.

She was conscious that Camilla was speaking very flurriedly. Indeed, it seemed to her that Mrs. Lancing had confided the contents of her letter to Sir Samuel Broxbourne almost unconsciously, as though she were glad to speak for the mere sake of speaking.

Dennis had been greatly upset that morning by something her mistress had told her, but she had not shared her trouble with Caroline as yet. Indeed, up to the present the girl was absolutely ignorant (although she and Camilla had been drawn so closely together in the night hours) of the nature of the trouble that had evidently fallen so unexpectedly.

She found the children back on the doorstep; they parted with Rupert Haverford with reluctance.

"Say you'll be stayed till we come in," pleaded Betty.

Baby kept them waiting while she solemnly unfolded a piece of crumpled paper; from this she extracted a crushed-looking object that once had been a chocolate drop, and before Caroline could intervene she had pressed this upon Haverford. He accepted the gift with gratitude, and

carried it upstairs to show it with pride to Baby's mother.

"Let me tell you," said Camilla, as she gave him her hand without rising, "that that is a sign that you are in very great favour. I thought I was the only person with whom Babsy shared the things she was eating. She is so fond of eating, dear little soul. Just like me. Pull up that chair and be sociable. Do you know that it is years since I saw you? Where *have* you been? I begin to think there is something mysterious about these journeys to the north."

It was an attempt at her usual pretty, light-hearted manner, but only an attempt.

Haverford did not pull up the chair; he stood by the fire and looked down at her. Strangely enough he felt quite at his ease with her to-day.

He had drawn off the glove that had the chocolate drop sticking to it, and Camilla noticed, not for the first time, what a fine hand he had. Though it was brown, and had been trained to such hard work, there was a charm about it. A hand can be so significant. With a sudden shiver she remembered the flat, coarse, cruel finger-tips of Samuel Broxbourne.

There was something inviting, something pleasant about the look of Rupert Haverford's hand.

"Do sit down," she said suddenly; and there was a little nervous tone in her voice.

Instead of obeying her he put a question to her.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" he asked.

She pretended to misunderstand him.

"I told Caroline I was sure I was not fit to be seen to-day;" then she shrugged her shoulders. "Late hours, my dear friend. The result of all the silly, stupid things that I know you want to denounce from the housetop. I came home very late last night," she said, after a little pause. "I played cards, and I lost a lot!... And then I found some tiresome letters waiting for me, and so"—she shrugged her shoulders a second time—"I had a bad night, and to-day, of course, I look a wreck."

"I think you ought to see a doctor," said Rupert Haverford.

Camilla moved impatiently in her chair.

"How unoriginal a man is! You are all alike," she said. "You imagine that as soon as a doctor has scribbled something on a paper, and the chemist has sent in a neat little white packet, and an equally neat little bill, then everything must be all right! Shakespeare was a man, but he knew things better than most of you do. He knew, for instance, that all the doctors in the world cannot do any good when the mind is ill."

There was a pause, in which Camilla made a strange discovery. She found she could hear her own heart beat quite plainly.

Was it chance or Providence that had sent this man to her now?

"The other day," said Rupert Haverford, in his quiet, seemingly unemotional way, "you came to me to ask me to help a friend of yours. You know my only reason for existence just now is that I may be of some service to other people. I cannot help feeling that perhaps I might be of some use to you. If you won't try a doctor, suppose you try me?"

"Suppose we talk about something else," said Camilla. "I know I have something to say to you—what is it?" She wrinkled her brows and closed her eyes, and he looked at her almost hungrily.

Lying back with her eyes closed, it seemed to him that her face had grown more delicate, that her general aspect was more fragile.

The very suggestion that she should be really in trouble, that care should be fretting her, was torture to him.

"Ah, I know what it was," she said, opening her eyes and bending forward. "I have a bone to pick with you. I hear that you are not pleased because Miss Graniger accepted the situation I offered her. I call that horrid of you."

"I suppose I have no right to feel anything about the matter one way or another," Rupert answered; "but, in reality, I did feel a little annoyed. I was not sure that it would be a good arrangement for either of you. You see, I know practically nothing about this girl."

"And you know too much about me," finished Camilla, with a little laugh. "Well, as it happens, it is the happiest thing for both of us. You can see for yourself that the children have turned to Caroline just as little ducklings turn to water; and as for myself, except for Agnes Brenton, I think this girl is the nearest approach to what I call a *real* woman I have ever met; so I hope," with a flash of her old manner, "you are not going to interfere, exert your rights as a guardian or a parochial officer, or whatever you are, and take Caroline away."

He only smiled. The question of Caroline Graniger was of no interest to him.

As he remained silent Camilla felt that heart-beat sound again with heavy thuds in her ears.

"Do sit down," she said to him, almost weakly; "you—you look so big, so commanding as you stand there. I assure you I am not well enough to be awed to-day. I think I must have some tea. If I have a cup of tea I shall be stronger."

When the bell had been rung, and answered, she really had taken a grip of herself.

"It is very nice of you to come and see me," she said. "When did you get back?"

"I arrived just before lunch," he said; "I came down in the motor."

"Wasn't it very cold?"

He nodded his head.

"Yes; the country is rather bleak just now." Then he smiled. "Now I will sit down," he said, "since my size is so alarming!"

Camilla's delicate fingers were picking at the lace on her sleeve a little nervously.

"So you have only been back an hour or two, and you came to see me at once. Now that was very sweet of you, Mr. Haverford. Some instinct must have told you that I was dull and lonely, and dying for a pleasant companion."

Haverford's brown face coloured a little.

"The truth is, Mrs. Lancing," he said, "I felt in need of sympathy, so I came to you."

"Sympathy! Has something happened? Oh! do let me know!"

She spoke for the first time naturally.

He sat forward and looked into the fire for a moment, and then quietly and in a very few words he gave her the story of what had happened, or, rather, the story of what he had discovered up north, and Camilla listened eagerly; her own trouble, bitter and pressing and painful as it was, faded from her as she listened.

"I don't suppose anybody in the wide world knows what this means to me," Haverford said slowly, when he had spoken of his disappointment, of the breakdown of his hopes. "I was so fond of those people. I counted so surely on their faith in me, in their real affection. Money is a very destructive thing, Mrs. Lancing! I will stake my existence that there is not a man or a woman who had not a good thought for me in the old days. And now there is not one who would not enjoy flinging a brick at me."

Camilla did not speak for a moment.

"I think I understand," softly; then she said, "But I don't believe I can give you sympathy, Mr. Haverford. I am sure this has gone too deeply for any words of mine to help you."

She stretched out her hand, however, as she spoke, and Rupert took it, laying it on one broad palm and closing his other tenderly over it. He felt the nervous thrill that ran through her. Her face was scarlet as she took her hand away with a jerk.

"Here comes tea," she said. "You are going to wait upon me, please, Mr. Haverford. I don't feel quite equal to lifting the teapot."

When he had done this gravely, taking any amount of care, and they were alone, without any further interruption, he stood once more by the fireplace, and looked at her.

"Now I have told you my trouble, won't you tell me yours?"

She winced and caught her breath, and then with a sudden irresponsible movement she put her hands to her face, and he saw that she was crying.

His own hands moved convulsively, but almost immediately Camilla had mastered her weakness.

"Don't ... think me quite a fool," she said, "and don't, *please* don't, run away with the idea that I want to cry. I must be very strong now.... I never want to cry ... tears are useless at all times, but they are worse than useless now. I believe," she said, as she dried her eyes hurriedly, "that it won't surprise you in the least to be told that I have always been more or less in difficulty. Of course it is money—hateful, horrible, *horrible* money."

She got up and moved away from him, still drying her eyes.

"I dare say lots of people have told you all there is to know about me, and so you may have

heard that the only money I have in the world to live upon has come to me from my husband's people. Well! then you will understand a little bit why I am so upset to-day when I tell you that Colonel Lancing, that is, the children's grandfather, is so angry with me that he has stopped my money, and ... and ..." she broke off here, and put her hands against her trembling lips. "He thinks to force my hand, you see," she said, hoarsely; "he knows I have nothing, that there is no one to give me anything but himself, he knows that if I am content to starve myself I cannot let the children starve, and that is why he says the children are to belong to him. Oh!" she turned again, flinging out her hands with a little gesture of despair, "I am not going to try and defend myself. I know better than anybody can tell me how foolish I have been. What a multitude of wrong things I have done. I have been preparing myself for some sort of punishment—people who do wrong always do get punished, don't they? But I never, never thought of this. Of course he cannot take them from me by law. I am their mother, they are mine ... *mine*.... But if he cuts off the money, that gives him law!"

She sat down on a couch the other side of the room and dabbed her eyes with her wet handkerchief, and Rupert Haverford looked across at her with eyes that were wet too.

The silence that was so natural to him, and so irritating to Camilla, became oppressive now. She got up with a jerk.

"You *would* make me tell you what the matter was with me, and now I have bored you," she said. "Other people's troubles *are* bores, say what one will!"

And then he found his voice.

"Oh! don't let us play with realities," he said. "I could not speak at first because, well! because I am not good at words. You must have realized that by this time; and you must have realized something else, Camilla, and that is that everything that concerns you is dear to me, so dear that I tremble at the thought that I am still outside your life." He left the fire and went nearer to her. "I came here to-day," he said, "because I found that I could not go through another twenty-four hours without seeing you. You mean so much to me. I had no idea whether you would care for me to come; indeed, the last time I saw you I tormented myself by imagining that you found me tedious, and dull, that you wanted to have no more to do with me. Still I had to come."

Camilla gave a sharp sigh and turned round, her face was blurred with tears, she hardly looked young or pretty.

"I know what you are going to say," she said, "I know what you are going to ask me, but I am afraid to listen."

"Afraid?" he said, and his brows met; "afraid of what?"

"Oh, you don't know me," said Camilla, with a broken sound in her voice; "you think me pretty, you like me. Perhaps I fascinate you, but you don't know me. I ... I am not going to refuse to be your wife," she said, she spoke with her teeth half closed; "but I don't want any false pretences, I don't want you to imagine things about me that do not exist. I am full of faults, I am not a bit good. You don't know," she opened her eyes for a minute, and looked at him, "you don't know how un-good I am, and you ... you are so good. You will want to make me like yourself."

"God forbid," said Rupert Haverford.

He was so near to her now that he almost touched her. She was trembling with excitement.

"Oh! I don't mean that you would do it unkindly, only that you look at things differently. I am so afraid you will be disappointed in me, but ..." the tears were running down her cheeks, "I know one thing about you. I know that you are true, and that if you give your word it will be your bond." Her lips quivered. "The children," she said brokenly; and then she was lying with her face pressed down on his breast, and his arms were folded about her.

What he said she hardly heard, she was only conscious in that moment of a great, a wonderful relief. It was as though some gnawing pain that had fretted into her very soul had been lulled; that a beautiful rest had followed on the pain.

She closed her eyes, and she nestled nearer to him. Then, little by little, she came back to the reality, and her heart leapt in her throat, she tried to free herself, but those strong arms held her tightly. Some one was kissing her brow, and close beside her she could feel the quick beating of a strong heart.

Once she had said to herself, "He will love me too much."

And now she had accepted this love; she had bartered her freedom for it....

The thought of the bondage burned her, yet it had come about so naturally.

"I did not seek him," she said to herself; "he came, he would have come a little later, but he came now ... just when I needed some one ... something...."

How his heart beat!... How strong he was! When he kissed her brow and hair and eyes she

could feel his lips quiver.

He would love her too much! He did not ask her to kiss him in return. He was so good ... so generous! He had given her back her children. For that she could have knelt at his feet. But she almost prayed that he would not ask for her kisses ... not yet ... not yet....

CHAPTER X

On the following day the children and their governess went down to Yelverton. There was so much excitement and bustle in getting away that Caroline had little time to realize that she was tired. She saw nothing of Mrs. Lancing, who was in her room.

The children were told to keep very quiet because mother had a bad headache.

It was Dennis who had communicated the news to Caroline that she was to take Betty and Baby down to Mrs. Brenton's delightful country house by an early afternoon train.

It seemed to the girl that Dennis was in a great state of excitement about something. Also it was evident that the gloom that had appeared to settle so definitely on the little house the day before had been lifted.

When they were ready to go, the children crept into their mother's room to say "good-bye," but Caroline remained outside.

Betty brought out a message.

"Mother says we are to be as good as we know how, and to do everything we are telled."

It was very delightful to be welcomed by Mrs. Brenton so cordially.

Betty had dilated with enthusiasm on the joys that awaited them at Yelverton, and Caroline quickly realized that the child had exaggerated nothing.

The little people were installed in a wing of the house where there were any number of empty rooms and long passages just made to be danced in and to echo with happy voices—a veritable playground; and Agnes Brenton, who had studied the art of making people comfortable all her life, took the children's governess into her first consideration.

There were no guests when they arrived, though plenty were expected for Christmas.

The mere thought of having her house full, and of arranging all sorts of treats for the children, made Mrs. Brenton quite happy.

"I am going to keep you tremendously busy," she said to Caroline; "we must furbish up this old house. This is the first year that Camilla has let me have the children with me for Christmas. But I intend to make a bargain with her now. I shall insist that she sends them here as much as possible. I know Rupert Haverford will join forces with me in this. I suppose they will be married very soon."

Caroline looked so surprised that Mrs. Brenton laughed.

"Do you mean to tell me you have not heard the great news? It is known now to everybody," she said, "therefore I am not betraying confidences. I am so delighted about it, for I confess I have been hoping for this for a long time past. You know how dear Camilla is to me, and I like him immensely. Don't you?" Then Mrs. Brenton laughed. "Oh, I forgot you don't know him! It is funny that you never came across him when you were with his mother!"

"He used to go very seldom to see Mrs. Baynhurst," Caroline answered. She spoke slowly, as if her thoughts were occupied.

The engagement between Mrs. Lancing and Rupert Haverford was of course largely discussed at Yelverton, and was the favourite item of gossip elsewhere for the moment. As Camilla had prophesied, the world gave nearly all its congratulations to Haverford's betrothed. Mrs. Lancing was very delightful, very pretty—in every way a most charming woman; but there are any amount of charming and delightful and pretty women in the world, and rich men (rich, at least, in the great way that Haverford was) are so scarce.

Caroline was sharply startled when she heard that Mrs. Lancing was pledged to marry Rupert Haverford.

There was a suggestion of anxiety in the way her thoughts worked about the other woman.

Camilla had ceased utterly to be a stranger to her. If there had been nothing else to bind them together, that scene in the silence of the night would have put them into very close touch with one another. Moreover, it was natural that the girl should sit and weave stories to herself out of the material that lay to her hands.

There was everything about Camilla Lancing to excite the imagination, to stimulate the appetite for romance.

Agnes Brenton rejoiced frankly over the enormous material satisfaction this engagement signified, and Caroline joined with her in this; but she was unlike Mrs. Brenton in one respect, for whereas the older woman saw nothing but a certainty of happiness in this marriage, Caroline, young, unworldly as she was, felt from the very first that there was in this prospective union a doubtful element; that difficulties would most certainly present themselves—great difficulties, every whit as great, as black, and as heart shadowing as any that had belonged to Camilla in the past.

She needed very little now to convince herself that Haverford would meet those difficulties in a firm, a straightforward way. But what about the woman?

Although she had only seen him twice, Caroline had been instantly impressed with the restraint, even the coldness of Haverford's manner.

To her he seemed to be the very last man in the world who would be able to assimilate himself with Camilla's effervescent nature. Surely her fanciful inconsequence, her pretty conceits, her irresponsible ways, would never wed with his seriousness and restraint, his peculiar gravity?

That spell of definite heart anguish, witnessed and shared by herself, charged all memory now of the children's mother with pathos. She could not help associating it with what had occurred.

Knowing nothing definitely, Caroline yet knew enough to assure herself that the engagement had been forced into existence by that very mental maelstrom of only a few hours before. And already she felt she understood Camilla well enough to be sure that this act, born of expediency, the outcome of intense excitement, would have its aftermath of judgment, perhaps of condemnation.

But for this sense of clinging anxiety about the woman she had learnt to love so dearly the girl would have been so happy.

"I want you to run wild," Mrs. Brenton said to her. "You can always leave the children with me when you want to be alone; they don't bother me in the least."

So on every possible occasion Caroline was out of the house either with the children or without them, and day by day she blossomed out a little more into health and good looks.

"I wonder if you have Irish blood in your veins," Mrs. Brenton asked her on one occasion when they went for a brisk walk together. "Your eyes are distinctly Irish, you know."

Caroline had laughed.

"I may be a Hottentot for all I know about myself. Undoubtedly I must have had some beginning, but what it was I have not the least idea."

Agnes Brenton did not answer at once, and then she said—

"You have never heard from Mrs. Baynhurst?"

The girl shook her head, and then laughed again.

"Oh no, I never expected to. I dare say Mr. Haverford has tried to make her speak, but I shall be very much surprised if he gets anything out of her."

"I am quite sure he will have tried," said Mrs. Brenton warmly.

"Oh!" said Caroline, "he must have so many things to think about just now. I expect he has forgotten all about me."

On Christmas Eve Mrs. Brenton handed over the completion of the decorations to Caroline. People were arriving all day.

Towards the afternoon Betty fell into a state of great consternation. They had run out of gold and silver paper, and there were any amount of other little things that had been forgotten.

Caroline rose to the occasion.

"Look here, sweetheart, I'll tell you what I will do. I will ask Mrs. Brenton if I may go and get everything for you."

"You will be gone ages, and ages, and ages, and I want it now," said Betty, who was like her mother in more than one thing. She pleaded to be allowed to go into the town, too, but the wind was much too cold.

Mrs. Brenton fell in quickly with the arrangement, only suggesting that Caroline should drive; but the walk did not frighten the girl.

Indeed, a sense of gladness radiated her as she progressed briskly along the muddy road, and yet perhaps it was inevitable that as she found herself alone, away from the warmth and the cosy atmosphere of the busy household, she should drift into comparisons; that she should awaken to the significance of how really apart she was from these happy elements of home, and family, and festival.

Oddly enough, it was not for herself as she was this day that she felt pity, it was for herself as that little, lonely creature left to pick what sunshine she could out of the bleakest surroundings that her heart ached.

The very pleasantness of her present circumstances emphasized all she had missed.

Christmas hitherto had been to her synonymous only with the packing of boxes and the departure of all of her schoolmates. The last winter she had spent in that old schoolhouse had, it is true, been less lonely than most, for two other little children had been left to share her solitude, and she had made gallant efforts at gaiety. She smiled faintly now as she recalled all she had done, but she sighed too.

"Yet we were really and truly happy," she said to herself. "At any rate, it was a hundred times better than last Christmas. Shall I ever forget that dull, long, miserable, foggy day! It seemed as if it would never end. My food sent up as usual to my room, and not a soul to say a kind word! Well, it is a little bit different now!"

The wind swept across the open places. It was so strong and cold that it made her gasp for breath every now and then, but it stung the colour into her cheeks, and made her dark eyes light up into extraordinary beauty.

"If only this could go on for ever," she said to herself; "but somehow I feel so afraid it can't last. She is so sweet, so affectionate"—the "she" was Camilla—"when we are together, but even now I believe she has forgotten my existence."

Indeed, though a daily report of the children's doings was sent to London, Mrs. Lancing had not even scribbled a word to the girl in reply. She wrote to Mrs. Brenton, she telegraphed, she telephoned, and she sent all manner of things to her children, but she showed no signs of remembrance to Caroline.

"And"—then the girl mused—"I am all very well now, but Betty will want a real governess in a little while. It will be very hard to leave them. I almost think," said Caroline, a little unsteadily, "that I was better off when I had no chance of growing very attached to any one. It cannot hurt to part when one does not know how sweet it is to care and to be cared for."

Cheerless and yet grey as the country was in its wintry aspect, it had always a charm and a beauty for Caroline.

Halfway to the town she marked a bush standing high above the hedge, on which clustered some brilliant red berries.

"Those are just what Betty wants," she said to herself. But she deferred picking them till her return.

The afternoon light was beginning to fade as she left the town; she was laden with parcels, her arms were quite full.

She had just passed into the long road that led to Yelverton, when a cab overtook her. It was an open fly, and a man sat in it alone, with some luggage piled in front of him.

Caroline just glanced round, and then to her surprise she recognized Rupert Haverford, who quickly stopped the cab as he in his turn recognized her.

"Are you walking?" he asked. "But it is getting quite dark, you will lose your way!"

She laughed.

"Oh, impossible! It is a straight road, one could not go astray."

"Give me some of those things," said Haverford, and he began to unload her arms. "This looks like Christmas." Then he said, "You will let me give you a lift?"

Caroline hesitated a moment, and then said, "Thank you. But I must stop a little way down," she said, "because I want to get some berries for Betty. I will tell you when we get to the place."

As he sat beside her in the cab, Rupert Haverford put a question to her rather eagerly.

"Do you know what train Mrs. Lancing came by?"

"Mrs. Lancing? She had not arrived when I left," Caroline answered. "I think she was expected just before dinner. At least, I heard Mrs. Brenton arranging that the carriage should go to meet the quick train down from London. I believe she expected that you would come together."

"It was arranged we were to come together," said Haverford. But that was all he said; he began immediately to talk about Caroline herself.

"No doubt you will have been expecting to hear from me, Miss Graniger?"

Caroline said "No," in a quiet way.

He looked at her.

"Surely yes. You must have expected to hear from me?"

"Well," said Caroline frankly, "I thought it possible that you might forget to write, or that you were so annoyed with me you might not care to bother about me any more."

"I was not annoyed with you," said Haverford quickly.

"Oh! weren't you? I thought you were!"

They drove on for a little while in silence, and then Caroline bent forward.

"Oh, will you ask the man to stop, please? I must really have those berries."

Haverford got out with her.

"They are much too high for you to reach," was his observation.

"They are rather high," Caroline agreed, "but I am sure I can reach them if I give a jump."

He laughed.

"I can get them without a jump."

He mounted the rough ground and reached up to the bush that stood high above the hedge.

Caroline thanked him.

"Betty will be delighted," she said; "we have been looking everywhere for those red berries, and somehow we never thought of coming down this road."

When they were back in the cab and jolting on again Haverford said to her—

"Although you pretend that you did not expect me to write, I suppose you will be a little interested in hearing that I have some odds and ends of intelligence to give you about yourself. I should have written to you days ago," he went on quickly, "but my mother is rather a difficult person to handle, as you know, and it was only yesterday that I managed to corner her on this subject. She knew what was coming, and shirked me accordingly."

Caroline said nothing. She waited for him to continue. Nevertheless, her heart began to beat a little nervously.

"It is quite true," Haverford said after that little pause, "my mother is your guardian, or rather was, for in future I intend to relieve her of that office. You are her niece by marriage. Your mother was Gerald Baynhurst's only sister. From what I can gather, this sister must have been very dear to him. I am really as much a stranger to my mother's life as yourself, Miss Graniger. Beyond knowing that she married Mr. Baynhurst after my father's death, I have never been informed, I may add that I have never cared to inform myself, about anything connected with this marriage. So I can only give you the bare outline of your story."

He paused again, and this time Caroline spoke, her voice sounding very low in her own ears.

"Of course, my mother and my father are dead?"

"Yes; your father died before your uncle," Haverford answered. "Your mother, apparently a very delicate woman, was left in the charge of her brother Gerald, and he was also appointed your guardian. When he died suddenly this charge passed on to my mother."

He ceased speaking abruptly. It would have been difficult to have grasped from his tone whether he judged his mother harshly or not.

"I hope to get you more details," Mr. Haverford said when he spoke again. "As a matter of fact, I have brought down with me a quantity of old letters and other papers which I dare say will

throw some light on your early history. You seem to have been quite a baby when your mother died, and you came to England when you were a little child between three and four."

"Then I must have gone immediately to Miss Beamish, my old schoolmistress," said Caroline.

"Yes; my mother tells me you were placed in a school. She explains this rather strange proceeding by telling me that Cuthbert was at that time such a delicate child that her whole thought and care had to be given to him, and she herself was in such a poor state of health that she was not in a condition to charge herself with too much responsibility."

Caroline laughed. It was not an unkind laugh.

"No, I am sure Mrs. Baynhurst never did care about responsibilities," she said.

She stooped forward to push some of the parcels more securely on the opposite seat, and the colour rushed to her face as she asked him another question.

"There is one thing I *should* like to know," she said, "and that is if I have been kept by charity all this time. Did you find out anything about that?"

They were close to the gates of Yelverton now, and Rupert Haverford answered her hurriedly.

"You touch on a rather important phase of this matter, Miss Graniger," he said, "and I have more to communicate to you; but we cannot go into this properly now. As I shall be here for a day or so I hope you will afford me an opportunity for speaking quietly with you."

"Of course," said Caroline. Then she thanked him, and, indeed, she did feel grateful to him. It sent a warm sensation through her heart to realize that all this time, when she had imagined herself forgotten (when, indeed, it might have been excusable if he had put her out of his thoughts), he had been working on her behalf.

Just before they rolled up to the big door she turned to him.

"I want to ask you something. Please let me know that you are no longer vexed with me for having agreed to stay with Mrs. Lancing. I believe I am going to answer very well, and you can't think how glad I am to be with the children. I do see now," Caroline said quickly, "that I ought to have referred the matter to you, but the circumstances were against me. It seemed such a wonderful chance for me to find work in such a moment."

"Of course I am not angry," Haverford said.

He helped her to alight, and carried all her parcels into the house, and as Mrs. Brenton came forward to greet him, Caroline ran quickly upstairs to her own room.

She was conscious of a great desire to be alone for a few moments, for there was a pressure on her heart, and she hardly felt prepared to meet the children's searching eyes. Betty could ask the most pointed questions at times.

As she put down her packages in a heap on the table she found she had carried up with her a large brown glove. It was warm still with the imprint of the man's strong hand; he had drawn it off to pay the driver, and it must have fallen among her parcels.

Caroline picked it up and stood a little while holding it; she derived, quite unconsciously, a definite sense of pleasure from the touch of this glove; it recalled the owner so clearly.

"I am so glad he did not forget," she said to herself; "it is so nice to be remembered."

CHAPTER XI

Caroline did not go down to dinner that night. When bedtime came Baby was restless and seemed inclined to cough. Caroline was anxious.

Mrs. Brenton came upstairs, however, and reassured the girl. She administered homely remedies, and prophesied that all would be well in the morning.

Then she tried to persuade Miss Graniger to go down to dinner, but she failed.

"If you won't mind, I would so much rather stay here," the girl said; "Baby likes to hold my hand, dear little soul, and I should not be a bit happy if I went downstairs."

"Well, do as you like, my dear," Mrs. Brenton said; then she added, "I am so glad you had a lift home this afternoon. Now my party is all complete except for Camilla. I am very vexed with

her."

Caroline looked at her quickly.

"Why?"

"Well, she ought to have come down this evening as she promised," Agnes Brenton answered impatiently, "she arranged to meet Rupert at a certain time, kept him waiting about for an hour and a half at the station, and then, when he supposed she had come on here by some mistake, he follows her only to find a telegram saying she has gone to Lea Abbey and will not be here till to-morrow in time for luncheon. I cannot think what has induced her to go to the Bardolphs," Mrs. Brenton added irritably. "She says it is because Lady Pamela is ill, and sent for her; but to my certain knowledge Camilla and Pamela Bardolph have not been seeing one another for months past."

Caroline followed Mrs. Brenton out on to the landing. She felt subdued, even saddened, as she listened.

"Of course I am disappointed, but I am not thinking entirely about myself. I am sure Rupert is far more upset and annoyed than his manner shows. Ah well! by this time I suppose I ought to know Camilla too well to be surprised at anything she does! See that you have all you want, my dear, and if you should be at all anxious about the child, don't hesitate to send for me."

As she was passing on to the staircase Mrs. Brenton paused.

"Mr. Haverford has brought down a number of things for the children. He said he was going to send them up to you. I hope they will learn to grow very fond of him," said Agnes Brenton earnestly. "Do you know that he has made them two little rich people? He has settled quite a fortune on Camilla, and on her children. Nothing can touch this money; it is hers and theirs, whatever may happen. He has asked me to be one of the trustees for the children."

Once again Mrs. Brenton turned back as she was going, and kissed Caroline.

"For all reasons," she said, "I deeply regret that Camilla has not come to us to-night."

It was a long time before Baby would be wooed into slumber, and even then Caroline did not like to leave her; not until she had assured herself that the child was sleeping deeply and tranquilly did she go into the other room.

She only snatched a few moments to eat some supper. There was really so very much to do.

An enormous parcel of costly things had been sent down by Camilla for the children, and every one in the house had brought a little offering. All these had to be ticketed and tied up. No ordinary sized stocking would hold what awaited the children, so large baskets had been made ready to put at the foot of each bed.

On inquiring, Caroline found that Mr. Haverford had sent nothing up to the nursery as yet.

After a while she dismissed the maid to go down to the servant's supper, and was busy scribbling and tying, when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," she called.

As the door opened Rupert Haverford appeared. His arms were full of parcels as hers had been in the early afternoon. He was smiling, but Caroline quickly noticed that he looked tired, as if he were worried.

"Mrs. Brenton said I might come up. I hope I am in time."

"Oh yes," said Caroline with a laugh. "I am only just beginning to arrange things. Won't there be a scene to-morrow morning?"

"Can't I help?" asked Mr. Haverford; "this seems far too much for one pair of hands to manage."

As he disembarrassed himself of his burden he said, "And I particularly desire to have my share in making the children's Christmas a happy one this year, for they belong to me now in a sense."

Caroline coloured.

"Yes, I know;" it was almost unconsciously that she added, "and I am so glad."

His eyes lit up and his lips took an eager expression.

"Are you?'" he asked; "well, then I ought to be content, for do you know, Miss Graniger, I have been hearing nothing but delightful things about you. Mrs. Lancing cannot say enough in praise of you."

"It is very good of her," said Caroline, and her voice was not very steady; "but she has to test me yet. She really knows so little about me."

Haverford sat down to the table, and began to help her.

They had to untie some of his packages to see which were the presents for the respective children.

"I think some of these things will have to disappear after to-morrow," said Caroline; "already these little people have enough toys to stock a shop."

It amused her to watch Rupert Haverford pack up and tie and direct as she commanded. He was so deliberate in all he did. Camilla would have lost her patience very quickly, but Caroline liked his slow ways. His parcels were so neat.

Every now and then he stole into the bedroom to see if Baby was still sleeping.

"I was rather anxious about her," she said to Haverford, "for Dennis has told me that she gets very heavy colds at times, and she seemed really rather feverish to-night."

As he remembered the interview with his mother the day before, he found himself looking every now and then with real interest at Caroline.

"I can't think why you want to bother about Caroline Graniger. I gave her a fair trial," Mrs. Baynhurst had said fretfully; "but she is a fool, and I hate fools. Give me a knave any day in preference to a fool!"

There seemed to be nothing foolish, or weak, or hesitating about Caroline as he saw her, but in the hours that had followed on his visit to his mother, he had been able to fill in the empty spaces that she had left, and he seemed to understand all at once why it was that Octavia Baynhurst had set herself so resolutely against Caroline, both as a little child and a growing girl.

Undoubtedly there had been an old and bitter feeling rankling in her heart for Gerald Baynhurst's sister.

It was inevitable that the love the man had evidently lavished on his sister had been a source of resentment and misery to such a woman as his wife.

On Caroline, the helpless child, therefore, had the accumulation of this bitter anger and jealousy been poured out.

He broke the silence after a long and busily filled pause.

"My mother has a new secretary," he said, and as their eyes met they both smiled. Caroline found his face very attractive when he smiled.

"I saw her. She is middle-aged and very alarming looking. It is my impression that my mother is going to be managed for the first time in her existence. You will be well avenged, Miss Graniger."

When all the little parcels were made ready, and they filled the table, he got up.

"Well, I suppose I ought to go downstairs again. You are very cosy here. I am so glad the children are not in London this dismal weather."

Before going he asked permission to look at Betty and Baby as they slept. When he rejoined Caroline he said—there was a very tender look in his eyes—

"I feel quite important to-night, for now I have three wards; those two tiny souls and yourself, and if one can go by tradition, the life of a guardian is not entirely free from anxiety."

"I don't require a guardian," said Caroline. But she said it shyly, not sharply. "I have always taken care of myself, and I am sure I can do it now."

"I am afraid that argument does not move me," he answered, and with a smile he held out his hand and said, "Good night."

When he was gone Caroline sat down and thought about him. She felt sorry for him.

"I do wish she had come," she mused to herself. "I wonder why she did not? He looks miserable when he is not talking. I should like him to have a happy Christmas; he certainly has helped to give me one, and I expect I am only one of hundreds.... I remember last year how his mother grumbled at all his charities; I little thought then that he and I should be together for this Christmas! So everything is coming with a rush," Caroline mused on. "To-night I discover that I actually had a mother and a father, and now I have a guardian," and then she laughed outright, "and of course Cuthbert Baynhurst is my cousin! That sounds funny! How pleased he will be!" She reverted again to the subject of Camilla later on. "Will she come to-morrow? Oh, surely yes!... She *could* not let Christmas go without seeing the children!"

And on the morrow, when every one was at church, except Caroline and Baby, who certainly was not quite her usual brisk little self, Mrs. Lancing arrived.

She went up at once to the nursery, flung off her furs, and sat down and took her Baby in her arms.

"She is not really ill, is she?" she queried anxiously.

"Oh, she is ever so much better this morning," said Caroline. "You see, it has been so damp the last few days, and yesterday the wind was very keen."

"And she always gets cold in the nasty wind, don't you Boodles, my precious?"

The mother hugged the little figure in her arms, then stretched out her hand to Caroline.

"A happy Christmas!" she said, and then in the same breath, "how well you look, and how nice! And oh, what a wonderful lot of toys! Why, Babsy, Santa Claus must have nearly broken his back bringing all these things."

With the child nestling in her arms, she leaned back and closed her eyes.

"I've got a most awful headache," she said wearily. "We were up till any hour this morning.... Have you some strong smelling-salts, Caroline? Chris Bardolph brought me over here in the motor." She sniffed the salts, and lay aback with closed eyes for awhile. Then she said, "I thought the air would do me good, but I feel quite cracked up. Where is everybody?" she asked the next moment languidly; and she smiled when she heard that the whole party had migrated to church.

"Has he gone?" she asked, and then she answered the question herself; "but of course. I am sure he must sing hymns most beautifully."

"I don't think Mr. Haverford went with the others," Caroline said; "he said he would take Betty and the maid who has gone with her to mass."

"But he is not a Catholic," Mrs. Lancing observed quickly; "there is another duty for me! I shall have to try and make a convert of him. Oh dear, my head!... It feels as if it would come in two! Babsy darling, mummy must go down and rest in her own room...."

But Babsy clung to her mother, refusing to be separated, and of course got her way.

Left to herself, Caroline Graniger stood and looked out of the window thoughtfully. A shadow had gathered on her face.

She felt both pained and irritated, and found herself hoping almost eagerly that Mrs. Lancing would not speak of Rupert Haverford to others in that slighting, half-mocking manner.

From where she stood she could see right down almost to the entrance gates, for the trees were leafless, and the window where she stood was set high.

Rupert Haverford was walking up the broad drive briskly, and Betty was dancing beside him.

Caroline studied him attentively for a time, then turned away from the window and laughed.

"How ridiculous I am!" she said to herself; "why on earth should I mind if she sneers at him or praises him? Assuredly it is no affair of mine."

Of course Betty went straight to her mother's room on entering the house, and after a while Miss Graniger went down to fetch both children.

She found Mrs. Lancing on the sofa with one little daughter crouched up beside her, and the other engaged in softly rubbing her brows.

"I wish I could go to bed," Camilla said. "I do hate these kind of family functions. And Agnes loves them."

There was a fretful tone in her voice.

"Poor mummy," said Betty, and stooping, she laid her pretty little lips on her mother's face.

Both children were so happy to be with her.

"Sit down and tell me all you have been doing since I saw you," commanded Mrs. Lancing. "How long have you been down here? It seems like a century to me."

"Have you wanted us very much, sweetie?" asked Betty, and Camilla turned to kiss the dear little face.

"So much—oh, so much!" and then she moved a little impatiently on the couch. "Some one is knocking," she said; "it must be Aunty Brenny. Open the door and bring her in, Betty."

She just flashed a look at Caroline and gave a little laugh.

"Now for my scolding," she said in a low voice.

But Mrs. Brenton did not scold. She greeted Camilla most gently and affectionately, and was greatly concerned to hear about the bad headache.

The mere fact, however, that she ignored all mention of the truant act of the night before stung Camilla into a little show of bad temper.

"Don't for goodness' sake follow Rupert's lead," she said, "and adopt a martyr-like expression. I know perfectly well, Agnes, that you were furious with me because I did not turn up last night, now, weren't you?"

"I was not furious exactly," said Mrs. Brenton, "but disappointed, and rather surprised."

"I couldn't help it," said Camilla, in the same impatient way; and then the colour flooded her face and her eyes lit up for an instant as she smiled.

"Don't grudge me my few remaining holidays; I shall not have too many in the future. Yes, darlings"—this to Betty—"you must go. Caroline wants to make you ready for lunch. You are going to put on those pretty new frocks that I sent down and make yourselves ever so smart. Of course you shall sit next me at luncheon. What an idea! Where else would you sit? I shall have one of you on each side of me."

Mrs. Brenton was speaking as the children were going out of the room with Caroline.

"So it was an excuse," Caroline heard her say, in a strained voice; "and Pamela Bardolph is not ill?"

"An excuse, of course," Mrs. Lancing answered, with a laugh. "I knew they were going to have a really lovely time, and when Pamela pressed me to go just for one night, I really could not resist the temptation. We had such fun, Agnes, and finished up with...."

Caroline hurried the children out of the room. She always dreaded what Betty would repeat. The child was very sharp, and her memory was extremely retentive.

It was difficult to chat lightly with the children as she dressed them and made them pretty for the big Christmas Day luncheon.

Caroline had said "Good-bye" to all her former isolation.

Though she still stood alone, and had no one on whom she could make a real claim, her life all at once seemed charged with ties and privileges; already she had commenced to expand, to weave the tendrils of her affections, her sympathy, and her tender thought in and about these people among whom she now lived and moved.

She recognized a great debt of gratitude to Agnes Brenton, but for Camilla she felt something deeper than gratitude.

In this phase of awakened emotions she would naturally have turned to some outlet for her feelings, even if she had drifted into touch with the most ordinary, the most commonplace of individuals; but thrust, as she had been, suddenly into the stirring atmosphere of life as it was lived in Camilla Lancing's household, and hemmed about by the beguiling influences of an absolutely fascinating personality, Caroline at once lost her heart.

But just because this heart was stirred so strongly, so deeply, she could not deny herself the right to judge Camilla; and it was an easy task to judge now.

"Why marry him if she despises him so much?" asked Caroline of herself. "There is surely no law to make her do this?"

Dennis came up to give her a helping hand, and told her that Mrs. Lancing wanted to go downstairs with the children.

"She's not fit to stand, that she isn't," said the maid; "but she'll go through the lunch somehow, and then she'll have to rest." Here Dennis exhibited, with great pride and excitement, the beautiful watch that Mr. Haverford had given her.

"There hasn't no one been forgotten," she said; "he is a proper sort of man! This is a happy Christmas for us, my dear."

Indeed, Dennis's aspect was entirely changed. She seemed to have grown a little fat, and Betty quickly discovered that she had on a new gown, apparently an amazing event.

Miss Graniger followed the children and their mother downstairs.

It made her heart thrill to see the way Haverford turned to greet Camilla. He was evidently

sharply concerned about Mrs. Lancing's indisposition, but he did not fuss her, and she stood with both children clinging to her as she exchanged a few words with him.

At lunch-time Caroline found herself seated next to him. Betty was on his other side.

"Look after Miss Graniger, please, Rupert," Mrs. Brenton had said to him, and he took up the duty in a literal sense.

"This is a typical English Christmas dinner," he said to her once. He tried to make her smile and talk, but Caroline had no command of words. She felt dazed with the myriad sensations that encircled her about.

When the plum-pudding, all afire, was brought in with cheers, and every one stood up to sing "Should auld acquaintance be forgot," Caroline broke down for a moment. But only Haverford knew this. Almost at once she had conquered herself, and as he asked her to clink glasses with him she smiled. Her face moved him sharply; it was quivering with emotion; her eyes were most beautiful.

She had lost her white, careworn look, and though she was still thin there was a pinkish glow in her skin; no one would have called her plain in this moment.

"Suppose you change places with me," he said; "Betty wants to have you near her."

They effected the change quite quietly, and with the need of looking after the child, that oppression of emotion slipped gradually away from the girl's heart.

Long afterwards, when all that was new and strange had grown into a calm and natural background, Caroline remembered that Christmas luncheon at Yelverton as one of the pleasantest experiences ever granted to her.

Mrs. Lancing ate nothing, but she did her best to be bright; that she was suffering all the time was, however, clear to both Caroline and Haverford.

It was a long time before she could escape from the festivities, but when everybody had trooped to the Christmas tree, she managed to slip away, and she drew Caroline aside with her.

"Come and help me," she said. "This is one of Dennis's rare holidays, and I don't believe I can get upstairs by myself."

It was on Caroline's lips to ask if she should call Mr. Haverford; but glancing back, she saw that he had been summoned by Mrs. Brenton to officiate at the huge tree, so they passed out together.

"It is a shame to bother you," said Camilla when she got up to her room. She was trembling as with cold, and her brows and eyes were contracted with the sharpness of the pain.

"You know I am glad to come," said Caroline in her quietest way.

"I know you are very comforting; just the sort of person one wants about one when one is ill. Don't go away for a little while."

Caroline made up the fire, and then sat down in an armchair beside it, just as she had sat on another memorable occasion. She looked ever and again at Mrs. Lancing, who had crouched on the sofa, both her hands pressed to her head.

In a little while the tension seemed to relax, and Camilla opened her eyes.

"Has Rupert told you your own story?" she asked.

"A little bit; not all."

"He says it is my duty to let you leave me if you want to go," said Camilla, after another little pause.

Caroline looked at her with a little start.

"Why should I want to leave you?"

"Well"—it was a very weak little laugh that Camilla gave—"of course, now that you are an independent young person, you may not care to stop." Her brows came together again sharply for a minute, and she held her hand pressed tightly to her eyes, "Fancy that odious mother of his cheating you out of your money all this time," she said feebly when she spoke.

Caroline felt hot, and yet there was a blank sensation about her at the same time.

"Money?" she said.

"Oh, hasn't he told you? How like him! I suppose it will be a month before he will let you know everything."

"I think Mr. Haverford meant to speak to me this afternoon," Caroline said very hurriedly, "but we have had no chance as yet of any private conversation. He did tell me that I was right in supposing that I had a claim upon Mrs. Baynhurst, and he told me also a little about my mother, but that was all."

"Well, there doesn't seem very much to tell," said Mrs. Lancing, after a pause, "except that you have a certain small income of your own, which his mother, it appears, has kept entirely for herself all these years. I don't know that I ought to say very much about that sort of thing," said Camilla, with her half bitter laugh. "I am not so wonderfully straight and honest myself, and I hate throwing stones at anybody else. Still, I don't know that I should defraud a child, and that is what Mrs. Baynhurst did, and would have continued doing if she had not been in a bad temper one day, and turned you out of her house."

Caroline sat with her hands locked round one of her knees.

"I expect she did it because of Cuthbert," she said.

This remark seemed to rouse Mrs. Lancing.

"Oh, by the way, he is staying with the Bardolphs," she said; "it is the first time I have met him. You know he is a very handsome fellow, Caroline, and how clever! He sings enchantingly. Pam Bardolph is raving about him. He is painting her portrait. Did you ever know two men more unlike than he and Rupert?"

"Yes, they are very unlike," said Caroline.

Mrs. Lancing lay still a minute or two, and then she opened her eyes again and smiled at Caroline.

There was no light in the room, except the strong glow from the flames which shot up the chimney. From below they could hear the murmur of voices, and sometimes the excited laughter of the children.

"But you won't leave me just yet, will you?"

"I am afraid you will have to turn me out when you want to get rid of me," said Caroline. A moment later, in a low and moved voice, she said, "Do you imagine it would be so easy for me to separate myself from you and the children?"

The woman on the couch stretched out her hand, and Caroline stooped forward and took it in hers.

"I should like to think that you would stick to me, that you would never turn against me," she said, and her lips quivered.

Caroline's only answer was to tighten her hold on that slender hand. Then she rose and put a warmer wrap over Mrs. Lancing.

"Don't you think if I were to leave you now you would sleep? Perhaps I had better go downstairs again, and see what the children are doing. They may be getting into mischief and I am sure Babsy, dear little heart, must be nearly worn out."

And with some persuasion Mrs. Lancing assented to this. As she reached the big hall, Caroline met Rupert Haverford.

"Mrs. Lancing is resting. I have persuaded her to lie down. She wants to be well for dinner."

Rupert thanked her.

"I was just coming to look for you. The children are clamouring to know why 'Caroline' has vanished? So I volunteered to find her. Are you having a happy Christmas?" he asked, with a smile.

"I am happy altogether," Caroline answered him; "it is so wonderful to find that after all I have a little place of my own in the world, and that there are people who actually care to know what is passing with me."

They moved together through the big, comfortable hall to the room from whence issued a babel of voices and music and laughter.

"I want you to give me five minutes either to-day or to-morrow," said Haverford, in answer to this; and Caroline coloured hotly.

"Mrs. Lancing has just been telling me a little more about myself," she said nervously.

The warm colour in her cheeks was reflected in Rupert Haverford's face. His manner was rather abrupt, and his voice hard, as he said—

"I am sorry Camilla has spoken of this subject, for I particularly wished to broach it to you myself."

At that moment Betty caught sight of her, and Caroline had no opportunity of replying. The child rushed towards them; her cheeks were flaming, and her beautiful little head was crowned with a tinsel cap.

"Oh, you have found her!" she cried. "We have been wanting you ever such a lot, Caroline. Where have you been congregating to? Baby's beginning to make a nice noise. She's sitting on Aunty Brenny's knee now, saying that she feels like to cry." Then eagerly, "Caroline, I needn't go to bed yet, need I.... Say I needn't?"

Mrs. Brenton looked relieved to see Caroline. In her lap sat a very tired, a very cross, and much tumbled, lace-trimmed small person.

Caroline held out her arms.

"Come along, sweetheart, and Caroline will tell you a lovely story all to yourself."

"Shall I carry her?" Haverford asked.

Caroline shook her head.

"Oh no; she isn't a bit heavy!"

She closed her arms round her little charge. Baby rested her flushed cheek against the girl's pale one, and her tiny arms were tightly pressed round Caroline's neck.

As Haverford opened the door for her, Caroline gave him a bright little nod as she passed out.

"I think I shall say 'good night'" she said, "for I shall not come down again this evening. Baby wants to say 'good night' too, darling, don't you?"

Rupert Haverford stooped, and the child turned and kissed him fondly. His head was very close to Caroline; she noticed how crisply his brown hair curled just at the sides, and what fine brows he had. Baby refused to let him go—refused to be taken from Caroline's arms, and so, as the girl walked slowly up the stairs, Rupert Haverford followed close behind. He had hold of the child's small fingers over Caroline's shoulder; every now and then she felt the warm touch of his hand and wrist rest on her shoulder.

When the long corridor was reached, with babyish inconsequence, Caroline's small burden elected to go to his strong arms, and he carried her right into the nursery.

"Can you manage quite alone?" he asked, as this haven was reached, so cosy and quiet and warm. "Won't you have a maid or some one to help you?"

But Caroline shook her head, and so, with a parting kiss to the child, he turned away.

At the door he paused.

"If you see Camilla, will you say that I entreat her not to come down unless she is much better? I understand she sat up nearly all night with Lady Pamela, and she is not strong enough to do these sort of things. She wants nursing herself."

Caroline frowned sharply, and made no reply; indeed, she was so silent during the preparations for the bath that Baby made loud complaint; she wanted her story and her usual lullaby songs. It was long before the girl's composure returned to her.

As she sat rocking the sleepy child in front of the fire, she took herself to task a second time that day.

"This should be nothing to me; it *can* be nothing," she said. But she knew they were empty words, even as she whispered them to herself. Where these two people were concerned, she had passed far beyond the range of indifference.

CHAPTER XII

With the new year the damp, wet weather set in again, and it was generally conceded that it was much better that the children should be kept in the country.

"That is such a little poky house in town," Agnes Brenton declared.

Nevertheless, Camilla clung to the poky little house, although Haverford urged her all the time to fix a definite date for their marriage.

"Why should we wait?" he asked, very reasonably; "we have really no one to consult or consider. I am just longing for you to come into my great empty house and turn it into a home."

Camilla chose to treat the matter flippantly.

"Oh, is that all you want me for? Well, my dear Rupert, if you want a nice, comfortable, domesticated, housekeepery sort of a woman, I know the very person for you. I am ornamental, you know—exceedingly ornamental, but I am not the least bit of good to look after the linen, or to mend your socks, and I couldn't boil an egg to save my life."

Another time he said to her—

"I want to get you away from this house. I want to take you out of all that belonged to old times and sorrows. Have you forgotten that we are to go to Italy? To all the places where you were so happy with your father? Let us be married and start at once."

But Camilla always pleaded for time.

"I tell you why," she said to him once. "I want you—us—to get thoroughly well used to one another. Of course, you have known me a long time—it is nearly two years since we met—but there are such heaps of things we ought to realize before we make our great start together. I have made a little promise to myself," Camilla said weightily, "that I will not marry you till I have taught myself to be a little worthy of you."

"I wish you would not talk such rubbish," the man answered, with a very natural touch of bad temper.

"Now, you see," said Camilla, and she laughed—"you see I have done something to annoy you, and I am sure I don't know what it is. I shall be perpetually making these mistakes if we marry in haste." Then she changed her tone. "Surely, dear Rupert, we should be much wiser to wait another month or two. I—I am not really well enough to go abroad just yet. After Easter it will be delightful. We will do Paris first, and then go on to the south of Italy. Naples is enchanting in May." She gave a quick sigh. "And then I am making up my mind to be separated from the children," she said, "and, as Sammy Broxbourne would put it, 'it takes a little doing!' Oh, by the way, did I tell you that I had quite a charming letter from Sir Samuel, congratulating me on my engagement to you? Poor fellow! he has had an accident at Monte Carlo, and has injured his leg. He tells me he will not be able to walk for another month or so, and cannot get back to England just yet."

"The longer he stays away the better for England," said Haverford; "he is a very objectionable man."

"Oh, I see," answered Camilla, almost impatiently. "Agnes has been prejudicing you."

But Haverford made no reply to this, and the subject was dropped.

This was but a specimen of the conversation which passed between them whenever they met. But, as a matter of fact, they saw very little of one another.

Camilla got into the habit of running away from town to stay with one friend or another; the greater part of her time, however, was spent at Yelverton.

When she said she was not well in these days she stated the actual truth.

Mrs. Brenton was a little anxious about her, and tried to coddle her, and make her take care of herself—a difficult operation. It was strange to see Camilla listless and bored. She could not be roused to take an interest in anything except what concerned the children.

"I know I am deadly dull," she said on one occasion, "but you must put it all down to money. I don't owe a penny in the world, and you can't *think* how lonely I feel! I am simply rusticating for the want of excitement. When I am in town, and the door-bell rings at breakfast-time, I am perfectly unmoved; the postman's knock doesn't give me a single thrill. I can walk into Véronique's without troubling to invent a harrowing story about delayed remittances or unfortunate speculations. I can buy what I like and pay for it ... consequently I don't want to buy anything. And I was becoming such an excellent diplomatist. That is the polite word, is it not, for one who fights by subtlety and fabricates untruths? Also I am growing mean, Agnes. Do you know, now that I have got a fat banking account, and all the world is bowing down to me, I hesitate before I give away a shilling. I even went in an omnibus the other day."

She laughed as she said this; she would have loved to have explained to Mrs. Brenton that she had sought refuge in this useful conveyance to escape from meeting Haverford whom she had caught sight of in the distance. But she curbed the desire.

"Poor Agnes, she shivers and turns cold when she hears me say those sort of things. She is so afraid I am going to lose everything just as I have got it, and oh dear me, I wish I could lose him!

If I had not been in such a hurry, perhaps I should have been able to patch things up, and have struggled on a bit longer; but now I am bound hand and foot. His unparalleled generosity"—there was a sneer in her thoughts—"prevents all chance of escape. If a woman lets a man settle any amount of money on her and her children, she cannot very easily back out and tell him that she is going to keep the money and say 'good-bye' to him."

On this same occasion Mrs. Brenton spoke for the first time on the subject of the Lancing people.

"You have never told me what they said about your engagement."

Camilla yawned a little.

"The old man cursed me, I suppose, but he had the decency to keep the curses off paper. Violet wrote, of course." She laughed languidly. "Violet is always ready to hold a candle to the devil, and Horace sent me a few kind words. Horace is not really a bad sort."

Camilla was silent a moment, and then she said—

"You know Rupert wanted to go down and interview Colonel Lancing, but I stopped that and made him write instead. I am not sure that it would not have been a good thing for him if he had gone; he would have heard some nice home-truths about me, wouldn't he? It would have been a kind of preparation for what is to come."

Agnes Brenton had taught herself already not to encourage this kind of conversation. Like Rupert Haverford, she was very anxious indeed for the marriage to take place, but she did not urge it openly as he did. Where she attacked the subject was on the practical side.

"Why not marry very quietly, and go abroad for two months? You really want rest and a thorough change; it would do you all the good in the world."

"Oh, I am too lazy!" Camilla said. "I hate travelling when I am not well, and, you see, Rupert is still so new. I must get a little more used to him before I go rushing off to the other side of the world with him. And then I must have a trousseau. Besides, we have settled to wait till Easter. Rupert is so busy. He is throwing himself into the *rôle* of the ready-made father with the greatest zest. You should see all the arrangements he is making for the children. He bought Betty a pony the other day. I wish he would buy Caroline for me. I am so afraid one of these days she will fly away and leave us."

She had fallen into the trick of sitting a great deal in the little room that was called Caroline's sitting-room; her one interest at this moment was in putting together a charming wardrobe for the girl, and no one knew how to buy prettier clothes better than Mrs. Lancing.

That same day, after she had been chatting with Mrs. Brenton, she climbed slowly up the stairs to the children's floor, but she found it empty.

No place is lonely, however, that is dedicated to the use of children, and she walked through the large rooms (that no amount of tidiness would keep tidy) smiling sometimes, and sometimes standing and looking wistfully about her.

As she passed through the night nursery she paused in front of the portrait of Betty's father.

"What is there about Cuthbert Baynhurst that reminds me of Ned?" she said to herself. "The resemblance between them is very marked. Sometimes when Cuthbert is talking I could almost imagine Ned was in the room."

She put the portrait down abruptly, and biting her lip she went through to the sitting-room again.

"How lovely it would be if I could go abroad with Caroline and the children! I wonder if he would let us do that?" This thought brought a frown. The more she realized that Rupert Haverford had the right to dominate her the more she chafed at her position.

In truth, at times it seemed to her as if she had passed merely from one bondage—from one form of dependence to another. This bondage was splendid enough—she was surrounded with every possible thing she wanted or fancied; the magnificence of Haverford's settlement and gifts to her was still the theme for comment and amazement—but, splendid as it all was, it was still a bondage to Camilla. And he had no idea of this.

It gave him such wonderful happiness to share his wealth with this woman.

In the days following immediately on their betrothal he had seemed to walk on air. It was absolutely the first time that the fact of his enormous wealth had given him a sense of enjoyment or satisfaction.

He yearned over Camilla just as if she had been a child. He diverted his interest, the purpose of his life, from all former channels; henceforward it should be planned to run as she would have it run. He had no longer doubt as to her judgment; he imagined that he was beginning to

understand her now.

Just because she had shown a desire to be at Yelverton, and to turn away from all the people whom he had regarded as being so injurious to her, he told himself that all those little things (about which he had troubled so sharply) had merely been the outcome of circumstances, and that she was now drifting into her proper, her natural mental condition. It sometimes angered Camilla that he should suppose she was so malleable, but for the most part she regarded his satisfaction as being satisfactory for herself also.

"As long as he is pleased, what does anything else matter?" she said now and then to herself. "He has paid a long price for me, so it would be rank hard luck if he felt he had made a bad bargain."

She stood now a little while at the window of the sitting-room, and then roused herself.

"A walk will do me good," she said; "I will go and meet them." She put on her furs, and went slowly downstairs to the large, cosy hall, stopping on her way out to chat a few minutes with Mr. Brenton, a tall, thin, careworn-looking man, who lived for the most part in the clouds, and was never so happy as when he and his wife were at Yelverton alone.

He was known all over the country as a collector of old and rare books, and also as an enthusiastic rather than a judicious purchaser. There were tons of useless volumes lumbering the upper storeys of the house, and still they continued to come. But dreamer and bookworm as he was, Dick Brenton had a place in his heart for all those who were dear to his wife, and he was very fond of Camilla Lancing. He always said her beauty was so helpful, so illuminating; and he adored her children.

As she passed into the damp and rather dismal grounds, Camilla's thoughts turned as usual to the coming future. The nearer the time approached the more she longed to postpone the marriage.

"Surely I ought to be able to invent something to give me a little more time," she said to herself; and just for an instant it crossed her mind how helpful it would be if the children could have some slight ailment; but she immediately took herself to task for this.

"God forgive me!" she said. And she shivered at the bare thought of what an illness to either of these loved little creatures would mean to her. Still, she craved to keep her freedom. At the same time, she realized that an indefinite engagement was out of the question. The man's very goodness and generosity forced upon her a duty to him.

"The worst is," she said to herself restlessly now, "he has no idea of the truth. Of course, he knows I don't love him in the way he cares for me, but I am sure he thinks I do care for him. I suppose I could never let anybody understand, even myself, how I feel about him ... how strangely I am drawn to him at one moment, and how I almost hate him the next...."

The butler had told her that he thought she would find the children on the road to the village.

And she moved in that direction. Her fretting, troubled mood broke and vanished as Betty's lithe, small figure came running round a corner of the road, and a cry of real joy hailed her.

It was the height of bliss to Betty and Baby to have their mother with them for a walk.

"Caroline's coming. I runned on because I wanted to hide ... and oh, such fun, mummy! we saw the hounds and a lot of the field running and jumping in the distance. They looked so 'cited.'"

Camilla slipped her arm through Caroline's as the girl and Babsy joined her.

"I missed you," she said; "I didn't know you were out." Then a little abruptly she added, "I think I shall have you back to town with me when I go this week. I have had the nurseries done up, and the children have been here so long, really I feel ashamed of trespassing too much on Agnes's hospitality."

Betty clapped her hands. She wanted to see the big, new house that was going to be her future home.

Rupert had told her that she should choose her own furniture, and her own little bed, and that her room should be done up entirely as she liked. But she had to talk about this in mysterious whispers so that Baby should not hear.

"You see I shall have to begin to get my clothes," Camilla said; "I don't want any really, but I must spend money; it is expected of me. Oh, I wish I were you, Caroline! If I had a hundred and fifty a year of my own I'd be the happiest creature in the world."

Caroline looked at her wistfully.

"I wish I could give you all I have," she said.

"Rupert declares," said Camilla, in her irrelevant way, "that I must make some arrangements

to relieve you. What do you say to having a French maid for the nursery? Betty ought to begin to speak French now. She picked up the language very quickly when I had Hortense to maid me, but she was picking up other things too; that was why I sent Hortense packing."

"There's a man coming," announced Betty; "he's been tumbling in the mud, and his horse is all lame. Oh, do look, mummy!"

They paused and looked backwards. The picture Betty had described was very accurate.

Evidently the man, who was advancing rather slowly, limping a little as he moved, had come a cropper. He was splashed with mud from head to foot. Betty suddenly gave an exclamation.

"Why, mummy," she said, "it's Sammy!"

Caroline felt Mrs. Lancing start violently, and press closer to her as if unconsciously seeking protection. Instantly, however, she rallied herself.

Betty ran forward, of course, to greet Sir Samuel; and her mother, loosing her hand from Caroline's arm, followed the child.

"No need to ask you where you come from," she said, half gaily. She held out her hand to Broxbourne, but he shook his head, and showed his own mud-stained one by way of explanation.

He was not agreeable to look at. There was a grim, ugly expression on his face—the look of a man who knew how impotent anger was, and yet who could not help being angry.

Camilla was full of sympathy.

"I hope you have not hurt yourself," she said; "but," remembering quickly, "how came you to be hunting? I thought you were an invalid?" Then with a fugitive smile, "Indeed, I supposed you were still abroad."

"Came back three days ago," the man answered rather shortly. "I suppose Brenton will not mind putting this animal up for me? He can't go much further."

"Where are you staying?" asked Camilla.

They all moved on together slowly. He mentioned a house that had been taken for the hunting season by some friends of hers.

At this juncture Caroline and the children walked briskly on ahead.

"It is tea-time, you know," the girl explained. As a matter of fact, she was anxious to get away.

Sir Samuel had a trick of staring at any woman he thought worth looking at in a very embarrassing fashion, and Caroline was certainly pleasing to the eye.

The note of her appearance was simplicity itself beside the costly elegance of Mrs. Lancing, but she was slim, and straight, and fresh, and young, and with such a pair of eyes any woman must have been attractive.

"So you are rusticating," Broxbourne said, as he and Camilla were left to themselves; "not much in your line, is it? But I suppose now that you are going to settle down you have turned over a new leaf entirely. Is the lucky man down here?"

"No, he has gone to build a hospital, or buy up a whole county, as a thanksgiving for our approaching wedding," Camilla laughed. "Don't you think a hospital is a very good idea? I expect he imagines he may want it before I have finished with him."

She spoke as lightly as ever, and laughed with the same ease, but within the warm embrace of her furs she seemed to wither, to shrink a little. Not half an hour before she had been longing, praying almost, for some barrier to stand in the pathway of her marriage. Now she knew with the unerring sense of intuition that what she had dreaded so much just before Christmas, and which of late she had managed to forget almost entirely, was coming upon her—that her future was definitely threatened.

She had been so protected of late, so wrapped about with the tenderest, the most chivalrous care, that she felt this sudden translation into the old atmosphere more keenly than she had ever felt any of her former troubles and anxieties. It was as though she had been stripped of every warm garment, and thrust shivering and helpless into the aching cold of a black frost.

Yet she tried to play her part.

"You wrote me a very nice letter, Sammy," she said.

He laughed.

"Yes, didn't I? Too good by half."

Fate had played Camilla a nasty trick by bringing her face to face with this man just at this particular moment.

When he had been thrown, his first act on picking himself up had been to thrash his horse unmercifully. That had relieved him a little, but the poison of his anger had not worked off completely. He had always promised himself the pleasure of dealing very straightly with Mrs. Lancing. He was not likely to deny himself the satisfaction of doing this when he felt so much in need of a vent for his feelings; when, too, he knew that he had the situation in the hollow of his hand.

"I must say," he said, with that same sneering tone in his voice, "that I was taken all aback when I heard what had happened. Always thought you were a model of fidelity, that your heart was buried in Ned's grave, and that sort of thing, don't you know? But money makes a great difference, and there has never been quite enough money for you, has there, Camilla?"

She shivered. There was a leer on his face as he turned and looked at her. She answered him half lightly, half wearily.

"Oh, I don't know! I think one can have too much of anything, even of money."

At this Sir Samuel laughed loudly.

"Well, I must say you are a clever woman. Yes, by Jove! you are. I used to think in the old days, when Ned was on the scene, that you were a fool and a saint combined. I know a little bit better now."

Camilla's lips quivered. She turned to him. There was an unconscious entreaty in her voice.

"Dear Sammy," she said, "why are you so cross with me?"

But he only answered with another laugh.

"Yes, in the old days," he went on, "you played the part of the prude to perfection. Kept a fellow at arm's length, and pretended all sorts of things."

"Why go back to those old times?" asked Mrs. Lancing, in a very low voice.

"Because I choose to do so; because there is something that has to be settled between us, and you know that! I suppose you think I was taken in by the sweet way you treated me when we met down here in November. But it was the other way about. I took you in, didn't I?"

It was very cold in this damp country road; all the world seemed grey; the trees with their bare, seemingly withered branches stood like spectres against the dull sky.

Camilla's colour had faded. She looked haggard.

"Please speak a little more plainly," she said.

And Broxbourne answered her.

"Not I. There is nothing to be gained by telling the truth to a woman, especially to a woman like you."

She caught her breath sharply, almost as if she had been struck. Her mind, trained to work with almost incredible swiftness, fathomed the significance of these words.

She put out her hand and gripped his arm.

"What has to be said must be said to me, and to me only." Then suddenly she broke down. "Oh, Sammy!" she said, "I know. Don't you believe I know I did you a great wrong? There is nothing to excuse it, except that you don't know what a corner I was in!... What an awful temptation it was! It has all been so easy for you. You have never had to face hard times and black, killing difficulties. You can't be expected to understand what these things mean."

"Why didn't you ask me?" the man said surlily; and she answered in that same broken way—

"I ... I could not. First of all, you had gone away, and then I was afraid...."

She broke off abruptly; he looked at her sharply, and again he laughed.

"You thought I would want payment," he said. "Well, you're right there. I have a good business instinct. I always like to get full value for what I spend, or what is taken from me."

At this juncture they had reached the gates of Yelverton Park, and Sir Samuel caught sight of a gardener. He hailed the man, gave the horse into his charge, and burdened him with all sorts of commands to the head-groom.

"I'll be round at the stables very shortly," he said.

Camilla had walked on, but he overtook her. Her white, drawn face seemed to give him a great deal of satisfaction.

"You don't offer to give me back the money, but I suppose that is what is in your mind," he said.

His half-bantering tone stung her like the lash of a whip; she was silent only because she could not speak.

"Well, my dear, you may as well put that out of your mind once and for all; that little piece of paper which you worked at so carefully is not to be redeemed by money."

He searched in his pockets, found his cigarette case, paused to strike a match on his heel, and began smoking without any pretence of courtesy.

"This is a funny world, and no mistake! I was very fond of you when I came upon you first," he said; "I was prepared to make no end of a fool of myself about you. And you snubbed me up and down dale; wouldn't have anything to do with me. You were quite able to get along without my friendship, thank you. There are some things that stick, you know, Camilla, and the way you shut down on me in those old days is one of those things. I must say you have a rummy notion of morality! I wasn't good enough to come near you, yet you had no hesitation whatever about robbing me when the time came along."

An exclamation like a sob escaped Camilla. He laughed.

"It is an ugly way of putting it," he said; "but it is the only way, and I fancy that with his peculiarly straightforward views, his working man's propensity for calling a spade a spade, Mr. Haverford will regard the matter in the same light."

The woman turned at this half passionately.

"You are not going to tell him! Oh, you cannot. You *shall* not!"

"It lies with you to decide whether I tell him or not."

He puffed out some smoke on to the damp air, and Camilla watched it wreathe and separate and finally fade into the mist that was gathering about the trees; watched it with eyes dry and hot with misery and shame and fear.

Suddenly Broxbourne turned to her.

"You must break with this man," he said; "I have a prior claim. I don't intend to let you marry him."

She stood still and looked at him with dilated eyes.

"Break my engagement? Impossible.... *Impossible*!"

Her heart was throbbing in her breast, her lips were white.

"Nothing is impossible," answered the man; "after all, I am not treating you badly. If I did the right thing, I should go straight to Haverford. What do you think he'd say, if he heard my pretty little story? How you begged a cheque out of me for a charity bazaar, and how, by chance having got hold of a blank cheque of mine, you filled it in for a nice large sum, and signed my name, by Gad! as bold as brass! I remember," said Broxbourne, shaking the ash from his cigarette, "I was in a tearing hurry when I answered your letter—it was the very day I left for America, in fact. I just scribbled the small cheque anyhow, and never noticed that as I tore it out of my cheque-book I tore a blank one with it. But you found that out in double quick time, didn't you?..."

Camilla turned to him. The hard, dry look had gone from her eyes; they were dim with tears.

"Sammy!" she said brokenly, "don't rub it in so hard. I know.... I *know* how horrible this thing is! When you came back last November, I nearly died when I saw you. I prepared myself for everything, and when you were so friendly, when you said nothing, I began to hope, even to believe, you did not know. Why did you not speak then? Don't you see how much worse it is for me now?"

Sir Samuel smiled at her.

"Of course it is," he said, his cigarette between his teeth; "I know that.... I tumbled to your little game with this man the very moment I came back, and I promised myself some fun. It tickled me to death to have you running after me just as if you liked me, pretending to want me, and imagining you were throwing dust in my eyes! I settled then I would wait awhile. Worse for you! Well, do you want me to say 'I am sorry?'"

"I ... I want you to be merciful ... I am in your hands, I know it—but you—you won't be cruel to me, Sammy," said Camilla, in that same moved voice. She caught her breath. "If Rupert Haverford must be told ... I will tell him...." She turned to Broxbourne abruptly. "Do you know

why I have promised to marry him? It is for my children's sake. Ned's father suddenly stopped the money he had been giving me, and demanded the children. If I had not done this thing, made them, myself, independent, he would have taken them from me. It is the truth I am telling you, Sammy—the truth. The children are more to me than life...."

Broxbourne answered her coolly; he was unmoved by her broken voice and her stained face.

"I have only been back a day or two, but from what I can gather," he said easily, "I believe you are now a fairly wealthy woman. I must say he has behaved extraordinarily well, but of course that was a little bit more of your cleverness. Anyhow, as you have just told me you have only promised to marry him because of the children, you see the man himself doesn't count. You've got the money, and he can't take that away from you—I don't suppose he would if he could—so all you've got to do is to slide out of things as quickly as you can. I'll give you a month to do it in," Broxbourne said magnanimously.

Camilla brushed her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief; she was utterly unable to answer him, and at that moment they heard the voice of Betty calling to them. The child was evidently running back to join them.

"Go on," said Camilla, hoarsely; "go on ... and meet ... her.... For God's sake, go ... don't let her come ... I ... I will follow...."

"I'll take her along with me to the stables," Broxbourne said, and he limped onwards with a smile, as Camilla turned, and half wildly, half blindly, walked sharply away from the house.

CHAPTER XIII

The year was speeding into spring. Easter had come and gone.

Down in the country, in the old-fashioned gardens that stretched at the back of Yelverton, the sun was busy bringing out the leaves, and even the blossoms, almost visibly.

The children had found a delightfully warm, sheltered spot, and here they sat with Caroline basking in the sunshine, protected from the chilliness of the spring wind by the tall, sunburnt wall on which spread pear trees and peach trees, the pink flowers and the white flowers mingling together where the long arms of the branches met and touched.

Betty was supposed to be having lessons, but she was not a very diligent pupil; not that any one urged her to learn.

Mrs. Brenton's theory was that children should run wild till they were seven or eight, provided they were properly influenced, and it was really Agnes Brenton who superintended with Caroline the care of the children now.

Mrs. Lancing had gone back to town just before Easter rather hurriedly, and she had not taken the children with her.

Her plans had been changed. Instead of staying in London she went to the south of England on a visit. From there she wrote announcing that she had felt impelled to postpone the marriage.

"I don't quite know what is wrong, but my heart is playing me tricks, and I really want to feel much better before I rush into my new responsibilities.... I have a sort of idea the Devonshire air will do me no end of good."

The children rejoiced openly when they found they were not going away from Yelverton.

Rupert Haverford came frequently down to see them all. His manner with Caroline always amused her. He seemed to regard it as a duty that he should put her through a sort of cross-examination.

"I wish you would understand," she said to him, half impatiently, once, "that I really and truly want to be with the children. What should I do with myself if I went away from them?"

"You might travel. You might study. Your income is not a very large one, but still it would give you the opportunity of coming in contact with a lot of things about which you know nothing now."

Caroline laughed at this.

"Well, that is true. I am woefully ignorant," she said. "It is rather impertinent of me to call myself a governess, but I am studying all the time. Mr. Brenton is educating me. I shall be quite learned in a little while."

"I only feel that it is my duty to put before you certain possibilities," Haverford said.

And Caroline answered—

"I am very much obliged to you, but I prefer the certainty that I have to all the possibilities in the world."

Then there had been a rather brisk passage of arms between them on the subject of Caroline's money.

"I wish you would not pretend things to me," the girl had said, when they had first discussed the matter. "I can't help feeling that this is all your doing, that you consider it your duty to make some provision for me; in fact," Caroline had added defiantly, "I don't believe my mother had anything to leave me." After a little pause she said, "And I assure you I don't care in the least to take money from other people, even from you, except, of course, when I earn it...."

She was astonished to see how cross he looked.

"Evidently," he said, "you have not read those old letters and papers I gave you."

And Caroline was obliged to confess she had not done so.

"I advise you," Haverford had remarked, "to acquaint yourself with your mother's story, then you will see I have invented nothing."

Caroline could be obstinate at times.

"Well," was all she had remarked in answer to this, "there may have been something; but I am convinced, Mr. Haverford, you are giving me more than I ought to have."

To this, a little stiffly, he said—

"If you are not satisfied with what has been arranged, you can instruct a lawyer to go into the matter. I will give you the address of a very good man."

And Caroline had frowned, and then smiled.

"You know perfectly well I am not grumbling at you. The idea is ridiculous!"

"Are you not?" he had queried, with a smile. "Well, it sounded uncommonly like it."

On the whole, however, they were on the best of terms, though they never progressed to intimacy.

April was well advanced when the children's mother arrived unexpectedly at Yelverton.

She had travelled up from Devonshire without pausing for rest in town, and declared that she was perfectly well; but Agnes Brenton was shocked at her appearance—shocked, too, and pained by the change in her manner.

That quiet, apathetic langour was gone; Camilla was all jerks and nerves. She seemed strung up to the highest pitch of excitement. She talked incessantly, and smoked nearly all the time. This was a new habit.

It appeared she had not come to stay at Yelverton. She was due at Lea Abbey.

"I want to leave Dennis here," she said to Mrs. Brenton. "She is seedy, poor soul, and I told her she had better take a holiday. I can manage without her for a day or two."

They strolled out-of-doors to join the children. Caroline was dreaming.

It was so delicious out in the garden, sitting looking at the country that stretched away in the distance, veiled in that tender, velvety bloom which is the first embrace of spring; so delicious to hear the irresistible and varied notes of the thrush from the boughs of the old apple tree, chanting to the buzz of the bees humming in and out of the adjacent currant bushes.

The children were playing about her. Baby was picking flowers; every now and then she would over-balance herself and topple over, and then would sit solemnly contemplating the earth with a resigned expression till Betty came and pulled her up. Her treasures were always brought and laid on Caroline's lap.

The girl closed her eyes for a moment, and when she opened them it seemed as if a fresh bunch of snowy pear blossom on the wall beside her had been whispered into life. Beyond in the paddock little lambs were bleating.

Betty had made a great discovery that morning. The robin's eggs in the nest hidden so cunningly (just at the entrance into the fruit gardens) had vanished, and in their place some little feathered morsels, with wide-open beaks and glittering eyes, were treasured in the warm, dark depths. Life was full of indescribable delights.

The coming of Camilla was like the falling of a curtain. The time for dreams was ended; the quiet garden seemed to quiver with another kind of life.

She spent the few hours she was at Yelverton with the children. They carried her everywhere —through the rough meadows, over the marshes to the woods that were carpeted with primroses, with here and there a patch of wild violets, and anon a streak of budding bluebells. A great weight seemed to have gathered about Caroline's heart. For the first time she lagged as she walked, and quite forgot to look for plovers' eggs. Once, as they paused to listen to a lark piping out its soul in the clear sky, and then watched it drop to earth, Camilla pinched the arm she held.

"Naughty Caroline," she said; "you are not a bit glad to see me!"

Caroline's eyes filled with tears.

"I am not a bit glad to see you looking as you look now," she answered.

"How do I look?"

"Ill and ... miserable...."

Camilla laughed.

"Ill and miserable, my *dear* child; do you know what you are saying?... I may be a bit seedy—I don't deny that—but how can I be miserable when I have everything in the world to make me happy?"

"I don't know why you should be. I only know you are," Caroline said, in her quiet way. They had to carry Baby across the dykes; the exertion brought the colour flashing into her mother's cheeks for awhile.

"I shall get you a donkey to ride, Boodles," she said, as they turned homewards, their arms full, and their hats wreathed with the wood flowers. "You are such a lot too heavy to carry. That reminds me, Betty," Camilla added, "you are going to have a dog, a real beauty. Sammy is sending it to you."

"I don't want it, thank you very much," said Betty, in her clear treble. "Rupert's going to gived me a dog. I don't like Sammy." A little pause, then the child said thoughtfully, "I'm glad I'm not a dog, mummy—special Sammy's dog—because I've not gotten to eat my din-din out of his plate. And he can't kick me. I've saw him kick his horse in the stable that day he was throwed. I think he's a horrid man."

Camilla had turned white.

"You only care for the things Rupert gives you," she said, in a strangled voice; then, "Oh dear, how tired I am, and there is a dance-to-night! Why *did* I walk so far?"

Indeed, she was a long time getting back to the gardens, and when they were reached, she asked that the carriage might be made ready at once to take her over to Lea Abbey.

"When do you want us to go to London?" Caroline asked her as they went indoors together.

"Next week.... I don't know.... I will write. It seems a sin to take the chicks away from here. How well they look!"

A little later, when she was getting into the carriage, Mrs. Lancing drew the girl towards her.

"Don't let them forget me...." Her voice had an odd, dry sound. "Don't let them suppose I am forgetting because they do not see me. Children can forget so easily." She pressed Caroline's hand. "It is funny," she said, in an unsteady way. "I never left them before without yearning to be back the moment they were out of sight; but I leave them with you, almost happily, you funny little cross-patch Caroline."

Caroline looked at her. Once again there were tears in her eyes.

"Come back soon," she said. "Come back and let us make you well. We all want you."

Their hands unclasped, the door was shut, and the carriage rolled away.

At the bend of the drive Mrs. Lancing leaned forward and waved her hand out of the window.

Caroline stood a minute or two and watched the carriage roll out of sight. The air was fragrant with the scent of spring, laden with the whispers of a thousand unseen blossoms.

From where she stood she could see nothing save the lawn and the mass of newly garmented trees. Only a little while before it had been easy to see the entrance gate; now all was blocked out by that fresh shutter of golden-green foliage.

Turning at last, she walked slowly through the hall. Mr. Brenton had discarded his usual

corner, and had taken his books out into the sunshine. She could hear the children laughing and singing beyond. Their mother had given each a little parcel as she had gone away. It seemed to Caroline as if she had shirked taking farewell of them.

The girl was glad to be alone for a little while.

Dennis was with the children. Mrs. Brenton had vanished.

Caroline walked to and fro slowly in the afternoon sunshine. She wore no hat, but her head was well protected from any chilly breeze by the splendid thickness of her hair.

A curious longing possessed her in this moment to follow Camilla, and urge her to come back to Yelverton. She could not quite understand the reason for this protracted separation.

"There seems to be something more, something new," she said to herself. By that she meant that there was something more than that lack of sympathy with the man she had promised to marry that was actuating Mrs. Lancing in all her movements now.

"What is the use of my being happy?" Caroline asked herself suddenly, "if I cannot assure happiness to others?—to these two in particular?" And half impatiently she asked herself, "Why is she so obstinate? Why cannot she see that the longer she stands alone the farther she must be away from all that she needs? Surely she ought to trust him. I can't understand why she should doubt or hesitate for an instant."

The children came running up to her to show her their latest possessions, and then she had to greet Dennis, who seemed to be delighted to be where she was.

"It's a real joy to be here, miss," she said to Caroline; "but didn't I tell you what it was going to be when you first came? Just look at them two little angels! They ain't the same children; I declare they ain't."

"I'm sorry to hear you have not been very well, Dennis," Caroline remarked, as she collected the children and their toys and took them towards the house, for, as the sun began to drop, the air was cold.

"Me ill?" said Dennis, in surprise. "Why, there's nothing the matter with me! Who said I was ill?"

"Oh, I had a sort of idea you were not well," said Caroline. "Now, come along, chicks; we'll go upstairs and have a lovely game."

"And Dennis shall tell us a story," said Betty, to whom the last comer was always the most welcome.

Caroline walked behind the others laden with their treasures; and the stairs seemed long, and her limbs were strangely tired this day. There was, too, a curious ache when her heart beat.

The bath-time was over, and two little people were tucked up in bed when Mrs. Brenton beckoned Caroline out of the room.

"I hope you won't mind if we leave you this evening, but there is that concert and entertainment in the village. You said you did not care to go to it, but I think we must go. We always have supported the vicar, and he would never forgive if we did not turn up. Will you change your mind and come?"

Caroline shook her head.

"As a matter of fact, I have a good deal of work to do for Mr. Brenton. I have not translated my last lesson. The children are so pleased to have Dennis that she is going to sit with them."

"You will dine at the same hour," said Mrs. Brenton, and with a smile she passed on.

It was a significant fact she said nothing about Camilla.

Caroline went into her sitting-room, brought out pen and ink and foolscap, dictionaries and Latin grammar; but when she sat down to work, her usual pleasure and eagerness had flown.

She could hear Dennis whispering in the next room and one or the other child putting a pertinent remark in a very unsleepy voice; but she knew them well now. By the time she had changed her dress and had gone downstairs, both little voices would be hushed in sleep.

Camilla's few words to her just as they parted haunted her, but instead of that glow of satisfaction which would surely have come had they been spoken under other circumstances, they brought a renewed touch of heartache.

After a while she put away her books and writing.

"Assuredly," she said to herself, "love goes hand-in-hand with sorrow. When I had no one to

love, nothing to care for, nobody to make me anxious, I never had tears in my eyes as I have them now. If only tears would do some good! But how *can* I help her? what can I do? I have the sort of feeling that I ought to do something, but what—what?"

She was still standing by the window, looking at the beautiful evening sky, when a maid came into the room softly.

"If you please, miss," she said, "would you come downstairs and see Mr. Haverford? He says he would like to speak to you."

Caroline whipped round from the window.

"Mr. Haverford! He was not expected, and both Mr. and Mrs. Brenton are out."

"Yes, miss, I told him so; but he said he wanted to see you. He hasn't got any luggage; I don't think he means to stay. He's come in his motor, miss."

Caroline paused only an instant. Her brows had met with a frown—a sign that she was moved and nervous.

"Please say I will be down directly."

She went towards her bedroom with the intention of changing her dress, and then she checked herself.

Stealing into the children's room, she whispered to Dennis that she was going downstairs. The maid nodded her head; the children were quite quiet, and Dennis herself looked half asleep.

As she went slowly down the broad staircase Caroline saw him. He was standing in front of the fire in the hall warming his hands.

"Both Mr. and Mrs. Brenton are out—a rare occurrence," she said; "but it is a village festival...."

She gave him her hand, and as he took it she coloured very faintly.

"Yes, so I hear. I am rather glad to see you alone." His tone was terse. As Caroline moved forward to the fire he said, "I have come down to ask for news of Camilla. Can you give me any?"

The girl looked at him for an instant.

"She was here to-day," she said.

"Here?... What time?"

"She came in the morning. I understand she had travelled straight through from Devonshire, only changing stations in town."

He caught his breath in a way that was very like a sigh, and sat down, half shutting his eyes.

"Then she wished to avoid me," he said. "Where has she gone?"

When Caroline told him, he just nodded his head and said—

"Yes...." He paused a moment, and then he said, "I am very troubled about her, Caroline." Indeed, his voice sounded very heavy with trouble.

Caroline waited for him to go on.

"She seems to be slipping out of my hands," said Haverford; "try as I will, I cannot satisfy her, or keep pace with her. I assure you these last few weeks I have been like a creature on wires. I have not known from one moment to the next what she wished me to do. Perhaps I am too exacting. I don't know. I only know that I am wretched, that I cannot sleep for thinking about her; thinking, not in a selfish fashion, ... I give you my word it is not that, but troubling about her...." He sat forward, and stared into the fire. "The last time we were together we quarrelled rather badly," he said then.

Still Caroline said nothing.

There was nothing to say. It was a moment in which silence was more helpful than words.

"We quarrelled about Cuthbert," the man said, rising, and standing by the fireplace. "She has been sitting to him for her portrait. That I don't object to; but what I do object to most emphatically—what seems so wrong, so unmanly on his part, so weak, so foolish on hers—is the fact that he has been getting money out of her. I taxed him with it.... He could not deny it. And when I brought the matter to her, and insisted on giving her back the money, she said very bitter things to me."

He drew in his breath sharply; then, as if to himself, he said—

"What is there, who is there, that can help me to give this woman happiness? I hoped I was going to do it, but I have failed, failed right through!"

"How do you know that you have failed?" asked Caroline, speaking for the first time. "She is not an easy person to deal with, yet it is just her very elusiveness which gives her her hold on us. And I know one thing. I can affirm this, that if there is a creature on this earth whom she honestly respects and values, you are that person."

"Respect!" said Haverford. The fire-glow lit up his face, and she saw that he was smiling faintly. He was silent for a time, and then he said—

"I don't regard the question of Cuthbert as a serious one, notwithstanding that she has taken this peculiar attitude, ranging herself with him against me, and declaring my resolution to let him work up to fortune and fame as a cruel, an almost unnatural, thing; there are other points far more serious, unfortunately, which make the situation so difficult just now. I have repeatedly asked her not to go to Lea Abbey, yet, you see, she has gone there. And I have felt myself compelled to absolutely forbid her to have any sort of intercourse with Sir Samuel Broxbourne. To-day I learned quite by chance that he has been staying in Devonshire the greater part of the time she has been there. The man is her shadow. Wherever she goes he appears, and when we meet there is a look about him as though he would pick a quarrel with me."

Then Haverford pulled himself up suddenly.

"I really beg your pardon," he said. "I am pouring out my troubles just like an old woman. How pleasant it is here," he added abruptly, "so quiet, and cosy, and home-like." He paused again, then he asked hurriedly. "How was she looking?"

"Ill," Caroline answered, and added, "very ill!"

Then her eyes flashed. "Why don't you assert yourself? Why don't you insist on getting married? She belongs to you. When once she is your wife, all this nonsense will end. I think you are as much to blame as she is. After all, she has promised you; you ought to exact the fulfilment of her promise."

He turned and looked at her.

"That is how you spoke the first night you came to my house," he said, and his tone had a faint touch of amusement in it. "You are a little bit of a mystery, Caroline. How any one so sharp and impatient as you are can handle children as you do is a marvel."

Caroline was trembling with nervousness, and with a strange sick sensation of pain, but she laughed.

"Oh! I don't believe in fussing," she said; "if I had only had a little bit more spirit when I was with your mother, it would have been a better thing for me." She moved away from him, and then she came back to him, and looked straight into his face. "Do you know what you ought to do? You ought to go over now to Lea Abbey, and bring her back here. You ought to keep her here, and marry her down here. If you want a witness, I'll be one."

"I cannot do that to-night," said Haverford. "I have brought nothing with me, and I really must go back to town."

She understood him. It was not the first time she had realized how supremely delicate was his attitude towards Camilla. To follow her now might be to suggest to Camilla a desire to know what she was doing; to demonstrate to others his right to do this.

For all this thought and tact Caroline gave him keenest appreciation; at the same time she felt in her impatient way that it was the moment for action.

"Suppose I take the children to town to-morrow? I know she will come if I let her suppose she is wanted," she suggested.

"But they are so happy here, and so well."

"Oh!" said Caroline, almost sharply, "we are not considering the children now; they don't count. And besides, they can always come back here."

She sat down on the broad fender stool, and pondered a moment staring into the fire.

"Really and truly I believe if you pull her up sharply, let her know you are tired of being played with, all will go well. Mrs. Lancing is a bundle of nerves—she has had so much to try her, that she is really not able at this moment of taking matters into her own hands. I think it is so natural that she should be doubtful and nervous," said Caroline; "but one thing is sure, that the longer she delays, the more difficult it will seem to her to take any definite step. She wants some one else to show her the way. That is your duty."

She looked up at him; and Haverford smiled as he looked down at her.

"Practical little person," he said; "you would have made a splendid man, Caroline."

"I mean to be a working woman," the girl answered, "and that can be just as good as being a man."

Haverford did not answer her. He stood looking into the fire for a long time in silence.

"I wish I could feel that all would work out as you say," he said, rousing himself at last; "but ——" Then he said, "I know she is ill; she seems to me to be on the eve of a nervous breakdown, but any remedy I suggest seems to have no healing power for her. You cannot think how I brood over her! She is so dear to me. The first living creature that has belonged to me since I was a boy. Mrs. Brenton gave me very much the same advice as yours," he said next. "The last time I was here, she urged me strongly to take Camilla abroad at once. I have pleaded with her a dozen times to do this: in vain!"

From a long, pregnant silence he roused himself.

"Sometimes I ask myself if she would not be happier without me."

"No!" said Caroline, sharply. "What ... what an absurd idea!" Then she turned on him again. "Oh! I wish I were in your place! I would not talk, or think, or sit down and worry. I would simply say I am going to have such and such a thing done, and I would see that it *was* done!"

She was trembling so much she had to get up and move away from him, and was thankful that the lights had not been lit in the hall, and that it was too dark for him to see her face distinctly.

A moment later she said—

"You would like dinner as soon as we can have it, I suppose?"

This roused him.

"Oh, thank you very much, but I want to get back! I will have some supper in town. I have a morning full of engagements to-morrow." He went to slip on his big motoring coat again. "Don't let Mrs. Brenton imagine all sorts of things because I ran down in this hurried way."

"Of course not," said Caroline.

He held her hand, and pressed it warmly.

"Thank you so much," he said, "you have cheered me up a great deal. A man is always a clumsy creature in these sort of things, and I am quite sure that everything that is happening is my own fault. Good-bye."

"We shall meet soon," said Caroline, as steadily as she could. "I shall telegraph to Mrs. Lancing in the morning, and tell her I find it necessary to take the children to town. I shall invent a great many things for her to do. I dare say she will find me very tiresome; but I must risk that."

He laughed and released her hand, and then he moved back again and looked at her in his characteristically keen way.

"I have not asked you how you are yourself?" he said.

"It is such an unnecessary question," retorted Caroline, "when you see that I am in robust health."

"Are you? I thought you were looking anything but robust as you came downstairs."

"Now please," said Caroline, "don't begin to go through the usual catechism!"

"I won't," he answered, "except I want to know—have you got the maid you were going to have?"

"All the servants in this house wait upon me and the nursery," said Caroline. "I have only to command and I have what I want. Will that satisfy you?" But he still paused.

"If I could only get her abroad," he said, with a thrill of eagerness in his voice, "I should keep her there, and then send for you and the children. A month or two in Switzerland, and then through Italy by easy stages. Doesn't it sound delightful? Well! Good-bye once more, and I think I shall take your advice." He laughed almost cheerily. "If I could only manage to elope with Camilla without her knowledge or consent, how she would enjoy it."

Caroline clapped her hands.

"At last," she said, "you are beginning to see your road."

He would not let her go outside, nor would he let her summon the butler. He passed out and shut the door behind him, and for a moment Caroline leaned against that door, and shut her eyes

whilst she fought down the wild tumult of passion and heart suffering that rushed upon her.

There was a humiliation, too, in the suffering, a proud shame that she should confess even to herself, that this man who had just gone from her was so capable of moving her, that the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice, meant joy, in its most exquisite meaning, and that as he passed away from her, taking with him the spell of his presence, the light and the warmth of life itself went with him. And still a very lifetime of self-condemnation would not alter what had come. Love to some natures is borne as lightly, has as little value as a thistledown floating on the wind; it has the sparkle of a new jewel, the passing radiance of a summer day, to fade with the setting sun, and to come again when another day is born. But with other natures love comes but once, and comes to stay; pain, sorrow, age, separation, even death itself, have no power to dispossess such a love of its dwelling-place in natures such as these.

And it was in this fashion that love had come by stealth as it were into the heart of Caroline Graniger.

CHAPTER XIV

To sit and eat dinner alone in the large dining-room was beyond Caroline this evening. She went upstairs resolutely determining to work again, but she had reckoned without Dennis.

The maid was ripe for a good long chat. She insisted, too, on bringing up some dinner and waiting on Caroline.

Dennis found the girl looking very tired and depressed. But when she pressed this point Miss Graniger promptly declared that she had never felt better in her life.

"Tell me all that you have been doing, Dennis," she said.

Really it was a rest for her to sit and say nothing, a rest not to vex her brain with futile questioning for a while.

It amused her to hear the maid's views of things in general. Dennis's admiration for a beautiful country largely depended on how the servants were lodged and cared for in any particular house.

"This ere's a kind of paradise," she said; "down with them rich folk in Devonshire we was that crowded we didn't know how to turn round. Some of them slept in huts, but I was a bit better off than most, because Miss Camilla wanted me with her most all the time. What do you think of her, miss?" Dennis asked abruptly, "don't you find her looking simply awful? She's that shaky, I do declare, at times I can hardly get her into a frock, and for all she swears it isn't so; I'm certain sure she's got something worritin' her."

Dennis was silent a moment, then she went on: "I wouldn't say it to a soul but you, but I can't help thinking as it's that fellow Broxbourne's as is vexing her."

Caroline sat with her elbow on the table, her face shadowed by her hand.

"But isn't that rather ridiculous, Dennis?" she asked. "Why should Sir Samuel vex her?"

"Ah! my dear," said Dennis, "that's a question I'd like to answer. I wish to the Lord she'd marry and settle down; for there's no getting away from the fact that Sir Samuel's been buzzing about her ever so much of late, and it does her no sort of good." A note of exasperation came here into Dennis's voice. "Just to think of all she's got now, all what's been done for her. How she's been took out of all her difficulties, and stands on her own feet! Didn't she ought to be lively and well? I can't make it out! Why don't they marry, miss?"

"Oh, I think they will now very shortly," Caroline said. "Now, run down and have your own supper, Dennis ... it is getting late."

When the maid had gone, Caroline sat in the same attitude. She was not thinking of what Dennis had just told her, she was thinking of that deep, tender note in Haverford's voice when he had been speaking of Camilla. How he loved her! The one creature who had brought to him all that had been lacking in his life till now! How many years he must have hungered for such love. Surely now that it had come it would have its real value! Surely a love such as his could not be born only to be wasted!

"She is so dear to me," the words haunted Caroline, and when her mind jerked back and she recalled the earlier hours of this day, and the veritable anguish which she had experienced when she had looked at Camilla's changed, almost worn face, her eagerness to stand and to help him, to put an end to this indecision, this dangerous and futile waiting, seemed to burn in her veins,

and quicken the beat of her heart.

"I will certainly go to London to-morrow," she said; "I feel almost inclined to pretend that I am overtaxed, that the children try me, that I want attention. She is always urging me to let her know if that should happen, and that is where she is so sweet, everything else stands on one side when she thinks there is a claim on her."

Here a sound from the nursery drew Caroline into the children's room.

It was only Baby talking in her sleep, but she sat down a little while, and in the tranquillity of the children's room some tranquillity fell on her own nerves too.

"At least I have one great joy," she said to herself as she sat there; "they all trust me. She could not give me greater proof of this than in the words she spoke to me about these dear little souls to-day."

Just then she heard some one moving in the other room, and rising, she went softly to the door. It was the maid who usually waited on her.

"I have brought you a letter, miss. It's just come. Sent over from Lea Abbey."

"Thank you," said Caroline.

She waited until the maid had made up the fire and gone out of the room, and then when she was alone she still waited.

It was very ridiculous of her, but she felt suddenly frightened.

There was nothing unusual in Camilla sending a letter at this hour. Her letters and messages arrived at any time.

"What *is* the matter with me?" asked Caroline of herself impatiently. "I am all upside down to-day!" And then she opened the letter.

It was written in pencil; written in haste.

"I did intend not to have sent a word to any of you, but just as I am starting for London I feel I must scribble a message to you, dear little Caroline. Ask Agnes to forgive me. The fact is I cannot bring myself to write to her, and you—you little bit of a thing as you are, draw me as I have never been drawn before. I am taking a big step to-night, Caroline. It is ridiculous to suppose that you will any of you regard what I am doing as anything but madness, but I cannot help myself. Everything forces me away from what you all think the best for me; but then, you see, you none of you have known just exactly what has been passing with me. I had a great temptation to open my heart to you when we were together out on the marshes to-day, but I could not do it. Remember what I told you about the children. They won't see me for some little while, but as soon as possible they will come to me, and you, too ... if you *will* come. Tell Agnes I will write to her in a day or two, and that I am always hers lovingly, that is if she cares any longer for my love."

The initials "C. L." were scribbled under this.

Caroline put down the letter, and stood staring ahead of her, seeing nothing.

At first the full significance of what Camilla had written did not come to her. She was only conscious of that almost hopeless feeling of irresistance, of surrender to emotion, which any acutely pathetic element produces.

But this dazed, only half-conscious sensation, passed from her quickly, and then her mind began to act nervously, feverishly. She spun threads together, and with hideous clearness she remembered now the words Dennis had spoken only just a little while before.

She took up the letter again, and she read it this time deliberately.

"She is gone to London," she said to herself; "that means that she will sleep there—that she will not leave till to-morrow, wherever she is going. It has all been planned out. She got rid of Dennis because Dennis might have asked questions. Lea Abbey was only one of the details, and now she is in London. Well, I shall go there, too!"

She crumpled the letter, and went quickly into the corridor. The nursery-maid was in a room a little further along.

"Please stay with the children," said Caroline; "I am going downstairs."

She ran down to the hall, and sought and found a railway guide. All at once she remembered that a guest who had once been summoned away very hurriedly from Yelverton at night had caught a train at some junction a little distance away. By so doing he had reached London at a very early hour.

Caroline decided to follow his course. The express paused at Swaile Junction somewhere before four o'clock, but she would start off now.

To have to sit there and wait till the Brentons came back, and to go into explanations was utterly beyond her. Besides, she felt half afraid that Mrs. Brenton might try to dissuade her from going, and Caroline could not endure that. It was not only the woman who called to her, it was the man who loved this woman—the man whom she loved herself—who seemed to clamour to her to stand between Camilla and what she intended to do.

She scribbled an explanation to Agnes Brenton, and slipped Camilla's letter inside.

"It may be only a chance," she wrote; "but I cannot help feeling that I shall find her in London. She will never dream that one of us would follow her, and if human hands can drag her back from this miserable mistake, I want mine to be the hands to do it."

She intended to keep Dennis in ignorance of her going, but she took one of the other maids into her confidence.

"Don't let there be any fuss," she said, "but I must get up to London as quickly as I can. I am sorry not to wait for Mrs. Brenton, but you will give her that letter. Can you manage to keep Dennis downstairs while I run up and slip on my hat and coat?"

"Yes, miss, of course. But where are you going from, there's no trains now, miss?"

"There is a train that stops at Swaile Junction somewhere between three and four, I am going to catch that."

"Swaile," said the maid; "but that's miles away, miss. How will you go?"

"Quite easily," said Caroline. "I am going to walk."

"But you'll never do it, miss. It's much too far."

"Don't talk rubbish," said Caroline, quickly. "I can walk ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, or even thirty miles, if needs be. Walking does not hurt me."

As she ran down again she glanced at the clock. It was a quarter to eleven. There was ample time, although she would have to keep to the roads, because she did not know any short cut. The idea that she should be frightened amused her in a way.

"If anybody hits me, I shall hit back," she said to herself, as she gripped her umbrella and started forth.

It was not a dark night, though there was no moon.

At first the mere physical satisfaction of moving, of walking swiftly, carried Caroline along pleasurably. The fresh, sweet cold in the air was like an embrace.

She skirted the village, and ventured across one field which she knew would cut off a considerable corner. This field was studded with sheep and lambs.

The foolish creatures got up with a jerk, and ran away, complaining and fearful, as she passed swiftly beside them. In the faint, misty light the lambs looked prettier than ever.

Once on the high-road Caroline pushed on vigorously, but by degrees that unconscious sense of exhilaration which had possessed her when she had first started fell away, and she felt heart-weary and indescribably sad as she realized the purport of this solitary excursion.

How far she walked she never knew, but her feet were getting stiff and tired when at last she saw the lights of the junction in the distance. Nevertheless, she could not rest when she was in the station. She spent the time waiting for the train to come in restlessly pacing the platform.

It was about half-past six when she reached London, and put herself into a cab. The horse seemed as tired as herself, and the journey from the station interminable, but at last she had alighted at the familiar little house.

Her heart was in her throat as she rang the bell.

"Perhaps I shall have to wait a little while," she said to herself. "They never get up very early."

But, strangely enough, the door was opened to her almost immediately by the cook, whose face lit up when she saw Caroline.

"Oh, miss, I am glad to see you!" she said. "I've had such a start. He's upstairs in the drawing-room. If you'll believe me, he's been here since a quarter to six. Wouldn't be said no! But how tired you look, miss! Come in and sit down."

Caroline could not get her voice for a moment. Vaguely she remarked a strapped

portmanteau standing on one of the chairs. Then she asked—

"Mrs. Lancing, is she here?"

The servant shook her head.

"No, miss, she's not here. That's what I've been telling Sir Samuel. He won't believe me. He says she's coming."

"Not here?" said Caroline.

She stepped back, and rested against the hall wall. All her strength went from her for a moment, but she rallied herself quickly, and turned into the dining-room.

"Who did you say was upstairs?" she asked.

"Sir Samuel, miss. Come here at a quarter to six, as I told you. Said as the mistress had fixed him to come. There's only me and Annie sleeping here. He rang the bell like mad; hardly gave me time to put my clothes on. Of course, the missus isn't here; she ain't expected, leastways, not by us. Did you come to meet her?"

"Yes," said Caroline; but her tone was weary, and she closed her eyes.

"Well, I've no news of her, miss. Most like she's coming. She don't always give us notice. But there, I'll go and get you a cup of tea."

At that very moment they heard the stamp of a heavy foot, and the drawing-room door was opened with a jerk.

"Now he's coming to swear at me again!"

Caroline got up, stood a moment with her eyes shut, then opened them with a jerk, and walked out of the room straight up the stairs. She took off her hat as she went. Sir Samuel Broxbourne was standing on the top stair; he frowned as he saw her. He was dressed as for travelling, in a rough tweed suit.

It was the girl who spoke first.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. "By what right do you come to the house at this time? Will you please be so good as to go at once?"

He stared at her, and, as she advanced, he moved mechanically on one side and let her pass, but he followed her into the drawing-room.

"I am here by appointment," he said; his tone was sullen, his manner rude. "Mrs. Lancing desires to see me."

"No person would give you an appointment for six o'clock in the morning," said Caroline.

"Ordinary people might not," he answered with a smile that was a sneer, "but this is not an ordinary house."

Caroline walked into the dismantled drawing-room.

"As Mrs. Lancing is not here," she said, "it is undesirable that you should remain."

"I shall go when I choose," was Broxbourne's answer.

Caroline shrugged her shoulders, and turned at once to leave the room, but he stood in the way.

"No," he said, "since you give orders you must know what is going on here. If Mrs. Lancing is not here, why are you here?"

"I recognize no right on your part to question me," said Caroline.

She was swayed about by the most extraordinary feelings, prominent amongst which was a sense of acute relief that almost amounted to joy. Whatever Camilla had done, wherever she was, this man at least was not with her. It was impossible for Caroline to try and piece out what probable step the other woman had taken, but at least the degradation of close association with this man was not part of her movements.

Sir Samuel eyed her with suspicion, and yet her quietness, her tired pale face, and that wonderful dignity which sat upon her so naturally, impressed him.

"I don't want to question you," he said surlily, "I only want to see her."

"She is not here," said Caroline.

"Then, where is she? You think I'm lying when I tell you that I came here by appointment; but I tell you that she fixed the hour herself. If you don't believe me, here's her note."

He held out a crumpled piece of paper. Caroline put it on one side, but she could not help seeing the writing, and she knew it only too well.

"If Mrs. Lancing has told you to come here to meet her, then I can say no more."

She moved away to the door, and once again he stood on one side and let her pass.

At that moment they heard the sound of a cab approaching in the street; it pulled up; a moment later the bell rang.

Some colour flickered into Caroline's face. She put out her hand and rested it against the door, and with that support she passed on to the landing, holding her breath to catch the first sound of the pretty voice she knew so well.

"Will she be angry with me? How will she look? What will she say?"

Thought chased thought through her brain wildly. The door was opened, but no one entered. There was a buzzing in her ears; she could not catch what passed. But as she stood there, trembling now in every limb, the cook ran up the stairs with a letter.

"For Sir Samuel, miss," she said.

Broxbourne was just behind, and he snatched the letter out of the woman's hand.

"Won't you come down, miss?" said the servant, in a hurried way. "Do come. I've made some tea for you."

But Caroline looked backwards at that moment. She had caught the sound of a muttered exclamation. She hardly knew what prompted her to send the woman away, but she did so, and she turned and went back into the drawing-room, shutting the door behind her.

Broxbourne was standing biting his moustache. His red face had turned white. He looked ugly and alarming.

"You have news from Mrs. Lancing?" Caroline said.

He looked at her, but made no answer.

The tension of her nerves gave. Caroline groped her way to a chair, sat down, and hid her face in her hands for an instant; then she looked up.

"I *entreat* you to tell me what has happened," she said brokenly. "I care for her so much. I came here because I care so much ... because I thought I could help her." Her voice was husky. "I only heard from her late last night, but I had to come, and I prayed I might not be too late. Where is——"

Broxbourne looked at her as her words died away.

"Take my word for it, she isn't worth fretting over. She can take care of herself."

There was an indescribable amount of bitterness in his voice. Something about Caroline's look had checked his rage.

"She's all right," he said roughly.

"Yes, but where is she?"

Sir Samuel laughed, and then he scowled.

"You say you heard from her, so I suppose you know all there is to know."

Caroline brushed back her hair from her tired aching brow.

"I know only this much—that she contemplated something rash and foolish.... She told me nothing, but I fancied I should find her here. That was why I came.... I wanted so much to be with her."

"You mean you've just come up from Yelverton; but how did you manage that?"

She told him, and he frowned almost unbelievingly; then he said, in that surly, bitter way—

"Well, I tell you she isn't worth it. She wouldn't care if you broke yourself up into little bits to help her. She——" There was a hard, ugly word on his lips. He stifled it, but not easily; then he said, "Mrs. Lancing is married. In this note she informs me she was married yesterday morning early to Cuthbert Baynhurst."

Caroline cried out sharply.

"It isn't true!... Oh, it isn't true!"

"I think you'll find it is," said Broxbourne shortly.

He avoided looking at Caroline. He was not over sensitive, but something about this girl made him uncomfortable.

"And if you want to know why she has done this, I am the person to tell you. She wanted to show me that she's a bit cleverer than I took her to be, and, by God! she's about done it! She's tricked me fairly; but if she thinks it ends at this she'll live to know her mistake. No one scores off me more than once in their life."

His blustering return to anger made no effect on the girl sitting rigidly in the chair.

"It can't be true," she was saying to herself wildly, over and over again. "It can't be true!"

A timid knock sounded at the door. It was the cook with a cup of tea. Sir Samuel took the tea and sent the woman away. She went unwillingly.

"I advise you to drink this," he said, advancing awkwardly enough.

But Caroline refused the tea, whilst thanking him.

"Why should you care so much?" asked Broxbourne; in that sullen way. "She's tricked you as well as me, and everybody else. I tell you, you don't know her. She's the sort of woman who looks like an angel, and has no more heart or conscience than—than my boot has. She's clever, though; I'll give her that much. By Gad! to think she should have had me like this! But if she thinks she's settled with me, she's a lot out. I wish her joy of Mr. Baynhurst. They're a good match. After sponging all he knew on the other chap, he walks off with the woman and the money. Well, I'll take pretty good care the beautiful Camilla don't show her face here again very soon. She may trick me; but she isn't out of the wood, for all that." He was getting excited now. "If I've held my tongue all this while, there's nothing to prevent my speakin' now.... And I think it's on the cards that our dear friends may have their honeymoon excursion brought to an end a little sooner than they expect. Forgery is a nasty offence, Miss Graniger.... It means seven years."

Caroline looked at him with strained, incredulous, and miserable eyes.

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"I mean that your dear friend Camilla is nothing better than a common thief; that she robbed me of four hundred pounds a year and a half ago."

Caroline's lips turned white.

"I will not believe you," she said; but the man hardly heard her.

He was wound up; the whole venom of his wrath was let loose. Stamping to and fro, he laid bare the history of the last few weeks; coarsely, brutally he told the truth, ending with the part that had brought him to the house this morning.

Caroline's very soul went out in an agony of pity for the woman who had been tortured by this man. If only she had known! If only Camilla had turned for help to her!

Once started, Broxbourne seemed to have no end to his vituperation.

"She thinks I'll never do it, but she might know me a little bit better. I'll soon show her! I tell you straight, when I leave this house I go to my lawyer, and give him orders to start proceedings right away."

Caroline got up; her hat, her gloves rolled to the ground. She was breathing hardly. Scarcely realizing what she was doing, she moved awkwardly, almost stiffly, to the door and stood against it. Her movement, her attitude drew his attention; he turned and looked at her. His face was swollen now with the force of his increasing rage. He was almost shouting out his words. As he paused, his chest heaved as though he had just been through some violent exertion.

Caroline looked at him steadily.

"Please do not make so much noise; the servants will think you are killing me, and—and I have done nothing to deserve that."

Broxbourne frowned, stood for a moment looking at her in an uncertain way, and then sat down heavily.

"I beg your pardon," he said. He wiped his brow. "I'll do it," he said, hardly conscious that he was speaking. "A little prison life will teach her a lot of things she ought to know."

The girl standing at the door, shaking in every limb, could have cried aloud her passionate

abhorrence for him; but something stronger than anger and hate dominated her; it was fear. Strung up as he was, he was ripe for some quick and terrible revenge. Even now she could see his purpose was strengthening; in a few hours' time the world would be blazoned with this sorry, this miserable story. Camilla's pathetic face—Rupert—Agnes Brenton—the children limned themselves in turn before Caroline's eyes.

Though she would have given her life to have denied his accusation, she knew it was true. So much was explained now—so much—so much!

As Broxbourne made a move as if to get up, she commenced speaking indistinctly, half wildly.

"You have said a most terrible thing. You have accused this—my friend of a great crime, and you mean to have her punished. Why? Not for any honourable or upright reason, but because you are so angry with her that you are like a madman, and want to strike at her somehow, you don't care how. That seems to me to be very paltry."

Broxbourne wiped his brow again.

"Oh, indeed; I never asked for your opinion!" he said.

"I never asked you to go into a frenzy of rage," Caroline answered; "one good turn deserves another. If you try to frighten me out of my life, I am at liberty to tell you what I think of you; and what I think is not pleasant."

Sir Samuel sat down again, and looked at her steadily. She had a defiant—a picturesque air, standing against the door.

"I don't care what any one thinks," he said. "I'm the best judge of my own actions."

"Are you?" Caroline laughed. "Well, then, there must be something very wrong with you, even a schoolboy knows it is only a coward who hits a woman." She caught her breath. "I should not have taken you to be a coward, Sir Samuel."

He put his eyeglass into his eye, and looked at her again.

His anger began to subside. As he fixed Caroline with a steady gaze, he unconsciously settled his collar, and fingered his tie.

"You're an odd sort of girl. Always thought you couldn't say 'Boo' to a goose, and here you are going at me as if you were made of fire."

Caroline laughed, such a tired, miserable laugh.

"You have never spoken to me before," she said.

"No, by Jove! but I've wanted to, many a time. I'm sure I've looked at you hard enough. First time I saw you, that night you threw my glove back at me, do you remember? I took a fancy to you."

"Really!" said Caroline.

Her heart was quaking. She was horribly afraid of him, but this fear was as nothing compared to that withering, awful one of a few moments before. She moved away from the door, turning the handle, and pulling it open as she went.

"Yes, really; but you know it; every pretty woman knows her own power."

He made her change colour; she was very interesting.

He was not sure that her head was not prettier than Camilla's; and her eyes were glorious. His critical glance travelled over her body; the lines were perfect; she stood so well. When he arrived at her feet, and saw her mud-stained boots, he frowned.

"You're not only pretty, but you're a good sort, though you do call me a coward," he said jerkily. "I tell you what. I like grit, and you've got plenty of it. It isn't every woman, let me tell you, that would walk nine miles through the country in the dead of the night, just to stand by another woman! I didn't take it in at first, but, by Jove! I do now. I'll shake hands with you, Miss Graniger."

He got up. Caroline seemed to grow suddenly very small.

"I—I cannot shake hands with you, Sir Samuel," she said, hoping her voice would not desert her altogether.

"Why?"

"Because I am afraid of you."

"Afraid?" he laughed almost good-humouredly. "Oh, come, I won't believe that, I don't believe

you could be afraid of anything or anybody!"

Caroline looked at him, and looked away.

"You are very strong and fierce, and I think you can be cruel."

He laughed again.

"All granted; but I shan't hurt *you*. I give you my word I won't."

Caroline bit her lip.

"If you hurt Camilla, you will hurt me horribly."

He frowned sharply.

"That's another matter," he said.

"No, it is all one; I love her. I love her children." Caroline's voice broke.

"Don't cry," said Broxbourne, drawing a little nearer.

She shrank away from him, but not visibly. Her heart was beating in her throat.

The last remnant of anger had gone from his expression, his eyes were softer, his hands moved restlessly. Her white quivering face had more significance to him than mere prettiness in this moment. He had measured her will already in many an abortive attempt to attract her.

There had been an element of contempt in her indifference, in her cold rejection of his admiration, that had given her a lasting place in his thoughts. It gratified him strangely now to feel that he could move her, that he had beaten down that barrier of indifference. To a considerable degree, this surrender as it were to his power helped to reinstate him.

He was not likely to forget for many a day that he had been outwitted, made a fool of by a woman whom he imagined he had under his thumb, but there was more than a passing sensation of satisfaction and even pleasure in the realization that he could wring tears from such a girl as Caroline, that he had broken down such a proud spirit as hers.

He approached her a step nearer, but an interruption came to this little scene at this moment.

As Caroline had opened the door the cook, who had been hovering outside on the staircase (really nervous as to what was passing) made her appearance.

"Don't you think as you ought to have some breakfast, miss, and rest a bit? There'll be a message perhaps from Mrs. Lancing by-and-by."

Caroline picked up her hat and her gloves.

"Thank you, I will come," she said.

"Look here," said Broxbourne, following her quickly and scowling at the servant, "I'd like to say something more to you about this. When can I see you?"

She leaned against the doorway and rested with her eyes shut for half a moment, then she looked at him.

"I am going back to Yelverton now, directly."

He paused a moment, and then he said, in a dogged sort of way—

"Then I'll go to Yelverton, too. Now I'll take myself off."

As he passed her, Caroline put out her hand and caught his arm feebly.

"Sir Samuel, you will not——" words failed her.

There was a pompous air about him as he answered that broken sentence.

"I will do nothing till I have seen you again. Will that please you?"

She could only bend her head. As he went heavily down the stairs her eyes closed again.

Like a blind, broken-down creature, she turned into the drawing-room once more, and as she fell into a chair she lay there inert, too prostrate to move or even to think consciously for a little while at least.

CHAPTER XV

The dark green blind flapped lazily to and fro against the lower part of the open window, letting in occasional streaks of golden light, and stirring the delicate fronds of the fern that, with a pot of heliotrope and some bowls of flowers, stood on the table at the foot of the bed.

Caroline lay and watched for those fugitive glimpses of sunshine and sun-bathed trees.

It must be very lovely out in the garden, so she mused, dreamily; only it was such a long, long way to get there, and here it was so pleasantly restful, so calm, so conducive to dreams.

A great many birds had congregated on the big beech tree close to her windows; there was a swallow's nest just under the eaves of the roof, and a great twittering went on every now and then. Caroline could picture the cluster of yellow, wide-open beaks, and the industrious mother voyaging backwards and forwards, always with some toothsome morsel for one of those hungry mouths in her own beak.

"I think tiny swallows are very greedy," she said to herself, sleepily. "They are never satisfied."

And some one answered her—a small voice, from the floor, apparently.

"Caloline ... Caloline ... is you going to wake up.... Oh, *do* wake up, Caloline!"

The voice was plaintive almost to tears.

Caroline opened her eyes, paused, and then, with an effort, pushed herself forward, resting on her elbow.

"Is there somebody there?" she asked, in such a funny, wavering voice.

For answer a very hot and a very small hand came creeping over the white sheet like a little mouse.

"It's me ... Babsy.... They've sented me away all the time, nasty unkind peoples. But I crawled in, and I *do* want you, Caloline."

"Climb up," said Caroline, faintly.

It was a stupendous undertaking, entailing much slipping and dragging at the bed-clothes, but at last a small, hot, dishevelled little person had crawled close to the pillow and was kissing the white face lying there and cuddling a weak hand and arm as if it were a doll.

And then confidences followed.

"Betty's dog has comed; he's a awful duck, but she won't let me have nothing of him. Isn't she selfish?"

"I will give you a dog, sweetheart."

"A really one?"

"A real one."

"Nice, *dear* Caloline!"

The little soft face pressed close to the white one.

"But not a wool-fur dog?"

"No, a real one."

Baby lay and stared dreamily about the room.

"I'll give him jam," she said.

Caroline laughed.

"Fancy a real dog eating jam!"

"Fancy a real grown-up thing going to sleep for all the days."

"I am very sorry," said Caroline, humbly.

The door was pushed open here in the softest way possible, and a voice whispered cautiously from the aperture——

"Baby.... Baby...."

Baby giggled, and put her finger up in a warning fashion, but Betty was not deceived.

"I know you're here," she said, "and you didn't ought to come. You know what Aunty Brenny said. You was to leave Caroline alone."

"Nasty thing!" said Baby, suddenly, in abusive fashion.

Caroline said, "Hush!" but this brought Betty straight to the bed. It took her just a minute to climb and nestle down on the other side.

"How long has she been here, little pickle?" she demanded.

The wooliness had gone from Caroline's brain.

"Don't tease her, darling," she urged, and she smoothed Baby's downy cheek soothingly as she spoke.

"She *is* a pickle," retorted Betty. "A horrid pickle."

Caroline made haste to avert a battle.

"Watch the blind," she said, "and you will see the sunbeam fairy sail into the room."

But Betty had no use for fairies this afternoon.

"My dog's got a silver collar. He's called Box."

"Who brought him?" asked Caroline, in a low voice.

"Oh, Rupert, of course!"

The girl's heart gave a bang. She tried to remember when it was that she had staggered into this cool, restful bed with that aching torture in her brow and eyes.

"He will bite," said Betty.

And Baby whispered eagerly——

"Mine will, too, won't he?"

"I think I will get up," said Caroline; but Betty at once assumed a sitting posture.

"You can't," she said, "you're clothes have all been took away."

"Then I'll wear yours," said Caroline.

She was trembling all over! How stupid of her to have been ill. How long had she been shut up in this room?

The children began with bursts of laughter to dress her up in imagination in their garments.

She listened to them, hearing nothing; then she began to question again——

"You're the grown-up young lady, Betty," she said. "What has been going on downstairs? Did ... did ... Rupert really come?"

"Really and truly," said Betty. "He said he was awful sorry you was ill. Aunty Brenny's been 'plaining, too. Oh, Caroline, you *must* get well by Saturday! Cook's sister Flo is going to be married. Cook's making a cake. You will let me and Baby go, won't you? We want to carry her train."

"Is that all the news?" asked Caroline.

The child puckered her brow and nodded her head, and then said——

"Oh no. Somethin' else. Mummy sent us each a watch; a real living watch, Caroline; and she's gone to some mountains, and she's very well, and she's got a new name, and it isn't Rupert's and she wants us to say our prayers for her every night."

The little voice on Caroline's right began to murmur these devotional offices, but she stopped sharply halfway, because Betty exclaimed——

"Rupert's going to send my pony down here, and a donkey for Baby. Do you want your letters?" suddenly asked Betty. "There's a 'eap waiting."

The heap turned out to be two. One with a foreign postmark, and one with the address of a London club stamped on the envelope.

"I know who that's from," said Betty, with a laugh, "that's Sammy. Oh, he's been down here, too! And what do you think? Baby asked him for a shilling!"

A voice from the staircase called both children to attention.

They slid off the bed like two culprits.

"Please ask Dennis if she will come to me," Caroline said, and Betty paused to shrug her shoulders.

"Can't! Dennis is went to mummy." Then she said—"When did she go, Baby? I don't remember 'xactly."

"I think it was the day after this day," said Baby, after some reflection.

"Well, please," said Caroline, "I should like my clothes."

The moment she was alone she sat forward, and with trembling fingers tore open Broxbourne's letter, the other she slipped under her pillow; she was not strong enough to read what Camilla had written just yet.

Sir Samuel was not skilful with his pen; his letter was brief.

"DEAR MISS GRANIGER,

"I ran down as I said I should, and was awfully sorry to hear you were knocked over. I'll be down again soon, but I thought I would scribble you a word to say I shall keep my promise till I see you again."

Caroline's hand closed over the letter, and she lay back and let the nervous beat steady down in her heart and pulses.

The blind still flapped to and fro, but the golden streak had moved. A blackbird was piping in the clear air; she could hear the children's voices from the garden. The room had the same tranquil air as before, but the soft reposeful element had passed away; Caroline's eyes were closed, but she neither slept nor dreamed.

Remembrance was with her again, and with remembrance, heartache, yearning, and regret.

CHAPTER XVI

In June, when the gardens at Yelverton were glorious with roses (and Caroline's one task seemed to be hunting the children out of the strawberry-beds), Cuthbert Baynhurst and his wife returned to town.

They did not do this voluntarily; it was literally to see his mother die that Cuthbert was summoned back to England.

Rupert Haverford himself wrote the message that brought his half-brother home.

He himself was on the eve of sailing for the United States when his mother's condition became so serious.

He had promised Mrs. Brenton to spend one night at Yelverton before leaving for America, but of course all his arrangements were upset.

"It is impossible to describe to you the suffering my poor mother is enduring just now," he wrote. "She is amazingly brave, and her brain is as active as ever. It sounds cruel to say it, but I almost regret this, for she persists in fatiguing herself. Only yesterday she worked for three hours."

Another time he wrote—

"She has been very ill for some time, how ill no one but she herself has known; but undoubtedly she has hastened matters to the present crisis by her unhappiness about Cuthbert's marriage. It was a great shock to her; she craves for him, and seems to torture herself with vain and unreasonable jealousy. I am most unhappy about her.... It is a bitter thing to feel that I have not the gift of ministering to her!"

All these letters passed into Caroline's hands.

Usually she read them out in the garden, and when she was alone.

She was well again, but very restless in these days. After that nervous breakdown Mrs. Brenton endeavoured to treat her as a kind of invalid, but she quickly abandoned this as a hopeless undertaking, and indeed the girl very speedily picked up her colour and her strength. But she was changed; her calm, determined, practical mood was gone altogether.

There were times when Mrs. Brenton was puzzled by her manner, and nothing was more difficult for her to understand than the friendship which appeared to have sprung up between Caroline and Sir Samuel Broxbourne.

Sir Samuel was always turning up at Yelverton at unexpected moments.

As the Brentons had known him since he was a boy he was outside the category of guests; but though Mrs. Brenton was hospitality itself, she really chafed a little at his constant visits, and if she could only have imagined that he was indirectly or directly connected with what she in her plain-spoken way called Camilla's "wickedness," he would have found himself shut out of Yelverton in particularly quick time.

As it was, very little of what went on in Broxbourne's world found its way to Mrs. Brenton's ears, and she was in happy ignorance of the fact that when Camilla had broken her traces in that startling fashion, Broxbourne had been as much an object of curiosity to a certain section of society as Rupert Haverford himself.

Nevertheless she gave him very little encouragement to come so often; but Sir Samuel was, happily for himself, thick-skinned.

"What *do* you find to talk about, you two?" she asked Caroline on one occasion, almost irritably; and the girl had shrugged her shoulders.

"I listen," she said; and then, with an effort, she had added, "Sir Samuel amuses the children. He is always inventing some marvellous games."

"Yes," said Mrs. Brenton, thoughtfully; "but it is not a bit like Sammy Broxbourne to spend his time inventing games to amuse children."

Caroline's eyes had flashed, and she had laughed for a moment.

"I expect he finds the country air refreshing after town."

"Is it possible," Mrs. Brenton said to her husband after this little conversation, "is it possible that Sammy has fallen in love with Caroline?"

Mr. Brenton closed his book with his finger in it to keep the place.

"It does not seem improbable," he said; and then he added, "Caroline is a very sweet girl."

To which his wife retorted—

"Do you think I don't know that? She is much too sweet for a man like Sammy."

In a vague sort of way this question of Broxbourne seemed to divide Caroline and Mrs. Brenton. The older woman resented, not unnaturally, the fact that the girl should not confide in her.

"Of course if he is in love, and he wants to marry her, it might be foolish to do anything to prevent it. Though he is not very nice himself, he has a very nice position, and his people are the kindest creatures in the world. It would be what the world would call a wonderful marriage for Caroline, I suppose. But *does* he want to marry her? And would she have him?" Here Mrs. Brenton had to shrug her shoulders hopelessly. "I should have thought he would have been the last man on earth to attract her."

And Caroline was perfectly well aware of what was passing in the other woman's mind. It was one of the many little prickly burdens which she carried in her heart in these days.

If it could have been possible to have shared this trouble with Agnes Brenton, she would have done it gladly; but she knew that Camilla's disloyalty had worked far deeper into the heart of this woman, who had loved her with the anxious love of a mother for so many years, than even Agnes Brenton herself realized.

Mrs. Brenton had never set Camilla on a pedestal; she had never proclaimed her faultless, but she had never ceased to find reasonable excuses for all the mistakes that the younger woman had made.

Her love had always been tempered by her judgment. She had forgiven more in Camilla than she would have been able to forgive in other people; but she could not easily pardon that act of

betrayal, that deliberate renunciation of right, of honour, and of duty.

Caroline was by no means sure that if she were to have lain before Mrs. Brenton the facts which Sir Samuel had disclosed to her that sad and strange morning, she would have received any suggestion of help. On the contrary, it seemed to her that Camilla's old friend might have been more definitely estranged, as assuredly she would have been made more miserable were she to have listened to that story of temptation and weakness and dishonour.

Caroline herself, though she pitied, also condemned.

Undoubtedly the woman had been sorely tried; she must have endured a veritable torture at Broxbourne's hands, but surely (Caroline argued now), surely she owed the man who had loved her so wonderfully, too big a debt of gratitude to have exposed him so needlessly to the heart suffering and humiliation she had brought upon him?

"What she ought to have done," Caroline said over and over again to herself, "was, firstly, to have broken her engagement, then if he had pressed her for an explanation, she could have told him the truth. I know this must have seemed too hard for her to do, but I know, too, that such love as he had for her can work miracles. If she had only thrown herself on his hands for protection, I am convinced he would have stood by her. As it is, she has lost him, she has lost Agnes Brenton, and she has sold herself into a worse bondage than any she ever had in the past!"

And still though she judged, and even condemned, Caroline could not detach herself from this woman. In her turn she owed a heavy debt to Camilla, a debt that was sweet to pay, that claimed from her the best she had to give.

The same spirit that had sent her out into the night, eagerly defiant of fatigue, loneliness, or any possible danger, merely to stand beside this helpless, lovable woman, animated her still. She could not shut out of her remembrance the pleading patheticness of Camilla's look the last time they had met, and though they were now parted by an irrevocable barrier, she remained still acutely sensitive to the spell exercised by that creature of wayward moods and tenderest influences.

* * * * *

When Mrs. Cuthbert Baynhurst reached London, she at once wired to Yelverton, announcing her arrival, and desired that the children might be taken to town the following day to meet her.

To Caroline she sent a little pleading note, in which she asked the girl to bring the children herself.

"She has at least the grace not to suggest coming here," said Mrs. Brenton, with a laugh that had the sound of tears in it.

Then she looked at Caroline.

"You will go?" she said in a low voice; and Caroline said—

"Yes."

The Cuthbert Baynhursts were installed naturally in one of the best suites of one of the largest and most sumptuous hotels.

It was so strange, so natural, and yet so unreal to see Camilla again!

She looked marvellously well; that fretted, excited, nervous air had gone entirely.

As Betty phrased it—

"You look *so* pretty, mummy darling, just like a new, young girl."

The presence of the children relieved the situation to a great extent, yet both Caroline and Cuthbert Baynhurst's wife felt the strain of this meeting sharply.

"You're going to stay with me a day or two?" said Camilla, entreatingly. "It will be sweet to have you." Then with a flash of her old merriment, "remember we are cousins now."

Caroline shook her head.

"I am afraid I must go back this evening; but the children will be all right with Dennis."

And Camilla bit her lip.

"Of course, if you must go, you must go." Then she added, restlessly, "I hope we shall not stay here more than a few days ourselves. It was horrible coming at all. And then I am so afraid this illness will upset Cuthbert. He is so sensitive. I have entreated him not to stay longer than a few minutes in his mother's room. I wish he need not go in at all. Cancer is such an awful thing."

Then she shuddered.

Caroline said nothing. She had no reason to care one way or another about Mrs. Baynhurst, but it was impossible for her to withhold her pity in such an hour as this; because she knew, none better, the hopelessness of the mother's passionate love for her second child, and because it had been a creed with Octavia Baynhurst to sneer at womanly weakness, and suffering; to deny almost scornfully the terrors of death.

And now death had come upon her—and what a death!

There was a tragedy to Caroline in the thought of that fine intellect, that strong nature, surrendering itself to the ravages of the most appalling disease the human frame can know.

As the children danced off to another room to find Dennis, and they were alone, Camilla turned and stretched out both her hands to the girl.

"Have I lost you, Caroline?" she said; "you look at me so strangely, your eyes hurt me. I have always clung to the hope that you would never change, that you would always love me."

Caroline paused a moment, and then took the hands for an instant.

"Are you happy?" she asked in a low voice.

The look that flashed into the other woman's face was a revelation to her.

"So happy," she said. "Oh, Caroline, it is all the beginning over again, only better, truer, and, please God, more lasting! Caroline, I love him. He is so young, so beautiful, so full of poetry, he makes life quite different! Oh, I love him, and I never thought I should love any one again after Ned."

Caroline turned away; her lips quivered.

"Then we who care for you must be content," she said. There was a bitter and yet a sad note in her voice.

Cuthbert Baynhurst's wife stood and looked at her.

"Of course," she said a little hardly, "I know you think I did a dreadful thing, and I will tell you one thing, Caroline, that I wish from the bottom of my heart that I could have come by this happiness in a different way. I don't want to excuse myself, for I have no excuse, but equally I don't want you or anybody else to make up things that don't exist. Don't for instance, run away with the idea that Rupert is breaking his heart about me. He is much too prosaic, too stolid, too commonplace. You saw for yourself how calmly he took the whole thing. If he had been another sort of man, well!" she laughed, "there might have been four inches of steel for Cuthbert, and perhaps a bullet through my brain."

Caroline turned and looked at her coldly.

"How can you speak so foolishly. What do you know of his heart? You have never understood him; even when you had the life of his life in your hands you sneered at him as poor and paltry. Make a mockery of him to others if you will, but not to those who know what sort of man he is. It is pitiful; it makes your wrong so much, much worse."

Camilla looked almost frightened. Her lip quivered, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"Oh, don't speak to me like that," she said brokenly. "Do you think I don't know how good he is—how more than good; his generosity won't bear talking about; but you don't know all, Caroline. If you did, perhaps you would judge me more mercifully."

There was a little pause.

Caroline made no answer; she turned aside sharply, and walked to one of the long windows. Though she had spoken so quietly, so coldly, a wild sort of passion swirled about her; her heart beat so violently she felt almost suffocated.

Camilla moved across to her.

"Caroline, darling," she said pleadingly. She put her hand on Caroline's shoulder, and as the girl still said nothing she gave a quick sigh.

"Well," she said, letting her hand slip down, "whatever any one else may think, Rupert himself ought not to reproach me. For I was absolutely honest with him. I always told him I was not half good enough for him. There was no deception, my dear Caroline, and he chose to do what he did with his eyes open. I don't mind betting you anything you like that he is ever so much happier now that I am off his hands," Camilla declared. "Our marriage would have been the most awful failure of modern times."

She came back to the girl by the window, and gave her a little shake.

"You know you love me, and you shan't be angry with me, Caroline."

There was a mist in Caroline's eyes. She turned, and would have spoken, but at that moment Dennis looked in at the door and called to her mistress.

"If you please, ma'am, I think you'd better come to Mr. Baynhurst. He's in the other room. I'm afraid something bad has happened."

Camilla stumbled in her haste to get out of the room, and almost immediately she was back again.

"I'm sorry," she said indistinctly, nervously; "but I think the children had better not stop. Cuthbert's mother is dead. She died an hour ago. Try not to let them be disappointed, Caroline. Tell them they shall see me very soon, perhaps to-morrow. It seems awfully unkind to send them away, poor little souls, but he is in a terrible state. I must be with him. It would be so miserable for the children here."

Indeed the children seemed glad to go. They kissed their mother, who held them to her in a passionate, nervous kind of way, and then let Dennis put on their hats, and went away with Caroline, dancing as they went.

Outside in the hot sunshine they clamoured for food.

"I can smell beef," said Betty, wrinkling up her pretty nose. "I thought we was going to have a lovely dinner, and we didn't have none. Oh, Caroline, I am so hungry."

And Baby chimed in with the same remark.

Caroline hoisted them both into a cab, and they drove to the station. There she regaled them with lunch, and by the middle of the afternoon they were back at Yelverton.

CHAPTER XVII

It was of course impossible for Haverford to leave London immediately after his mother's funeral. He had to charge himself with the arrangements of her affairs, a matter in which his half-brother should have taken his share. But Cuthbert Baynhurst had hastened away as quickly as he could go.

He seemed to be haunted by the dread of infection if he set foot again in the house where his mother had suffered and died. More than this, he had put into his mind the morbid fear that he had in him already the seeds of this complaint which his mother had endured in silence for so long. He was not even present at the funeral.

At the time the coffin was being lowered into the ground Camilla and he were travelling in hot haste away from London, from England, from the mere possibility of breathing the air the poor dead woman had breathed.

"This will be the beginning of the end," Caroline said to herself. "Her eyes may be blinded for a little while, and he may attempt to tyrannize through this power he has over her now, but Camilla is not his mother. She will tire so soon, and his selfishness has no limits."

She was sitting out in the garden alone. There was a moon, and the world was wrapped about in the hush of the summer night.

The children were asleep. They had been in a great excitement all day because it had suddenly been decided that there was to be a departure from the country to the sea.

Mrs. Brenton had expected to have relinquished her little charges to the care of their mother, but this was now postponed indefinitely.

The note Camilla had scribbled just before leaving London had touched Agnes Brenton almost in the old way.

She wrote so lovingly. One could see that her heart yearned for her children, and yet that she could not separate herself from this new tie.

She burdened both Mrs. Brenton and Caroline with all sorts of charges for her two little ones; above all, she entreated them pathetically to keep her always vividly in front of her children's eyes.

"If I did not know that they were so safe with you, that they were put completely out of the reach of Ned's people, I should never be able to leave them."

At once Mrs. Brenton decided that they would go away from Yelverton.

"A change will be good for all of us," she declared, with something of her old briskness. "You have never been to Normandy, have you, Caroline? Well, prepare yourself for a delightful experience!"

On the morrow the packing would commence, and Caroline smiled half faintly to herself as she conjured up the importance of this occasion to Betty and Baby. How busy they would be, and what a muddle they would make!

Caroline leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes.

It was deliciously cool and quiet. This was the moment that she loved to be alone, when the gardens had greater beauty for her and the healing tranquillity of the country spoke to her eloquently.

She was glad to go away, and yet it would be a wrench to leave this place, which now seemed sown with the most precious of her thoughts, watered with her heart's tears, and warmed with that joy which, though it had come in secret, had remained to illumine her whole life.

She had written him a few words of sympathy. They were not framed in the usual conventional formula; she wrote from her heart. She seemed to know that his mother's death would have a far greater significance to him now than at any other time; that, as he had stood and looked on his mother, dead, there must have come a new and a deeper rush of bitterness.

The grave Camilla had dug had been the burial-ground of all those sweet hopes and dreams which had clustered about him like children of late. His heart must have been barren as he had stood by his mother's grave.

She had not seen him since that most memorable evening; it did not seem likely or probable that they should see him again before they went away.

Betty had been writing him a number of epistles. It appeared that she required a great many things to go abroad with, and she had already learned to turn to Rupert for the fulfilment of all her wishes. Nothing touched Caroline so much as his attitude to the children; he was, if possible, more tender than before. He adopted a little more serious air, and in every sort of way made it known to all that he was their guardian.

"I was afraid," Mrs. Brenton had said once to the girl—"I was afraid that he might have changed in this, but I ought to have known him better!" Another time she said, "Did I tell you he had refused to take back a single thing he had given her? She told me all this in the first letter she wrote from Italy, and yet even now," Mrs. Brenton added, in a low tone, "I don't believe she grasps the full meaning of his generosity. After telling me all this, she added that, of course, if it had been any other man than Cuthbert she could not have kept the jewels; but that, as Cuthbert was his brother, he had a right to share in so much wealth."

"That was not her own suggestion," Caroline had said quickly.

Her thoughts hovered pityingly about Camilla this night, and about the memory of the woman who was just dead.

That year in his mother's house had taught her to know Cuthbert Baynhurst through and through.

His desertion now of his duty, his cowardice and exacting selfishness were made doubly contemptible, when she remembered his mother's clinging love, her heart-whole devotion, her pride in him.

"He is not worthy to be walked on by Rupert," Caroline determined hotly. And at that very moment some one spoke her name, and, starting violently, she turned to find Rupert himself standing just behind her chair.

"Do forgive me," he said quickly, realizing how much he had startled her. "Mrs. Brenton sent me to find you. She told me you are always out here at this time."

"I fancied I was quite alone," said Caroline nervously; then she added, "Have you been here long? Did you motor down?"

He said "Yes."

Their hands had clasped and unclasped.

"I felt I must come down and see you all before you fly away. In particular, I want to speak to you."

"Yes," said Caroline.

"Are you tired?" Haverford asked rather abruptly. "Shall we walk?"

She got up at once.

"It is so delightful out here at this time. I will take you to Betty's garden. There is a rose waiting for you, Mr. Haverford. It was going to be sent by post in a box to-morrow. I don't know that I dare pick it, but you may look at it."

As they passed under the interlacing branches of the trees, he said—

"I thought you would like to know that my mother spoke of you several times. She has bequeathed to you some odds and ends of jewellery which I fancy must have belonged to your mother. I cannot say that she spoke kindly," he said, with half a sigh; "but at least she remembered."

"It grieved me," said Caroline, in a low voice, "to know that she suffered so much."

He sighed.

"At times it was terrible. What stuff some of you women are made of! She had her faults, my poor mother, but she had marvellous qualities. In some ways you remind me of her, only you are not in the least masculine."

When they reached Betty's garden he knelt down and put his lips to the rose.

"Tell her I have been here, that I have left a kiss for her. I won't pick it. Dear little creature, let her send it on, if she wants to."

"But are you going back to-night?" Caroline asked.

In her white muslin gown she looked wraith-like, part of the mist which hovered like a white veil over the ground.

"I think so. I have a sort of fever in my bones.... I want to be moving all the time." Then quite abruptly he turned, and put his hand on her shoulder. "There is something else I want to say to you."

She trembled and drew back, and he at once removed his hand.

"Yes?"

"I am told that Sir Samuel Broxbourne has been coming here very often of late, coming apparently for the purpose of seeing you."

"Who has told you this?" Caroline asked very coldly.

"It has been told me by a friend, and from the very best of reasons."

"I know Mrs. Brenton is everything that is kind and good," said the girl, in a hard and cold tone; "yet I fail to see why she should approach you on such a matter as this."

"Do you?" said Haverford. "She does it because she knows that I have the right to know what is passing with you, the right to enter into all that is important in your life. You are in my charge, subject to my command for the next two years."

Caroline laughed half bitterly and half weakly.

"Oh, don't let us talk such nonsense!" she exclaimed, and she moved away, but he followed her.

"It is not nonsense," he spoke irritably. "I have established myself as your guardian, and by my mother's will you are bequeathed to my care, therefore I have a right to put questions to you which might seem impertinent if asked by anybody else."

"I think Mrs. Brenton makes a mistake," said Caroline, still walking on.

"In what way?"

"Sir Samuel is an old friend of the house, he has been in the habit of coming here freely, I understand; why, therefore, should it be supposed that he comes now only because of me?"

"I don't know why, but I hope to God he does not come for that reason!" His voice grew harder. "You know what I think of this man; I have spoken to you freely about him, and, better than that, your own instinct, which has carried you to such rare judgments, must tell you that he is no fit associate for a girl. I was going to say for any decent woman."

Caroline was silent for a long time. Suddenly she said—

"All women are unreasonable, you know; that is a tradition, and sometimes they see things in a light that is hidden to you men. I don't suppose Sir Samuel is a paragon of perfection, but, at the same time, I don't think he is half so bad as he has been painted. At least he is very harmless,

and rather amusing."

Rupert Haverford looked at her, and a great amazement which bordered on pain took possession of him.

"You like him?" he said, going to the point in his peculiarly direct way.

Caroline shrugged her shoulders.

"I really think I do, but I am not sure; at any rate, I don't bother myself about it very much." Her tone was flippant. "How you *do* love catechising!" she said. It might have been Camilla speaking.

They passed up the garden again in silence; beyond the wide expanse of lawn the house stood hospitably open. Lights gleamed everywhere, Mr. Brenton's tall figure with stooping shoulders was coming slowly towards them.

"Well," Haverford said, in a cold, dry way, "if you regard him in this uncertain way it is easier for me to act."

Caroline looked round sharply. There was indignation in her tone.

"How do you mean ... act?"

"I mean I shall take steps to prevent this acquaintance from becoming an intimate one. However much it may annoy you, the fact remains that I am your guardian, and that until you are twenty-one you are not free to do anything of which I do not approve, and I assuredly do *not* approve of your friendship with this man."

Caroline paused and caught her breath.

"This surveillance," she said coldly, "is not only very ridiculous, it is very objectionable. You may arrogate to yourself a certain authority where my money is concerned, but in the matter of choosing my friends I demand absolute liberty. Please understand I can recognize no law you may make in this." She stood a few seconds, then she said "Good night" abruptly, and she walked away from him quickly. Indeed, halfway across the lawn she broke into a run, and had gained the house almost before he realized she was gone.

Mr. Brenton called out something to her as she passed him so fleetly, but she made no answer.

"What's wrong with Caroline?" he asked as he reached Rupert Haverford.

The young man sat down, and did not reply for a moment; then he said shortly—

"I have been speaking to her about Broxbourne."

"Oh!" said Mr. Brenton. He stretched himself comfortably in another chair. "That's what my wife has been putting you up to, I suppose? Aggie has worked herself into a rare state over this business of Sammy. You know, my dear fellow," Dick Brenton said, in his pleasant, tranquil voice, "I don't quite go with you both. I know Sammy is a bit wild, his father was before him, but he will settle down. He's got the nicest old mother in the world. Seems to me he is in earnest."

"The thing is preposterous," said Rupert Haverford, in his decisive way. "I am not speaking of his position, his title, or his family; it is the man himself I abhor. I should be sorry to see any woman I care about married to him."

"Well, my experience teaches me," said Mr. Brenton, after a little silence, "that these things right themselves. I don't suppose Caroline gives Sammy two thoughts, but, on the other hand, she may. I am rather sorry you spoke."

"I am not," said Haverford shortly. A moment later he said, "I thought she was unusually sensible, and able to take care of herself; but I see now I have made a mistake."

He was extraordinarily disturbed. If he had not questioned her himself he would not have believed this thing. There had been something so fresh and clear to him about Caroline, she had matched himself in straightforwardness; her word had been charged with truth, and over and again she had given evidence of such unusual qualities that he had unconsciously endowed her with wisdom beyond her years, and regarded her mental outlook as peculiarly well balanced. Not even the great overthrow of his life's sweetest task had moved him more sharply than he was moved now. Indeed, then he had been partially prepared. As he had put it himself to Caroline, he had felt that the creature he loved was slipping gradually but surely out of his grasp; he had been conscious that the butterfly he had caught and chained was fluttering restlessly (albeit the chain was a glittering one), and he had nerved himself for the pronouncement that his love was wearying, his devotion exacting. And when all this had come, he had met it quietly, as something that was inevitable. But he had suffered none the less.

All things he had expected from Camilla except the thing she had done. And the astounding

conviction of her disloyalty had been hardly more startling than this curious phase of her nature which Caroline had revealed this night.

He had, like Agnes Brenton, found it possible to pardon in Camilla many, many things that would have been unforgivable in others, because he took her mental construction into consideration first of all; because he regarded her as a child, a headstrong, foolish, sweet, irresponsible child, with all the innocence that belongs to extreme youth, and because he knew she had been from the beginning surrounded by the most disastrous influences. And Camilla had shown him how mistaken he had been to treat her with such tender thought.

So now with Caroline. He had placed her apart; he realized now that he had thought of her as something fragrant and beautifying, and with her own lips she had confessed herself capable of a sympathy for a man who was brutal, vulgar, coarse in heart and mind.

Were all women so framed? Or was it merely his destiny to be denied knowledge of woman in her true personification? The woman of sweetest compassion and bravest comradeship; that figure of nobility and modesty of whom poets had sung from ages uncounted and for whose purity and honour men had died in centuries gone. His mother had shown him one side of the picture, Camilla the reverse; now Caroline added her touch.

He sat a long time after Mr. Brenton had smoked his cigar and gone indoors. He was both angry and miserable. His feeling, as he had approached Yelverton that evening, had been one nearly akin to pleasure. He was glad to meet Agnes Brenton, glad to see Caroline again; and after the first greeting Mrs. Brenton had swept him into a fresh element for trouble and regret. "The fault is in myself," he mused, "it must be so. I am in my wrong groove; that's what is at the bottom of it all."

He delivered himself up wholly in this moment to that old yearning to shake off the trammels of his present existence, to be stripped of all that made the world envy him.

For a brief while he had sunned himself in the glory of a false paradise, and for that brief while the clamour of his old ambitions had been silenced, the weighty responsibility of his money had been changed into satisfaction. But once that glory had been darkened his spirit had gone back with a rush to the old habits, the old desires.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that he should turn against this environment of wealth and luxury, of soft raiment and cultivated beauty, since he had been taught the hollowness of this social life, since trickery and selfishness, lies and banalities, had swept so destructively across his path. Not that he condemned wholesale; he made distinctions. There was good everywhere. These very people whose guest he was this night were in themselves the surest testimony to that. Brought in contact now with all sorts and conditions of people, he was quick to recognize that there were hearts as honest and as simple in the ranks of the moneyed class as in any other walk of life. Nevertheless, Haverford's real sympathies were with those who worked; it seemed to him there must always be more possibility for finding gold in the natures of those who toiled and suffered and even died together in their grind to put bread into the mouths of their children, than could be possible to the idlers and the well-cared-for.

Back in the old days he had seen many an evidence of this golden nature packed away in a rough frame, an uncouth personality.

And the women of those old days, was not their history such as to place them apart for honour and admiration? Why, he could bring back memories now of fidelity, and courage, and dogged endurance among those working women that made his eyes wet and his heart thrill as he recalled them.

And he remembered, too, that till this night there had always been something about Caroline Graniger to remind him of those people who had been once so dear to him, to whom his heart still turned, despite their recent churlish treatment of him; who made such a close bond between his boyhood and his present self.

Yes, Caroline had surely possessed something of the simplicity, that quiet, reticent strength of those North Country people. He was conscious now of how much he had relied on her. He got up with a sigh at last, and before he went indoors he made his way to Betty's little garden again. He stooped and touched the rose once more with his lips, but it seemed as if the fragrance had gone from the flower, as if the soft beauty of the garden had lost something. Certain it was that as he slowly moved under the trees he had a sense of loss heavily upon him, as if in the flitting away of that girl's white-robed figure, not merely the little world about him was robbed of a potent charm, but that there had gone with her a sympathy, an influence that all unconsciously had suggested to him consolation.

CHAPTER XVIII

The sea had gone out a long way, and between the tiny digue and the beach there stretched a large expanse of rich wet sand, broken here and there by large smooth pools which reflected as in a mirror the wondrous opalescent colouring of the sky, made inexpressibly glorious by the sinking of the hot, tired sun.

At least Caroline felt that it ought to be tired, it had been shining so fiercely for so many hours.

She sat in a low canvas chair on the sands, and watched her two small people scampering here and there absolutely regardless of fatigue. They had their dainty clothes pinned up carefully, and their pretty little legs were burnt dark brown. Betty looked quite tall, especially with her sunny hair bunched on her head.

Every now and then Caroline would call—

"Bed-time, chicks."

But she said it dreamily, and no one took any notice.

She was spellbound by the marvellous beauty of the sea and sky. As the sun descended slowly and reluctantly the world was alive with colour. Fiery streaks of orange, mingled with the tenderest rose-pink flung themselves upwards in the sky, forming a diadem for the departing monarch; and hovering near (creeping every instant closer like ministering spirits) clustered the clouds, some deepest purple, and some misty grey. Below, the sea murmured its evening hymn, whilst its surface caught the reflected pageantry, shifting from one wondrous scheme of colour to another. Caroline's heart contracted with emotion as she watched the golden glory melt into a sea of red, then the red fade into a wondrous mauve, that in its turn glided into turquoise blue; and lastly into the melancholy green that heralded the dark shades of night.

It was really growing late; Caroline got up with an effort and called the children.

Baby nestled in her arms at once, a flushed and sandy little individual. It was only a few steps fortunately to the annex of the hotel. Betty was taking farewell of an admirer. There was not a masculine heart, even of the tenderest age, that had not succumbed to Betty's fascinations.

At the children's ball every week at the Casino the little "Anglaise" was the acknowledged beauty. Just before they left the sands Caroline turned and looked at the sea; it was growing cold and grey now, the pale moon gave it a touch of sadness.

Somewhere over where the sea and the night sky met lay the land where he was. If only her spirit could wing itself through these thousands of miles and look upon him!

He seemed lost. It was not only distance that divided him.

Since that June night in the old garden there had been silence between them—a silence that was fraught with the most hurtful significance to Caroline.

She turned away and cuddled baby closer.

"News from Camilla," said Mrs. Brenton, as the little cavalcade turned into the hotel gardens. "She is in Dieppe. We shall see her to-morrow. She writes in a great hurry, but seems in the best of spirits. It is useless," added Mrs. Brenton, with a faint smile, "to pretend that I can keep up a defensive attitude with Camilla. She writes for all the world as if she had never given me an hour's uneasiness in all her life!"

Caroline dressed for dinner an hour later with a nervous feeling, that was almost apprehension, weighting her.

"Why has she come to Dieppe?" she asked herself. "Can she know that he is there? I wish I could be more sure of him. It is just because he never speaks of her now that he makes me so anxious."

As luck would have it, that night when they went for their usual stroll after dinner Agnes Brenton introduced Broxbourne's name.

It was her husband who had urged her to let the matter stand all this time. She would not have spoken now only that she really was perplexed by Caroline's manner, and could not rid herself of the suggestion that though the girl was so bright, and her spirit seemed so unflagging, she was in reality not at all happy. From this it was a very short step to imagine that the man who was undoubtedly hovering about Caroline was the cause of this unhappiness.

They stood a long time in silence watching the moonlit sea; then Mrs. Brenton said, with a sigh—

"I shall be sorry to go away from here;" and Caroline said—

"So shall I." A moment later she said, "I wish I knew what my future is going to be."

Mrs. Brenton looked at her.

"What do you mean, dear child?"

"I mean," said Caroline, "that everything before me is uncertain. Undoubtedly the children's mother will make an attempt to have them with her; but this cannot possibly be a lasting arrangement, because I know something about Cuthbert Baynhurst, and I can hardly picture him living in the same house, however large, with children. And," said Caroline, with a little catch in her voice, "assuredly in that house there would be no place for me."

Mrs. Brenton was silent a minute, and then she said—

"Camilla knows there is always room at Yelverton for the children, and I should be happy if I could hope that you would be with them for a long time to come. But this is unreasonable. So too is *our* desire to keep you with us. Indeed, I have been preparing myself to hear that you were thinking of having a home of your own." Then Agnes Brenton slipped her arms round the girl's shoulder. "I *must* know!" she said. "Caroline, are you going to marry Sammy?"

She was almost amazed by the emphatic way in which Caroline denied this.

"But he wants to marry you? That is patent to all the world. Is it so hard for you to speak to me, Caroline?"

"I know so well what you have had in your mind all this time," the girl answered. "I know you think it most extraordinary that I should encourage Sir Samuel, and I know that a lot of people would think it very wrong of me to seem to encourage him. He has asked me four times already if I will marry him, and if he asked me four hundred times I should answer the same thing."

"Then, ..." said Mrs. Brenton, and she stopped and all at once she drew Caroline round and looked at her almostly sternly. "I think I begin to understand.... There is something you are hiding, Caroline...."

And Caroline made no attempt to deny it.

"There is something that I have tried to deal with singlehanded, but it is growing too difficult for me," she said, and she spoke almost wearily. "It is not my secret, and I cannot share it even with you."

"What an ass I have been!" said Agnes Brenton, suddenly. Then she bent forward and kissed Caroline. "Now," she said, "we stand together. I don't ask you to tell me what this trouble is. I only want you to answer two questions. Does it affect Camilla?"

Caroline said "Yes."

"Does it affect others besides Camilla?"

Again Caroline said "Yes." And then the words broke from her involuntarily, "It might do lasting harm to the children.... It might spoil their future. I don't believe," the girl said half passionately, "that she for one instant realizes this. I don't believe she has grasped for a single instant the danger that has threatened her."

Mrs. Brenton sighed.

"Oh, to put some depth into Camilla!" she said. Then, "And you have managed to stand between her and this danger; but how, my dear, dear child?"

"How?" said Caroline, she laughed, but it was a wretched laugh. "Indeed, I scarcely know. I think I have attracted him just because I have been truthful with him. I have never once pretended that I liked him. I have given him more home-thrusts than I fancy he has had from anybody else. And he only wants me because he thinks I am not easy to get. At the same time," Caroline said, "I must do him this justice. He gave me a promise, it was not a little thing, indeed, remembering what he is, it was a big thing; and up to now he has kept this promise. I am only afraid he won't keep it much longer. He is getting tired," Caroline said, with a break in her voice. "I saw a difference in his manner when he was here the other day. If I lose my power of attraction," the girl's voice was bitter, "I am afraid all I have tried to do will be so much wasted work."

They paced to and fro and were silent a long time. Then Agnes Brenton said—

"I must enter into this. I have every right to do so. I am glad now that Sammy is so near. I shall send and ask him to come and see me without further delay." Then she reproached Caroline. "Why did you not bring this trouble to me at once?"

Caroline caught her breath with a sigh.

"I suppose we all try to do clever things once in our life." Then she took Mrs. Brenton's hand and carried it to her lips. "I did not want you to have more to bear, dear friend. You were so unhappy, and I believed I should be able to keep this away from you always."

In a low voice a moment later, Caroline said—

"When she comes to-morrow, you will say nothing to her?" and Agnes Brenton promised this.

Later, when she was alone with her husband, she surprised him by observing with some vehemence.

"Dick, I give you full permission to call me a fool whenever you feel inclined to do so."

Mr. Brenton looked up from his latest treasure, an old French book which he had picked up in a day's excursion to Rouen.

"I will start at once, if it will give you any satisfaction, my dear," he said, in his gentle way.

CHAPTER XIX

The children were in the wildest state of excitement at the prospect of seeing "mother." They quarrelled when they were having their hair brushed as to the time she would arrive, and what she would come in.

Baby declared Mummy would arrive in a boat, at which Betty scoffed openly.

"A boat doesn't go on the road. She'll come in a motor."

And Betty was right.

Camilla arrived in the smartest and latest of automobiles; she was exquisitely dressed in white, and caused a flutter in the little toy watering-place, which, with so many of its kind, stud the coast of Normandy. She came not alone. There were two men and another woman with her.

Mrs. Brenton and Caroline and the children were down on the digue when she arrived, and as the children caught sight of their pretty mother and rushed to greet her, Agnes Brenton caught Caroline by the wrist.

"There is no occasion to send for Sammy," she said; "Camilla has brought him."

And when a little mist had cleared away from Caroline's eyes she saw that Mrs. Brenton had made no mistake.

It was Broxbourne himself. He looked sheepish and uncomfortable as he caught Caroline's eyes, and he made no attempt to approach her.

There was never any one so gay as Camilla. The moment she arrived she seemed to radiate the whole place. The little crowded digue concentrated its whole attention on her. She provoked universal admiration.

When the whole party made a move towards the hotel for luncheon, she caught Caroline by the hand.

"I want you, Caroline—I want to ask you something," she said. She sent the children on ahead; then, when there was no one near, she said, "Can you give me news of Rupert?"

"No," said Caroline, "but I have no doubt Mrs. Brenton can."

Camilla threw back her long gauze veil.

"Oh dear, how hot it is here!" she said; "there is absolutely no air. The place lies in such a hole, but the chicks look splendid." Then, in her restless way, "Well, if you know nothing, I must ask Agnes, for we have heard the most extraordinary rumour about him"—she meant Haverford. "I thought perhaps you could tell me if it was true; I mean about his having gone to America because he has found some relations of Matthew Woolgar, and that he intends to give them all the money."

Caroline answered almost impatiently.

"I assure you I know nothing whatever about Mr. Haverford, or what he is doing. How should I?"

"Well, I hope to goodness there is no truth in this report," said Mrs. Cuthbert Baynhurst. "If there is, it is a very bad look-out for all of us."

Caroline crimsoned.

"Have you not enough already?"

This made Camilla look at her; then she stood still and gave Caroline a little pull.

"Now, don't be cross with me," she said, and, just like Betty, she added, "Nasty, unkind Caroline!" Then, becoming serious again, "You know it is not at all impossible that he might do this. He is so extraordinary about some things. I wonder who put the idea into his mind? I always understood that old Woolgar had no relations."

They walked on, and then, with a little laugh, Camilla said—

"If you want to know the truth, we have not got *half* enough. I find Cuthbert is every bit as extravagant as I am. I wanted him to come with me to-day, but do you think I could get him away from the 'petits chevaux'? Not I! And let me tell you one can lose a fair amount of money at that game, silly as it is."

Caroline stood still; there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, dearest!" she said, "is ... is it always to be the same? Is...."

Camilla whipped her round, and they walked sharply back towards the sands.

"You shan't cry for me," she said; "I'm a beast. I'm not worth it. You don't know how little I deserve your tears."

"Yes, I do," said Caroline; "but I can't help crying; because I love you, because you are the first person, you and the children, who have belonged to me, who have made life real, and because I want the children to have a proper mother. Not just a pretty doll dressed up every time they see her in something new. You had it in your power once to turn your back deliberately on all this worthlessness; but I won't go into that now.... Only I must speak, I must try to let you realize...." Once again her voice broke; then, with an effort, Caroline said, "Though you have lost so much, there is still so much left.... I know it will be a little bit harder for you now, but still you can do it if you like. Everybody can rise...." The words ended abruptly.

"Don't!" said Camilla, and then she added, "When I am with you I want to be as you want me to be, but when I am away I have not the strength to change, and it all seems so useless; the trying, I mean...." There was real depth in her voice as she said, "Do you think I don't know what I have lost? I have known it more and more every day. I expect I shall know it a good deal more surely before I come to the end of my life. It's only this excitement that makes me want to go on at all."

"I thought you were happy," Caroline said in a low, moved voice.

The other woman shrugged her shoulders and said nothing. Then, quite abruptly, she began speaking about Broxbourne.

"Do you know that ever so many people assured me you were going to marry him. I wouldn't believe it, and when I saw him in Dieppe yesterday I determined all at once that I would speak to him myself. I don't mind telling you, Caroline, that I have been deadly afraid of Sammy all this time; he ... I mean ... I did something to make an enemy of him, and he can be horribly nasty when he likes.... But yesterday, the moment I saw him, I was no longer afraid."

Caroline was staring at the white-flecked sea. Her heart was throbbing in her throat; to speak was beyond her.

"Yes," said Camilla, "I saw at once that the worst of his anger had burned out, and so I took my courage in both hands and went straight up to him, and I asked him boldly if I had to congratulate him. I think I rather startled him," Camilla said composedly; "anyhow, he would not speak at first, and then, when he had thawed, he told me that he had proposed to you half a dozen times, but that you would not have anything to do with him. He said something more; that you were the best sort he had ever come across, and that if there was anybody in the world who could pull him up and make a decent fellow of him, he thought you were the person who could do it, and I could see he was in earnest. Fancy you and Sammy being such friends. You funny, quiet Caroline! Perhaps it is you who have made him so amiable to me!" But Camilla rejected this idea even as she said it. "No, I expect he knows I have done for myself this time, and as I am going to be paid out for all my sins, he feels, perhaps, he can afford to be a little generous. Anyhow, I am glad you won't have anything to do with him. I have a good mind to make up a match between him and this girl who is with us to-day. She would jump at him, if only for his title. Funny," Camilla mused. "That was never one of my weaknesses."

At this moment Betty came flying after them, announcing that *déjeûner* was ready, and that everybody was waiting.

It was a merry meal, thanks entirely to Camilla and the children, and very shortly afterwards the motor-party started again from Dieppe. When they were gone, Mrs. Brenton said to Caroline —

"I don't fancy Sammy will come here any more. I tried to get five minutes alone with him, but he avoided me."

Betty pushed a letter into Caroline's hands.

"You're to read that when you're quite alone. Sammy gived it to me," she said mysteriously; then she danced off, and Mrs. Brenton, with one quick glance at the girl, turned and went into the hotel.

Caroline walked into the garden. She crossed the bridge under which the clear white water of the mountain spring ran down to the sea, and opened Broxbourne's letter. Inside the envelope there was a sheet of paper on which nothing was written. Inside this paper there was a cheque.

She just glanced at it and then crushed it in her hand.

CHAPTER XX

Rupert Haverford came back from America about the beginning of October. He went down immediately to Yelverton.

The children were still with Mrs. Brenton—that is to say, they had gone for a brief while to stay with their mother; but the visit had not been a success, and Camilla herself proposed that she should make some arrangement to let the little folk stay for a few months longer under Mrs. Brenton's care.

"You see, we haven't got a house yet," she said; "nothing would induce Cuthbert to live in the house his mother left him. We must get that off our hands before we settle ourselves in another, and then I think we shall go to the Riviera this winter. He has several portraits that he wants to paint there."

Once, with a laugh, she had said—

"I have two minds to ask Rupert to lend us that big house of his. It is absurd to shut it up for months at a time when we are homeless."

It was, therefore, as much on the children's account as anything else that Haverford went to Yelverton.

Nevertheless, he found himself travelling down to Mrs. Brenton's comfortable house with a sense of eagerness that was half pleasure.

The reason for his visit to the States had not been wrongly reported; chance had brought to his knowledge the fact that there were some connections of Matthew Woolgar settled in America —humble, struggling people to whom money would be a godsend.

He spent at least a couple of months before he came across a trace of these people, and then, to his disappointment, found that the family had dwindled to two old people, who were quite unfit to take the voyage to England, and for whom little was possible except placing them in comfortable circumstances.

So he said to Agnes Brenton when he told her of all this.

"You see, I can't get rid of my money."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Brenton, "you have made a very good attempt at it." Then, with a little colour in her face, she added, "I go back to my old theory about you. I want to see you well married. I should like you to take a prominent part in the life of the day."

He made no remark for a little while, then he said—

"Yes, I shall marry; I hope soon."

To herself Mrs. Brenton confessed a great disappointment.

"An American woman!" she said to herself. "I did hope he would have married somebody over here."

The welcome the children gave him was a royal one; but Caroline barely touched his hand, and expressed no pleasure at seeing him again. It seemed however, that he had something to say to her.

"I want to talk to you about the children," he said. "Will you come out into the garden?"

"I thought everything was settled for the time being," Caroline said.

"There are various things I should like to discuss with you."

She stole a little glance at him as they walked into the well-remembered path, where now the rose-bushes were barren of bloom and the ground was carpeted with faded leaves.

He was looking wonderfully well, with that bronzed look in his skin, which made his teeth so white, and his eyes so delightful. She noticed that he seemed altogether brisker, and his first speech touched on this.

"Do you know that my trip to America has done me a lot of good? It has shaken me up—hustled me out of my old groove. The Americans are a wonderful nation! There are no rich idle men there, they have given me enough hints to keep me employed for the rest of my existence."

He looked at her with half a smile.

"I am glad," said Caroline.

"Are you? Well say it a little more as if you meant it."

Against herself she laughed.

Then he stretched out his hand.

"You don't bear me any grudge, Caroline?"

"Why should I?"

She did not take his hand, and with a quick frown he let it drop to his side.

"Well, you know you have not written me a line since I have been away."

She looked at him with open eyes at this.

"Did you expect me to write?"

"Of course," he said, with a smile. "It would have been the proper thing for a ward to do. And that brings me to the question I put to you just now. Are you still angry with me because I tried to enforce my authority when last I saw you?"

"No," she said, "I am not angry."

"Then look more pleasant."

Again she had to laugh, but it was a very transitory laugh.

"I thought you wanted to talk about the children."

"You are one of the children," he answered.

As she made an impatient movement he changed his tone.

"I want to talk to you about myself. I'm not exactly a child, but I find I want some one to give me just a little of the attention that you give Betty and Baby."

She grew very hot, and found it rather difficult to breathe.

"I am not satisfied with you only as a ward," Haverford said, and there was an indescribable note of tenderness in his voice, "because there are such difficulties in the way of seeing you. I want you for something closer, better, more helpful. Caroline, will you be my wife?"

She stopped dead, and looked at him with eyes ablaze, then, in a choked voice, she said—

"No!" and then again, "No!" and then she walked on very quickly. He followed her.

"You can't mean that," he said, his tone one of absolute astonishment.

She answered him over her shoulders.

"I do most emphatically." He looked quite dismayed, and the girl broke in hurriedly, "Of course it is very astonishing, I suppose; but call it a caprice, if you like, I have an objection to marry a very rich man. I have an objection," she said, with quivering lips, "to be chosen for a wife just as somebody would choose a carpet, or a piece of furniture."

"Good God!" said Haverford. "Do you suppose that I want to buy you?"

"I don't suppose anything," said Caroline, "except that I thank you very much for your offer; and I decline it."

He let her walk on, and stood looking after her bewildered and pained. She had grown so closely into his thoughts of late, she had become so individualized with all his new schemes for the future, she was so necessary, so dear, so precious (especially since he had learned how he had misjudged her, and Mrs. Brenton had lost very little time in making him acquainted with this) that he could hardly realize that she had turned so deliberately away from him.

He made no effort to follow her, however; there had been something authoritative in her voice and in her manner—something that stung him almost reproachfully. But his chief sensation was a rueful realization of failure.

"I am a vain, clumsy fool!" he said to himself, with a vast amount of irritation.

And after he had walked about for some considerable time, and had pondered the situation carefully, this unflattering estimate of himself strengthened.

If he could have comfortably taken himself away from Yelverton he would have done so; but as he had proposed himself for this visit it would have been difficult to have found a tangible reason for ending it in so abrupt a fashion.

The quiet, comfortable influence of the house, and particularly the presence of the children, worked pleasantly on his troubled mood, however, and at dinner-time he sat chatting briskly away over his American experiences, and noting with some satisfaction (and a good deal more vexation) that the girl in the white gown on the opposite side of the table matched himself in ease of manner and flow of spirit.

"I find him wonderfully improved," said Mrs. Brenton, as she and Caroline sat having their coffee in the hall.

"Oh, he was always fairly good looking," said the girl, carelessly.

She had let Betty decorate her for dinner, and there was a large red flower tucked in among the masses of her dark hair just behind one small ear. She had grown taller, but was just as slim as ever; although Mrs. Brenton invented all sorts of fattening dishes entirely for Caroline's consumption, she refused to grow fat.

"Oh, I don't mean his looks, I mean his manner! Don't you find him ever so much brighter and brisker? He seems quite happy too. I am glad of that!"

Caroline put down her coffee-cup. She heard the dining-room door open.

"I am just going to run upstairs to see if Betty has dropped off. She looked very wakeful."

Her white gown whisked out of sight as Mr. Brenton and his guest came out of the dining-room, and though they sat a long time chatting and smoking, Miss Graniger never came back.

"I am trying to divide her a little from this devotion to the children, but it is not very successful," Mrs. Brenton said to Rupert, "and yet she cannot remain with them all her life."

"I am afraid she is rather obstinate," Haverford remarked, a trifle grimly.

The next morning he left Yelverton early—so early that the children were only half dressed when he went.

Betty lamenting, recalled a score of promises unfulfilled, and wept bitterly; and Caroline, as she listened to the child, felt almost ashamed.

"Although," she argued with herself, "he need not have gone away if he had not wanted to go."

Mrs. Brenton at luncheon gave it as her opinion that the change she had remarked in Rupert Haverford denoted more than a surface alteration.

"I am convinced," she said, "he is going to marry an American. Isn't it too abominable? I am so disappointed."

"When I marry," observed Betty, "I'm going to keep hens, speckley yellow ones. You know the sort, Baby, same as the one you chooced out of Aunt Brenny's garden."

"Chased," corrected Caroline.

"Chased," said Betty, then, in a different tone, "How *red* you are, Caroline, quite like as if you was boiled."

"Well," said Mr. Brenton in his quiet way, "you were saying the other day you wanted him to marry, you know."

"So I do," agreed Agnes Brenton, "but I did not suppose he would care about an American wife."

They discussed the probable union for some time.

It struck Caroline as so strange that both these people should regard it as natural and certain that he should marry, and not from a mere sense of duty, but from inclination, even from affection.

"Do they forget so easily?" she asked herself.

CHAPTER XXI

At Christmas-time Mrs. Cuthbert Baynhurst joined the Yelverton party unexpectedly. She wore her beautiful sables, and looked quite radiant when she arrived. As usual, she seemed to charge the atmosphere with excitement of a pleasant nature.

"It is *so* nice to be here!" she declared. "You can't think how tired I am of foreign beds and cooking. Agnes, I hope you are going to give me beef and plum-pudding every day."

Mrs. Brenton received her beautiful guest warmly; nevertheless, it was quickly evident to Camilla that there was something on the older woman's mind.

"Don't hesitate to send me away if you don't want me," she said easily. "I can easily go back to town, or to Lea Abbey, or—well, anywhere, you know."

"Of course I shan't turn you away," said Agnes Brenton. Then she added, colouring a little, "Only I must wire to Rupert; we expected him for Christmas."

Camilla laughed ever so prettily.

"Dear soul, why should you? We have met already several times. You see," she added, quite seriously, "when things went so horribly bad with Cuthbert and me two months ago, I was obliged to send and ask Rupert to come and help me. And he was *so* kind. He arranged everything. You know, don't you, that Cuthbert and I have agreed to separate—at any rate, for a little while? Perhaps when he does not find life quite so easy he may alter. His temper, my dear Agnes, is something beyond description; and he is so lazy, and *so* difficult! And then there are the children. My duty is really to them first of all; and I have neglected them terribly. Rupert suggests I should go back to my own little house, and have a chaperone to live with me. I supposed that Caroline would be quite enough, but from something Rupert said, I fancied, perhaps, she had some new plans in her mind."

"I have heard nothing," said Mrs. Brenton.

She had listened to this speech with a confusion of feeling. Camilla's easy acceptance of a most difficult position was not, perhaps, so very extraordinary, but other people worked a little more slowly.

"I don't quite approve of the little house. Why not stay here?" Mrs. Brenton added.

"My dear Agnes! Have I not already outraged your friendship? Do you realize that you have been burdened with my children over a year?"

"What is a year! Besides, you know perfectly well there has been no burden. Haven't I been clamouring to have the children with me for ages? It has given both Dick and me a new spell of life to have these little souls about us, and if you will only make up your mind to stay on indefinitely, it will be a real happiness."

"Thank you, darling," said Camilla; "it sounds delightful. I will talk it over with Rupert when he comes."

She said this in the most natural way possible.

But Haverford was not at Yelverton for Christmas. He wired from the north that he was ill—had caught a violent cold, and was unable to travel.

He was not too ill, however, to forget his Christmas remembrances.

Packages kept arriving by every post, and the children were in a ferment of excitement. They rushed to their mother as each new gift arrived, and Camilla confessed to Caroline that she was frantically jealous of the attachment between Rupert and the little creatures.

"Of course, it is the best thing that could happen, I know that; but, after all, they are my children, and I ought to come first. As it is, I believe I am not even placed now. Rupert comes first—before any one; you are second; and Agnes a good third."

"You are talking nonsense," said Caroline, in her calmest way; "the children love you more and more every day."

Camilla smiled, frowned, and sighed.

"Well, it may be so; at all events, I don't mind Rupert, or you, or Agnes. It would have killed me if the old man had taken them, and turned them against me, as he certainly would have done. Oh, Caroline, that reminds me; has Betty chosen something for Violet Lancing's girl? If not, let her send this bangle. I mean to be kind to that girl for Horace's sake."

A moment or two later Camilla said with a laugh—

"I wonder if Rupert will send me a Christmas present.... I suppose I must not expect it."

But she got one—a very lovely and unique necklace, composed of pieces of jade strung on a fine chain, alternated with emeralds.

Caroline's gift was a writing-table, and when the heavily laden post-bag was opened on Christmas morning there was a letter also.

She kept it for several hours unopened, and then stole out into the cold garden to read it. It was not very long. He had the trick of going straight to the point. But it was a letter that moved her deeply—that made her heart beat and her eyes dim. He called her "dearest," and once he wrote "dear capricious Caroline."

He did not claim her boldly this time, nor did he plead too much. There was a directness in his simplicity that almost made her waver. But she delayed answering till the morrow; and all that evening, as she felt the old irresistible fascination of Camilla's beautiful presence hold her in sway, she felt equally her heart grow steady and that strange rush of joy die down.

"It is impossible ... impossible," she said to herself; and though she put her words as gently as she knew how, she wrote and for a second time refused to be his wife.

CHAPTER XXII

When the question of a return to that little town house was mooted in earnest, Caroline joined issue with Mrs. Brenton in pronouncing the suggestion impracticable.

She was honest enough to confess that her objection was to a large degree based on sentiment.

"Oh, don't go back there; you had so many, many dark days there," she urged. "Besides, the house is let till March. Why not let us go to Paris for a few months? Don't you think that is a good idea?"

"Oh!" said Camilla, delightedly; "then you *are* coming with me?"

It was Caroline who looked surprised.

"Of course. I should love to stay six months in Paris. I want to pick up French if I can, and it would be so good for the children."

Camilla agreed.

"And if Cuthbert should pass through Paris we need not see him," she mused. "Happily he would not be able to stay for more than a few days; he owes too much. Caroline, we *will* do this!"

So it was settled, despite Mrs. Brenton's protestations; but, as usual, Camilla upset the arrangement. She was happy at Yelverton for a week or two, but all at once she got restless, and went up to town for a few days. From thence she announced that she was going to pay one or two country visits.

Caroline was still making preparations for the migration to Paris, when the children's mother wrote announcing that their plans would be changed.

"I have some news for you," she scribbled; "Sammy is going to be married! My little matrimonial scheme has 'panned out' successfully. I can't say that Sammy is exactly my idea of a husband; but this girl is apparently wildly in love, and thinks herself ever so lucky. They are both staying here. It seems that old Lady Broxbourne is delighted, and the wedding is to be in a few weeks' time. For my sins I have promised to do all I can for the bride this season; she is quite provincial, you know, and has everything to learn, and she clings to me almost pathetically. So I am afraid our little jaunt abroad will be knocked on the head till the summer, at all events; and

then I think we ought to coax a yacht out of Rupert, and have a real good time. What do you think?"

Yelverton was very quiet without Camilla, and the children fretted for her a good deal.

Caroline herself was actually conscious of a sensation of void and loneliness. She could never pass the room where Camilla had been without a sort of pang.

Long ago she had ceased to question or to speculate on the extraordinary power of this other woman; to ask herself why or why not certain things should be! She simply recognized that, despite all that had gone and all that might come, she loved Camilla with a deep, and an anxious love, and would always give homage to the caressing, the bewitching influence of this beautiful, this most unreliable of women.

Sometimes, indeed, Caroline confessed to herself that even with her eyes widely opened as they now were, she would still do what she had done in the past, and if protection were needed, exert every effort of wit and courage to stand beside Camilla and keep trouble away.

And this although she had sacrificed her own feelings so vainly, although she knew Camilla would have been totally unable of comprehending what that apparent friendship with Broxbourne had cost her, and what real suffering had come to her through it.

On the day the letter came containing the news of the approaching Broxbourne marriage, Caroline left the children playing hide-and-seek in the hall, and went out for a little walk.

The day was bleak, and she felt the cold penetrate her heart.

She pushed on quickly till she left the house well behind her, and then she sat down and closed her eyes. Of late there had been many moments when she had felt tired out in spirit, when life would seem empty and unprofitable; such a mood fell upon her now. She was not sure if it was disappointment or a sense of relief that followed on the realization that she was not to be uprooted from the life of the last six months. All she knew was that she had become so nervous that she winced when the children screamed either in play or temper, and that she had a strong desire to scream herself sometimes.

"I think I will go off somewhere all by myself for a week or two," she mused now. "I know I must be horrid to live with just now. When I banged my books down on the table last night, I saw Mr. Brenton look at me as if he thought I had gone mad. I believe I ought to have taken Mr. Haverford's advice, and have travelled a little last year. I should hate to leave the children now, but I am not at all sure it would not be a good thing for them. Perhaps I will talk it over with Mrs. Brenton." A moment later she said, "No, I don't think I will. If I do she will only question, and if she wants to know what is wrong, and why I want to go away, what on earth am I to say to her? If I cannot satisfy myself I am not likely to satisfy her."

With a sharp sigh she relinquished this train of thought, and leaning back, she closed her eyes, and remained with them closed for a little while. Then all at once she was conscious that some one was watching her, and she opened her eyes quickly. In reality, Rupert was not looking at her, but was pacing to and fro in front of the bench.

As she sat forward with a jerk, he turned and came hurriedly towards her.

"What madness brought you out here to sleep?" he queried, almost sharply.

Caroline knit her brows.

"I don't think I have been asleep," she answered. Then confusedly, "How long have you been here?"

"Ten minutes—a quarter of an hour?"

He continued to look at her fixedly.

"You are ill," he said; "you look very white. Mrs. Brenton wrote me she was anxious about you; that is what brought me down to-day."

This brought the colour flaming to her cheeks.

"I am perfectly well. I am always well!"

He bent forward, took both her cold hands, and drew her to her feet. For an instant he chafed her hands almost unconsciously. Then they walked on a little, Caroline as in a dream.

Suddenly he paused, and catching her hands again more closely, faced her. There were tears in her eyes just ready to run down her cheeks.

"If you are well, why are you crying?" he asked abruptly. Then tenderly, "Come, Caroline, be honest with me. Something is wrong, and I must know what that something is. Don't you realize that I would give my life itself to be sure that you were happy? Have you the least idea what you

are to me—how much I love you?"

She shook her head; and then she looked up, and her lips smiled for an instant.

"How should I know these things? You have never told them to me."

"Surely yes," he said.

"Surely no," she answered. "That day you spoke to me just after you came back from America, you simply dictated to me the fact that you found you required a wife, and that you considered me a suitable person for the situation; and your letter at Christmas was just the same thing."

"I knew I had done some clumsy thing," he said remorsefully. "But dearest, sweetest heart, you must have known that I love you!"

He unloosened her hands as he spoke, meaning to gather her into his arms, but she placed those two little hands in protecting fashion against his heart.

"No. Wait," she said. "It can't be true. Remember what she was to you. If you are the man I imagine you to be, then you are not one to easily forget. You—you can't love me if you loved her."

He smiled, but he answered her gravely.

"Since you have apparently studied me and my nature so well, the whole situation should be clear to you. Other people might doubt, but not you, Caroline. You were so closely mingled in with that episode, and you must have realized that when she took herself out of my life everything appertaining to her faded absolutely into the background. The way had been prepared for this so thoroughly. You know that evening I came down here that I was clinging to a last hope, even though I knew how poor it was. I confess," he said, with a faint smile, "that had we separated differently, some sentiment might have lingered. It was the way she did this that swept my heart clean. And yet," he added, "I am wrong to deny all sentiment. I am her friend—I am glad to be her friend—and I shall never cease trying to help her to the happiness she craves for; but I shall never succeed. No one can help her. It is her destiny to be a disappointment to herself, and to all who have her interest at heart."

Caroline shivered a little. Her hands had dropped. They were standing apart now.

"And still she holds one. There is a sort of spell about her," she said, in a low voice—"you must recognize that. I, too, have suffered through her, and yet——" Then she bit her lip, flushed crimson, and said passionately, "I could never share! Don't think I am only sensible, and practical, and quiet ... I ... I know myself better, I am capable of horrid feelings, and my temper can be quite savage.... I don't want to fill a gap.... I want all for myself. Why, even when I realize what she was to you, I feel as if I could suffocate...."

She was turning away, but he caught her by the shoulder and wheeled her round.

"Do you know what that means?" he said, in a curious voice; "that means that you love me. And do you suppose I am going to let you slip out of my life now that I know this? Caroline, you *shall* not deny me my right! I have stood by all these months I even came here to-day with the intention of saying nothing more to you on this subject, because I said to myself, 'I have no right to force myself upon her; if she cared a toss of a button about me she would not play with me;' but the temptation to speak was too strong, and now that you have confessed that I am indeed so much to you ... you will never get rid of me!"

He was holding her so tightly that he almost hurt her.

The colour waned in her face, and came back with a rush as she tried to look at him and could not meet his eyes.

"When will you marry me?" he asked.

She gasped.

"Oh, please," she said, "I don't think I said anything to ... to ... but if ... suppose that I should care for you a little, that does not mean that ..." she broke off.... "Really, I cannot marry you," she said then, with a note of desperation in her voice.

Haverford laughed.

"Why? Give me one good reason, and I will let you go."

She had to laugh too, but she would not yield easily.

She enumerated many reasons.

"The children need me ... it is so soon. I have ever so many things I want to do this year...." Then finally and a little weakly, "I don't want to marry at all."

Rupert looked at her intently.

"There is not one honest reason in all these, and the last is the weakest of the lot," he said coolly. "I really cannot listen to it. You must think of something else...."

"I can hear the children," Caroline said, in a hurry. "Listen! don't you hear them calling for me? I am convinced they will have forgotten their coats, and this wind is so cold."

Rupert's eyes glistened.

"Let them come.... I will refer the matter to Betty.... She will soon settle everything."

Caroline turned crimson, and then she put out her hand.

"Perhaps ... I will marry you ... but it must be ever so far off.... Wait ... will you wait?" she asked half wistfully.

He stooped, and despite the fact that the children were so very near now, he kissed her hands and then her lips.

"You know I will ... all my life, if you insist," he answered.

But Caroline did not keep him waiting quite so long.

PRINTED BY
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production,

promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and

how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.