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Title: The Star-Gazers

Author: George Manville Fenn

Release Date: November 8, 2010 [EBook #34244]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STAR-GAZERS ***

George Manville Fenn

"The Star-Gazers"

Volume One—Chapter One.

Lodestars.

Ben Hayle, keeper, stepped out of his rose-covered cottage in Thoreby Wood; big, black-whiskered, dark-eyed and handsome, with the sun-tanned look of a sturdy Englishman, his brown velveteen coat and vest and tawny leggings setting off his stalwart form.

As he cleared the porch, he half-turned and set down his carefully kept double-barrelled gun against the rough trellis-work; as, at the sound of his foot, there arose from a long, moss-covered, barn-like building, a tremendous barking and yelping.

"Now then: that'll do!" he shouted, as he walked towards the great double door, which was dotted with the mortal remains of what he termed "varmin"—to wit, the nailed-up bodies of stoats, weasels, hawks, owls, magpies and jays, all set down as being the deadly enemies of the game he reared and preserved for Mrs Rolph at The Warren. But even these were not the most deadly enemies of the pheasants and partridges, Thoreby Wood being haunted by sundry ne'er-do-weels who levied toll there, in spite of all Ben Hayle's efforts and the stern repression of the County Bench.

"May as well stick you up too," said Ben, as he took a glossy-skinned polecat from where he had thrown it that morning, after taking it from a trap.

He opened one of the doors, and two Gordon setters and a big black retriever bounded out, to leap up, dance around him, and make efforts, in dog-like fashion, to show their delight and anxiety to be at liberty once more.

"Down, Bess! Down, Juno! Steady, Sandy! Quiet! Good dogs, then," he cried, as he entered the barn, took a hammer from where it hung, and a nail from a rough shelf, and with the dogs looking on after sniffing at the polecat, as if they took human interest in the proceeding, he nailed the unfortunate, ill-odoured little beast side by side with the last gibbeted offender, a fine old chinchilla-coated grey rat.

"'Most a pity one can't serve Master Caleb Kent the same. Dunno, though," he added with a chuckle. "Time was—that was years ago, though, and nobody can't say I've done badly since. But I did hope we'd seen the last of Master Caleb."

Ben Hayle took off his black felt hat, and gave his dark, grizzled hair a scratch, and his face puckered up as he put away the hammer, to stand thinking.

"No, hang him, he wouldn't dare!"

Ben walked back to the porch to take up his gun, and a look of pride came to brighten his face, as just then a figure appeared in the porch in the shape of Judith Hayle, a tall, dark-eyed girl of twenty, strikingly like her father, and, as she stood framed in the entrance, she well warranted the keeper's look of pride.

"Are you going far?"

"'Bout the usual round, my dear. Why, Judy, the place don't seem to be the same with you back home. But it is dull for you, eh?"

"Dull, father? No," said the girl laughing.

"Oh, I dunno. After your fine ways up at The Warren with Miss Marjorie and the missus, it must seem a big drop down

to be here again.”

“Don’t, father. You know I was never so happy anywhere as here.”

“But you are grown such a lady now; I’m ’most afraid of you.”

“No you are not. I sometimes wish that Mrs Rolph had never had me at the house.”

“Why?”

“Because it makes you talk to me like that.”

“Well, then, I won’t say another word. There, I must be off, but—”

He hesitated as if in doubt.

“Yes, father.”

“Well, I was only going to say, I see young Caleb has come back to the village, and knowing how he once—”

“Come back, father!” cried Judith, with a look of alarm.

“Yes, I thought I’d tell you; but I don’t think he’ll come nigh here again.”

“Oh, no, father, I hope not,” said the girl, looking thoughtfully towards the wood, with her brows knitting.

“He’d better not,” said the keeper, picking up and tapping the butt of his gun. “Might get peppered with number six. Good-bye, my dear.”

He kissed her, walked to the edge of the dense fir wood, gave a look back at the figure by the porch, and then plunged in among the bushes and disappeared, closely followed by the eager dogs, while Judith stood frowning at the place where he had disappeared.

“I wish father wouldn’t be so close,” thought the girl. “He must know why I’m sent back home. It wasn’t my fault; I never tried; but he was always after me. Oh, how spiteful Miss Madge did look.”

She went into the cottage to stand by the well-polished grate, her hand resting upon the mantelpiece, whose ornaments were various fittings and articles belonging to the gamekeeper’s craft, above which, resting in well-made iron racks, were a couple of carefully cared-for guns; one an old flint-lock fowling-piece, the other a strong single-barrel, used for heavier work, and in which the keeper took special pride.

“Caleb,” she said with a shudder, “come back! Well, I was so young then.”

As Ben Hayle went thoughtfully along the path, trying to fit into their places certain matters which troubled him, the man of whom they had both been thinking was near at hand, so that, as the gamekeeper was saying to himself,—“Yes: it’s because young squire come home to stay that the missus has sent her back,”—Caleb Kent stood before him in the path, the dogs giving the first notice of his presence by dashing forward, uttering low growls, and slipping round the slight, dark, good-looking, gipsy-like fellow coming in the opposite direction.

“Hallo, you, sir!” said the keeper sharply.

“And hallo, you, sir!” retorted the young man, showing his white teeth as he thrust his hands far down in his cord breeches pockets, and, as he stopped, passing one cord legging over the other.

“What are you doing here?”

“Looking at you, Ben Hayle. Path’s free for me as it is for you. No, I aren’t got a gun in two pieces in my pockets. You needn’t look. You know how that’s done.”

“If I’d been you, I’d ha’ stopped away altogether,” said the keeper, “and not come back here, where nobody wants you.”

“Pity you weren’t me. Six months’ hard would have done you good once more.”

“When I get six months’ imprisonment, it won’t be for night poaching, but for putting a charge of shot in you, you lunging hound. And don’t you let that tongue of yours wag so fast, young man. I’m not ashamed of it. Everyone knows I did a bit of poaching when I was a young fool, and did my bit in quod for that trouble with the keepers. But they know too that, when I came out, and the captain’s father come to me and said, ‘Drop it, my lad, and be an honest man,’ I said I would, and served him faithful; so shut your mouth before I do it with the stock of my gun.”

“All right, mate, don’t be waxey. Look here:—s’pose I turn honest too.”

“You!” said the keeper, scornfully.

“Yes, me; and marry Judy.”

“That’ll do,” cried the keeper sharply.

“No it won’t, we’re old sweethearts—Judy and me.”

"That'll do, I say. Now, cut."

"When I like," said the man, with a sneer. "Better let me marry her; the captain won't."

The keeper caught him by the throat.

"Will you keep that cursed tongue still!"

"No, I won't," cried the young man fiercely, and with a savage look in his eyes. "I know, even if I have been away. I know all about it. But I'm in that little flutter, Ben Hayle."

"Curse you! hold your tongue, will you," roared the keeper; and the dogs began to bark fiercely as he forced the young poacher back against a tree, but only to release him, as a quick sharp voice, called to the dogs, which dashed up to the new-comer, leaping to be caressed.

"Hallo! what's up? You here again?"

Captain Robert Rolph, of The Warren, and of Her Majesty's 20th Dragoon Guards, a well-set-up, athletic-looking fellow, scowled at the poacher, and the colour came a little into his cheeks.

"Oh yes, I'm back again, master."

"Then take my advice, sir; go away again to somewhere at a distance."

The young man gave him a sidelong glance, and laughed unpleasantly.

"Look here, Caleb Kent: you're a smart-looking fellow. Go up to Trafalgar Square. You'll find one of our sergeants there. Take the shilling, and they'll make a man of you. You'll be in my regiment, and I'll stand your friend."

"Thankye for nothing, captain. 'List so as to be out of your way, eh? Not such a fool."

"Oh, very well then, only look out, sir. I'll see that Sir John Day doesn't let you off so easily next time you're in trouble."

"Ketch me first," said the young man; and giving the pair an ugly, unpleasant look, he walked away.

"Not me," he muttered. "I haven't done yet; wait a bit."

"No good, sir," said the keeper, looking after the young poacher till he was out of sight. "Bad blood, sir; bad blood."

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Morning, Hayle. Er—Miss Hayle quite well?"

"Yes sir, thank you kindly," said the keeper; and then, as the captain walked away, he trudged on through the woods, talking to himself.

"*Miss Hayle*," he said, and he turned a bit red in the face. "Well, she is good enow for him or any man; but no, no, that would never do. Don't be a fool, Ben, my lad: you don't want trouble to come. Trouble," he muttered, as he half cocked his gun, "why, I'd—bah!" he ejaculated, cooling down; "what's the good o' thinking things like that? Better pepper young Caleb. Damn him! he set me thinking it. Captain's right enough. I like a man who's fond of a bit of sport."

As it happened, Captain Rolph was thinking, in a somewhat similar vein, of poachers and dark nights, and opportunities for using a gun upon unpleasant people. But these thoughts were pervaded, too, with bright eyes and cheeks, and he said to himself,—

"He'd better; awkward for him if he does."

Volume One—Chapter Two.

Mars on the Horizon.

In the drawing-room at The Warren, Mrs Rolph, a handsome, dignified lady of five-and-forty, was sitting back, with her brows knit, looking frowningly at a young and pretty girl of nineteen, whose eyes were puzzling, for in one light they seemed beautiful, in another shifting. She was a Rosetti-ish style of girl, with too much neck, a tangle of dark red hair, and lips of that peculiar pout seen in the above artist's pictures, in conjunction with heavily-lidded eyes, and suggesting at one moment infantile retraction from a feeding-bottle, at another parting from the last kiss. There was a want of frankness in her countenance that would have struck a stranger at once, till she spoke, when the soft, winning coo of her voice proved an advocate which made the disingenuous looks and words fade into insignificance.

Her voice sounded very sweet and low now, as she said softly,—

"Are you not judging dear Robert too hardly, aunt?"

"No, Madge, no. It is as plain as can be; he thinks of nothing else when he comes home—he, a man to whom any alliance is open, to be taken in like that by a keeper's—an ex-poacher's daughter."

"Judith is very ladylike and sweet," said Marjorie softly, as if to herself.

"Madge, do you want to make me angry?" cried Mrs Rolph, indignantly. "Shame upon you! And it is partly your fault. You have been so cold and distant with him, when a few gentle words would have brought him to your side."

"I am sure you would not have liked me to be different towards him. You would not have had me throw myself at his feet."

The words were as gentle-sounding as could be, but all the same there was a suggestion of strength behind, if the speaker cared to exert it.

"No, no, it is not your fault, my dear," cried Mrs Rolph, angrily; "it is mine, I can see it all now. It was a foolish mistake having her here. Educating a girl like that is a great error, and I see it now that it is too late. Oh, Madge, dear, if I could see him happily wedded to you, how different things might be. But I declare that nothing shall ever induce me to consent. If he will go on in utter rebellion to his mother, he must do so."

"But is it too late, aunt?"

"Unless you rouse yourself up to the position, act like a woman of the world, and drag him from this wretched girl. Oh, it is too disgraceful. If I had only thought to send her away before his regiment was quartered so near."

"Yes," said Marjorie, musingly, "but it is too late now."

"Then you will not try?"

"I did not say so. Here he is."

There was a step in the hall, the sound of a stick being thrust carelessly into a stand, and, directly after, Rolph tramped into the room.

"Ah, Madge," he said, in a careless, easy way; and, ignoring the smile of welcome with which she greeted him, he walked across to his mother's chair.

"Well," he said, "how is the head?" and he stooped down and kissed her brow.

"Not at all well, my dear," she said affectionately. "I think I will go up to my room."

"Have a drive, dear; I'll order the tandem out."

"No, no, my dear, I shall be better soon."

She rose, kissed him, and left the room.

"Dodge to leave Madge and me together," muttered the young man. "All right. Bring things to a climax."

"How very little we see of you, Robert," said Madge softly. "So much training?"

"Health. Shows how wise I have grown. I'm like pepper; a little of me is very nice—too much an abomination."

Marjorie sighed.

"Hallo! Been reading poetry?"

"No," said the girl, in a low, pained voice. "I was thinking."

"Thinking, eh? What about?"

"Of how changed you are from the nice frank boy who used to be so loving and tender."

"Ah, I was rather a milksop, Madge; wasn't I?"

"I never thought so; and it pains me to hear you speak so harshly of yourself. What has made you alter so?"

"Ask Dame Nature. I was a boy; now I am a man."

Marjorie sighed, and gave him a long, sad look.

"Well," he said, "what is the matter?"

She looked at him again, long and wistfully.

"As if you did not know," she said.

"Know? How should I know?"

"Then I'll tell you," she cried quickly.

"No, no; confide in some lady friend."

"Robert," she said, in a low, husky voice, and her whole manner changed, her eyes flashed and the lines about her lips grew hard. "What have I done that you should treat me like this?"

“Done? Nothing.”

“Then why have you turned so cold and hard to me?”

“I am the same to you to-day that I have always been.”

“It is not true,” she whispered, with her voice full of intensity of feeling, “you left no stone unturned to make me believe you cared for me.”

“Nonsense! Why—”

“Silence! You shall hear me now,” she continued, with her excitement growing. “I resisted all this till you almost forced me to care for you. You even make me now confess it in this shameless way, and, when you feel that you are the master, you play with me—trifle with my best feelings.”

“Gammon! Madge, what is the matter with you? I never dreamed of such a thing.”

“What!”

“Are you going mad?”

“Yes,” she cried passionately, “driven so by you. It is shameful. I could not have believed the man lived who would have treated a woman so basely. But I am not blind. There is a reason for it all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think me a child? I am to be won and then tossed aside for the new love—fancy, the poacher’s daughter, and when—”

“Don’t be a fool, Madge. You are saying words now that you will repent.”

“I’ll say them,” she cried, half wild with jealous rage, and her words sounding the more intense from their being uttered in a low, harsh whisper, “if I die for it. The gamekeeper’s daughter, the girl taken in here by your mother out of charity.”

“Madge!”

“Who is to be the next favourite, when you are weary of your last conquest—one of the kitchen wenches?”

“Perhaps,” he said coolly.

“Rob! Have you no heart that you treat me as you do?”

“I never thought, never said a word to make you think I meant—er—marriage.”

“Think you meant marriage?” she whispered. “I did love you as dearly as I hate you now for your heartless cruelty to me. But you shall repent it—repent it bitterly.”

“Look here,” he said roughly; “for years past we have lived in this house like brother and sister, and I won’t have you speak like this. Does my mother know?”

“Ask her.”

“Bah!”

“You dare not ask her what she thinks or whether she approves of your choice. Captain Rolph in love with the gamekeeper’s daughter! Is she to be taken to the county ball, and introduced to society? And is she to wear the family diamonds? Judith—Judy—the miserable, low-bred—”

“Here, hold hard!”

Marjorie Emlin stopped short, startled into silence by the furious look and tone she had evoked. The young man had listened, and from time to time had made deprecating movements to try and turn away the furious woman’s wrath till she had made this last attack, when he glared with a rage so overpowering that she shrank from him.

“You have done well,” he said. “My mother looks upon you as a daughter. I have always been to you as a brother.”

“It is not true,” she said, as she stood quivering with fear and rage before him, trying to meet his eye. Then, with a low cry, full of vindictive passion, she struck at him, and ran out of the room.

“Curse the girl!” growled Rolph. “I wish women wouldn’t be such fools. A kiss and a few warm words, and then, hang ’em! you’re expected to marry ’em. Man can’t marry every pretty girl he kisses. They want a missionary among ’em to tell ’em this isn’t Turkey. If there’s much more of it, I’m off back to Aldershot. No, I’m not,” he added, with a half laugh, “not yet—Hallo, mother! You?”

“Yes, my boy. I saw Madge go out just now, looking wild and excited. Rob, dear, you have been speaking to her?”

“Well, I suppose so,” he said bitterly.

"And you have told her you love her?—asked her to be your wife?"

"Good heavens, mother! are you gone mad too?—Madge—I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Why?" said Mrs Rolph, with a strange coldness.

"Because—because—"

"Yes; because you have taken a fancy to another," said Mrs Rolph sternly. "Robert, my son, it is not I who am mad, but you. Have you thought well over all this?"

"Don't ask questions," he said sulkily.

"I am your mother, sir, and I assert my right to question you on such a matter as this, as your poor father would have questioned you. But there is no need. I have done wrong, and yet I cannot blame myself, for how could I, his mother, know that my son would act otherwise than as a gentleman."

"Well, I never do."

"It is false. When Mary Hayle died, I bade her go in peace, for I would try to be a mother to the orphaned girl. Heaven knows, I tried to be. I brought her here, and made her the humble companion of your cousin Madge. She shared her lessons; she was taught everything, that she might be able to earn her own livelihood as a governess."

"Well, I know all that."

"To be treated with ingratitude. My foolish son, when he comes home, must allow himself to be enmeshed by a cunning and deceitful woman."

"What bosh, mother!"

"But it is true. You do not dare to tell me you do not love Judith Hayle?"

"There is no dare in question. I like the girl."

"Unhappy boy! and she has led you on."

Captain Rolph whistled.

"Any telegram come for me? I sent a man to Brackley."

"Telegram!"

"Yes. I want to know about the footrace at Lilley Bridge."

Mrs Rolph gave her foot an impatient stamp.

"Listen to me, sir. This is no time for thinking about low sports."

"Hallo? Low?"

"Yes, sir; low. I have never interfered when I saw you taking so much interest in these pursuits. My son, I said to our friends, is an officer and a gentleman, and if he likes to encourage athleticism in the country by his presence at these meetings, he has a right to do so; but I have not liked it, though I have been silent. You know I have never interfered about your relaxations."

"No; you've been a splendid mater," he said laughingly.

"And I have been proud of my manly son; but when I see him stooping to folly—"

"Misapplied quotation, mater—when lovely woman stoops to folly."

"Be serious, sir. I will not have you degrade yourself in the eyes of the neighbourhood by such conduct, for it means disgrace. What would the Days say—Sir John and Glynne? If it had been she, I would not have cared."

"Let the Days be," he said gruffly.

"I will," said Mrs Rolph; "but listen, Rob, dear; think of poor Madge."

"Hang poor Madge! Look here, once for all, mother; I'm not a witch in Macbeth. I don't want three ounces of a red-haired wench—nor seven stone neither."

"Rob! Shame!"

"I'm not going to have Madge rammed down my throat. If I'm to marry, she's not in the running."

"What? when you know my wishes?"

"Man marries to satisfy his own wishes, not his mother's. I have other ideas."

"Then what are they, sir?" said Mrs Rolph scornfully.

"That's my business," he said, taking out his cigar-case.

"Then, am I to understand that you intend to form an alliance with the family of our keeper?" said Mrs Rolph sarcastically.

"Bah!" roared her son fiercely; and he strode out of the room and banged the door.

"Gone!" cried Mrs Rolph, wringing her hands and making her rings crackle one against the other. "I was mad to have the wretched girl here. What fools we women are."

Her son was saying precisely the same as he marched away.

"Does she think me mad?" he growled. "Marry freckle-faced Madge!—form an alliance with Ben Hayle's Judy! Not quite such a fool. I'll go and do it, and show the old girl a trick worth two of that. She's as clean-limbed a girl as ever stepped, and there's a look of breed in her that I like. Must marry, I suppose. Ck! For the sake of the estate, join the two then—I will—at once. It will stop their mouths at home, and make an end of the Madge business. She'll be all right, and begin kissing and hugging her and calling her dearest in a week. That's the way to clear that hedge, so here goes."

He stopped, took a short run and cleared the hedge at the side of the lane in reality to begin with, before striking off through one of the adjacent fir woods, so as to reach the sandy lanes and wild common on the way to Brackley.

Volume One—Chapter Three.

Concerning Virgo and Gemini.

"And what does Glynne say?"

"Well, Sir John, she don't say much; it isn't her way to say a deal."

"Humph! No; you're quite right. But I should have thought that she would have said a good deal upon an occasion like this."

"Yes, I thought she would have roused up a little more; but she has been very quiet ever since I went into training for the event."

"Hang it all, Rolph, don't talk about marriage as if it were a bit of athletic sport."

"No, of course not. It was a slip."

"Well, tell me what she did say."

"That I was to talk to you."

"Humph! Well, you have talked to me, and I don't know what to say."

"*Say yes*, sir, and then the event's fixed."

"Exactly, my dear boy, but I might say *yes*, and repent."

"Oh no, you won't, sir, I'm precious fond of her; I am, indeed. Have been since a boy."

"No one could know my daughter without being fond of her," said Sir John stiffly.

"Of course not; and that's why I want to make sure."

"Humph!" ejaculated Sir John. "You've a good income, my boy, and you're a fine, sound fellow; but I don't much like the idea of my little Glynne marrying into the army."

"Oh, but I shall only stay in till I get my commission as major; and then I mean to retire and become a country squire."

"Humph! yes; and go in more for athleticism, I suppose."

"Well, I think an English country gentleman ought to foster the sports and pastimes of his native land—the hunt, the race meetings, and that sort of thing."

"Humph! Do you? Well, I think, my boy, that we ought to take to agriculture and the improvement of stock. But there, I daresay you'll tone down."

"Then you have no objection, Sir John?"

"Who?—I? None at all, my boy; I liked your father, and I hope you'll make her a good husband—as good a husband as I did my poor wife; though, as the common folk say, I say it as shouldn't say it. Now then, have you any more questions to ask?"

"No, I don't think I have. Of course I'm very happy and that sort of thing. A fellow is sure to be at such a time, you

know."

"Yes, yes, of course. To be sure. Then that's all is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't want to ask questions about settlements, eh?"

"No, I don't want to ask any questions. I want Glynne, and you say I may have her; so that's all."

"Come along then, and see my pigs."

Captain Robert Rolph looked a little chagrined at the suggestion respecting pigs; but he concealed his annoyance and walked briskly on beside his companion, Sir John Day, Bart of Brackley Hall, Surrey, a grey, florid, stoutly-built gentleman, whose aspect betokened much of his time being spent in the open air. He was an intent, bright, bustling-looking man, with grey, mutton-chop whiskers; and his drab-cord trousers, brown velveteen coat and low-crowned, grey hat, gave quite a country squire, country-town-bench turn to his appearance.

"I've great faith in these pigs," he said, sharply. "Been at a deal of trouble to get hold of the breed, and if I don't take a cup at the Agricultural Show this year, I shall be down upon some of those judges—in the *Times*."

"Ah, 'tis disappointing when you've set your mind upon a cup and don't get it," said the captain. "How many have you won, Sir John?"

"What, cups? Thirty-four, my boy, thirty-four."

"Ah, I've got fifty," said the captain, with a touch of pride in his tone. "When I go in training for anything, I always say to myself, I shall put it off, and I pretty generally do."

"Humph! yes," said Sir John, shortly; "so I suppose. Oh, by the way though, Rolph, you'd oblige me very much by going back to the house. I'll show you the pigs another day."

"Certainly, certainly," said the young man with alacrity.

"You see there's my brother. He thinks a great deal of Glynne, and I never like to take any important step in life without consulting him. Do you understand?"

"Well—er, not exactly."

"Oh, I mean, just go back and see him, and say what you did to me just now."

"What! Do you mean I must ask his consent, Sir John?" cried the young man, aghast.

"No, no, no! of course not, my dear boy. Tell him I've given mine, and that it's all settled, and that you hope he approves, and—you know what to say. He'll like it. Be right, you see. Captain to senior officer, eh? There, be off, and get it over. I must go on and see the pigs."

"Confound the major!" said Captain Rolph, as he stopped, looking after the brisk retreating figure of the baronet. "He'll want me to ask the housekeeper next. Hang it all! it's almost worth more than the stakes. I did think I'd got it over. The old major's as peppery as a curry. He'll want to order me under arrest if he doesn't like the engagement. Well, here goes to get it over. Let's see; just a mile to the park gates. Pity to waste it."

He glanced round to see if there was anyone near, but he was quite alone on the hard, sandy, retired road; so, buttoning his well-cut morning coat tightly across his chest, he tucked up his cuffs and the bottoms of his trousers, selected two smooth pebbles about as large as kidneys from a stone heap, clasped one firmly in each hand, and then thrust one in his pocket for a moment while he referred to a stop watch, replaced it, took hold of the stone once more, and then, throwing himself into position, the gentlemanly officer seemed to subside into the low-type professional walking or running man.

For a few moments he remained motionless in a statuesque attitude, his brow all in wrinkles, his teeth set, lips tight, and his chest expanded and thrown forward as if he were waiting the order to start. Then he cried, "Off!" and bounded away at a rapid rate, running hard till he reached the park gates at Brackley, where he stopped short, threw away the stones, referred to his watch, and nodded and smiled as he drew himself up—the stiff, military officer once more.

"Not bad," he said, "and as fresh as a daisy. I could have done it in half a minute less. Now, I'll go and see the old man."

Captain Rolph did not "see the old man" then, for when he reached the house, the old man—that is to say, Major Day, formerly of a lancer regiment that took part in several engagements in the Sikh war, but who had long since hung up his sabre in his bedroom at Brackley—was out for a morning walk, following a pursuit in which he took great delight—to wit, gathering fungi, a family of plants that he made his study, and he was coming back with a small, bright trowel in one hand, his stout stick in the other, and a large salmon creel slung from his shoulder, when he encountered his brother, the baronet, striding away to his model farm.

Major Day was a fierce-looking, smart, officer-like man of sixty, with curly grey hair that stood out from his well-shaped head, piercing eyes, heavy dark brows, and a massive, zebra-patterned moustache, the rest of his face being closely shaven.

Perhaps “zebra-patterned” is an unusual term to give to a cavalry moustache; but this was regularly striped in black and silver grey, giving a peculiar aspect to the keen, upright, military man.

“Halt!” shouted the major. “Hallo, Jack, going to see the pigs?”

“Yes. Thought you were at home. Just sent Rolph to speak to you.”

“To speak to me? What about?”

“Oh, I thought it best, you see, being my brother, and—er—as you like Glynne, and—er—”

“What in the name of fortune are you stammering about, Jack?” said the major, sharply. “Why, you don’t mean—”

“That he has proposed for Glynne.”

“Damn his impudence!”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Jem,” said the baronet, testily. “He has proposed, and I have given my consent.”

“But I always thought he was to marry that second cousin, Marjorie Emlin.”

“Doesn’t look like it. Never seemed very warm when they dined here.”

“But—but it’s so unexpected, so sudden. And Glynne?” cried the major, flushing, and bringing his heavy brows down over his eyes; “she hasn’t accepted him?”

“Why, of course she has. Don’t be a fool, Jem,” cried the baronet, angrily.

“Fool! It’s enough to make any man a fool. What does that fellow want with a wife—to take gate-money at some meeting?”

“I do wish you wouldn’t be so prejudiced, Jem.”

“To hold the tape when he’s coming in after a footrace?”

“Hang it all, Jem, do be sensible.”

“To feed him with raw steaks when he is in training?” continued the major, ironically. “To keep time, and polish his cups, and mind that he does not break the rules of his trainer? Good heavens! Jack, why, both you and Glynne must be mad.”

“Indeed!” said the baronet, hotly. “I don’t see any madness in giving my consent to my child’s accepting the son of an old neighbour, a confoundedly fine fellow, of good birth, and with four thousand a year.”

“I don’t care if he were better of birth, and had twenty thousand a year. He wouldn’t be a fit husband for our Glynne.”

“Well, no,” said the baronet, proudly. “No man would be sufficiently good for her.”

“Who’s talking nonsense now?” cried the major. “There are lots of good fellows in the world if she wants a husband, but I don’t believe she does.”

“But she has accepted him.”

“Silly girl. Bit taken with the fine-looking fellow, that’s all. Don’t know her own mind yet. This is springing a mine.”

“Ah well, the thing’s settled, so you may just as well retreat from your position, Jem.”

“But I shall not retreat, sir. I shall hold my position as long as I can, and when I am driven back, I shall do my duty as one in command of a light cavalry regiment should: I shall harass the enemy’s flanks and rear. He’ll get no rest from me.”

“Hang it all, Jem, don’t do that—don’t be rude to the young fellow,” cried the baronet in dismay.

“I—I don’t approve of it at all, Jack. I don’t really.”

“But the thing’s done, man—the thing’s done.”

“Then why do you send the fellow to me?”

“Well, I thought it would be a bit civil to you, Jem, and respectful, and—”

“It is not either,” cried the major. “I look upon it, knowing as you do how I am attached to Glynne, as a regular insult.”

“Now, what nonsense, Jem.”

“It is not nonsense, Jack. The fellow is a mere machine—a good-looking, well-built machine, with not a thought above low-class footraces, and training, and rowing, and football, and cricket.”

“And not bad things either,” said the baronet, hotly.

“No, sir,” replied the major, drawing himself up, “not bad things, but good things if a young man takes to them as amusements to keep his nature in subjection, and to bring it to its finest state of development, that he may have a sound brain in a sound body.”

“Hear, hear!” cried Sir John.

“But bad, rotten, and blackguardly things when a man gives the whole of his mind to them, and has no more ambition than leads him to be the winner of a cup in a walking match.”

“Oh, rubbish!” cried the baronet, warmly. “Rolph’s a gentleman.”

“Then he’s a confoundedly bad specimen of the class, Jack.”

“You’re as prejudiced as an old woman, Jem,” cried the baronet, angrily.

“Perhaps I am,” replied his brother: “but it isn’t prejudice to see that this fellow can’t talk to a girl on any subject but athletics. I haven’t patience with him. I always hated to see him here.”

“And I haven’t patience with you, Jem; ’pon my honour, I haven’t. Why, what next? Here, out of respect to you as my brother, I sent my daughter’s future husband to you, and you tell me to my face that you will insult him. I won’t have it, sir; I say I won’t have it. You’re intolerable. You’re getting beyond bearing, and—and—confound it all, I will not have it! Pretty thing, indeed, when a man mayn’t choose a husband for his own child.”

The baronet took a few strides this way and that way, grew scarlet as he spoke, and ended by taking off his grey hat and dabbing his shining forehead.

“I’ve too much love for Glynne, and too much respect for her mother’s memory to stand by silently and see such a miserable bargain concluded; and I enter my protest against what must turn out an unhappy match,” said the major.

“It will turn out nothing of the sort, sir,” cried the baronet, hotly; “and, look here, Jem, it’s time we came to an understanding. I will not have your dictatorial mess-room manners brought into my establishment; and I tell you once for all, if you can’t conform to the simple home life of a country squire’s house, the sooner you go, sir, the better.”

The major stuck his stick into the turf with a furious stab, as if he had a feud with mother earth; then, dragging round the creel he banged the bright trowel with which he had been gesticulating into the basket, and giving the wicker a swing back, caught up his stick and strode away without a word.

“Confound his insolence!” cried Sir John furiously, “I won’t have it. My own brother: my junior by two hours! A man who has been petted and pampered too, because—because he is my brother—because he has been in the wars—because—because—because he is—my brother—because—hang it all!” he roared, stamping heavily on the turf. “What an abominably hasty temper I have got. He’ll pack up and go, and—here!—hi!—Jem!—Jem!”

The baronet was stout, but it was the active, muscular stoutness of a man constantly in the open air: he did not suffer from the abnormal size of that which Punch’s fashionable tailor called his middle-aged customer’s chest, so that it required little effort on his part to set off at a trot after his brother, who heard his shouts and his pursuing steps, but paid no heed to each summons; for, with head erect, and his stick carried as a military man bears his sabre on the route, he marched steadily on with the regular swinging pace of a well-drilled soldier.

“Jem! Hold hard! Jem, old fellow,” cried the baronet, overtaking him; but the major kept on without turning his head.

“Jem! Here, I beg your pardon. I lost my temper. I’m a passionate old fool.”

Still there was no response, and the major passed on; but his brother now took tight hold of his arm.

“Jem! Come, I say. Don’t you hear me? I beg your pardon, I say. Hang it all, old boy, do you want me to go down upon my knees.”

“No, Jack,” cried the major, stopping short and facing him, “I don’t; but you told me I’d better go.”

“Yes: in a passion; but you know I don’t mean what I say. Here, shake hands, old boy. I say, though, what a peppery old fire-eater you are!”

“Am I, Jack?” said the major, with a grim smile.

“No, no; I mean I am. Look here, old chap, I’m sure there’s a membrane, or a strap, or a nerve, or something of that sort, given way inside me. It lets my temper out, and then I say things I don’t mean.”

“It must have given way a great many years ago, Jack,” said the major, drily.

“Oh, come, Jem! Hang it all, old fellow, I’ve begged your pardon. I’ve humbled myself to you. Don’t jump on a man when he’s down. ’Tisn’t chivalrous; it isn’t indeed.”

“Then you don’t want me to go?”

“Go? Now look here, Jem, do try and be reasonable. What should I do without you?”

“Well then, I’ll stop this time; but really, Jack, if ever you insult me again like that, I can have my old chambers in St James’s, close to the club, and I shall go back to town.”

“Go along with you!” cried Sir John. “Don’t talk nonsense. We’re getting old boys now, Jem, and you’ll stop along with me to the end.”

“Yes, we’re getting old, Jack, very fast indeed,” said the major, as his brother laid a hand affectionately upon his shoulder just as he used in old school-boy days; “time gallops away now.”

“Ay, it does; and that’s why I can’t help feeling a bit anxious about seeing Glynne happily settled in life.”

“And it ought to make you the more particular about—”

“Hush!” cried the baronet, interrupting him sharply, “the girls! Oh, hang it! how can Glynne be so absurd.”

Volume One—Chapter Four.

Serpens.

Sir John and his brother had just reached an opening in Brackley Wood, a fine old pheasant preserve, when the former became aware of the fact that his child and the lady whom she had of late made her companion and friend, were seated in the shade cast by a venerable oak, Glynne painting in front of her easel, upon which were the skilful beginnings of an oil picture representing a rough looking gipsy seated upon a tree stump, in the act of carving the knob of a stick with his long Spanish knife, while Lucy Alleyne, the friend, was reading from a book resting upon her knees.

The group formed a pretty enough natural picture, upon which a silvery rain of sunshine was poured through the dense foliage of the overhanging boughs, for, without being classically beautiful, Glynne Day was as fair a specimen of a young English lady as a country visitor would be likely to see in one twenty-four hours. Her’s was the kind of face with its sweet, calm, placid repose that asked for a second look and then for a third: and when this was complete, he who gazed, old or young, wanted to look again, and so on, in never tiring mood. It was not that her soft, abundant brown hair was so remarkable, nor that her face was so perfect an oval, nor her nose so true an aquiline, nor her eyes so dark a grey; but it was the completeness of the whole countenance, the elasticity of the step that bore onward so tall and graceful a figure, while the sweet repose of the face would have warranted anyone in taking the major’s side when he declared that no pulse in her frame had ever yet been quickened by the thought of love.

Glynne’s companion, Lucy Alleyne, also possessed her share of attractions; but they were cast in a very different mould, for she was dark, large-eyed, little and piquante, with an arch expression about her bow-like mouth that told of suppressed merriment, and a readiness to join in anything that promised laughter, or, as she would have called it, a bit of fun.

The other figure in the group—the model, whose counterfeit presentment was being transferred to canvas, first heard the steps; and he looked up sharply, in a wild, danger-fearing way, as a weasel might, and seemed about to spring to his feet and start off; but a peculiar leer crossed his face, and he half closed his eyes and sat firm as the brothers came up, both glancing at him sourly, the major taking a tighter grip of his stick.

“Ah, my dears!” said Sir John, gruffly, “’most done, Glynne?”

“Yes, papa, quite, for to-day,” said the lady addressed, opening her purse and taking out half-a-crown, the sight of which made the model’s eyes open a little wider as it was held out to him, while an unpleasant animal look was darted at Glynne as she spoke. “That will do for to day. I will send word by the policeman when I want you again.”

“Thankye kindly, my lady,” said the young man, wincing at the name of the messenger; and he now touched his hat to Sir John humbly, and then to his brother.

“You’re back again, then, Caleb Kent,” growled Sir John.

“Yes, sir, I’ve come back,” whined the man.

“Then, just see if you can’t lead a decent life, sir, for I warn you, that if you are brought up again for poaching, it will go pretty hard with you.”

“Yes, sir; I know, sir, but I’m going to reform, sir, and turn keeper, and—”

“That’ll do. Be off. Let’s have deeds, not words.”

“Yes, sir, I will, sir. I’m a-goin’ to try, sir.”

“I said that will do.”

“Yes, sir,” said the man, humbly; and, touching his cap all round, he slouched off, with an ill-used look, and gave two or three loud sniffs.

“Oh, papa, dear,” cried Glynne, “how can you speak so harshly to the poor fellow. He did wrong once, and he has been punished.”

“Did wrong once. Bah! He did wrong in being born, and has done wrong ever since. The fellow’s a regular gaol-bird, and I don’t like to see him near you. For goodness’ sake, my dear, if you must paint, paint something decent, not a scoundrel like that.”

"Your father's quite right, my dear," said the major, grimly. "That's not the sort of fellow to paint. Whitewashing is what he wants."

Sir John chuckled, and his child looked at him, wonderingly.

"But he is so picturesque, papa, dear, and when I get the canvas finished—"

"Oh, you don't want to finish canvases, pet. Let that go. Plenty else to think of now, eh, Miss Alleyne? Why, my dear, you have a colour like a peach."

"Have I, Sir John?" said the girl, demurely. "How shockingly vulgar! Then I must wear a veil."

"For goodness' sake, don't, my dear child," cried the baronet, hastily. "Pray, don't insult poor nature by refusing to look healthy and well."

"I join in my brother's prayer," said the major, as he shook hands in a quiet, old-fashioned, chivalrous way.

"And so do I," said Glynne, smiling in a calm, strangely placid manner. "Do you know, Lucy, I've been enjoying your colour as I painted."

"James, old fellow," said the baronet, laughing, "let's be in the fashion. How handsome you do look this morning. How your hair curls."

"Uncle always looks handsome," said Glynne, seriously, and she sent a thrill of pleasure through the old man, by quietly taking his arm and leaning towards him in a gentle, affectionate way.

"And I'm nobody, Miss Alleyne," said Sir John with mock annoyance.

"You would not think so, if you heard all that Glynne says about you when we are alone, Sir John."

"Oh, come, that's better," cried the baronet, nodding and brightening up. "Well, I must go. I suppose you will walk back with uncle, eh, Glynne?"

"Yes, papa," said Glynne, smiling on him tenderly.

"Then, once more, here goes to see my pigs. You don't care to come, ladies?"

"No, papa, dear," said Glynne, with the same gentle smile. "We were going home almost directly."

"Go along, then," said Sir John. "I shall be back before lunch. Morning, Miss Alleyne," and he strode away. "Hope he won't upset Glynne," he muttered. "No, I don't suppose he will say a word. Can't, as Lucy Alleyne is there. Nice little girl that, by the way."

Sir John was wrong, for his brother did say something to Glynne—a good deal, in fact. Indeed, no sooner had the baronet gone than Lucy Alleyne exclaimed,—

"And now, dear, if you won't mind, as you have your uncle with you, I should like to run home."

"Oh, no," cried Glynne, "you'll come and have lunch."

"Not to-day, dear. Mamma will be anxious to see me back."

"Indeed!" said Glynne, raising her eyebrows slightly.

"Yes, dear; she is a little anxious, too, about Moray; he has been working so hard lately."

"Has he?" said Glynne, half-wonderingly, as if it seemed strange to her, in her placid existence, that people should ever work hard.

"New discovery?" said the major. "Star-gazing?"

"I think so," replied Lucy; "but he is so quiet and reserved, and he does not like to speak until he is sure. If you would not mind coming round our way, I could leave you at the end of the lane."

"Mind? No," cried the major; "but are you sure you will not come home with us to lunch?"

"Quite sure, please," said Lucy.

"Then, we'll see you right to your door," said the major, as he shouldered the little easel; "eh, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, of course, uncle," replied Glynne; and they continued along the side path for about a quarter of a mile, before crossing a fir wood, whose trunks rose up like so many ruddy, grey-bronze columns, while the ground was made slippery by the thick coating of pine needles beneath their feet.

"Oh, here's one of your favourites, Major Day," cried Lucy, eagerly, as she ran on and picked a curious grey-looking fungus, with a rough efflorescence on the top. "No, no, don't tell me: I want to see if I recollect what it is."

"She doesn't know, Glynne. Tell her, my dear."

"I, uncle?" said Glynne, smiling up at him. "You know I never recollect the names."

"I know you won't rouse up that brain of yours to take an interest in anything," said the major in a tone of good-tempered reproof. "It's a great shame, when you are naturally so clever."

"I! Clever! Oh, uncle!" said Glynne, laughing.

"I know—I remember," cried Lucy, eagerly—"stop a moment, I have it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the major, whose eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he seemed sufficiently animated to set a stranger wondering at an old soldier taking up with enthusiasm so strange a pursuit as that in which he engaged. "There, you don't know, my dear, but I applaud your brave effort to remember. Someone here would not even try."

"No, uncle, it is of no use," said Glynne, quietly, though she evidently took an interest in her companion's enthusiastic ways.

"I do know," said Lucy, "and I won't be told."

"You don't," said the major, banteringly.

"I do," cried Lucy. "Yes, I have it. It's an *Amanita*."

"Bravo!"

"*Amanita Rubescens*," cried Lucy triumphantly; "and if you break it the flesh turns red—there!"

"And she has broken the mushroom in half, and it has not turned red," said the major, "because she is wrong."

"Oh, Major Day!" cried Lucy, "don't say that. I am right, am I not?"

"No, my dear, not quite," said the major, "but very nearly. That is *Amanita Pantkerinus*, a very near relative of the one I showed you yesterday."

"But I have been trying," cried Lucy.

"I know you have," said the major, smiling, "and I'm sure you can tell me what these are," he continued, pointing to a cluster of flat, greeny-grey buttons, with dimly marked orange rings upon their surface.

"Oh yes, I know them," cried Lucy, eagerly picking two or three from the patch of grass in an opening amongst the Scotch firs. "*Agaricus Deliciosus*; and, oh, it is getting so late. I must make haste back. I can run home now. Good-bye, Glynne; good-bye, Major Day."

"Good-bye, little pupil," he replied, "and you shall have your marks although you were not right."

"We'll stop and watch you till you are safely home," said Glynne. "Good-bye—good-bye."

Volume One—Chapter Five.

Virgo Asleep.

Glynne Day stood with her uncle at the edge of the dark wood, where the slippery fir-needles lay thickly, and kept every blade of verdure from thrusting forth a relief to the dull, neutral grey that carpeted the ground, amid the tall, bronze-red columns. They gazed down a steep slope, and over the wild heathery waste that lay between them and what looked like a little wooded islet, rising out of the common into quite a mamelon, almost precipitous of side, and crowned with a heavy-looking edifice of brick, with other structures attached, all solid, plain, and terribly out of character with the wild landscape.

For, from where they stood, as it were on the very verge of the cultivated land, there was a stretch of miles upon miles of rolling surface, here sand, there bog, the one brown and purple with the heather or yellow with the gorse, the other in little patches of vivid green or creamy pink, where the *sphagnum* grew, and the cotton rushes had their home.

"What a desolate looking spot it is," said the major thoughtfully, as they watched the active little figure tripping along the sandy road; "and yet it has its beauties after all."

"Ye-es, I suppose it has," said Glynne, "but I never think about its being ugly or beautiful."

"No, my dear, you don't," said the major half pettishly; "and that's what annoys me. Here you are, as beautiful a girl as well can be."

"Am I, uncle, dear?" said Glynne, with the same calm, pleasant smile.

"Are you? Why of course you are, and with a splendid intellect, only you won't use it."

"Don't scold me, uncle," said the girl, creeping closer to him, "I don't want to be clever, I don't want to know more than I know. I am so happy: why should I change?"

The old man's brow grew knotty and corrugated, partly, from perplexity, partly from annoyance, and he gazed sharply down at the sweet face looking lovingly in his.

"There, there," he said, "I won't scold you, my darling. Look, there's little Lucy waving her handkerchief before she enters Fort Science. Fine fellow that brother of hers."

"Yes, Mr Alleyne is nice," said Glynne, returning her friend's salute; and then, as Lucy disappeared at the curve of a steep path that ran up the sandy mound, they turned and walked back towards the hall.

"And so you are very happy, my dear?" said the major, after a thoughtful pause.

"Oh yes, uncle, so very happy," replied Glynne quietly. "You and papa both love me."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said the major. "I'm not so sure that I do."

"But I am," said the girl gently, "quite sure. Then Lucy loves me very much, and our friends are all so kind, and even the servants always smile pleasantly when I want anything done."

"Of course they do," said the major, testily.

"And it sets me wondering, when people talk about sorrow, and the weariness of the world."

"Humph! I suppose so," the major said, stopping short; "and how about Rolph?"

"Oh, he loves me too, uncle," replied Glynne in the same quiet, placid tone and manner. "I was going to tell you: he has asked me if I would be his wife."

"And you—you have told him you would be?"

"Yes, uncle. Papa approves of it, I know; and Robert is so brave and strong and manly. Don't you think it is right?"

The major gave his hat a tilt on one side, and scratched his grey head vigorously.

"Look here, Glynne," he cried; "you are the most extraordinary girl I ever knew."

"I'm very sorry, uncle," she replied. "I can't help being so."

"No, no, of course not. But look here—do you love Rolph?"

"Oh yes, uncle, very much indeed."

"How do you know you do?" cried the major, in the tone of an examiner dealing *viva voce* with a candidate for a post in the army.

"Oh, because he loves me," said Glynne, naïvely; "and, you see, I've known him a little ever since he was a boy."

"Yes, but look here; what makes you love him? Have you no other reason?"

"No, uncle, dear," said Glynne; and there was not the slightest heightening of colour, nor a trace of excitement as she spoke.

"But, my dear child," cried the major in the most perplexed way, "people don't fall in love like that."

"Don't they, uncle?"

"No, no, of course not. There's a lot of passion and storm, and tempest and that sort of thing."

"But only in books."

"Oh, yes, in real life. I remember when I fell in love with Lady Mary Callaghan."

"Were you really once in love, uncle?" cried Glynne with the first touch of animation that she had shown.

"Of course I was—of course—once—but it didn't come to anything. Well, there was a lot of fire and fury over that."

"Was there, uncle?"

"Yes, to be sure. I felt as if I couldn't live without her, and she felt as if she couldn't live without me, and we were always writing letters to one another and couldn't keep apart."

"Oh, I never felt anything of that kind, uncle, and I rarely write letters if I can help it."

"Then you can't be in love," said the major triumphantly.

"But were you really in love, uncle, with Lady Mary—Mary—"

"Callaghan, my dear. Yes."

"But you did not marry her, uncle."

"N-no—no; you are quite right, my dear, I did not. Circumstances occurred and—er—we were not married. But really, Glynne, my dear, you are a most extraordinary girl."

“I am very sorry.”

“Don’t say that, my dear; but—er—I—er—this is a very serious thing, this promising yourself in marriage, and I—er—I—er—should like you to be perfectly sure that you are doing wisely. I think a great deal of you, my dear—old bachelor as I am, and it would trouble me more than I can say if you did not make a happy match.”

“Dear uncle,” she said tenderly, as she clasped her hands upon his arm, and clung to him more closely. “But you need not be afraid, for Robert says he loves me very dearly, and what more could a woman desire?”

“Humph! No, of course not, my dear,” said the major, looking more perplexed than ever, as he gazed down into the unruffled face by his side. “Untouched, if I know anything of womankind,” he said to himself, “but if I attempt to interfere I shall be making trouble, and upset Jack as well. What the devil shall I do?”

There came no mental answer to this self-put question, and the communings were stopped by Glynne herself, who went on thoughtfully and in the most matter-of-fact way.

“I told Robert that we must not think of being married for some time to come, and he said he was glad of that.”

“Said he was glad of it!” cried the major, looking at her aghast.

“Yes, uncle, dear. You see he has to make so many engagements beforehand. His card is quite full for matches of one kind and another.”

“Is it indeed?” said the major sarcastically.

“Yes, uncle. He has to go in training—in training—in training—for, what did he call it? Oh, I remember; in training for the various events, and he would not like to break any of them and pay forfeit.”

The major’s eyes rolled in their sockets, and he seemed to be trying to swallow something that was extremely unsavoury, but he held his peace.

“He says these engagements take up a great deal of his time; but the people like him, so that he can’t very well get out of them.”

“Ah, it would be a pity to disappoint them,” said the major, while Glynne, in her happy, childlike content, did not notice his tone, but talked on as calmly as if the great event of a woman’s life were a most commonplace affair, justifying to the fullest extent her uncle’s idea that her heart was quite untouched.

They had spent so long over their walk that Sir John had had time to finish his visit to the pigs, and they all reached the park gates together.

“Halloa!” he exclaimed, looking inquiringly from one to the other, “so you two have had a good talk. Here, what does your uncle say, my dear?” he continued, with a suspicious tone in his voice.

“Uncle? Say?” replied Glynne, opening her beautiful eyes a little wider. “Oh, uncle has said very little, papa. I’m afraid I have done nothing but prattle to him all the time.”

“What about?” said her father, sharply.

“Oh, principally about my engagement,” she replied calmly.

“Well, and what does he say to it?” said Sir John, half-defiantly.

“Uncle thinks it a very serious step.”

“Yes, of course.”

“And that I ought to be careful in taking it.”

“To be sure, my dear, to be sure. Well?”

“Well, that was all, papa,” she replied. “Lunch must be ready. I’ll go in and take off my things. You are coming soon? Oh, here is Robert. I won’t stop for fear of keeping you waiting.”

The captain was some fifty yards away, but Glynne did not stay. She merely waved her hand, and hurried to the front of the house, while her future lord came slowly on, whistling, with his hands in his pockets.

“You’ve not opposed the match, then?” whispered Sir John.

“No,” said the major, “but I think less of it than ever.”

“Humph!” ejaculated his brother. “Have you spoken to Rolph yet?”

“No. Haven’t seen him.”

“Then, for goodness’ sake, drop all prejudice, Jem, and shake hands warmly. You see they are devotedly attached.”

“No, I don’t,” said the major, gruffly; “but I’ll shake hands.”

"Yes, do, Jem, do. It's the one desire of my life to see Glynne engaged to a good, manly fellow who cares for her, and, now the opportunity has come, I look to you to help me."

"Humph!" ejaculated the major, as Rolph came up, and Sir John struck the iron while it was hot, to use his own form of expression.

"Ready for lunch, Rob?"

"Awfully," said the captain. "Quite an edge on."

"That's right," cried Sir John. "Come along. Oh, look here though," he added, as if upon second thoughts; "I've had no experience before in this sort of thing, and I want to get it over, and go on again as usual. I never do anything without telling the major here."

Rolph bowed, and the major returned his salute stiffly.

"I've been telling him about you know what, and it's all settled now, so you can shake hands, you know."

"Yes; my brother has told me about your proposal," said the major, coldly. "You have won a prize, sir, and I wish you joy."

"Thankye, major, thankye," cried Rolph, seizing his hand and shaking it violently. "You don't want to say anything more to me, do you?"

"N-no," said the major, whose inward thoughts made him look ten years older. "N-no."

"That's right," cried the captain, with a sigh of relief. "Shall we go in to lunch now, Sir John?"

"To be sure, yes, my boy. Go on. I daresay Glynne is waiting. Come along, Jem."

He took his brother's arm; and, as the captain disappeared,—

"Thankye, Jem, thankye," he said earnestly. "Now for lunch. I'm as hungry as a hunter, and my mind's at rest."

"Humph!"

Volume One—Chapter Six.

Dust in the Observatory.

"Well, Mr Oldroyd, and what do you think? Pray, tell me frankly. You have found out what is the matter with him?"

"Yes, ma'am, I think I have."

"Then, pray, speak."

Mrs Alleyne leaned forward with every curve in her face as well as her eyes contradicting the form of her words. "Pray speak," sounded and looked like a command to speak at once under pain of the lady's displeasure. She was a woman of over fifty, with white hair and high clear forehead; but what would have been a handsome face was detracted from by a pinched, care-worn expression, as if there was some great trouble upon her mind; and this trouble had soured her disposition, and made her imperious and harsh. Her cold and rather repellent manner was not softened by her formal white cap or her dress, which was a stiff, black silk, that in its old age appeared to have doubts as to whether it ought not to be a brown, save where it was relieved by white cuffs and a plain muslin kerchief, such as is seen in old pictures, loosely crossed over the breast, and secured behind.

Neither did the room and its furnishings tend to soften matters, for, though good, everything looked worn and faded, notably the ancient Turkey carpet, and the stiff maroon curtains that had turned from red into drab, and hung limp and long beside the two tall gaunt windows, looking out upon a clump of desolate Scotch firs.

The rest of the furniture was depressing, and did not suggest comfort. The solid mahogany chairs were stiff, and the worn horse-hair coverings would have been places of torture to a child; the great dining-table was highly polished and full of reflections, but it had nothing pleasant to reflect, and whoever looked, longed to see it draped with some warm, rich cloth. While the great high-backed sideboard stood out like a polished mahogany sarcophagus upon which someone had placed a bronze funereal urn, though really inside that tomb-like structure there was a cellarette with a decanter or two of generous wine; and the bronze urn contained no ashes, merely an iron heater to make it hiss when it was used for tea.

The blank, drab-painted walls seemed to ask appealingly for something to ameliorate their chilling aspect; but there was no mirror, no bracket bearing bust or clock; only opposite to the windows had the appeal been heard. There, in the very worst light for the purpose, a large picture had been hung, whose old gilt frame was tarnished and chipped, and the gloomy canvas, with its cracked varnish, had been covered by some genius of the Martin type with hundreds of figures in every conceivable posture of misery and despair. Fire was issuing from the earth, and lightnings were angularly veining the clouds, the tableau being supposed to represent the end of the world; and the consequence was that, as far as the walls were concerned, the aspect of the room was not improved.

Now, in every good dining-room, the fireside is, or should be, the most cheerful part. Prior to the days of the Georges, people knew this, and bright tiles and carvings and solid pillars gave a cheery look and countenance to the fire; and

this style, thanks to the most sensible modern aesthetes, has come again into vogue, with handsome overmantels, kerbs, and dogs; but Mrs Alleyne's fireside was chilly, the fender and fire-irons were well-polished, but attenuated and of skewery form as to the latter, sharp edge as to the former, while the narrow drab shelf that formed the mantelpiece had for ornaments two obelisks that appeared to have been cast in that objectionable meat-jelly known as brawn.

It only needed the yellowish roller blinds to be drawn half-way down to make the very atmosphere seem oppressive. And this had been done, so that, as the lady of The Firs sat opposite Philip Oldroyd, the young doctor, who was patiently trying to solve that medical problem known as making a practice in an extremely healthy district, could not help thinking to himself that the place was enough to drive a susceptible person melancholy mad.

Oldroyd did not answer for a few moments, but sat thinking, and Mrs Alleyne watched him intently, scanning his great head, and somewhat plain, but intelligent features with his deep, brown, thoughtful eyes, and closely shaven face. The latter was a sacrifice to Mrs Grundy, so that no objection should be made to his appearance by the more critical inhabitants of a narrow-minded country district, the result having been the destruction of a fine and flowing beard at the cost of much nicking of the skin, and the discomfort of shaving regularly, fine weather or foul.

"I think, Mrs Alleyne, that I know exactly what is the matter with your son."

"Yes, yes," said the lady, impatiently. "Mr Oldroyd, you torture me."

"Then, now I will relieve you, madam," he said with a pleasant smile. "He has really no physical complaint whatever."

"I do not understand you," she said coldly.

"I will be more plain then. He has no disease at all."

"Mr Oldroyd!" said the lady in a disappointed tone, that to the young doctor's ears seemed to say as well:—"How foolish of me to call in this inexperienced country practitioner, who, beyond a little general idea of his profession, knows next to nothing at all."

"Oh, yes, my dear madam, you think he is very ill, and—pray excuse my plainness—in your motherly eyes he appears to be wasting away."

Mrs Alleyne did not reply, but gazed at the speaker haughtily, and looked as cold and repellent as the room.

"Your son, I repeat, has no organic disease; he has a marvellously fine physique, great mental powers, and needs no doctor at all, unless it is to give him good advice."

"I presumed, Mr Oldroyd, that it was the doctor's duty to give advice."

"Exactly, my dear madam; but pray be patient with me if I talk to you a little differently from what you expected. You were prepared for me to look solemn, shake my head and say that the symptoms were rather serious, but not exactly grave; that we must hope for the best; that I was very glad you sent for me when you did; and that I would send in some medicine, and look in again to-morrow. Now, you said, 'Be frank with me;' I say the same to you. Did you not expect something of this kind?"

"Well," said Mrs Alleyne, with something that looked like—not the dawning of a smile, but the ghost of an old one, called up to flit for a moment about her lips, "yes, I did expect something of the kind."

"Exactly," said Oldroyd, smiling genially, and as if he enjoyed this verbal encounter. "Now, kindly listen to me. As I say, your son has a fine physique, but what does he do with it? Does he take plenty of active out-door exercise?"

Mrs Alleyne shook her head.

"Does he partake of his meals regularly?"

"No, Mr Oldroyd," said Mrs Alleyne, with a sigh.

"Does he sleep sufficiently and well?"

"Alas! No."

"Of course he does not, my dear madam. Here is a man who never employs his muscles; never takes the slightest recreation; disappoints nature when she asks for food; and turns night into day as he performs long vigils watching the stars, and burning the midnight oil. How, in the name of all that is sensible, can such a man expect to enjoy good health? Why, nature revolts against it and steals it all away, to distribute among people who obey her laws."

Mrs Alleyne sighed, and thought better of the doctor than she did before.

"It is impossible for such a man to be well, Mrs Alleyne; the wonder is that he has any health at all."

"But he is really ill, now, Mr Oldroyd."

"A little touched in the digestion, that is all."

"And you will prescribe something for that?"

"Yes, ma'am, I'll prescribe turpentine."

"Turpentine!" cried Mrs Alleyne, aghast.

"Yes, madam, out of nature's own pharmacopaeia. Let him go and climb the hills every day, and inhale it when the sun is on the fir woods. Let him get a horse and ride amongst the firs, or let him take a spade and dig the ground about this house, and turn it into a pleasant garden, surrounded by fir trees. That is all he wants."

"Oh, doctor, is that all?" said Mrs Alleyne more warmly; and she laid her thin, white hand upon her visitor's arm.

"Well, not quite," he said, with a smile. "He is a great student; no one admires his work more than I, or the wonderful capacity of his mind, but he must be taken out of it a little—a man cannot always be studying the stars."

"No, no; he does too much," said Mrs Alleyne. "You are quite right. But what would you recommend?"

"Nature again, madam. Something to give him an interest in this world, as well as in the other worlds he makes his study. In short, Mrs Alleyne, it would be the saving of your son if he fell in love."

"Doctor!"

"And took to himself some sweet good girl as a wife."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The doctor started, and looked for the source of the gush of mirth.

A sweet ringing silvery laugh, that sounded like bell music in the gloomy room, for Lucy Alleyne had entered unheard, to catch the doctor's last words, and burst into this girlish fit of merriment.

"Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs Alleyne with an angry glance, as she rose from her chair.

"Oh, I am so sorry, mamma. I beg your pardon, Mr Oldroyd, but it did seem so droll."

She laughed again so merrily that it seemed infectious, and the young doctor would have joined in had not Mrs Alleyne been there; besides, as this was a professional call, he felt the necessity for some show of dignity.

"May I ask, Lucy, what is the meaning of this extremely unseemly mirth," said Mrs Alleyne, with a good deal of annoyance in her tone.

"Don't be angry with me, mamma dear, but it did seem so comical; the idea of Moray falling in love and being married."

"I fail to see the ridiculous side of the matter," said Mrs Alleyne, "especially at a time when Mr Oldroyd has been consulted by me upon the question of your brother's health."

"Oh, but you don't think he is really ill, Mr Oldroyd, do you?" cried Lucy, anxiously.

"Indeed, I do not, Miss Alleyne. He requires nothing but plenty of open-air exercise, with more food and regular sleep."

"And a wife," said Lucy, with a mirthful look.

"And a wife," said Oldroyd, gravely; and he gazed so intently at Lucy that her merry look passed away, and she coloured slightly, and glanced hastily at her mother.

"We must make Moray go out more, mamma dear," she said hurriedly. "I'll coax him to have walks with me, and I'll teach him botany; Major Day would be delighted if he'd come with him—I mean go with him; and—oh, I say, mamma, isn't dinner nearly ready? I am so hungry."

"Lucy!" cried Mrs Alleyne, with a reproachful look, as Oldroyd rose.

"It is an enviable sensation, Miss Alleyne," he said, as a diversion to the elder lady's annoyance; "one of nature's greatest boons. As I was saying, Mrs Alleyne, *à propos* of your son, he neglects his health in his scientific pursuits, and the beautifully complicated machine of his system grows rusty. Why, the commonest piece of mechanism will not go well if it is not properly cared for, so how can we expect it of ourselves."

"Quite true, Mr Oldroyd. Did you ride over? Is your horse waiting?"

"Oh, no, I walked. Lovely weather, Miss Alleyne. Good-day, madam, good-day."

"But you have not taken any refreshment, Mr Oldroyd. Allow me to—"

"Why, dinner must be ready, mamma," said Lucy. "Will not Mr Oldroyd stop?"

"Of course, yes, I had forgotten," said Mrs Alleyne, with a slight colour in her cheek, and a peculiar hesitancy in her voice. "We—er—dine early—if you would join us, we should be very glad."

"With great pleasure, madam," said the young doctor, frankly; "it will save me a five miles' walk, for I must go across the common this afternoon to Lindham."

"To see poor old Mrs Wattley?" cried Lucy eagerly, as Mrs Alleyne tried to hide by a smile, her annoyance at her

invitation being accepted.

“Yes; to see poor old Mrs Wattley,” said Oldroyd, nodding.

“Is she very ill?” said Lucy sympathetically.

“Stricken with a fatal disease, my dear young lady,” he replied.

“Oh!” ejaculated Lucy.

“One, however, that gives neither pain nor trouble. She will not suffer in the least.”

“I’m glad of that,” cried Lucy, “for I like the poor old lady. What is her complaint?”

“Senility,” said Oldroyd, smiling. “Why, my dear Miss Alleyne, she is ninety-five.”

“Will you come with me, Lucy,” said Mrs Alleyne, who had been vainly trying to catch her daughter’s eye, and then—“perhaps Mr Oldroyd will excuse us.”

“Not if you are going to make any additions to the meal on my account, madam,” said the doctor, hastily. “I am the plainest of plain men—a bachelor who lives on chops and steaks, and it needs a sharp-edged appetite to manage these country cuts.”

Mrs Alleyne smiled again, and the visitor was left alone.

“Old lady didn’t like my staying,” he said to himself. “Shouldn’t have asked me, then. I am hungry, but—Oh! what a pretty, natural, clever little witch it is. I wish I’d a good practice; I should try my luck if I had, and I don’t think there is any one in the way.”

“Humph! End of the world,” he said, rising and crossing to look at the picture. “What a ghastly daub!”

“What a wilderness; why don’t they have the garden done up?” he continued, going to one of the windows, and looking at the depressing, neglected place without. “Ugh! what a home for such a bright little blossom. It must be something awful on a wet, wintry day.”

“Sorry I stopped,” he said, soon after.

“No, I’m not; I’m glad. Now, I’ll be bound to say there’s boiled mutton and turnips for dinner, and plain rice pudding. It’s just the sort of meal one would expect in a house like this. Mum!”

He gave his lips a significant tap, for the door opened, and Lucy entered, accompanied by a sour-looking maid with a clayey skin and dull grey eyes, bearing a tray.

“Be as quick as you can, Eliza,” said Lucy. “You won’t mind my helping, Mr Oldroyd, will you?” she continued. “We only keep one servant now.”

“Mind? Not I,” he replied cheerily. “Let me help too. I’ll lay the knives and forks.”

“No, no, no!” cried Lucy, as she wondered what Mrs Alleyne would have said if she had heard her allusion to “one servant now.”

“Oh, but I shall,” he said; and the maid looked less grim as she saw the doctor begin to help. “Let’s see,” he said, “knives right, forks left. Won’t do to turn the table round if you place them wrong, as the Irishman did.”

Just then the maid—Eliza—left the room to fetch some addition to the table.

“I am glad you are going to stay, Mr Oldroyd,” said Lucy naïvely.

“Are you?” he said, watching her intently as the busy little hands produced cruets and glasses from the sideboard cupboard.

“Oh yes, for it is so dull here.”

“Do you find it so?”

“Oh, no, I don’t. I was thinking of Moray. It will be someone for him to talk to. Mamma fidgets about him so; but I felt as sure as could be that he only looked ill because he works so terribly hard.”

A step was heard outside, and the young doctor started from the table, where he was arranging a couple of spoons on either side of a salt-cellar, with so guilty a look that Lucy turned away her head to conceal a smile.

Oldroyd saw it though, and was annoyed at being so weak and boyish; but he felt that, after all, he was right, for it would have looked extremely undignified in Mrs Alleyne’s eyes if he had been caught playing so domestic a part in a strange house.

“I wish she had not laughed at me, though,” he said to himself; and then he tried to pass the matter off as Mrs Alleyne came back, bland and dignified, trying to conceal the fact that she had been out to make a few preparations that would help to hide the poverty of the land.

“You will excuse our meal being very simple, Mr Oldroyd,” she said quietly; “I did not expect company.”

“If you would kindly treat me as if I were not company, Mrs Alleyne, I should be greatly obliged,” replied Oldroyd; and then there was an interchange of bows—that on the lady’s part being of a very dignified but gracious kind, one that suggested tolerance, and an absolute refusal to accept the doctor as anything else than a visitor.

Oldroyd felt rather uncomfortable, but there was comfort in Lucy’s presence, as, utterly wanting in her mother’s reserve, she busied herself in trying to make everything pleasant and attractive for their guest, in so natural and homely a manner, that while the doctor had felt one moment that he wished he had not stayed, the next he was quite reconciled to his fate.

“I feel as sure as can be that I am right,” thought Oldroyd, as at the end of a few minutes, Eliza entered with a large dish, whose contents were hidden by a battered and blackened cover, placed it upon the table, retreated, came back with a couple of vegetable dishes, retreated once more and came back with four dinner-plates, whose edges were chipped and stained from long usage.

Oldroyd glanced at Lucy, and saw her pretty forehead wrinkled up, reading accurately enough that she was troubled at the shabbiness of the table’s furnishings; and, as if she felt that he was gazing at her, she looked up quickly, caught his eye, and coloured with vexation, feeling certain as she did that he had read her thoughts.

“Will you excuse me a moment, Mr Oldroyd?” said Mrs Alleyne, with dignity. “We do not use a dinner-bell, the noise disturbs my son. I always fetch him from the observatory myself.”

Oldroyd bowed again, and crossed the room to open the door for his hostess to pass out.

“What a nuisance all this formality is,” he thought to himself, “I hate it;” but all the same, he felt constrained to follow Mrs Alleyne’s lead, and he was beginning once more to regret his stay when he turned to encounter the fresh, natural, girlish look of the daughter of the house.

“Mamma makes a regular habit of fetching my brother to meals, Mr Oldroyd,” said Lucy; “I don’t believe he would come unless she went. But while she is away, do tell me once again you don’t think Moray is going to be seriously ill?”

“But I do think so,” he replied.

“Oh, Mr Oldroyd!”

The young doctor gazed at the pretty sympathetic face with no little pleasure, as he saw its troubled look, and the tears rising in the eyes.

“How nice,” he thought, “to be anyone she cares for like this,” and then he hugged himself upon his knowledge, which in this case was power—the power of being able to change that troubled face to one full of smiles.

“I think he is going to be very seriously ill—if he does not alter his way of life.”

“He could avoid the illness, then?” cried Lucy, with the change coming.

“Certainly he could. He has only to take proper rest and out-door exercise to be as well as you are.”

“Then pray advise him, Mr Oldroyd,” said Lucy, who was beaming now. “Do try and get him to be sensible. It is of no use to send him medicine—he would not take a drop. Hush! here he is.”

At that moment there were slow, deliberate steps in the hall, and then the door opened, and Mrs Alleyne, with a smile full of pride upon her calm, stern face, entered, leaning upon the arm of a tall, grave, thoughtful-looking man, whose large dark-grey eyes seemed to be gazing straight before him, through everything, into the depths of space, while his mind was busy with that which he sought to see.

He was apparently about three or four-and-thirty, well-built and muscular; but his muscles looked soft and rounded. There was an appearance of relaxation, even in his walk; and, though his eyes were wide open, he gave one the idea of being in a dream. He was dressed in a loose, easy-fitting suit of tweeds, but they had been put on anyhow, and the natural curls of his dark-brown hair and beard made it very evident that the time he spent at the toilet-table was short.

What struck the visitor most was the veneration given to the student by his mother and sister, the former full of pride in her offspring, as she drew back his chair, and waited until he had seated himself, before she took her own place at the head of the table, and signed to her guest to follow her example.

It was a reversal of the ordinary arrangements at a board, for Oldroyd found himself opposite Moray Alleyne, with Mrs Alleyne and her daughter at the head and foot. In fact, it soon became evident that Mrs Alleyne’s son took no interest whatever in matters terrestrial of a domestic nature, his mind being generally far away.

Mrs Alleyne had announced to him, as they came towards the dining-room, that Mr Oldroyd would join them at the meal; but the scrap of social information was covered by a film of nebular theory, till the astronomer took his place at the table, when he seemed to start out of a fit of celestial dreaming, and to come back to earth.

“Ah, Mr Oldroyd,” he said, with his face lighting up and becoming quite transformed. “I had forgotten that you were to join us. Pray forgive my rudeness. I get so lost in my calculations.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Oldroyd, nodding; and then he looked hard at his *vis-à-vis*, marvelling at the change, and the tones of his deep mellow voice, and thinking what a man this would be if he had become statesman, orator, or the like, concluding by saying mentally, “What a physique for a West End physician! Why, that presence—a little more grey, and that soft, winning, confidential voice, would be a fortune to him. But he would have to dress.”

“I am sorry we have only plain boiled mutton to offer you, Mr Oldroyd,” said Mrs Alleyne, as the covers were removed.

“I knew it was,” thought Oldroyd, glancing at the livid, steaming leg of mutton. Then aloud: “One of the joints I most appreciate, madam—with its appropriate trimmings, Miss Alleyne,” he added smiling at Lucy.

“I’m afraid the potatoes are not good,” said Lucy, colouring with vexation; “and the turnips seem very hard and stringy.”

“Don’t prejudge them, my dear,” said Mrs Alleyne with dignity. “We have great difficulty in getting good vegetables, Mr Oldroyd,” she continued, “though we are in the country. We—er—we do not keep a gardener.”

“And the cottage people don’t care to sell,” said Oldroyd. “I have found that out. But you have a large garden here, Mrs Alleyne.”

“Yes,” said the lady, coldly.

“Ah,” said Oldroyd, looking across at Moray Alleyne. “Now, there’s your opportunity. Why not take to gardening?”

“Take to gardening?” said Alleyne, shaking off the dreamy air that had come upon him as he mechanically ate what his mother had carefully placed upon his plate, that lady selecting everything, and her son taking it without question, as a furnace fire might swallow so much coal.

“Yes; take to gardening, my good sir,” said Oldroyd. “It is a very ancient occupation, and amply rewards its votaries.”

“I am well rewarded by much higher studies,” said Alleyne, smiling; and Oldroyd was more than ever impressed by his voice and manner.

“Exactly, but you must have change.”

Alleyne shook his head.

“I do not feel the want of change,” he said.

“But your body does,” replied Oldroyd, “and it is crying out in revolt against the burden your mind is putting upon it.”

“Why, doctor,” said Alleyne, with his face lighting up more and more, “I thought you had stayed to dinner. This is quite a professional visit.”

“My dear sir, pray don’t call it so,” said Oldroyd. “I only want to give you good advice. I want you to give me better vegetables than these—from your own garden,” he added, merrily, as he turned to Lucy, who was eagerly watching her brother’s face.

“Thank you, doctor,” replied Alleyne shaking his head; “but I have no time.”

Oldroyd hesitated for a moment or two, as he went on with his repast of very badly cooked, exceedingly tough mutton; but a glance at his hostess and Lucy showed him that his words found favour with them, and he persevered in a pleasant, half-bantering strain that had, however, a solid basis of sound shrewd sense beneath its playful tone.

“Hark at him!” he said. “Has not time! Now, look here, my dear Mr Alleyne—pray excuse my familiarity, for though we have been neighbours these past five years, we have not been intimate—I say, look here, my dear sir—potatoes! Thank you, Miss Alleyne. That one will do. I like them waxey. Now look here, my dear sir, you are an astronomer.”

“Only a very humble student of a great science, Mr Oldroyd,” said the other, meekly.

“Ah, well, we will not discuss that. At all events you are a mathematician, and deal in algebraic quantities, and differential calculus, and logarithms, and all that sort of thing.”

“Yes—yes,” said Alleyne, going on eating in his mechanical way as if he diligently took to heart the epigrammatic teaching of the old philosopher—“Live not to eat, but eat to live.”

“Well then, my dear sir, I’ll give you a calculation to make.”

“Not now, doctor, pray,” said Mrs Alleyne, quickly. “My son’s digestion is very weak.”

“This won’t hurt his digestion, madam,” said Oldroyd; “a child could do it without a slate.”

“Pray ask me,” said Alleyne, “and I will endeavour to answer you.”

“Well, then: here is my problem,” said Oldroyd; “perhaps you will try and solve it too, Miss Alleyne. Suppose two men set to work to perform a task, and the one—as you mathematicians would put it, say A, worked twenty hours a day for five years, while B worked eight hours a day for twenty years, which would do most work?”

“I know,” said Lucy, quickly; “the busy B, for he would do a hundred and sixty hours’ work, while A would only do a

hundred hours' work."

Alleyne smiled and nodded very tenderly at his sister.

"Isn't that right?" she said quickly, and her cheeks flushed.

"Quite right as to proportion, Lucy," he said, "but in each case it would be three hundred and sixty-five times, or three hundred and thirteen times as much."

"Of course," she said. "How foolish of me."

"Well, Mr Oldroyd, what about your problem?" continued Alleyne, commencing upon a fresh piece of tough mutton.

"You have solved it," said Oldroyd. "You have shown me that the eight-hour's man does more work than the twenty-hour's man."

"Yes, but one works five years, the other twenty, according to your arrangement."

"Not my arrangement, sir, Nature's. The man who worked twenty hours per diem would be worn out mentally at the end of five years. The man who worked eight hours a day, all surroundings being reasonable, would, at the end of twenty years, be in a condition to go on working well for another ten, perhaps twenty years. Now, my dear sir, do you see my drift?"

Moray Alleyne laid down his knife and fork, placed his elbows on either side of his plate, clasped his hands together, and then seemed to cover them with his thick, dark beard, as he rested his chin.

A dead silence fell upon the little party, and, as if it were some chemical process going on, small round discs of congealed fat formed on the mutton gravy in the dish.

Mrs Alleyne was about to break the silence, but she saw that her son was ready to answer, and she refrained, sitting very upright and motionless in her chair, as she watched the furrows coming and going on his brow.

"That is bringing it home, doctor," he said, and there was a slight huskiness in his voice as he spoke. "But you are exaggerating."

"I protest, no," said Oldroyd, eagerly. "Allow me, I have made some study of animal physiology, and I have learned this: Nature strengthens the muscles, nerves and tissues, if they are well used, up to a certain point. If that mark is passed—in other words, if you trespass on the other side—punishment comes, the deterioration is rapid and sure."

"Mother," said Alleyne, turning to her affectionately; "you have been setting the doctor to tell me this."

"Indeed, no, my dear," she cried, "I was not aware what course our conversation would take; but, believe me, Moray, I am glad, for this must be true."

"True?" cried Oldroyd. "My dear madam, the world teems with proofs."

"Yes," said Alleyne thoughtfully: and there was a far-off, dreamy look in his eyes as he gazed straight before him as if into space, "it is true—it must be true; but with so much to learn—such vast discoveries to make—who can pause?"

"The man who wishes to win in the long race," said Oldroyd smiling, and again there was a minute's absolute silence, during which the young doctor caught a reconnaissant look from Lucy.

Then Alleyne spoke again.

"Yes, Mr Oldroyd, you are right," he said. "Nature is a hard mistress."

"What, for not breaking her laws?" cried Oldroyd. "Come, come, Mr Alleyne, my knowledge of astronomy extends to the Great Bear, Perseus, Cassiopeia, and a few more constellations; but where would your science be if her laws were not immutable?"

For answer, to the surprise of all, Moray Alleyne slowly unclasped his hands, and stretched one across to the young doctor.

"Thank you," he said. "You are quite right. I give way, for I am beaten. Mother, dear, I yield unwillingly, but Nature's laws are immutable, and I'll try to obey them. Are you content?"

"My boy!"

Stern, unbending Mrs Alleyne was for the moment carried away by her emotion, and forgetting the doctor's presence, she left her chair to throw her arms round her son's neck, bend down, kiss his forehead, and then hurry from the room.

"She loves me, Mr Oldroyd," said Alleyne simply. "Lucy dear, bring mamma back. We are behaving very badly to our guest."

Lucy had already left her chair, and she, too, impulsively kissed her brother and then ran from the room to hide her tears.

"Poor things," said Alleyne, smiling. "I behave very badly to them, doctor, and worry them to death; but I am so lost

in my studies that I neglect everything. They have made such sacrifices for me, and I forget it. I don't see them—I don't notice what they do. It was to humour me that they came to live in this desolate spot, and my poor mother has impoverished herself to meet the outlay for my costly instruments. It is too bad, but I am lost in my work, and nothing will ever take me from it now."

"Nothing?" said Oldroyd.

"Nothing," was the reply, given in all simple childlike earnestness, as the young doctor gazed straight into the deep full eyes that did not for a moment blanch. "So you will not give me pills and draughts, doctor," said Alleyne at last, smiling.

"Medicine? No. Take exercise, man. Go more into society. See friends. Take walks. Garden. Make this desert bloom with roses."

"Yes—yes—yes," said Alleyne, thoughtfully. "I must try. Mr Oldroyd," he said suddenly, "I should like to see more of you—if—if you would allow me."

"My dear sir, nothing would give me greater pleasure. Here, I'll come and garden with you, if you like."

"I should be very grateful," said Alleyne. "Give me your advice," he continued, earnestly, "for I—I must live—I have so much to do—endless labour—and if I do not husband my strength, I—you are right: a man must take exercise and sleep. Mr Oldroyd, I shall take your advice, and—Hush, here they come."

In effect, looking red-eyed, but perfectly calm now, Mrs Alleyne entered with Lucy, and the rest of the dinner passed off most pleasantly to Oldroyd, who was ready to accord that the poor, badly-cooked mutton was the most delicious he had ever eaten, and the vegetables as choice as could have been grown. Doubtless this was due to Lucy's grateful glances, and the quiet, grave condescension with which Mrs Alleyne turned from her idol to say a few words now and then.

Even Alleyne himself seemed to be making efforts to drag himself back from the company of the twin orbs in space, or the star-dust of the milky way, to chat about the ordinary things of every-day life; and at last, it was with quite a guilty sensation of having overstepped the bounds of hospitality in his stay that Oldroyd rose to go.

"You will call and see us again soon, Mr Oldroyd?" said Mrs Alleyne, with the dignity of a reigning queen.

"Professionally, madam," he said, "there is no need. I have exhausted my advice at this first visit. It is for you to play the nurse, and see that my suggestions are carried out."

"Then as a friend," said the lady, extending her thin white hand. "I am sure my son feels grateful to you, and will be glad to see you at any time."

She glanced at Alleyne, who was seated in the sunshine, holding a pair of smoked glass spectacles to his eyes, and gazing up at the dazzling orb passing onwards towards the west.

"I thank you heartily," said Oldroyd. "Society is not so extensive here that one can afford to slight so kind an invitation."

"Mr Oldroyd going?" said Alleyne, starting, as, in obedience to a look from her mother, Lucy bent over him, and, pressing the glasses down with one hand, whispered a few words in his ear.

"Yes, I must be off now," said the young doctor.

"You will come and see us again soon?" said Alleyne. "Would you care to see my observatory? It might interest you a little."

"I shall be glad," said Oldroyd, "very glad—some day," and after a most friendly good-bye, he took his soft hat and stout stick, and, leaving the cheerless, sombre house, went down the steep slope, and took a short cut across the rough boggy land towards his patient's cottage.

"Thorough lady, but she is very stiff; and she worships her son. Charming little girl that. Nice and natural. No modern young-ladyism in her," he muttered, as he picked his way. "I should think it would be possible to be in her company a whole day without a single allusion to frilling, or square-cut, or trains, or the colour and shape of Miss Blank's last new bonnet. Quite a sensible little girl. Pretty flower growing in very uncongenial soil, but she seems happy enough."

Philip Oldroyd's communings were checked by some very boggy patches, which had to be leaped and skirted, and otherwise avoided; but as soon as he was once more upon firm ground, he resumed where he had left off.

"Wonderfully fond of her brother, too. Well, I don't wonder. He's a fine fellow after all. I thought him a dullard—a book-worm; but he's something more than that. Why, when he wakes up out of his dreamy state, he's a noble-looking fellow. What a model he would make for an artist who wanted to paint a Roman senator. Why doesn't nature give us all those fine massive heads, with crisp hair and beard? Humph! lost in his far-seeing studies, and nothing will draw him out of them for more than a few hours. Nothing would ever draw him away but one thing. One thing? No, not it, though. He's not the sort of man. He's good-looking enough, and he has a voice that, if bent to woo, would play mischief with a woman's heart. He'll never take that complaint, though, I'll vow. It would be all on the lady's side. And yet, I don't know: man is mortal after all. I am for one. Very mortal indeed, and if I go often to The Firs, I shall be mixing Lucy Alleyne up with my prescriptions, and that won't do at all."

Volume One—Chapter Seven.

Planets in Opposition.

Judith Hayle was busy “tidying up” the keeper’s cottage, which looked brighter since her return home, for there were flowers in glasses set here and there, and she was mentally wishing that father would clean the captain’s double gun out in the wash-house instead of bringing a pail of water into the living-room, to plant between his knees as he worked the rod up and down the barrels.

The girl looked serious, for her sudden return had made her father stern, and she expected to be called upon for more explanation, and a cross-examination, which did not begin.

“Who’s this?” said the keeper, with a quick look through the little lattice. “The missus. Here, Judy, she hasn’t come here for nothing. Go upstairs and let me see her first.”

The girl looked startled and hurriedly obeyed, while her father hastily wiped his hands and opened the door.

Mrs Rolph was close up, and he went out into the porch to meet her, drawing aside quietly and gravely to let her pass.

“Will you walk in, ma’am?”

“Yes, Hayle, thank you,” said Mrs Rolph, speaking in a distant, dignified way, as of a mistress about to rebuke an erring servant.

She passed him, looking quickly round the room in search of Judith, and then, turning her eyes inquiringly upon the keeper, who drew a chair forward, and then stood back respectfully as Mrs Rolph sat down.

“Do you know why I have come here, Hayle?” she said, striving to speak as one who feels herself aggrieved.

“Yes, ma’am. ’Bout sending Judith home.”

“Your child has spoken to you?”

“No, ma’am.”

Mrs Rolph coughed faintly, to gain time. The task did not seem so easy in presence of this sturdy, independent-looking Englishman, and she regretted the tone she had taken, and her next remark as soon as it was spoken.

“Well, Hayle,” she continued, “what have you to say to this?”

“Nay, ma’am,” said the keeper coldly; “it’s what have you to say?”

Mrs Rolph wanted to speak quietly, and make a kind of appeal to the keeper, but the words would not come as she wished, and she turned upon him, in her disappointment and anger, with the first that rose to her lips.

“To say? That all this is disgraceful. I am bitterly hurt and grieved to find that you, an old servant of my husband, the man whom he rescued from disgrace, should, in return for the kindness of years and years, give me cause to speak as I am compelled to do now.”

“Indeed, ma’am!”

“Yes. Out of kindness to your poor dead wife, I took Judith, and clothed and educated her, treated her quite as if she had been of my own family, made her the companion of my niece; in short, spared nothing; and my reward is this: that she has set snares for my son, and caused an amount of unhappiness in my house that it may take years to get over, and which may never be forgotten. Now, then, what excuse have you to offer? What has your child to say?”

The keeper looked at her and smiled.

“Nay, ma’am,” he said quietly, “you don’t mean all this, and you would not speak so if you were not put out. You know that I’ve got a case against you. I trusted my poor lass in your hands.”

“Trusted, man?”

“Yes, ma’am, that’s the word—trusted her. You promised to be like a mother to her.”

“And I have been till she proved ungrateful.”

“Nay, she has not been ungrateful, ma’am, and you know it. It’s for me to ask you what you were doing to let your son put such ideas in my poor child’s head.”

“Hayle!”

“Yes, ma’am, I must speak my mind.”

“It is madness. You know it is madness.”

“Yes, ma’am, if you call it so; but that’s how we stand, and my poor girl is not to blame. It is you.”

“How dare you!”

“Because I am her father, ma’am, and my child is as much to me as your son is to you.”

“This is insolence, sir. Have the goodness to remember who I am.”

“I never forget it, ma’am. You are my missus, the old master’s wife. But this is not a matter of mistress and servant, but of a mother and a father disputing about their children.”

Mrs Rolph drew herself up, and her eyes flashed, but the fire was drowned out directly by the tears of trouble and vexation, and the woman prevailed over the mistress directly after, as she said, in quite an altered tone,—

“Hayle, my good man, what is to be done?”

“Hah!” ejaculated the keeper; “now, ma’am, you are talking like a sensible woman, and we may be able to do business.”

“Yes, yes, Hayle, I was angry. I could not help it. All this comes nigh to breaking my heart. It is, of course, quite impossible. What do you propose to do?”

“Forget it, ma’am, if I can.”

“And Judith?”

“Hah! That’s another thing, ma’am.”

“But she surely is not so vain as to—to—”

“My Judith is a woman, ma’am. Is that vanity?”

“Yes, of course. No, no, Hayle. But, once more: it is impossible.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Ah, that’s very good and sensible of you. Now, look here. I have thought it all over as I came, and I am sorry to say what I have decided upon seems to be the best plan. It will grieve me terribly, but there’s no help for it. You and Judith must go away. You will agree to this, Hayle?”

“You mean, ma’am, that we old people are to settle the matter as to what is best for the young folks?”

“Yes, yes, that is right.”

“And what will the young folks say?”

Mrs Rolph hesitated for a moment or two.

“We cannot stop to consult them, my good man, when we are working for their good. Now, look here, Hayle; of course it will put you to a good deal of inconvenience, for which I am sorry, and to meet that difficulty I went back to my room and wrote this.” She took a cheque from her little reticule. “It is for fifty pounds, Hayle; it will cover all your expenses till you obtain another appointment. Why, Benjamin Hayle, how long have you been in our service?”

“A many years, ma’am,” said the keeper gravely; and then he read the cheque over as Mrs Rolph placed it in his hands. “Ah! ‘Pay to Benjamin Hayle or bearer, fifty pounds.—Constantia Rolph.’ A good deal of money, ma’am. And now, I think I’ll call Judith down.”

“Yes—yes, do. I must say a few words to her. Poor girl, I wish her well.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” said the keeper quietly.

“Yes: it is not all her fault.”

“Judith—Judith, my girl,” said the keeper, opening the door at the foot of the stairs. “Come down.”

There was the quick rustling of a dress, and Judith came down, red-eyed, pale and wild-looking, to lay her hand on her father’s arm.

“Ah, Judith, my dear,” began Mrs Rolph, hastily. “Your father and I have been discussing this unhappy affair, and, sorry as we are, we feel obliged to come to the conclusion—the same conclusion that you will, as a good, sensible girl, when you have well thought it out—that this silly flirtation cannot go on. It is for your sake as well as my son’s that I speak.”

Hayle felt his child’s hand tremble on his arm.

“You are too wise and too good to wish to injure my son’s prospects for life, and so we have decided that it will be better for your father to leave the place, and take you right away, where all this little trouble will soon be forgotten.”

“And,” interposed the keeper, “the missus has given me this, my dear—a cheque for fifty pounds, to pay all our expenses. What shall I do with it, my dear?”

"Burn it, father," said Judith, slowly. "It is to buy us off."

"Hah!" said the keeper, with a smile full of satisfaction, "that's well said;" and he placed the end of the cheque to the glowing ashes. It burst into flame and he held it till it was nearly burned away, tossing the scrap he had held into the fire.

"Hayle, you must be mad!" cried Mrs Rolph, astonishment having at first closed her lips.

"Nay, ma'am, we're not mad, either of us," said the keeper, gravely. "There are some things money can buy, and some things it can't, ma'am. What you want is one of the things it can't buy. Judith and I are going away from the cottage—right away, ma'am. I'm only a keeper, but there's a bit of independence in me; and as for my girl here, whom you made a lady, she's going to act like what you have made her. She owns to me, in her looks if not in words, that she loves young master, and she's too proud to come to you and be his wife, till you come to her, and beg her to. Am I right, Judith?"

The girl gave him a quick look, and then drew herself up, and clung to him.

"Yes, father," she said, in a whisper which caused her intense suffering "you are right."

"There, ma'am, are you satisfied?"

"No," said Mrs Rolph in a husky voice, "I am not satisfied, but it cannot be. My son's welfare is at stake."

She rose, and tried to speak again, but unable to utter another word, she left the cottage, father and daughter watching her till she disappeared among the dark aisles of the firs.

Volume One—Chapter Eight.

Mars in the Ascendant.

"Better get it over," said Captain Rolph, the next day, as he indulged himself in what he called a short "spin" down the lane by the side of The Warren, and in the direction of the Alleynes' home, which stood up, grim and bleak, out of the sandy desert land. "What with the old man, and the major, and the mater, and Madge, and—oh, hang it all! I'm not going to stand any humbug from Judy, and so I tell her. There, I'll go and get it over at once."

He stopped running, braced himself up, and marched in regular military fashion, back to The Warren, to see Marjorie seated at one of the front windows, ready to give him a smile in response to his short nod.

The next moment he stopped short, gazing sharply down the avenue at the broad, bent back of the keeper, who, with head down, was striding away toward the gate.

"What's he been here for?—to see me?"

Rolph entered the house, walked noisily into his study—a gun-room, for the study of fowling-pieces and fishing rods, with a museum-like collection of prize cups and belts dotted about, in company with trophies of the chase, heads, horns and skins. Here he rang the bell, which was very promptly answered by the butler, Captain Rolph being a follower of the celebrated Count Shucksen, and using so much military drill-sergeant powder with his orders that they went home at once.

"Hayle been to see me, Smith?" he asked, sharply.

"No, sir. Came to bring up your guns after my mistress had been down to the keeper's lodge this morning."

"Brought up my guns," said Rolph, wonderingly. "What for?"

The man looked at him rather curiously in silence.

"Well, idiot, why don't you speak?"

"Not my business, sir. In trouble, I suppose. Benjamin Hayle and me has never been friends, and so he said nothing, on'y one word as he went out."

"And what was that?"

"Sack, sir—sack!"

"That'll do."

"Yes, sir—I knew it would come some day," said the butler to himself. "Sticking up a notorious poacher on a level with respectable servants, and putting his daughter over 'em, making my lady of her. But pride always did have a fall."

"Humph!" muttered Rolph, with a laugh, "the old girl strikes first blow without knowing what was coming. All right. Now for it. Just as well, perhaps. But he was a good keeper."

He went out into the hall just in time to meet Marjorie, who was tripping blithely down the stairs, singing the while.

"What a lovely day it is, Rob," she said.

“Is it?” he said grimly.

“Isn’t it, dear? Why, what’s the matter? Are you going in to see auntie on business?”

“Yes, on that business. Did you and my mother hatch up that dodge between you?”

“I don’t know what you mean, Rob.”

“Of course not, my clever little schemer. Come in, too, and hear how I’ve flanked you both.”

A sudden change came over the girl’s smiling countenance, with its air of wonder, and it was with a vindictive flash of her eyes that she suddenly caught Rolph by the arm.

“Not married?” she said in a harsh whisper.

“No; not yet.”

“Hah!”

It was a catching sigh of relief as Rolph threw open the drawing-room door, and, with mock politeness, stood aside for Marjorie to enter.

Mrs Rolph looked troubled and disturbed, and evidently welcomed the appearance of Marjorie, making a sign for the girl to come to her side, and then drawing herself up in her most stately way ready to receive her son’s attack, which was not long in coming.

“Why did you go to Hayle’s this morning?”

“On business, Rob.”

“What for?”

“To tell him that the time had come when I required his services no longer, and that he must go at once.”

“What! My keeper?”

“Mine, Robert,” said Mrs Rolph, firmly. “You forget the terms of your father’s will. You have your income; I have mine, with undisturbed possession of everything at The Warren while I live. You occupy the position of my guest when you are here.”

“Humph! all right. And so you have discharged Ben, eh? When does he go?”

“To-day.”

“Sharp practice, mother; and all because poor Judy is pretty.”

“And all because, as I told him, I wished to save—I will speak plainly, even in your cousin’s presence—a weak, vain girl from disgrace.”

“Humph! pretty plain speaking that, mother.”

“There are times when plain speaking is necessary, my son, and when strong action is required to save you from the consequences of a mad passion.”

“Rubbish!”

“What! Don’t you know Ben Hayle better than that? Do you think he is the man to sit down quietly when he knows the truth? Have you not seen that the foolish fellow believes thoroughly what he as good as told me to my face this morning—that he expects to see his daughter some day mistress here?”

“Ben Hayle’s a fool,” cried Rolph, angrily, “and you and Madge here are half-crazy. Let’s have an end of it. Once for all, mother, I mean to do exactly as I like, and I have done as I liked.”

Mrs Rolph started forward in her chair, and Marjorie’s lips tightened.

“What do you mean, Rob?” cried the former.

“You want to see me married, I believe?”

“I want to see you prove yourself an honourable gentleman—a worthy son of your father, not a man for whom I should blush.”

“All right, then. I’ve taken the right steps for settling into a quiet, country gentleman. I’m going to be married.”

Marjorie’s eyes flashed.

“Rob, you will not be so mad as to marry that girl?”

“Yes, I shall,” he said coolly.

“Then I have done with you for ever. Judith Hayle may come here when I am in my grave, but till then—”

“Let the churchyard alone, mother. Do you think I’m such a fool as to marry a poacher’s daughter?”

“Rob! Then you have repented!” cried Mrs Rolph excitedly, and Marjorie trembled and sank upon her knees to cling to her aunt’s waist.

“Oh, yes, I’ve repented, and I’m going to be a very good boy and get married soon.”

“Madge, my dear child!” cried Mrs Rolph, embracing the girl at her feet.

“There, don’t get filling her head full of false hopes, the same as you did Judy Hayle’s mother,” said Rolph brutally. “I went yesterday and proposed, and have been accepted.”

Marjorie’s breath came and went in a low hiss as she turned her wild eyes upon her cousin.

“Proposed? To whom? Rob, not to that pert, penniless girl at The Firs?”

“What, the moon-shooter’s sister!” cried Rolph. “Hah! nice, little, bright-eyed thing. But no: try again.”

Mrs Rolph rose excitedly from her chair, and Marjorie’s hands dropped from her waist as she crouched lower upon the carpet.

“Not John Day’s daughter—Glynne?”

“Good guess, mother. Glynne Day is to be my wife by-and-by. The old man is agreeable and the major isn’t. So now, the sooner you go and call upon them and make it all right the better.”

Poor Marjorie dropped out of Mrs Rolph’s sight.

“Rob! my dear boy!” she cried as she flung her arms about her son’s neck to kiss him fondly, while Marjorie rose slowly, looking white even to her lips, and with a peculiar smile dawning upon them as her eyes flashed upon the group before her.

“I knew I could trust you, Rob,” cried Mrs Rolph; and then, recollecting herself, “Madge, my poor child, I am very sorry, but, you see, it was not to be.”

“No, auntie dear,” said the girl, with the smile growing more marked; “marriages are made in Heaven, you know. I shall not mind—much. Of course the great aim of all our lives was to see dear Rob happy. Glynne Day is very beautiful and sweet, and a daughter of whom you will be quite proud. I should be deceitful if I did not own to being grievously disappointed, but, as was natural, Rob’s love for me has only been that of a brother for a sister”—she fixed Rolph’s eyes as she spoke, and his turned shiftily away—“and if I have been a little silly, the pain will soon wear off. Glynne Day. How nice. I’m sure I shall love her very much, though she is rather cold. Isn’t she, Rob?”

“That is very nice of you, Madge, my dear,” said Mrs Rolph, embracing her niece. “And who knows how soon another prince may come, my dear.”

“Oh, aunt!”

“And you will try to forget all this?”

“Of course, aunt, dear. It was fate,” said the girl innocently.

“And—and you will not mind going over to Brackley with me to call?”

“I, mind? Oh, auntie, I should be horribly disappointed if you did not take me. There, Rob,” she continued, with a little sigh, “that’s all over, and I congratulate you—brother; and I shall kiss dearest Glynne as I kiss you now.”

“Humph! thought she was going to bite me,” muttered Rolph. Then aloud, “Well, Madge, it was a bit of a flirtation, I own. Now, then, as you’ve behaved like a trump, so will I. What shall it be—a pearl locket, or diamonds, or a bracelet?”

“Oh, how good and generous you are, Rob dear. How nice of you!” cried Marjorie in gushing tones. “I have so often longed for a sapphire bracelet.”

“Then you shall have one,” said Rolph, but not quite so warmly as he had spoken before. “I’m off now.”

“Won’t you stay to lunch, dear?” said Mrs Rolph.

“No. I shall have a sandwich in my room. I’m training. I say! can you go over this afternoon?”

“Of course we will, dear,” said Mrs Rolph, warmly; and there was a look of relief in her eyes.

“Then that’s all settled,” said Rolph; and he left the room, not noticing the hard look in his cousin’s eyes. “Sorry about poor old Ben Hayle,” he muttered as he went to his own room. “But perhaps it’s best. Going to be married, and must be a good boy now.”

Then a thought struck him, and he hurried back to the drawing-room, to surprise Marjorie upon her knees, with her face buried in Mrs Rolph’s lap.

"Oh, beg pardon," he said, hastily; "but look here, mother; don't be quite so hard on Ben Hayle. I mean as to a day or two."

"Leave that to me, Rob—please," said Mrs Rolph.

"Oh, all right," he cried, and he went right off this time. "Poor little Madge! but she won't be long before she hooks another fish. Bet a sov. she tries it on with the astronomer; but I must go and smooth it down a bit at the lodge. What a blessing it is to have nearly enough coin. That bracelet did wonders; but Judy mustn't play quite so high, and, as for Ben—well he's my mother's man, and—I know; I'll let him keep that old gun."

Volume One—Chapter Nine.

Attraction and Repulsion.

Rolph dined at Brackley that evening, and found Sir John in the best of spirits. Glynne was bright and eager to show him the progress she had made with her painting, at the sight of which he started as they stood together in the drawing-room.

"But I say, Glynne, you know, this is doosid clever and ought to go to the Academy; only, hang it all! you mustn't get painting fellows like that."

"Why not?"

"Because—because—well, you see the fellow's a regular scamp—dangerous sort of a character, you know—been in prison for poaching, and that sort of thing."

"But he's such a patient model."

"Model, eh? Not my idea of a model. Look here, if you want some one to sit, you shall have me."

The conversation changed to the visit she had received that afternoon; and Glynne in her new excitement was rapturous about "dear Mrs Rolph," but rather lukewarm about her niece, and Rolph noticed it.

"Madge nice to you?" he said.

"Your cousin? Oh, yes," replied Glynne, thoughtfully. "She seemed rather shy and strange at first, but soon got over that. We have always been a little distant, for I think I was too quiet for her; but of course we shall be like sisters now."

"H'm, yes, I suppose so. But Madge is rather a strange girl."

The dinner passed off pretty well. Rolph drinking a good deal of the baronet's favourite claret, and every now and then finding the major's eyes fixed upon him in rather a searching way which he did not like; but on the whole, Major Day was pleasant and gentlemanly, and rather given to sigh on seeing how happy and bright his niece looked. When at last she rose during dessert, and Rolph opened the door for her to pass out to the drawing-room, he was obliged to own that they would make a handsome couple, and on seeing his brother's inquiring glance, he nodded back to him, making Sir John look pleased.

"I've no right to object if they are satisfied," he said to himself; "but he is not the fellow I should have chosen."

All the same, he shook hands warmly enough when Rolph left that night.

"Jack," he said, as he sat with his brother over their last cigar, "I think I may as well get married now."

"You think what!" cried Sir John dropping his cigar.

"I think I shall get married. I mean, when Glynne has gone."

"I should like to catch you at it!" growled Sir John. "When Glynne goes you've got to stop with me."

"Ah, well we shall see," said the major, whose eyes were fixed on the dark corner of the smoking-room, where he could see a fir glade with a pretty, bright little figure stooping over a ring of dark-coloured fungi—"we shall see. Glynne isn't married yet."

The next morning, soon after breakfast, Rolph started off for a run, for he was training for an event, he said, the run taking him in the direction of the preserves about an hour later.

He had gone for some distance along the path, but he leaped over a fence now and began to thread his way through a pine wood, where every step was over the thick grey needles; and as he walked he from time to time kicked over one of the bright red or speckled grey fungi which grew beneath the trees.

He had about half a mile to go through this wood; the birch plantation and the low copse, and then through the grove in one of the openings of which, and surrounded by firs, stood the keeper's cottage.

He pressed on through the fir wood, then across the birch plantation, where the partridges loved to hide, and the copse where the poachers knew the pheasants roosted on the uncut trees at the edge, but dared not go, because it was so near the keeper's cottage.

Then on to Thoreby Wood, in and out among the bronze-red fir-tree trunks, under the dark green boughs, where the wind was always moaning, as if the sea shore was nigh, and the bed of needles silenced his footfalls, for the way was easy now. In another minute he would be out of the clearing, close to the cottage—at the back.

“Why, there she is,” he said to himself, with his heart giving a throb of satisfaction, as he saw before him a girl standing where the sun shone down through the opening where the cottage stood, and half threw up the figure as it rested one hand upon a tree trunk and leaned forward as if gazing out from the edge of the wood at something in the opening beyond.

Rolph stopped short, to stand gazing at her admiringly.

“What is she watching?” he said to himself, then, smiling as the explanation came.

“Been feeding the pheasants,” he thought. “She has thrown them some grain, and they have come out by the cottage.”

“Yes,” he continued, “she is watching them feed, and is standing back so as not to scare them. Poor beggars! what a shame it seems to go and murder them after they have been reared at home and fed like this.”

He hesitated for a few moments, and then began to walk swiftly on, with hushed footsteps, toward where the figure stood, a hundred yards away.

When he saw her first, he was able to gaze down a narrow lane of trees, but a deep gully ran along there, necessitating his diverging from that part, and going in and out among the tall trunks, sometimes catching a glimpse of the watcher, sometimes for her to be hidden from his sight. And so it was that when at last he came out suddenly, he was not five yards behind her, but unheard. He stopped short, startled and astonished. For it was not Judith who stood watching there so intently.

Madge! there!

At that moment, as if she were impressed by his presence, Marjorie Emlin rose partly erect, drawing back out of the sunshine, and quite involuntarily turning to gaze full in Rolph’s face, her own fixed in its expression of malignant joy, as if she had just seen something which had given her the most profound satisfaction. She was laughing, her lips drawn away from her teeth, and her eyes, in the semi-darkness of the fir wood, dilated and glowing with a strange light.

For a moment or two she gazed straight at Rolph, seeing him, but not seeming to realise his presence. Then there was a rapid change of her expression, the malignant look of joy became one of shame, fear, and the horror of being surprised.

“You here, Madge!” he said at last, in a hoarse whisper lest Judith should know that she was being watched. “What does this mean?”

She looked at him wildly, and began to creep away, as one might from some creature which fascinated and yet filled with fear.

She was still shrinking away, but he had caught her wrist and held it firmly as she glared at him, till, with a sudden effort, she tried to wrest herself away.

There was no struggle, for he suddenly cast her away from him, realising in an instant the reason of her presence and of this malignant look of satisfaction, for, as Madge darted away, he rushed into the opening where the cottage stood, in response to a wild cry for help.

He reached the porch in time to catch Judith on his arm, as she was running from the place, and receive Caleb Kent who was in full pursuit, with his right fist thrown out with all his might.

The impact of two bodies at speed is tremendous, and scientific people of a mathematical turn assure us that when such bodies do meet they fly off at a tangent.

They may have done so here, but, according to matter-of-fact notions, Rolph’s fist and arm flew round Judith afterwards, to help the other hold her trembling and throbbing to his heart; while Caleb Kent’s head went down with a heavy, resounding bump on the tiled floor of the little entry.

Then Judith shrank away, and Rolph in his rage planted his foot on Caleb Kent’s chest, as the fellow lay back, apparently stunned.

But there was a good deal of the wild beast about Caleb Kent. He lay still for a few moments, and then, quick and active as a cat, he twisted himself sidewise and sprang up, his mouth cut and bleeding, his features distorted with passion; and, starting back, he snatched a long knife from his pocket, threw open the blade, and made a spring at Rolph.

Judith uttered a cry of horror, but there was no occasion for her dread, for, quick in his action as the young poacher, Rolph struck up the attacking arm, and the next moment Caleb Kent was outside, with his opponent following him watchfully.

“Keep of!” snarled Caleb, “or I’ll have your blood. All right: I see; but never mind, my turn will come yet. If I wait for years, I’ll make this straight.”

And then as Rolph made a rush at him, he dodged aside and darted into the fir wood, running so swiftly that his adversary felt it would be useless to pursue.

Neither did he wish to, for Judith was standing there by the porch, looking wild-eyed and ghastly.

“You—you are hurt,” she faltered.

“Hurt!” he cried, as he clasped her once more in his arms. “No, no, tell me about yourself. Curse him! what did he say?”

“I was alone here and busy when he came. He has followed me about from a child and frightened me. To-day he walked straight in and roughly told me that he loved me, and that I must be his wife.”

She shuddered.

“The insolent gaol-bird!”

“He frightened me, though I tried very hard to be firm, and ordered him to leave the place; but he only laughed at me, and caught me in his arms, and tried to kiss me. I was struggling with him for a long time, and no help seemed to be coming. I screamed out, and that frightened him, and he left me; but, before I could fasten the door, he came back and spoke gently to me, but when I would not listen to him, he tried to seize me again, and I cried for help, and you—”

She did not shrink this time, as, throbbing with passion, and uttering threats against the scoundrel, Rolph once more folded her in his arms.

Again she struggled from him, trembling.

“I am not doing right,” she said firmly. “If you love me, Rob—”

“If I love you!” he said reproachfully.

“I am sure you have pity for me,” she said, taking his hand and raising it to her lips, to utter a cry of horror, for the hand was bleeding freely, and the ruddy current dyed her lips.

“Hurt in my defence,” she said with a pained smile, as she bound her own handkerchief about the bleeding knuckles.

“I’d die in your defence,” he whispered passionately; “your protector always, dearest.”

“Then protect me now,” she said, “that I am weak, and let me trust in you. You wish me to be your wife, Robert?”

“Eh? Yes, of course, of course,” he said hurriedly.

“And you won’t let your mother sending me away make any difference?”

“How could it, little stupid! I’m not a boy,” he said, banteringly. “But I must go now, and, as for Master Caleb Kent, I’ll just set the policeman on his track.”

“But that will mean his being taken before the magistrates, Rob.”

“Yes, and a long spell for him this time, or I’ll know the reason why.”

“No, no,” cried the girl, hurriedly. “You mustn’t do that.”

“Why?”

“Because he hates you enough as it is. He said he’d kill you.”

“Will he?” muttered Rolph, between his teeth.

“And I should have to go before the magistrates as a witness; and there’s no knowing what Caleb might say.”

Rolph looked at her searchingly, while she clung to him till he promised to let the matter rest.

“But suppose he comes again?”

“Father will take care of that,” she said confidently. “But do mind yourself as you go. Caleb may be hiding, and waiting for you.”

“To come back here,” he said sharply.

“If he does, he’ll find the door locked,” said Judith quietly. “Must you go now?”

“Yes: your father may come back.”

“But that doesn’t matter now, Rob, does it? Why not tell him we’re engaged?”

“No, no: not yet. Leave that to me. Good-bye, now.”

He drew the clinging arms from about his neck rather roughly, gave the girl’s lips a hasty kiss, and hurried out and

across the clearing, turning back twice as he went to see Judith looking after him, with her face shadowed by tears, and then, as their eyes encountered, beaming with sunshine. And again, after he had passed out of sight, he stole back through the trees to find that she was still wistfully gazing at the spot where she saw him last.

And, as unseen he watched her, his thoughts were many upon her unprotected state, and as to whether he ought not to stay until her father's return.

"No," he said, "the beggar will not dare to come back!" and, after making a circuit of the place, and searching in all directions, he walked thoughtfully away, thinking of what must be done with regard to Caleb Kent, and then about his cousin, against whom his indignation grew hotter the more he thought of what he had seen.

"She must have known that Caleb was in the cottage insulting Judith, and she was glorying in it and would not stir a step to save her, when her presence would have been enough to drive the beggar away. Oh, it seems impossible that a woman could be so spiteful. Hang it! Madge has got hold of that now. It's like being at her mercy. Phew! I'm getting myself in a devil of a mess. I meant to fight shy of her now altogether, but of course no fellow could help running to save a woman in distress."

He stopped short, for a sudden thought struck him.

"Then Judy hasn't heard about Glynne yet. Confound it all! what a tangle I'm getting in."

He took out and lit a cigar. Then smoking rapidly, he felt better.

"All right," he muttered; "the old woman sets that square, and the sooner they're off the estate the better for everybody. But there's no mistake about it, Judy is deuced nice after all."

"Day, sir," said a sharp voice, and Rolph started round to find himself face to face with Hayle.

"Ah, Ben!—you!"

"Yes, sir, me it is," said the keeper, sternly. "Down, dogs!"

This to the animals which began to play about the captain.

"Oh, let 'em be," said Rolph, patting one of the setters on the head.

"Never mind the dogs, sir. I've got something more serious to think about. I suppose you know as the missus has sacked me, and we're off?"

"Yes, Ben, I know; but it was no doing of mine."

"I never thought it was, sir; but me and Judy's to go at once—anywhere, for aught she cares. She'd like me to emigrate, I think."

"No, don't do that, Ben. England's big enough."

"For some people, sir. I don't know as it is for me. Well, sir, I'm sacked, and I dare say it will be a long time before anyone will take me on. My character usen't to be of the best, and the reasons for going 'll be again me. Of course you know why it is."

"Well—er—I suppose—"

"That'll do, sir. You know well enough, it's about you and my Judy."

The captain laughed.

"There, sir, you needn't shuffle with me. I'm my gal's father, and we may as well understand one another."

"My good fellow, recollect whom you are talking to," said the captain, haughtily.

"I do, sir. My late missus's son; and I recollect that I'm nobody's servant now, only an Englishman as can speak out free like. So I say this out plain. Of course, after what's been going on, you mean to marry my Judith?"

"Marry her? Well—er—Ben—"

"No, you don't," said the keeper fiercely, "so don't tell me no lies, because I know you've been and got yourself engaged to young Miss Glynne over at Brackley."

"Well, sir, and if I have, what then?" said Rolph haughtily.

"This, sir," cried the keeper, with his eyes flashing, "that you've been playing a damned cowardly mean part to Miss Glynne and to my Judith. You've led my gal on to believe that you meant to marry her, and then you've thrown her over and took up with Sir John Day's gal. And I tell you this; if my Judith hadn't been what she is, and any harm had come of it, you might have said your prayers, for as sure as there's two charges o' shot in this here gun, I'd put one through you."

"What?"

"You heared what I said, sir, and you know I'm a man of my word. And now, look here: you've been to the lodge to

see Judith, for the last time, of course, for if ever you speak to her again, look out. Now, don't deny it, my lad. You've been to my cottage, for it is mine till to-night."

"Yes, I have been to the lodge, Hayle," said Rolph, who was thoroughly cowed by the keeper's fierce manner. "I was going through the wood when, just as I drew near the cottage, I heard a cry for help."

"What?" roared Hayle.

"I ran to the porch just as a man was after Miss Hayle—Steady there."

The sound was startling, for involuntarily the keeper had cocked both barrels of his gun; and, as he stood there with his eyes flashing, and the weapon trembling in the air, the three dogs looked as if turned to stone, their necks outstretched, heads down, and their long feathery tails rigid, waiting for the double report they felt must follow.

"And—and—what did you do?" cried the keeper in a slow, hoarse voice, which, taken in conjunction with the rapid cocking of the gun, made Rolph think that, if it had been the father who had come upon that scene, there might have been a tragedy in Thoreby Wood that day.

"I say, what did you do?" said the keeper again, in a voice full of suppressed passion.

"That!" said Rolph, slowly raising his right hand to unwind from it Judith's soft white handkerchief, now all stained with blood, and display his knuckles denuded of skin.

"Hah!" ejaculated the keeper, as his eyes flashed. "God bless you for that, sir. You knocked him down?"

"Of course."

"Yes—yes?"

"And he jumped up and drew his knife and struck at me."

"But he didn't hit you, sir; he didn't hit you?" cried the keeper, forgetting everything in his excitement as he clutched the young man's arm.

"No; I was too quick for him; and then he ran off into the wood."

"Damn him!" roared the keeper. "If I had only been there this would have caught him," he cried, patting the stock of his gun. "I'd have set the dogs on him after I'd given him a couple of charges of shot; I would, sir, so help me God."

The veins were standing out all over the keeper's brow, as he ground his teeth and shook his great heavy fist.

"But wait a bit. It won't be long before we meet."

"I am very glad you were not there, Hayle," said Rolph, after watching the play of the father's features for a few moments.

"Why, sir, why?"

"Because I don't want to have you take your trial for manslaughter."

"No, no; I had enough of that over the breaking of Jack Harris's head, sir; but—"

"Yes, but," said Rolph, quickly, "I wanted to talk to you about that."

"It was Caleb Kent," said the keeper, with sudden excitement.

"Yes, it was Caleb Kent."

"I might have known it; he was always for following her about. Curse him! But talking's no good, sir; and, perhaps, it's as well I wasn't there. Thankye, sir, for that. It makes us something more like quits. As for Caleb Kent, perhaps I shall have a talk to him before I go. But mind you don't speak to my Judy again."

He shouldered his gun, gave Rolph a nod, and then walked swiftly away, the dogs hesitating for a few moments, and then dashing off, to follow close at his heels.

Rolph stood watching the keeper for a few minutes till he disappeared.

"Well out of that trouble then," he muttered. "Not pleasant for a fellow; it makes one feel so small. Poor little Judy! she'll be horribly wild when she comes to know. What a lot of misery our marriage laws do cause in this precious world."

"Now then for home," he said, after walking swiftly for a few minutes, and, "putting on a spurt" as he termed it, he reached the house and went straight to the library.

He had entered and closed the door to sit down and have a good think about how he could "square Madge," when he became aware that the lady in his thoughts was seated in one of the great arm-chairs with a book in her hand, which she pretended to read. She cowered as her cousin started, and stood gazing down at her with a frowning brow, and a look of utter disgust and contempt about his lips which made her bosom rise and fall rapidly.

“Do you want this room, Rob?” she said, breaking an awkward silence.

“Well, yes, after what took place this morning, you do make the place seem unpleasant,” he said coolly.

“Oh, this is too much,” cried Madge, her face, the moment before deadly pale, now flushing scarlet, as she threw down the book she had held, and stood before him, biting her lips with rage.

“Yes, too much.”

“And have we been to the cottage to see the fair idol? Pray explain,” said Marjorie, who was beside herself with rage and jealousy. “I thought gentlemen who were engaged always made an end of their vulgar amours.”

“Quite right,” said Rolph, meaningly. “I did begin, as you know.”

She winced, and her eyes darted an angry flash at him.

“You mean me,” she said, with her lips turning white.

“I did not say so.”

“But would it not have been better, now we are engaged to Glynne Day—I don’t understand these things, of course—but would it not have been better for a gentleman, now that he is engaged, to cease visiting that creature, and, above all, to keep away when he was not wanted?”

“What do you mean?—not wanted?”

“I mean when she was engaged with her lover, who was visiting her in her father’s absence.”

“The scoundrel!” cried Rolph, fiercely.

“Yes; a miserable, contemptible wretch, I suppose, but an old flame of hers.”

“Look here, Madge; you’re saying all this to make me wild,” cried Rolph, “but it won’t do. You know it’s a lie.”

Madge laughed unpleasantly.

“It’s true. He was always after her. She told me so herself, and how glad she was that the wretch had been sent to prison—of course, because he was in the way just then.”

“Go on,” growled Rolph. “A jealous woman will say anything.”

“Jealous?—I?—Pah!—Only angry with myself because I was so weak as to listen to you.”

“And I was so weak as to say anything to a malicious, deceitful cat of a girl, who is spiteful enough to do anything.”

“I, spiteful?—Pah!”

“Well, malicious then.”

“Perhaps I shall be. I wonder what dear Glynne would say about this business. Suppose I told her that our honourable and gallant friend, as they call it in parliament, had been on a visit to that shameless creature whom poor auntie had been compelled to turn away from the house, and in his honourable and gallant visit arrived just in time to witness the end of a lover’s quarrel; perhaps you joined in for ought I know, and—I can’t help laughing—Poor fellow! You did. You have been fighting with your rival, and bruised your knuckles. Did he beat you much, Rob, and win?”

Robert Rolph was dense and brutal enough, and his cousin’s words made him wince, but he looked at the speaker in disgust as the malevolence of her nature forced itself upon him more and more.

“Well,” he cried at last, “I’ve seen some women in my time, but I never met one yet who could stand by and glory in seeing one whom she had looked upon as a sister insulted like poor Judy was.”

“A sister!” cried Marjorie, contemptuously. “Absurd!—a low-born trull!”

“Whom you called dear, and kissed often enough till you thought I liked her, and then—Hang it all, Madge, are you utterly without shame!”

She shrank from him as if his words were thongs which cut into her flesh, but as he ceased speaking, with a passionate sob, she flung her arms about his neck, and clung tightly there.

“Rob! Don’t, I can’t bear it,” she cried. “You don’t know what I have suffered—what agony all this has caused.”

“There, there, that will do,” he said contemptuously. “I am engaged, my dear.”

She sprang from him, and a fierce light burned in her eyes for a moment, but disappointment and her despair were too much for her, and she flung herself upon his breast.

“No, no, Rob, dear, it isn’t true. I couldn’t help hating Judith or any woman who came between us. You don’t mean all this, and it is only to try me. You cannot—you shall not marry Glynne; and as to Judith, it is impossible now.”

“Give over,” he said roughly, as he tried to free himself from her arms.

"No, you sha'n't go. I must tell you," she whispered hoarsely amidst her sobs. "I hate Judith, but she is nothing—not worthy of a thought I will never mention her name to you again, dear."

"Don't pray," he cried sarcastically. "If you do, I shall always be seeing you gloating over her trouble as I saw you this morning."

"It was because I loved you so, Rob," she murmured as she nestled to him. "It was because I felt that you were mine and mine only, after the past; and all that was forcing her away from you."

"Bah!" he cried savagely. "Madge! Don't be a fool! Will you loosen your hands before I hurt you."

But she clung to him still.

"No, not yet," she whispered. "You made me love you, Rob, and I forget everything in that. Promise me first that you will break all that off about Glynne Day."

"I promise you that I'll get your aunt to place you in a private asylum," he cried brutally, "if you don't leave go."

There was a slight struggle, and he tore himself free, holding her wrists together in his powerful grasp and keeping her at arm's length.

"There! Idiot!" he cried. "Must I hold you till you come to your senses."

"If you wish—brute!" she cried through her little white teeth as her lips were drawn away. "Kill me if you like now. I don't care a bit: you can't hurt me more than you have."

"If I hurt you, it serves you right. A nice, ladylike creature, 'pon my soul. Pity my mother hasn't been here to see the kind of woman she wanted me to marry."

"Go on," she whispered, "go on. Insult me: you have a right. Go on."

"I'm going off," he said roughly. "There, go up to your room, and have a good hysterical cry and a wash, and come back to your senses. If you will have it you shall, and the whole truth too. I never cared a bit for you. It was all your own doing, leading me on. Want to go."

"Loose my hands, brute."

"For you to scratch my face, my red-haired pussy. Not such a fool. I know your sweet temper of old. If I let go, will you be quiet?"

Marjorie made no reply, but she ceased to struggle and stood there with her wrists held, the white skin growing black—a prisoner—till, with a contemptuous laugh, he threw the little arms from him.

"Go and tell Glynne everything you know—everything you have seen, if you like," he said harshly, "only tell everything about yourself too, and then come back to me to be loved, my sweet, amiable, little white-faced tigress. I'm not afraid though, Madge. You can't open those pretty lips of yours, can you? It might make others speak in their defence."

"Brute," she whispered as she gazed at him defiantly and held out her bruised wrists.

"Brute, am I? Well, let sleeping brutes lie. Don't try to rouse them up for fear they should bite. Go to your room and bathe your pretty red eyes after having a good cry, and then come and tell me that you think it is best to cry truce, and forget all the past."

"Never, Rob, dear," she said with a curious smile. "Go on; but mind this: you shall never marry Glynne Day."

"Sha'n't I? We shall see. I think I can pull that off," he cried with a mocking laugh. "But if I don't, whom shall I marry?"

She turned from him slowly, and then faced round again as she reached the door.

"Me," she said quietly; and the next minute Robert Rolph was alone.

Volume One—Chapter Ten.

A Cloudy Sky.

"Oh, father, I'm so glad you've come."

This was Ben Hayle's greeting as he reached the keeper's lodge.

"Eh? Are you?" he said, with an assumed look of ignorance; but the corners of his eyes were twitching, and he was asking himself how he was to tell his child matters that would nearly break her heart, as he yielded his hand to hers, and let her press him back into his windsor arm-chair. "Nothing the matter, is there?"

She knelt at his feet, and told him all that had passed, and the strong man's muscles jerked, and his grasp of her arm grew at times painful. As she went on, he interjected a savage word from time to time.

"Good girl, good girl. It has hurt you, my darling, but it was right to tell me all, and keep nothing back."

Then he laid his hand softly on her glossy hair, and sat staring straight before him at the window, the moments being steadily marked off by the *tick-tack* of the old eight-day clock in the corner, and no other sound was heard in the room.

Outside, the silence of the fir wood was broken by the cheery lay of a robin in one of the apple-trees of the garden, and once there came the low, soft cooing of a dove, which the soft, sunny autumn day had deluded into the belief that it was spring.

Then all was again silent for a time, and it seemed to Judith, as she looked up into the stern, thoughtful face, with its dark, fierce eyes, that the heavy throbbing of her heart drowned the beat of the clock; at other times the regular *tick-tack* grew louder, and she could hear nothing else.

"You're not cross with me, father?" she said at last.

"No, it was no fault of yours. Ah, Judy, my girl, I was so proud of your bonny face, but it seems as if it is like to be a curse to you—to us both."

"Father!"

"Yes, my lass; and I don't know which of they two we ought to be most scared of—Caleb Kent or the captain."

"Oh! father!" cried Judith; and she let her head fall upon his knee, as she sobbed wildly.

"I need hardly ask you, then, my girl," he said, as with tender, loving hands, he took her head and bent over it, with his dark, fierce eyes softening. "You like him, then?"

She looked up proudly.

"He loves me, father."

"Ay, and you, my lassie?"

"Yes, father. I have tried very hard not to think about him, but—Yes, I do love him very dearly, and I'm going to be his wife. He said he would speak to you."

"Yes, my dear, and he has spoken to me."

"Oh!" she cried, as she reached up to lay her hands upon the keeper's shoulders, and gaze inquiringly in his eyes.

"It was all one big blunder, my dear," he said; "you ought never to have gone up to the house, and learned things to make you above your station. I used to think so, as I sat here o' night's and smoked my pipe, and say to myself, 'She'll never care for the poor old cottage again.'"

Judith looked up quickly, and her arm stole round her father's neck.

"And then," she whispered, "you said to yourself, 'It is not true, for she'll never forget the old home.'"

"You're a witch, Judy," he cried, drawing her to him, with his face brightening a little. "I did. And if it could have been that you'd wed the captain, and gone up to the house among the grand folk, you would have had me there; you would not have been ashamed of the old man—would you?"

"Why do you ask me that, dear?" said Judith, with her lips quivering. "You know—you know."

"Yes," he said, "I know. But we shall have to go away from the old place, Judy, for it can't never be."

"Oh, father!"

"No, my dear, it won't do. It's all been a muddle, and I ought to have known better, instead of being a proud old fool, pleased as could be to see my lassie growing into a lady. There, I may as well tell you the truth, lass, at once."

"The truth, father?" she said sharply.

"Yes, my dear, though it goes again me to hurt your poor little soft heart."

"What do you mean, father?" she cried, startled now by the keeper's looks.

"It must come, Judy; but I wish you'd found it out for yourself. Young Robert isn't the man his dead father was. He's a liar and a scoundrel, girl, and—"

She sprang from him with her eyes flashing, and a look of angry indignation convulsing her features.

"It's true, my girl. He never meant to marry you, only to make you his plaything because he liked your pretty face."

"It isn't true," said the girl harshly; and the indignation in her breast against her father made her wonderfully like him now.

"It is true, Judy, my pretty. I wouldn't lie to you, and half break your heart. You've got to face it along with me. We're

sent away because the captain is going to marry.”

“It isn’t true, father; he wouldn’t marry Madge Emlin, with her cruel, deceitful heart.”

“No, my lass; he’s chucked her over too. He’s going to marry Sir John Day’s gal, over at Brackley Hall—her who came here and painted your face in the sun bonnet, when you were home those few days the time I had rheumatiz.”

“Is this true, father?”

“As true as gospel, lass.”

She gave him a long, searching look, as if reading his very soul, and then crept back to a low chair, sank down, and buried her face in her hands.

“Hah!” he said to himself, “she takes it better than I thought for. Thank God, it wasn’t too late.”

He stood thinking for a few minutes.

“Where am I to get a cottage, Judy, my lass?” he said at last. “One of those at Lindham might do for the present, out there by your grandmother’s, if there’s one empty. Mother Wattley would know. I’ll go and see her. Let’s get out of this. Poor old place, though,” he said, as he looked round. “It seems rather hard.”

Judith had raised her head, and sat gazing straight before her, right into the future, but she did not speak.

Volume One—Chapter Eleven.

In a Mist.

Glynne Day was seated in her favourite place—a bright, cheerful-looking room connected with her bedchamber on the first floor at Brackley, and turned by her into a pleasant nest; for the French windows opened into a tiny conservatory over a broad bay window of the dining-room, where were displayed the choicest floral gems that Jones, the head gardener, could raise, all being duly tended by her own hands.

The gardener shook his head, and said that “the plahnts wiltered” for want of light, and wanted to cut away the greater part of the tendril-like stems of the huge wistaria, which twisted itself into cables, and formed loops and sprays all over the top glass; but Glynne looked at him in horror, and forbade him to cut a stem. Consequently, in the spring-time, great lavender racemes of the lovely flowers clustered about the broad window at which the mistress of the Hall loved to sit and sketch “bits” of the beautiful landscape around, and make study after study of the precipitous pine-crowned hill a mile away, behind whose dark trees the sun would set, and give her opportunities to paint in gorgeous hues the tints of the western sky.

Here Lucy Alleyne would be brought after their walks, to sit and read, while Glynne filled in sketches she had made; and many a pleasant hour was passed by the two girls, while the soft breezes of the sunny country waved the long wistaria strands.

“It’s no use for me to speak, Mr Morris,” said the gardener one day. “It ’most breaks my heart, for all about there, and under the little glass house is the untidiest bit about my garden. I told Sir John about it, and he said, ‘Why don’t you cut it then, booby?’ and when I told him why, and ast him to speak to Miss Glynne, he said, ‘Be off, and leave it alone.’”

“And of course you did,” said Morris, the butler.

“Sack’s the word if I hadn’t, sir. But you mark my words: one of these days—I mean nights—them London burglars ’ll give us a visit, and they won’t want no ladder to get up to the first-floor windows. A baby could climb up them great glycene ropes and get in at that window; and then away goes my young lady’s jewels.”

“Well, they won’t get my plate,” said Morris with a chuckle. “I’ve two loaded pistols in my pantry for anyone who comes, so let ’em look out; and if I shout for help, the major’s got his loaded too.”

Glynne Day was seated one afternoon in her conservatory, bending over her last water-colour sketch by the open window, when a loud, reverberating bang echoed along the corridor, making the windows rattle outside her room. Starting up, knowing from old experience that it was only an earthquake, one of the social kind which affected Brackley from time to time, she hurried into her little study, and out into the passage, to go to the end, and tap sharply at the door facing her.

“Come in,” was shouted in the same tones as he who uttered the order had cried “wheel into line!” and Glynne entered to find the major with his hair looking knotted, his moustache bristling, and his eyes rolling in their sockets.

“What is the matter, uncle?”

“Matter?” cried the major, who was purple with rage. “Matter? He’s your father, Glynne, and he’s my brother, but if—if I could only feel that it wasn’t wicked to cut him down with the sword I used at Chillianwallah, I’d be thankful.”

“Now, uncle, dear, you don’t feel anything of the kind,” said Glynne, leaning upon the old gentleman’s arm.

“I do feel it, and I mean it this time. Now, girl, look here! Why am I such an old idiot—”

“Oh, uncle!”

”—As to stop here, and let that bullying, farm-labouring, overbearing bumpkin—I beg your pardon, my dear, but he is—father of yours, ride rough-shod over me?”

“But, uncle, dear—”

“But, niece, dear, he does; and how I can be such an idiot as to stop here, I don’t know. If I were his dependent, it couldn’t be worse.”

“But, uncle, dear, I’m afraid you do show a little temper sometimes.”

“Temper! I show temper! Nothing of the kind,” cried the old fellow, angrily, and his grey curls seemed to stand out wildly from his head. “Only decision—just so much decision as a military man should show—nothing more. Temper, indeed!”

“But you are hasty, dear, and papa so soon gets warm.”

“Warm? Red hot. White hot. He has a temper that would irritate a saint, and heaven knows I am no saint.”

“It does seem such a pity for you and papa to quarrel.”

“Pity? It’s abominable, my child, when we might live together as peaceably as pigeons. But he shall have it his own way now. I’ve done. I’ll have no more of it I’m not a child.”

“What are you going to do, uncle?”

“Do? Pack up and go, this very day. Then he may come to my chambers and beg till all’s blue, but he’ll never persuade me to come out here again.”

“Oh, uncle! It will be so dull if you go away.”

“No, no, not it, my dear. You’ve got your captain; and there’ll be peace in the house then till he finds someone else to bully. Why, I might be one of his farm labourers; that I might. But there’s an end of it now.”

“But, uncle!” cried Glynne, looking perplexed and troubled, “come back with me into the library. I’m sure, if papa was in the wrong, he’ll be sorry.”

“If he was in the wrong! He *was* in the wrong. Me go to him? Not I. My mind’s made up. I’ll not have my old age embittered by his abominable temper. Don’t stop me, girl. I’m going, and nothing shall stay me now.”

“How tiresome it is!” said Glynne, softly, as her broad, white forehead grew full of wrinkles. “Dear uncle; he must not go. I must do something,” and then, with a smile dawning upon her perplexed face, she descended the stairs, and went softly to the library door, opened it gently, and found Sir John tramping up and down the Turkey carpet, like some wild beast in its cage.

“Who’s that? How dare you enter without—Oh, it’s you, Glynne.”

“Yes, papa. Uncle has gone upstairs and banged his door.”

“I’m glad of it; I’m very glad of it,” cried Sir John, “and I hope it’s for the last time.”

“What has been the matter, papa?” said Glynne, laying her hands upon his shoulders. “Sit down, dear, and tell me.”

“No, no, my dear, don’t bother me. I don’t want to sit down, Glynne.”

“Yes, yes, dear, and tell me all about it.”

Fighting against it all the while, the choleric baronet allowed himself to be pressed down into one of the easy-chairs, Glynne drawing a footstool to his side, sitting at his feet, and clasping and resting her hands upon his knees.

“Well, there, now; are you satisfied?” he said, half laughing, half angry.

“No, papa. I want to know why you and uncle quarrelled.”

“Oh, the old reason,” said Sir John, colouring. “He will be as obstinate as a mule, and the more you try to reason with him, the more he turns to you his hind legs and kicks.”

“Did you try to reason with Uncle James, papa?”

“Did I try to reason with him? Why, of course I did, but you might as well try to reason with a stone trough.”

“What was it about?” said Glynne, quietly.

“What was it about? Oh, about the—about the—bless my soul, what did it begin about? Some, some, some—dear me, how absurd, Glynne. He upset me so that it has completely gone out of my head. What do you mean? What do you mean by shaking your head like that? Confound it all, Glynne, are you going to turn against me?”

“Oh, papa, papa, how sad it is,” said Glynne, gently. “You have upset poor uncle like this all about some trifle of so

little consequence that you have even forgotten what it was.”

“I beg your pardon, madam,” cried Sir John, trying to rise, but Glynne laid her hand upon his chest and kept him back. “It was no trifle, and it is no joke for your Uncle James to launch out in his confounded haughty, military way, and try to take the reins from my hands. I’m master here. I remember now; it was about Rob.”

“Indeed, papa!” said Glynne, with a sad tone in her voice.

“Yes, finding fault about his training. I don’t want him to go about like some confounded foot-racing fellow, but he’s my son-in-law elect, and he shall do as he pleases. What next, I wonder? Your uncle will be wanting to manage my farm.”

Glynne remained very thoughtful and silent for a few minutes, during which time her father continued to fume, and utter expressions of annoyance, till Glynne said suddenly as she looked up in his face,—

“You were wrong, papa, dear. You should not quarrel with Uncle James.”

“Wrong? Wrong? Why, the girl’s mad,” cried Sir John. “Do you approve of his taking your future husband to task over his amusements?”

“I don’t know,” said Glynne slowly, as she turned her great, frank-looking eyes upon her father. “I don’t know, papa, dear. I don’t think I do; but Uncle James is so good and wise, and I know he loves me very much.”

“Of course he does; so does everybody else,” cried the baronet, excitedly. “I should like to see the man who did not. But I will not have his interference here, and I’m very glad—very glad indeed—that he is going.”

“Uncle James meant it for the best, I’m sure, papa,” said Glynne, thoughtfully, “and it was wrong of you to quarrel with him.”

“I tell you I did not quarrel with him, Glynne; he quarrelled with me,” roared Sir John.

“And you ought to go and apologise to him.”

“I’d go and hang myself sooner. I’d sooner go and commit suicide in my new patent thrashing-machine.”

“Nonsense, papa, dear,” said Glynne quietly. “You ought to go and apologise. If you don’t, Uncle James will leave us.”

“Let him.”

“And then you will be very much put out and grieved.”

“And a good job too. I mean a good job if he’d leave, for then we should have peace in the place.”

“Now, papa!”

“I tell you I’d be very glad of it; a confounded peppery old Nero, talking to me as if I were a private under him. Bully me, indeed! I won’t stand it. There!”

“Papa, dear, go upstairs and apologise to Uncle James.”

“I won’t, Glynne. There’s an end of it now. Just because he can’t have everything his own way. He has never forgiven me for being the eldest son and taking the baronetcy. Was it my fault that I was born first?”

“Now, papa, dear, that’s talking at random; I don’t believe Uncle James ever envied you for having the title.”

“Then he shouldn’t act as if he did. Confound him!”

“Then you’ll go up and speak to him. Come, dear, don’t let’s have this cloud over the house!”

“Cloud? I’ll make it a regular tempest,” cried Sir John, furiously. “I’ll go upstairs and see that he does go, and at once. See if I ferret him out of his nasty, dark, stuffy, dismal chambers again. Brought him down here, and made a healthy, hearty man of him, and this is my reward.”

“Is that you talking, papa?” said Glynne, rising with him, for he made a rush now out of his seat, and she smiled in his face as she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

“Bah! Get out! Pst! Puss!” cried Sir John, and swinging round, he strode out of the library, and banged the door as if he had caught his brother’s habit.

Glynne stood looking after him, smiling as she listened to his steps on the polished oak floor of the hall, and then seemed quite satisfied as she detected the fact that he had gone upstairs. Then it was that a dreamy, strange look came into her eyes, and she stood there, with one hand resting upon the table, thinking—thinking—thinking of the cause of the quarrel, of the words her uncle had spoken regarding Rolph; and it seemed to her that there was a mist before her, stretching out farther and farther, and hiding the future.

For the major was always so gentle and kind to her. He never spoke to her about Rolph as he had spoken to her father; but she had noticed that he was a little cold and sarcastic sometimes towards her lover.

Was there trouble coming? Did she love Robert as dearly as she should?

She wanted answers to these questions, and the responses were hidden in the mist ahead. Then, as she gazed, it seemed to her that her future was like the vast space into which she had looked from her window by night; and though for a time it was brightened with dazzling, hopeful points, these again became clouded over, and all was misty and dull once more.

Volume One—Chapter Twelve.

The Professor in Company.

Sir John went upstairs furiously, taking three steps at a time—twice. Then he finished that flight two at a time; walked fast up the first half of the second flight, one step at a time; slowly up the second half; paused on the landing, and then went deliberately along the corridor, with its row of painted ancestors watching him from one side, as if wondering when he was coming to join them there.

Sir John Day was a man who soon made up his mind, whether it was about turning an arable field into pasture, or the setting of a new kind of corn. He settled in five minutes to have steam upon the farm, and did not ponder upon Glynne’s engagement for more than ten; so that he was able to make his plans very well in the sixty feet that he had to traverse before he reached his brother’s door, upon whose panel he gave a tremendous thump, and then entered at once.

The major was in his shirt-sleeves, apparently turning himself into a jack-in-the-box, for he was standing in an old bullock trunk, one which had journeyed with him pretty well all over India; and as Sir John entered the room sharply, and closed the door behind him, the major started up, looking fiercely and angrily at the intruder.

“Oh, you’re packing, then?” said Sir John, in the most uncompromising tone.

“Yes, sir, I am packing,” said the major, getting out of the trunk, and slamming down the lid; “and I think, sir, that I might be permitted to do that in peace and quietness.”

“Peace? Yes, of course you may,” said Sir John, sharply, “only you will make it war.”

“I was not aware,” said the major, “that it was necessary for me to lock my door—I beg your pardon—your door. And now, may I ask the object of this intrusion? If it is to resume the quarrel, you may spare yourself the pains.”

“Indeed!” said Sir John shortly.

“Well,” continued the major, “why have you come?”

“You are going, then?”

“Of course I am, sir.”

“Well, I came to tell you I’m very glad of it,” cried Sir John, clapping his brother on the shoulder; and then—“I say, Jem, I wish I hadn’t such a peppery temper.”

“No, no, Jack, no, no,” cried the major, excitedly; “it was I who was to blame.”

“Wrong, Jem. I contradicted you—very offensively, too, and I am confoundedly in the wrong. I didn’t know it till Glynne came and pulled me up short. I say, it’s a great pity for us to quarrel, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said the major, laying his hands upon his brother’s shoulders, “it is—it is, indeed, Jack, and I can’t help thinking that I shall be doing wisely in going back to my old chambers, for this projected wedding worries me. We’ll see one another more seldom, and we won’t have words together then. You see—no; stop a moment! Let me speak. You see, I feel my old wound now and then, and it makes me irritable, and then the climate has touched up my liver a bit. Yes, I had better go.”

“Don’t be a fool, Jem,” cried Sir John. “Go, indeed! Why, what the dickens do you suppose I should do without you here? Tchah! tush! you go! Absurd. There, get dressed, man, and come down to dinner. No: come along down with me first, and we’ll get a bottle or two out of the number six bin. There’ll just be time.”

The major shook his head, as he looked at the bullock trunk and a very much bruised and battered old portmanteau waiting to be filled.

“Now, Jem, old fellow, don’t let’s quarrel again,” cried Sir John, pathetically.

“No, no, certainly not, my dear Jack. No more quarrelling, but I think this time I’ll hold to my word.”

“Now, my dear old fellow,” cried Sir John, gripping his brother’s shoulders more tightly, and shaking him to and fro, “do be reasonable. Look here: I’ve asked little Lucy Alleyne to come *sans façon*, and—”

“Is she coming?” cried the major, eagerly.

“Yes, and you can talk toadstools as long as you like.”

The major seemed to be hesitating, and he looked curiously at his brother.

“Is Alleyne coming?”

“I asked him, but he is very doubtful; perhaps he is glued to the end of his telescope for the next twelve hours. Here, have that confounded baggage put away.”

The major looked a little more thoughtful. He was hesitating, and thinking of Glynne, who just then tapped softly at the door.

“Come in,” roared Sir John; and she entered, looked quickly from one to the other, and then went up to her uncle, and kissed him affectionately.

“There,” cried Sir John, looking half-pleased, half-annoyed; “it’s enough to make a man wish you would go, Jem.”

“No, it isn’t,” said the major, drawing his niece closer to him. “There, there, my dear, you were quite right. I’m a terrible old capsicum, am I not?”

“No, uncle,” said Glynne, nestling to him; “but hadn’t we better forget all this?”

“Right, my dear, right,” cried Sir John. “There, come along, and let your uncle dress for dinner. Where’s Rob?”

“I think he went for a long walk, papa.”

“Humph! I hope he’ll be in training at last,” said Sir John, good-humouredly. “You’re a lucky girl, Glynne, to have a man wanting to make himself perfect before he marries you. You ought to go and do likewise.”

“Don’t try, Glynne, my dear,” said her uncle affectionately. “A perfect woman would be a horror. You are just right as you are.”

“Well, you are not, Jem,” said Sir John, laughing, “so make haste, and come down. Come along, Glynne.”

He led the way, and, as he passed through the door, Glynne turned to look back at her uncle, their eyes meeting in a peculiarly wistful, inquiring look, that seemed to suggest a mutual desire to know the other’s thoughts.

Then the door closed, and in the most matter-of-fact way, the major proceeded to dress for dinner as if he had never quarrelled with his brother in his life.

When he descended, it was to find Alleyne in the drawing-room with his sister. Glynne was entertaining them, for Sir John had, on leaving his brother, gone down into the cellar for the special bottle of port, and, after its selection, found so much satisfaction in the mildewy, sawdusty, damp-smelling place that he stopped for some twenty minutes, poking his bedroom candlestick into dark corners and archways where the bottoms of bottles could be seen resting as they had rested for many years past—each bin having a little history of its own, so full of recollections that the baronet had at last to drag himself away, and hurry up to dress.

Rolph was also late—so much so that he had encountered Sir John on the stairs, and the party in the drawing-room had a good quarter of an hour’s chat in the twilight, before the candles were lit.

“And you think it possible that it is caused by another planet?” Glynne was saying as the major entered the room; and he paused for a moment or two noting the change that had come over his niece. There was an eager look in her eyes; her face was more animated as she sat in the window catching the last reflections of the western glow, listening the while to Alleyne, who, with his back to the light, was talking in a low, deep voice of some problem in his favourite pursuit.

“Yes; just as happened over Neptune. That appears to be the only solution of the difficulty,” he replied.

“Then why not direct your glass exactly at the place where you feel this planet must be?”

Alleyne smiled as he spoke next.

“I did not explain to you,” he said, “that if such a planet does exist it must be, comparatively, very small, and so surrounded by the intense light of the sun that no glass we have yet made would render it visible.”

“How strange!” said Glynne, thoughtfully; and her eyes vaguely wandered over the evening sky, and then back to rest in a rapt, dreamy way upon the quiet, absorbed face of the visitor.

“I was looking at Jupiter last night,” she said, suddenly, “trying to see his moons.”

“Yes?”

“But our glass is not sufficiently powerful. I could only distinguish two.”

“Perhaps it was not the fault of your glass,” said Alleyne, smiling. “A glass of a very low power will show them. I have often watched them through a good binocular.”

“I’m afraid ours is a very bad one,” said Glynne.

“No, I should be more disposed to think it a good one, Miss Day. The reason you did not see them is this; one was eclipsed by the planet—in other words, behind it—while the others are passing across its body, whose brightness almost hides them—in fact, does hide them to such an extent that they would not be seen by you.”

There was a few minutes’ silence here, broken at last by Glynne, as she said in a low, thoughtful voice,—

"How much you know. How grand it must be."

Alleyne laughed softly before replying.

"How much I know!" he said, in a voice full of regret. "My dear madam, I know just enough to see what a very little I have learned; how pitifully small in such a science as astronomy is all that a life devoted to its depths would be."

"For shame, Moray," cried Lucy, warmly. "You know that people say you are very clever indeed."

"Yes," he replied, "I know what they say; but that is only their judgment. I know how trifling are the things I have learned compared with what there is to acquire."

"What a goose Glynne is," said the major to himself, as he stood listening to the conversation. "Why, this man is worth a dozen Rolphs."

"But, Mr Alleyne," said Glynne, eagerly, "is it possible—could I—I mean, should you think I was asking too much if I expressed a wish to see something of these wonders of which you have been speaking?"

"Oh, no, Moray would show you everything he could. He's the most unselfish, patient fellow in the world," cried Lucy.

Glynne turned from her almost impatiently to Alleyne, who said, with a grave smile upon his face,—

"You have no brother, Miss Day. If you had, I hope you would not do all you could, by flattery and spoiling, to make him weak and conceited."

"Indeed I don't do anything of the kind, Moray," said Lucy, indignantly; "and now, for that, I'll tell the truth, Glynne; he's a regular bat, an owl, a recluse, and we're obliged to drag him out into the light of day, or he'd stop in his room till he grew mouldy, that he would. Why, he goes in spirit right away to the moon sometimes, and it only seems as if his body was left behind."

"What, do you mean to say he's moonstruck?" said the major, merrily, and looking half-surprised at the quick, indignant look darted at him by Glynne.

"I'm afraid that Lucy here is quite right," said Alleyne, smiling as he took his sister's hand in his and patted it. "I do get so intent upon my studies that all every-day life affairs are regularly forgotten. But I do not work half so hard now. They fetched a doctor to me, and it is forbidden. In fact, I have plenty of time now, and if Miss Day will pay my my poor observatory a visit, I will show her everything that lies in my power."

"Oh, Mr Alleyne, I should be so glad," cried Glynne eagerly, and to Lucy's great delight. "I want to see Saturn's rings, and the seas and continents in Mars, and the twin stars."

"Well, you needn't trouble Mr Alleyne," said Rolph, who had just entered. "There's a fellow at Hyde Park corner, with a big glass, lets people look through for a penny. He'd be glad enough to come down for a half-crown or two."

"Why, how absurd, Robert," said Glynne, turning upon him good-humouredly. "I want to see and learn about these things from someone who is an astronomer."

"Oh," said Rolph, "do you? Well, I see no reason why you shouldn't go and have a peep or two through Mr Alleyne's glass. I'll come with you."

"Here, I'm very sorry, Alleyne. Miss Alleyne, I don't know what sort of a host you'll think me for being so late," cried Sir John, bustling in. "I hope Glynne has been playing my part well."

"Admirably, Sir John," replied Alleyne. "We have been talking upon my favourite topic, and the time soon glides by when one is engaged upon questions regarding the planets."

"But I say, you know, Mr Alleyne," said Rolph, who, with all the confidence of one in his own house and proprietary rights over the lady, came and seated himself upon the elbow of the easy-chair in which Glynne reclined, and laid his arm behind her on the back, "I want to know what's the good of a fellow sacrificing his health, and shutting himself up from society, for the study of these abstruse scientific matters. 'Pon my word, I can't see what difference it makes to us whether Jupiter has got one moon, or ten moons, or a hundred. He's such a precious long way off."

Glynne looked up at him with a good-humoured air of pain, but only to turn back and listen to Alleyne.

"It requires study, Captain Rolph," he said thoughtfully, "and time to appreciate the value of the results achieved in astronomy. Perhaps we have nothing to show that is of direct utility to man, but everything in nature is so grand—there is so much to be learned, that, for my part, I wonder why everybody does not thirst for knowledge."

"Yes," said Glynne, thoughtfully, and below her breath.

"Oh, we all dabble in science, more or less," said Rolph, glancing at Sir John with a look that seemed to say, "You see how I'll trot him out." "Here's the major goes in for toadstools, and Sir John for big muttons and portly pigs."

"And Captain Rolph for exhibitions of endurance, to prove that a man is stronger than a horse," said the major, drily.

"Yes, and not a bad thing, either, eh, Sir John?"

"Oh, every man to his taste," said the host; "but I believe in a man feeding himself up, and not starving himself down."

"Oilcake and turnips, eh?"

"Yes, both good things in their way, but I like the chemical components to have taken other forms, Rob, my boy; good Highland Scots beef and Southdown mutton."

"I hope you will be able to indulge in a good dinner, Rolph?" said the major, looking at the young officer as if he amused him.

"Trust me for that, major," replied the young man loudly. "I'm not bad at table."

"I thought, perhaps," said the major sarcastically, "that you might be in training, and forbidden to eat anything but raw steak and dry biscuit."

"Oh, dear, no," said Rolph seriously. "Quite free now, major, quite free."

"That's a blessing," muttered Sir John, who looked annoyed and fidgety. "Hah, dinner at last."

"Walking makes me hungry and impatient, Miss Alleyne. Come along, you are my property. First lady."

He held out his arm, and, as Lucy laid her little hand upon it, he went out of the drawing-room chatting merrily; and, as he did so, Rolph leaped from his seat, and drew himself upright as if to display the breadth of his chest and the size of his muscles.

"Glad of it," he said. "I'm sharp set. Come along, Glynne."

Alleyne gazed at them intently with a strange feeling of depression coming over his spirit, and so lost to other surroundings that he did not reply to the major, who came up to him, moved by a desire to be polite to a man whom he was beginning to esteem.

Then Major Day drew back and his keen eyes brightened, for Glynne said quietly,—

"You forget. Go on in with uncle."

"Eh?" said the young officer, looking puzzled.

"Go on in with my uncle," said Glynne quietly.

And she crossed to where Alleyne was standing, and, in the character of hostess, laid her hand upon his arm.

"There, you're dismissed for to-night, Rolph," said the major, who could hardly conceal his satisfaction at this trifling incident.

Then, thrusting his arm through that of the athlete, he marched him to the dining-room, the young man's face growing dark and full of annoyance at having to give way in this case of ordinary etiquette.

"Confound the fellow! I wish they wouldn't ask him here," he muttered.

"Mind seems to be taking the lead over muscles to-day," said the major to himself, as he walked beside the young officer to the dining-room, while Glynne came more slowly behind, her eyes growing deeper and very thoughtful as she listened to Alleyne's words.

Volume One—Chapter Thirteen.

Mars Makes a Mistake.

The dinner, with its pleasant surroundings of flowers and glittering plate and glass, with the finest and whitest of linen, was delightful to Lucy, though to her it was as if there was something wanting, in spite of her position as principal guest. This resulted in her receiving endless little attentions from Sir John; but more than once she felt quite irritated with her brother, who seemed to find no more pleasure in the carefully cooked viands than in the homely joints at The Firs. He ate a little of what was handed to him, almost mechanically, and drank sparingly of the baronet's choice wines; but his mind was busy upon nothing else than the subject upon which Glynne was asking him questions.

The major had plenty to say to Lucy, but he kept noticing the increase of animation in Glynne. For she had been awakened from her ordinary, placid, dreamy state to an intense interest in the subject under discussion.

Major Day did not know why he did it, but three times as that dinner progressed, he laid down his knife and fork, thrust his hands beneath the table, and rubbed them softly.

"Muscles is out in the cold to-night," he muttered. "He'll have to go in training for exercising his patience. Bring him to his senses."

Possibly it was very weak of the major, but he had fresh in his memory, several little pieces of bitter ridicule directed at him by the captain, respecting the botanical pursuit in which he engaged.

Now, it so happened that early in the day the major had been out for a long walk, and had come upon a magnificent cluster of a fungus that he had not yet tried for its edible qualities. It was the peculiar grey-brown, scaly-topped

mushroom, called by botanists *Amanita Rubescens*, and said to be of admirable culinary value.

"We'll have a dish of these to-night," thought the major, picking a fair quantity of the choicest specimens, which he took home and gave to the butler, with instructions to hand them to the cook for a dish in the second course.

Morris, the butler, put the basket down upon the hall table, and went to see to the drawing down of a window blind; and no sooner had he gone than Rolph, who had heard the order, came from the billiard-room into the hall to get his hat and stick preparatory to starting for a walk.

He was passing the major's basket where it stood upon the hall table, when an idea flashed across his brain, and he stopped, glanced round, grinned, and then, as no one was near, took up the creel, walked swiftly across the hall out into the garden, dived into the plantation, ran rapidly down the long walk out of sight of the house, and turned into the pheasant preserve. Here, throwing out the major's fungi, he looked sharply about and soon collected an equal quantity of the first specimens he encountered, and then turned back.

"A sarcastic old humbug," he muttered; "let him have a dish of these, and if any of them disagree with him, it will be a lesson for the old wretch. He experimented upon me once with his confounded *boleti*, as he called them; now, I'll experimentalise upon him."

As a rule such an act as this could not have been performed unseen, but fate favoured the captain upon this occasion, and he reached the hall without being noticed, replaced the creel upon the table from which he had taken it, and then went for a walk.

Now, it so happened that Morris, the butler, had crossed the hall since, but the creel not being where he had placed it, he did not recall his orders; but going to answer a bell half-an-hour afterwards, he caught sight of the basket, remembered what he had been told, and, on his return, took the fungi into the kitchen.

"Here, cook," he said, "you're to dress these for the second course."

In due time cook, who was a very slow-moving, thoughtful woman, found herself by the basket which she opened, and then turned the fungi out upon a dish.

"Well," she exclaimed, "of all the trash! Mrs Mason, do, for goodness' sake, look at these."

Glynne's maid, who was performing some mystic kind of cooking on her own account, to wit, stirring up a saucepan full of thin blue starch with a tallow candle, turned and looked at the basket of fungi, and said,—

"Oh, the idea! What are they for?"

"To cook, because them star-gazing folks are coming. Morris says Miss Glynne's always talking about finding the focus now."

"But these things are poison."

"Of course they are. I wouldn't give them to a pig;" and with all the autocratic determination of a lady in her position, she took the dish, and threw its contents behind her big roasting fire. "There, that's the place for them! Mary, go and tell Jones I want him."

Jones was cook's mortal enemy; and in the capacity of supplier of fruit and vegetables for kitchen use, he had daily skirmishes with the lady, whom he openly accused of spoiling his choice productions, and sending them to table unfit for use, while she retaliated by telling him often that he could not grow a bit of garden-stuff fit to be seen—that his potatoes were watery, his beetroot pink, his cauliflowers masses of caterpillars and slugs.

Under these circumstances, Jones tied the string of his blue serge apron a little more tightly, twisted the said serge into a tail, which he tucked round his waist, and leaving the forcing-house, where he was busy, set his teeth, pushed his hat down over his nose, and, quite prepared for a serious quarrel, walked heavily into the kitchen. But only to be disarmed, for there was a plate on the white table, containing a splendid wedge of raised pie, with a piece of bread, and a jug of ale beside a horn.

Jones looked at cook, and she nodded and smiled; she also condescended to put her lips first to the freshly-filled horn, and then folded her arms and leaned against the table, while the gardener ate his "snack," feeling that after all, though she had her bit of temper, cook was really what he called "a good sort."

"Ah," he said at last, with a sigh, after a little current chat, "I must be off now. Let's see; you've got in all you want for to-night?"

"Yes, everything," said cook, smiling, "and I must get to work, too. You haven't any mushrooms, I suppose?"

"Haven't got any mushrooms?" said Jones, reproachfully. "Why, I've a bed just coming on."

"Then I should like to make a dish to-day, and use a few in one of my sauces," said cook; and half-an-hour later Jones returned with a basketful, which he deposited upon the table with a thrill of pride.

The presence of Moray Alleyne, and the way in which he was taken up, as the captain called it, by Glynne, so filled the mind of Rolph, that there was no room for anything else, and as the dinner went on, his annoyance so sharpened his appetite that he ate very heartily of the two *entrées* and the joint. It was not until the second course was in progress that a dish was handed round, to which, after a telegraphic glance between the major and Lucy, that young lady helped herself. Glynne took some mechanically, to the major's great delight, and, like Lucy, went on eating.

Then the dish was handed to Rolph, who fixed his glass in his eye, and started slightly as he suddenly recalled the trick he had played in the hall.

“What’s this?” he said in an undertone to the butler.

“*Sham pinions ho nateral*, sir.”

“Humph! no. Take the dish to Mr Alleyne.”

The man took the dish round to the guest, who, talking the while to Glynne, helped himself liberally, and went on eating.

“Won’t you have some, Rolph?” said the major, helping himself in turn.

“I! No. Don’t care for such dishes.”

“Seems to be very good,” said the major. “Smells delicious, and everyone’s eating it.”

“Not the ladies?” whispered Rolph.

“Yes; they’re revelling.”

“Good heavens!” muttered Rolph; and he turned cold and damp, the perspiration standing upon his brow.

“Nothing worse in this world than prejudice,” said the major, taking a mouthful of the delicate dish.

“Ah, yes: superb. Jack, old fellow, try some of these fungi.”

“Get out!” said Sir John, sipping his wine.

“But, my dear boy, they are simply magnificent,” cried the major. “Here, take the dish to your master.”

The mushrooms were handed, and Sir John tried a little, recalled the dish, and had some more, while Rolph sat perfectly still, not daring to speak, though he saw everyone at the table partaking of the stew.

“What are these?” said Sir John. “They’re very good.”

“*Agaricus Rubescens*, my boy. Tons of them rot every year, because there is no one to pick them but Miss Lucy Alleyne and your humble servant here.”

“Well, don’t let’s have any more go rotten,” cried Sir John. “They’re delicious, eh, Mr Alleyne?”

“I beg your pardon,” said the visitor, looking up.

“These fungi,” said the host, “uncommonly good.”

“Yes, admirable,” said Alleyne, who had finished his, and had not the most remote recollection of their quality.

“I don’t believe he tasted them,” said Sir John to himself.

“These are the fungi, Morris, that I gave you to-day to take into the kitchen?” said the major.

“Yes, sir,” said Morris, and the major finished his with great gusto.

“Uncommonly delicious!” he said.

“Capital, Jem,” cried Sir John; “but I hope they won’t poison us.”

“Trust me for that. They’ve been well tested, and are perfectly wholesome. Splendid dish.”

“They’ll all be in agonies before long,” thought Rolph. “I hope poor Glynne won’t be very bad. A bit of an attack would serve her right, though, for going on like that with the star-gazer. Phew! how hot the room is.”

“I give you credit, Jem,” cried the host. “What do you say, Miss Alleyne? It’s of no use to ask these people; they are off on comets or something else.”

“Oh, I’m growing a confirmed fungus-eater, Sir John,” said Lucy. “I am Major Day’s disciple. I think them delicious.”

“You’re a very charming little lassie, and I like you immensely,” thought Sir John, gazing at Lucy curiously and thoughtfully; “but I hope Jem has too much common sense to be making a fool of himself over you. He likes you, I know, but fungus-hunting is one thing and wife-hunting another. No, I won’t think it of you. You wouldn’t lead him on, and he’s too full of sound sense.”

“I shall have to leave the table,” said Rolph to himself. “I never felt so uncomfortable in my life. Ought I to go and get a doctor here? D—n the toadstools! I only meant the major to taste them. Who’d ever have thought that they’d all go in for them. Phew! how hot the room is. Champagne.”

The butler filled up his glass, and Rolph, in his excitement, tossed it off, with the result that the next time Morris went round, he filled the captain’s glass again.

"The thought of it all makes me feel ill," said Rolph to himself.

"I've got a splendid pupil in Miss Alleyne," said the major, sipping his wine. "I've given Glynne up. She can't tell an agaric from one of the polypori. Mr Alleyne, if you're trying to teach her star-names, you may give it up as a bad job."

"Don't interrupt, uncle," said Glynne, shaking her finger at him, playfully.

"How pale the poor girl looks," thought Rolph, who was now in an agony of apprehension. "Phew! this room is warm!" and he gulped down his glass of wine.

"Jack," said the major, "I couldn't have believed those fungi would be so delicious; cook has won the *cordon bleu*. Here, Morris, you are sure these are the same fungi?"

"Certain, sir," replied the butler. "I took them into the kitchen myself."

"And were they all used?"

"I think so, sir; part for the ontries in the first course."

"What!" roared Rolph, who had been horribly guilty over that dish; and he turned white as he clutched the seat of his chair.

"*Salmy of poulay ho sham pinions*, sir," said Morris, politely; and he picked a *menu* from the table and laid it before the captain, who refixed the glass in his eye and glared at the card.

"Do you mean to say that the hashed chicken and the other dish was made up with those con—those toadstools that were—were in that basket?"

"Yes, sir, the basket Major Day brought in, sir," said Morris.

Sir John chuckled. The major burst into a regular roar.

"Are—are you sure, Morris?" gasped Rolph, turning a sickly yellow.

"Yes, sir; quite sure."

"My dear fellow," cried the major, wiping his eyes, "what is the matter?"

"I've—I've eaten a great many of them," panted Rolph.

"Well, so we all have, and delicious they were. Why, hang it, man, they won't poison you."

"Don't!" gasped Rolph, with a wild look in his eyes; and, clutching at the decanter, he poured a quantity of sherry into a tumbler and gulped it down.

"I say, Rob, are you ill?" said Sir John, kindly.

"Yes—no—I don't know," gasped the captain, gazing wildly from one to the other, in search of a fresh victim to the poison.

"Would you like to leave the table?" said Sir John. "Here, Morris, give Captain Rolph a liqueur of brandy."

The butler hurriedly filled a wine glass, and the captain tossed it off as if it had been water, gazing dizzily round at the anxious faces at the table.

"Do you feel very bad, Robert?" said Glynne, rising and going round to his side to speak with great sympathy, as she softly laid her hand upon his broad shoulder.

"Horribly," whispered the captain, who was fast losing his nerve. "Don't you?"

"I? No. I am quite well."

"It was those cursed toadstools," cried Rolph, savagely.

"Nonsense, my dear sir," said the major, firmly. "We have all eaten them, and they were delicious."

"Give me your arm, some one," groaned Rolph, rising from his chair; and the major caught him, and helped him from the room, Alleyne and Sir John following, after begging Lucy and Glynne to remain seated.

"Send for a doctor—quick—I'm poisoned," said Rolph—"quick!"

"Here, send to the town," cried Sir John. "Let a groom gallop over. No; there's Mr Oldroyd in the village. Here, you, James, run across the park, you'll be there in ten minutes."

"Telegraph—physician," gasped Rolph.

"Poor fellow! He seems bad."

"I think," said Alleyne, quietly, "that a good deal of it is nervous dread."

Rolph looked daggers at him, and then closed his eyes and groaned, as he lay back on a sofa in the library.

"Have—have you telegraphed—sent a telegram?" said Rolph, after lying back with his eyes closed for a few minutes.

"I have sent for Mr Oldroyd," said Sir John, "and we will go by his advice. It would take a man half an hour to gallop to the station. We shall have the doctor here long before that."

Rolph looked round, partly for help, partly to see who was to be the next man attacked, and then closed his eyes, and lay breathing heavily.

"I wish you wouldn't bring in those confounded—eh? Who's there?" said Sir John. "Oh, you, my dear. No, you can't do any good. Go and talk to Miss Alleyne. Fit of indigestion coming on the top of a lot of physical exertion—training and that sort of thing. He'll be better soon."

Glynne, who had come to the door, closed it and went away, while Rolph uttered a groan.

"I was saying," continued Sir John, "I wish you wouldn't bring those confounded things into the house. You will be poisoning us some day."

"What nonsense, Jack!" cried the major. "I tell you the fungi were perfectly good. You ate some of them yourself. How do you feel?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

"So is Mr Alleyne; so are the girls; so am I. It is not the mushrooms, I'm sure. More likely your wine. We are all as well as can be."

"Attack you suddenly," groaned Rolph, piteously.

"Ah, well if it does," said the major, "I won't make such a fuss over it. Why, when we had the cholera among us at Darjeebad, the men did not make more trouble."

Rolph squeezed his eyes together very closely, and bit his lips, wishing mentally that a fit would seize the major, while he upbraided Fortune for playing him such a prank as this; and then he lay tolerably still, waiting for nearly half an hour, during which notes were compared by the others, one and all of whom declared that they never felt better. Glynne came twice to ask if she could be of any service, and to say that Lucy was eager to help; and then there were steps in the hall, and, directly after, Oldroyd was shown in, looking perfectly cool and business-like, in spite of his hurried scamper across the park.

"Your man says that Captain Rolph has been poisoned by eating bad mushrooms," said the young doctor. "Is this so?"

"He has had some of the same dish as all the rest," said Sir John; "and my brother declares they were perfectly safe."

"Humph!" ejaculated Oldroyd, who had seated himself by his patient, and was questioning and examining him.

"Better get him to bed," he said, after a pause; "and, while he is undressing, I will run home and get him something."

He started directly, and was back just as Rolph sank upon his pillow.

"There, sir, drink that," said Oldroyd, in a quiet decisive tone; and, after displaying a disposition to refuse, the young officer drank what was offered to him, and soon after sank into a heavy sleep.

"I'll come back about twelve, Sir John," said the doctor. "I don't think he will be any worse. In fact, I believe he'll be all right in the morning."

"But what is it?" said Sir John, in a whisper. "If it is the mushrooms, why are we not all ill?"

"Well, as far as I can make out," said Oldroyd, "there is nothing the matter with him but a nervous fit, and an indication of too much stimulant. It seems to me that he has frightened himself into the belief that he has been poisoned. But I'll come in again about twelve."

"No, no; pray stay, Mr Oldroyd," cried Sir John. "Come down into the drawing-room, and have a cup of tea and a chat. You don't think we need telegraph for further advice?"

"Really, Sir John, I fail to see why you should," said Oldroyd. "Your friend is certainly, as far as my knowledge goes, not seriously ill."

"Then come and sit down till you want to see him again," said Sir John. "I'm very glad to know you, Mr Oldroyd. You do know my brother? Yes, and Mr Alleyne? That's well. Now come and see Miss Day and her friend.—Oh, my dears," cried the baronet, in his hearty tones, "here is Mr Oldroyd come to cheer you with the best of news. Mr Oldroyd, my daughter—Well, Morris, what is it?"

"If you please. Sir John, cook says, Sir John, she's very sorry that there should be any unpleasant feeling about the mushrooms; but she had an accident with the ones Major Day sent to be cooked, and those you had for dinner were Jones's own growing in the pits."

"I could have sworn they had the regular mushroom flavour," cried the major.

"Then we needn't fidget about our dinner," said Sir John, laughing. "Doctor, you're right. Morris, that will do."

Somehow from that minute the evening brightened very pleasantly at Brackley. Lucy thought it charming, and Glynne was an attentive listener to every astronomical word that fell from Alleyne's lips. Twice over Oldroyd went up to see his patient, and each time came back with the information that he was sleeping heavily, and that there was not the slightest cause for alarm.

After that, no one was uneasy, and Rolph was almost forgotten. Alleyne left with his sister about eleven, the two being sent home in the brougham. Glynne needed no persuasion to go to bed, and Oldroyd sat and smoked a cigar with the major and Sir John in the library till twelve, when he went and had another look at his patient.

"Well," said the baronet, on his return, "what news?"

"Sleeping like a baby," replied Oldroyd. "I think I'll go now."

"Anybody sitting up for you, Mr Oldroyd?"

"Oh, no."

"Then there's no one to be uneasy about your absence?"

"Certainly not."

"Then would you oblige me by stopping here to-night, in case you are wanted?"

Oldroyd was perfectly willing to oblige, and he was shown to a spare bedroom, where he slept heartily till eight, and then rose and went to the patient, whom he found dressing for his morning walk, while his self-issued bulletin was that he was better.

He would not believe the cook.

Volume One—Chapter Fourteen.

Terrestrial Trials.

"I think it was very foolish of your brother to invite them, Lucy," said Mrs Alleyne, austerely. "All these preparations are not made without money; and when they are made, we have the bitterness of feeling that what is luxury to us is to them contemptible and mean."

"Oh, but, mamma, you don't know Glynne, or you would not talk like that. She is as simple in her tastes as can be, and thinks nothing of the luxury in which they live."

"She would think a great deal of it, my dear, if, by any misfortune in life, it should all pass from her."

"No, mamma, I don't think she would," said Lucy. "She is a strange girl."

"For my part," said Mrs Alleyne, very sternly, "I don't think we are doing wisely in keeping up this intimacy."

"Oh, mamma!"

"I have said it. Look at the expense I have been put to in preparations. In the constant struggle which I go through day after day, paring and contriving to make our little income last out; any addition of this kind is a weariness and a care. Of what good, pray, is this visit but to satisfy the curiosity of a few heartless people?"

"Oh, mamma, don't say that. Glynne is the kindest and most amiable of girls, and nobody could be nicer to me than the major and Sir John."

"Of course they are nice to you—to my daughter," said Mrs Alleyne, pulling up her mittens—a very dingy black pair that had lain by till they were specked with a few grey spots of mildew.

"And the major thinks very highly of Moray."

"It is only natural that he should," said Mrs Alleyne, haughtily. "But I repeat, I see no advantage of a social nature to be gained by this intimacy, even if we wished it."

"But you forget about Moray, mamma, dear."

"I forget nothing about your brother, Lucy. But pray, what do you mean by this allusion?"

"His need of change. He has certainly been better lately."

"Decidedly not," replied Mrs Alleyne, making a fresh effort to cover a very large and unpleasantly prominent vein that ran from the back of her hand above her wrist. "I have noticed that Moray is more quiet and thoughtful than ever."

"But Mr Oldroyd said yesterday, mamma, that he was better."

“Mr Oldroyd gave his opinion, my dear, but it was only the opinion of one man. Mr Oldroyd may be mistaken.”

“But, mamma, he seems so clever, and to know so much about Moray’s case.”

“Yes, my child—seems; but these young medical men often jump at conclusions, and are ready to take for granted that they understand matters which are completely sealed.”

Lucy coloured slightly, and remained silent.

“For my part,” continued Mrs Alleyne, “I do not feel at all easy respecting Moray’s state, and his health is too serious a thing to be trifled with.”

Lucy’s colour deepened as Mrs Alleyne swept out of the room.

“I’m sure he’s clever, and I’m sure he was quite right about Moray,” she said. “It’s a shame to say so, but I wish mamma would not be so prejudiced. She will not be, though, when she knows Glynne better.”

There was a pause here, and Lucy sat looking very intently before her, the intent gaze in her face being precisely similar to that seen in her brother’s countenance when he was watching a far-off planet, and striving to learn from it something of its mysteries and ways.

But Lucy was not studying some far-off planet, though her task was perhaps as hard, for she was trying to read the future, and to discover what there was in store for her brother and herself. She could not think of Moray being always engaged studying stars, nor of herself as continually at home with her mother leading that secluded life in the sombre brick mansion, finding it cheerless and dull in summer, cold and bleak in winter when the wind roared in the pine trees, till it was as if the sea were beating the shore hard by.

“There is sure to be some change,” she said, brightening up. “I know it, but I hope it will not bring trouble.”

No further allusions were made to the coming visit of the family from Brackley, but the next day and the next, to use Lucy’s words, mamma led her such a life that she wished—and yet she did not wish—that the visit was not coming off, so troublesome did the preparations grow.

Mrs Alleyne was going about her blank, chilly house one morning, looking very much troubled; and now and then she stopped to wring her hands, but it was generally in a cupboard or in a drawer, when there was not the slightest likelihood of her being seen. Her forehead was deeply lined, and there was a peculiar drawing down about the corners of her lips that indicated care.

It was the old story—money. She had been up to town only the week before to sell out a sum in Government Stock, to pay for an astronomical instrument her son required—a tremendously costly piece of mechanism, thus leaving herself poorer than ever; and now her idol had been putting her to fresh expense.

“So thoughtless of him,” she moaned, with her face in the linen closet—“so foolish. He seems to have no idea whatever of the value of money, and I don’t know what I shall do.”

But all the same there was the same glow of satisfaction in Mrs Alleyne’s breast that she used to feel when she had bought the idol a wooden horse, or a toy waggon full of sacks, or one of those instruments of torture upon wheels, which, when a child draws it across the floor, emits a series of wire-born notes of a most discordant kind.

Mrs Alleyne turned over three or four clean tablecloths, opening them out and looking wistfully at darns and frayings, and places where the clothes pegs had torn away the hems when they had been hung out to dry. These she refolded with a sigh, and put back.

“Oh, my boy, my boy, if you only thought a little more about this world as well as the other worlds!” she sighed, as she closed the door, and, with her brow growing more wrinkled, wrung her hands over the pantry sink.

It was not that she had washed them, for the tap was dry, no water being ever pumped into the upper cistern, and the pantry was devoted to the reception of Mrs Alleyne’s meagre stores.

There were cupboards here that held glass and china—good old china and glass; but in the one, there were marks of mendings and rivets, and in the other chips and, worse troubles, cracks, and odd glasses without feet, or whose feet were upon the next shelf.

“I don’t know how we shall manage,” sighed Mrs Alleyne, wringing her hands once more. “It was very, very thoughtless of him. The knives are worst of all.”

She unrolled a packet or two, which contained nothing but table knives that had once been remarkably good, but which had done their work in company with hard usage, and some of which had shed their ivory handles, while others were thin and double edged, others again being bent at the points, or worn down by cleaning until they were about two-thirds of their original length.

“Dear me—dear me! how things do wear out!” sighed Mrs Alleyne; and, raising her eyes, she saw her face reflected in a little square glass hanging upon the wall—“even ourselves,” she added, sadly.

Just then Lucy came in hurriedly.

“Oh, mamma,” she cried, “I’m sure I don’t know what we shall do. The more I look up things, the worse they seem. It is dreadful; it is horrible. I shall blush for shame.”

"And why, may I ask?" said Mrs Alleyne, sternly.

"Because people will do nothing but spy out the poverty of the land. Moray has no sense at all, or he would never have been so foolish as to ask them."

"Your brother had his own good reasons for asking Sir John Day, his brother, and his daughter, and I beg that you will not speak in that disrespectful way of your brother's plans."

"But you don't see, mamma."

"I see everything, my child," said Mrs Alleyne, stiffly.

"But you don't think how awkward it will be."

"Yes, I have thought of all that."

"But Moray never does. How are we to entertain people who are accustomed to live in luxury, and who have abundance of plate and china and glass, and servants to wait upon them? Oh, we shall look ridiculous."

"Lucy!"

"I don't care, mamma, I can't help it. I've been working away to see if I could not get things in proper trim to do us justice, but it is horrible. Moray must write and tell them they are not to come."

"My son shall do nothing of the kind, Lucy, and I desire that you do the best you can, so that Moray may be content."

"But, mamma, we have no flowers, no fruit for dessert, no pretty glass and vases; and I know the dinner will be horrible."

"Moray asked the Days to come and see us, not our household arrangements, and we must give them some dinner before they go up into the observatory."

"Oh, very well, mamma," said Lucy, "I have protested. You and Moray must have it your own way."

"Of course," said Mrs Alleyne, composedly; "and I beg that you will find no more fault with your brother's arrangements."

"No, mamma: I have done."

"I dare say Captain Rolph very often dines far worse at his mess than we shall dine to-morrow."

"But surely he is not coming, mamma," cried Lucy in horror; "he will be jeering at everything."

"If he is so extremely ungentlemanly, it is no fault of ours. Yes, he is coming; and, by the way, I did not tell you, I have just asked Mr Oldroyd to join us."

"Mamma!" cried Lucy, turning scarlet.

"Now don't exclaim against that, my dear," said Mrs Alleyne. "I am sure it will be almost a charity to have him here. He cannot be too grand for our simple ways."

Poor Lucy shrank away looking very thoughtful, and, resigning herself to fate, went busily about the house, working like a little slave, and arranging the place to the best advantage; but only to break down at last, with a piteous burst of tears, as she saw how miserable a result she had achieved, and compared her home with that of Glynne.

Mrs Alleyne was not in much better spirits, indulging herself as she did in various wringings of the hands in closets and corners, but all in the most furtive way, as she too thought of the barrenness of the house.

The next morning the preparations for the little dinner were in hurried progress, Lucy busily working with gloomy resignation, and the kitchen given over to the woman who had come to cook. Then the large covered cart from Brackley drew up to the gate, and upon Eliza going down, the man who drove helped her to unbar the great gates, and led his horse in and right round to the kitchen door.

He was the bearer of a note for Mrs Alleyne, and while Eliza had taken it in, and the recipient was reading it, to afterwards hand it over to Lucy, Sir John's man began unloading the cart in the most matter-of-fact way, and arranging things upon the kitchen dresser.

"What does he say, that he begs your pardon, and knowing that we have no garden, would we accept a few trifles of flowers and a little fruit?"

Mrs Alleyne frowned, and the shadow on her countenance deepened after Sir John's man had departed with the cart, for the trifles sent over were a magnificent collection of cut flowers, with grapes, a pine, hot-house peaches, and nectarines and plums.

Lucy coloured with pleasure, for all was most thoughtfully contrived. Even choice leaves in a neat bunch were included, ready for decorating the fruit in the dessert dishes. But directly after she could not help sharing her mother's annoyance—it seemed so like looking upon them as poor.

"It is almost an insult," said Mrs Alleyne at last.

Lucy looked up at her wistfully, with the cloud now crossing her own bright little face.

“It is because we live in so humble a manner,” cried Mrs Alleyne, angrily. “It is cruel—a display of arrogance—because I choose to live quietly that Moray may proceed with his great discoveries in science.”

Lucy gazed at her mother’s face, in which she could read the growing anger and mortification.

“Oh, I wish Moray had not been so ready to invite them,” she said to herself.

“The things shall go back,” exclaimed Mrs Alleyne at last.

“Oh, mamma,” whispered Lucy, clinging to her and trying to calm her anger, “don’t—pray don’t say that. It is only a present of fruit and flowers, after all.”

“You will not send the things back, mamma.”

Mrs Alleyne was silent for a few moments, and then said huskily,—

“No: they shall remain, but Moray must not know; and mind this, Lucy, when they come there is sure to be an offer for the man-servant to stop and wait. This must be declined.”

“Oh, yes, mamma,” cried Lucy, excitedly, as she began to imagine Sir John’s footman being witness of the shifts made in re-washing plates, and forks, and spoons.

“We must submit to the insult, I suppose. I cannot resent it for Moray’s sake. They are his guests, and must be treated with respect.”

In due time Sir John and Glynne, with Rolph and the major, arrived, and were heartily welcomed by Moray, who seemed to have thrown off his quiet thoughtfulness of manner, and to be striving to set the visitors at their ease. So warm and hearty, too, were Sir John and the major, that Lucy brightened; and had Rolph taken another tone, and Mrs Alleyne been satisfied with doing all that lay in her power to make her visitors welcome, leaving the rest, all would have gone well. But, in face of the stern, calm dignity of mien which she displayed, it was impossible for Sir John to adopt his easy-going sociability. In fact, between them, Mrs Alleyne and Rolph spoiled the dinner.

It was not by any means the greatest mistake that Mrs Alleyne had ever made in her life, but it was a serious one all the same, to attempt a regular society dinner in the face of so many difficulties. Poor woman: she felt that it was her duty to show Sir John that she was a lady, and understood the social amenities of life.

The consequence was that, having attempted too much, all went wrong: Eliza got into the most horrible tangles, and half-a-dozen times over, Sir John wished they had had a good Southdown leg of mutton, vegetables, and a pudding, and nothing else.

But he did not have his wish—for there was soup that was not good; soles that had become torn and tattered in the extraction from the frying-pan; veal cutlets, whose golden egging and crumbing had been in vain, for this coating had dissolved apparently into the sauce. The other *entrée* emitted an odour which made the major hungry, being a curried chicken; but, alas! the rice was in the condition known by schoolboys as “mosh-posh.” Then came a sirloin of beef and a pair of boiled fowls, with an intervening tongue and white sauce—at least the sauce should have been white, and the chickens should have been young—while what kind of conscience the butcher possessed who defrauded Mrs Alleyne by sending her in that sirloin of beef, with the announcement that it was prime, it is impossible to say.

The table looked bright and pretty with its fine white cloth, bright flowers and fruit, but the dinner itself was a series of miserable failures, through all of which Mrs Alleyne sat, stern, and with a fixed smile upon her countenance. Moray and Glynne were serenely unconscious, eating what was before them, but with their thoughts and conversation far away amongst the stars. Sir John and the major, with the most chivalrous courtesy, ignored everything, and kept up the heartiest of conversation; while Rolph, who was in a furious temper at having been obliged to come, fixed his glass in his eye and stolidly stared when he did not sneer.

It was poor Lucy upon whom the burden of the dinner cares fell, and she suffered a martyrdom. Oldroyd saw that she was troubled, but did not fully realise the cause, while the poor girl shivered and shrank, and turned now hot, now cold, as she read Rolph’s contempt for the miserable fare.

“Yes,” said the Major to himself, “it’s a mistake. She meant well, poor woman, but if she had given us a well-cooked steak how much better it would have been.”

Mrs Alleyne, behind her mask of smiles, also noted how Rolph’s eye-glass was directed at the various dishes, and how his plate went away, time after time, with the viands scarcely tasted. She hated him with a bitter hatred, and felt full of rejoicing to see his annoyance with Glynne, whose calm, handsome face lit up and grew animated when Alleyne spoke to her, answering questions, questioning her in return, and telling her of his work during the past few days.

The meal went on very slowly, and such success as attended it was due to Sir John and the major, the former devoting himself to his hostess, while the latter relieved poor little Lucy’s breast of some of its burden of trouble.

“Ah,” he said once, out of sheer kindness, just after Rolph had laughed silently at a grievous mistake made by Eliza, who, in a violent perspiration with work and excitement, had dropped a dish in the second course, breaking it, and spreading a too tremulous cabinet pudding and its sauce upon the well—worn carpet. “Ah, a capital dinner, Miss Alleyne, only wanted one dish to have made it complete.”

"How can you be so unkind, Major Day!" said Lucy, in a low, choking voice; "the poor girl is so unused to company, and she could not help it."

Major Day looked petrified. He had advanced his remark like a squadron to cover the rout of the cabinet pudding, and he was astounded by Lucy's flank movement, as she took his remark to refer to the maid.

"My dear child," he stammered, "you mistake me."

Poor Lucy could not contain herself. The vexations of the whole dinner which had been gathering within her now burst forth; and though she spoke to him in an undertone, her face was crimson, and it was all she could do to keep from bursting into a flood of tears.

"It is so unkind of you," continued Lucy; "we are not used to having company. Moray did not think how difficult it would be for us to make proper preparations, and it is not our fault that everything is so bad."

"My dear child!" whispered the major again.

"You need not have added to my misery by calling it a capital dinner, and alluding to the dish."

Fortunately Sir John was chatting loudly to Mrs Alleyne, Oldroyd was in a warm argument with Rolph on the subject of training, and Alleyne was holding Glynne's attention by describing to her the theory that the stars were in all probability suns with planets revolving round them, as we do about our own giver of warmth and light. Hence, then, the major's little interlude with Lucy was unnoticed, and Eliza was able to remove the evidences of the disaster with a dustpan and brush.

"My dear Miss Alleyne, give me credit for being an officer and a gentleman," said the major, quietly; "the dish I alluded to was one of some choice fungi, such as we discover for ourselves in the woods and fields. I meant nothing else—believe me."

Lucy darted a grateful look in his eyes, and followed it up with a smile, which sent a peculiar little sting into Oldroyd's breast.

"For," the latter argued with himself, "elderly gentlemen do sometimes manage to exercise a great deal of influence over the susceptible hearts of maidens, and Major Day is a smart, attractive, old man."

His attention was, however, taken up directly by Rolph, who, in a half-haughty, condescending tone asked him if he had studied training from its medical and surgical side, nettling him by his manner, and putting him upon his mettle to demolish his adversary in argument.

"Thank you, major," whispered Lucy. "I might have known—I ought to have known better."

And then, with the ice broken between herself and her old botanical tutor and friend, she seemed to jump with girlish eagerness at the opportunity for lightening her burdened heart.

"Everything has gone so dreadfully," she whispered. "I have been sitting upon thorns ever since you all came. It has been heartbreaking, and I shall be so glad when it is all over, and you are gone."

"Tut—tut! you inhospitable little creature," said the major. "For shame. I shall not. Why, surely my little pupil does not think we came over here for the sake of the dinner. Fie!—fie!—fie! Brother John, there, enjoys a crust of bread and cheese and a glass of ale better than anything; while I, an old campaigner, used, when I was on service, to think myself very lucky if I got a biscuit and a slice of melon, or a handful of dates, for a meal."

"But Sir John said you were so particular, and that was why he sent the fruit."

"My brother John is a gentleman," said the major, smiling. "But there, there, let me see my little pupil smiling, and at her ease again. Why, we've come over this evening to feast upon stars and planets, when the proper time comes. I say, look at Glynne, how bright and eager she looks. She is not troubling herself about the dinner; nor your brother neither."

"Moray?" replied Lucy. "Oh, no; nothing troubles him. Poor fellow! If you gave him only some bran he would eat it and never say a word. It's throwing nice things away to make them for him."

At last the dessert plates had been placed upon the table, and the fruit handed round by Eliza, who, in spite of several nods and frowns from Mrs Alleyne, insisted upon staying to the very last, by way of salving her conscience for the pudding lapse. Then she finally departed to look after the coffee; the ladies rose and left the room, and the gentlemen drew closer together to discuss their wine.

Some cups of capital coffee were brought in, its quality being due to the fact that Lucy had slipped into the kitchen to make it herself; and after these had been enjoyed, Sir John drew attention to the object of their visit. Rolph yawned, and made up his mind to remain behind, to go into the garden and have a cigar, and Alleyne led the way into the drawing-room, Glynne rising directly to come and meet them, all eagerness to enjoy the promised inspection of the observatory.

Volume One—Chapter Fifteen.

Glynne Looks at the Moon, the Professor at his Heart.

The secret of the poverty of Mrs Alleyne's home was read by the major and Sir John, as they followed their host and Glynne along a bare passage and through two green-baized doors, into the great dome-covered chambers where Alleyne pursued his studies, for on all sides were arranged astronomical instruments of the newest invention and costliest kind. The outlay had been slow—a hundred now and a hundred then; but the result had been thousands of pounds spent upon the various pieces of intricate mechanism, and their mounting upon solid iron pillars, resting on massive piers of cement or stone.

Glynne uttered a faint cry of surprise and delight as she saw the long tubes with their wheels and pivots arranged so that the reclining observer could turn his glass in any direction; gazed in the great trough that seemed to have a bottom covered with looking-glass, but which was half full of quicksilver; noted that there were sliding shutters in the roof, and various pieces of mechanism, whose uses she longed to have explained.

It was all old to Lucy, who felt a new pleasure, though, in her friend's eagerness, while Mrs Alleyne, who had suffered torments all the evening in mortified pride, felt, as she saw the looks of wonder of the guests, and their appreciation of her son's magnificent observatory, that she was now reaping her reward.

"Bless my soul!" cried Sir John, "I am astounded. I did not think there was such a place outside Greenwich."

Mrs Alleyne bowed and smiled; and then, as Sir John began eagerly inspecting the various objects and arrangements around, and the major chatted to Lucy, she gave a curious look at her son, who was bending over Glynne, explaining to her the use of the quicksilver trough, and arranging a glass afterwards, so that she might see how it was brought to bear upon a reflected star.

As Mrs Alleyne glanced round she saw that Oldroyd was also watching her son and Glynne, and her eyes directly after met those of the young doctor, whose thoughts she tried to read—perhaps with success.

For the next half-hour, Glynne was being initiated in the mysteries of the transit instrument, and had the pleasure of seeing star after star cross the zenith, after which, the moon having risen well above the refracting and magnifying mists of earth, the largest reflector was brought to bear upon its surface.

Ejaculations of delight kept escaping from Glynne's lips as she gazed at the bright tops of the various volcanoes, searched the dark shadows and craters, and literally revelled in the glories of the brightly embossed silver crescent. She had a hundred questions to ask, with all the eager curiosity and animation of a child, and with the advantage of having one as patient as he was learned, ready to respond upon the instant.

"I feel so terribly selfish," cried Glynne, at last. "Oh, papa, you must come and look. Uncle, it is wonderful."

"We'll have a look another time," said Sir John, good-humouredly; "only don't wear out Mr Alleyne's patience."

"Oh, I hope he will not think me tiresome," cried Glynne, whose eye was directed to the glass again on the instant, "but it is so wonderful. I could watch the moon all night. Now, Mr Alleyne, just a little way from the left edge, low down, there is a brilliant ring of light—no, not quite a ring; it is as if a portion of it had been torn away, and—Oh! Robert! how you startled me."

The spell was broken, for Rolph had entered the observatory, having finished his cigar. He had been standing at the door for a few moments, watching the scene before him, and a frown came over his forehead as he heard the eagerness of his betrothed's words, and saw the impressive way in which Alleyne was bending towards her, and answering her questions. Directly after, the young officer crossed the observatory, laid his hand almost rudely upon Alleyne's shoulder, and nodded to him as if to say, "Stand on one side."

Alleyne started, coloured, and then drew back, with the major watching him intently, while Rolph laid his hand playfully upon Glynne's forehead, and slipped it before her eyes.

"Now then, have you found the focus. What is it? A penny a peep? Here, Mr Alleyne, do you take the money?"

A dead silence fell upon the group till the major hastened to break it by saying a few words of praise of the place to Mrs Alleyne.

Soon afterwards they went back to the drawing-room and partook of tea, the carriage arriving directly after, and everyone thinking it time to leave, for a curious chill had come over the party, Glynne having subsided into her old, silent, inanimate way, and no effort of the major or Sir John producing anything more than a temporary glow.

"Why, how quiet you are, Glynne," said Rolph, as they were on their way home.

"I was thinking," she replied, quietly.

"What about?"

"About?—Oh, the wonders of—of what I have seen to-night."

"Are you satisfied, my son?" said Mrs Alleyne, when she kissed him that night.

"Yes, dear mother, thoroughly," he said to her; and then to himself—"No."

End of Volume One.

Volume Two—Chapter One.

After a Lapse.

It was about a mile from the Alleynes' where the sandy lane, going north, led by an eminence, rugged, scarped, and crowned with great columnar firs that must have sprung from seeds a couple of hundred years ago. By day, when the sun shone in from the east at his rising, or from the west at his going down, the great towering trunks that ran up seventy or eighty feet without a branch looked as if cast in ruddy bronze, while overhead the thick, dark, boughs interlaced and shut out the sky.

It was a gloomy enough spot by day amidst the maze of tall columns, with the ground beneath slippery from the dense carpeting of pine needles; by night, whether a soft breeze was overhead whispering in imitation of the surging waves, or it was a storm, there was ever that never-ending sound of the sea upon the shore, making the place in keeping with the spirit of him who sought for change and relief from troublous thoughts.

Moray Alleyne's brain was full of trouble, of imperious thoughts that would not be kept back, and one night, to calm his disturbed spirit, he went out from the observatory, bare-headed, to walk for a few minutes up and down the garden.

But there was no rest there, and, feeling confined and cribbed within fence and hedge, he glanced for a moment or two at the tall window with its undrawn blinds, through which he could see Mrs Alleyne, seated stiff and with an uncompromising look upon her face, busy stitching at a piece of linen in which she was making rows of the finest nature, in preparation for a garment to be worn by her son.

Lucy was at the other side of the table, also working, but, as the lamplight fell upon her face, Alleyne could see that it was unruffled and full of content.

He sighed as he turned away, and thought of the past, when his thoughts went solely to his absorbing work—when this strange attraction, as he termed it, had not come upon him and drawn him, as it were, out of his course.

Only a short time back, and he went on in his matter-of-fact, mundane orbit, slowly working out problems, sometimes failing, but always returning to the task with the same calm peaceful serenity of spirit, waiting patiently for the triumph of science that sooner or later came for his reward.

How calm and unruffled all this had been. No fever of the soul, no tempest of spirit to disturb the even surface of his life. But now all was changed. They had torn him amongst them from the happy, placid life, to give him rage, and bitterness and pain.

His brow grew rugged and his hands clenched as he walked rapidly out on to the wild heath, heedless of the bushes and the inequalities of the ground, until he fell heavily, and leaped up again, to turn back. Then, giving up the wide waste of moor which he had instinctively chosen as being in accord with his frame of mind, he made straight for the next desolate spot, where it seemed to him that he could be alone with his thoughts, and perhaps school them into subjection.

"Cool down this madness," he once said aloud, laughing bitterly the while; and the sound of his strange voice made him start and hurry on along the shady lane, as if to escape from the unseen monitor who had reminded him of his suffering.

"Yes, it is madness," he muttered, "I could not have believed it true. But, discipline, patience, I shall conquer yet."

He walked on, with the beads of perspiration coming softly out upon his brow; then, from being like a fine dew, they began to join one with the other, till they stood out in great drops unheeded, as he went swiftly on, and almost blindly at last turned rapidly up the steep ascent, climbing at times, and avoiding the pine trunks by a kind of blind instinct. He toiled on farther and farther, till he stood at the highest part of the great natural temple, with its windswept roof hidden in the darkness overhead, and two huge pines bending over to each other, like the sides of some huge east window, at the precipitous broken edge of the hill. Through this he could look straight away over the intervening billowy estate, to where Brackley Hall stood surrounded by trees, and with its lights shining softly against a vast background of darkness.

And now as he rested a hand upon a trunk, his vivid imagination pictured Glynne as being there, behind one or other of the softly-illumined panes.

Here he stopped and stood motionless for a time, gazing straight before him through the dimly-seen vista of the trunks, breathing in the soft, cool night air, dry and invigorating at that height. All was so still and silent, that, obeying his blind instinct, he seemed to have come there to find calmness and repose.

But they were not present; neither was the place dark—to him. For, as he stood there, with knotted brow, and teeth and hands clenched, turn which way he would there was light, and within that light, gazing at him with its intense, rapt expression—as if living and breathing upon his words—the one face that always haunted him now.

It had been so strange at first—that look of thoughtful veneration, that air of belief. Then, from being half-pleased, half-flattered, had come the time when it had created a want in his life—the desire to be master and go on teaching this obedient disciple who dwelt upon his words, took them so faithfully to heart, and waited patiently for fresh utterances from his lips.

It was not love on her part. He knew that. He was sure of it. At least it was the love of the science that he strove to teach—the thirsting of a spirit to know more and more of the wonders of infinite space. She liked to be in his society,

to listen to his words. He knew he was gauging Glynne Day's heart, when, with a sensation of misery that swept over him like some icy wave, he went over the hours they had spent together. But, when he tried to gauge his own he trembled, and asked himself why this madness had come upon him, robbing him of his peace and rest—making him so unfit for his daily work.

He strode on to and fro, winding in and out amongst the tall pillars of this darkened nature-temple, fighting his mental fight and praying from time to time for help to crush down the madness that had assailed him where he had thought himself so strong.

Strive how he would, though, there was Glynne's face ever gazing up into his; and beside it, half-mockingly, in its calm, satisfied content, was Rolph's; and as he met the eyes, there was the cool, contemptuous, pitying look, such as he had seen upon the young officer's face again and again, mingled with the arrogant air of dislike that he made so little effort to conceal.

For a time Alleyne had been growing calmer; his determined efforts to master himself had seemed as if about to be attended with success; but as in fancy he had seen Rolph's face beside that of Glynne, a feeling of rage—of envious rage—that mastered him in turn held sway.

But it was not for long; the power of a well-disciplined brain was brought to bear, and Moray Alleyne stood at last with his arms folded, leaning against a tree, thinking that after this mad ebullition of passion, he had gained the victory, and that henceforth all this was going to be as a bygone dream.

It must have been by some occult law of attraction that deals with human beings as inanimate objects are drawn together upon the surface of a pond, that Rolph, in contemptuous scorn of the sedative tea that would be on the way in Sir John's drawing-room, and holding himself free for a little self-indulgence, took three cigars from his future father-in-law's cabinet in the smoking-room, secured a box of matches, and, after putting on a light overcoat and soft hat, strolled out on to the lawn.

"Been on duty with her all day," he said, with a half laugh, "and a fellow can't quite give himself up to petticoat government—not hers. If it wasn't for Aldershot being so near, it would be awful."

Glynne was seated alone in the drawing-room, where the shaded lamp stood on the side-table, deep in a book that she was reading with avidity; and as Rolph, with his hands in his pockets, strolled round the house, he, too, stopped to look in at the window.

"There's no nonsense about it," he said, "she is pretty—I might say beautiful, and there isn't a girl in the regiment who comes near her."

"Humph! what a chance. The old boys are snoring in the dining-room, each with a handkerchief over his head, and for the next two hours I dare say we should be alone, and—drink tea!" he said with an air of disgust. "I hope she won't be so confoundedly fond of tea when we're married. It's rather too much of a good thing sometimes. And a man wants change."

He thrust his hands deeply into his coat pockets, where one of them came in contact with a cigar, which he took out, bit off the end mechanically, and stood rolling it to and fro between his lips.

"Shall I go in?" he asked himself. "Hang it, no! If one's too much with a girl she'll grow tired of you before marriage. Better keep her off a little, and not spoil her too soon. Yes, she really is a very handsome girl. Just fancy her in one of the smartest dresses a tip-top place could turn out, and sitting beside a fellow on a four-in-hand—Ascot, say, or to some big meet. There won't be many who will put us—her, I mean"—he added, with a dash of modesty—"in the shade. Here, I'll go and have a talk to her. No, I won't. I sha'n't get my cigar if I do. We shall have plenty of *tête-à-têtes*, I dare say. And I promised to-night—What's she reading, I wonder? Last new novel, I suppose. Puzzles me," he said to himself, as he swung round, "how a woman can go on reading novels at the rate some of them do. Such stuff! It's only about one in a hundred that is written by anybody who knows what life really is—about horses and dogs—and sport," he added after a little thought. "Poor little Glynne. It pleases her, though, and I sha'n't interfere, but she might cultivate subjects more that agree with my tastes—say the hunt—and the field."

He gave one glance over his shoulder at the picture of the reading girl in the drawing-room and then went off across the lawn, to be stopped by the wire fence, against which he paused as if measuring its height. Then going back for a dozen yards or so he took a sharp run, meaning to leap it, but stopped short close to the wire.

"Won't do," he muttered; "too dark."

He then stepped over it, bending the top wire down and making it give a loud twang when released, as he walked on sharply towards the footway that crossed the path and led away to the fir woods, whistling the while.

Perhaps if he had known that the book Glynne was reading with such eagerness did not happen to be a novel, but a study of the heavens, by one, Mr Lockyer, the ideas that coursed through his mind would not have been of quite so complacent a character—that is to say, if the strain upon his nature to supply him with muscles and endurance had left him wit enough to put that and that together, and judge by the result.

"It's getting precious dull here, and home's horrid," said Rolph, as he stopped in the shadow of a tree, whose huge trunk offered shelter from the breeze.

Here he proceeded, in the quiet deliberate fashion of a man who makes a study of such matters, and who would not on any consideration let a cigar burn sidewise, to light the roll he held in his teeth. He struck a match, coquetted with the flame, holding it near and drawing it away, till the leaf was well alight, when he placed his hands in his pockets,

and walked on, puffing complacently, for a short distance at a moderate pace, but, finding the path easy and smooth, his mind began to turn to athletics, and, taking his hands from his pockets, he stopped short and doubled his fists.

"Won't do to get out of condition with this domestic spaniel life," he said, with a laugh, and, drawing a long breath, he set off walking, taking long, regular strides, and getting over the ground at a tremendous pace for about half a mile, when he stopped short to smile complacently.

"Not bad that," he said aloud, "put out my cigar though;" and, again sheltering himself behind a tree, he struck a match and relit the roll of tobacco.

"I must do a little more of this early of a morning," he said, as he regained his breath, and cooled down gradually by slowly walking on, and as fate arranged it, entering the great fir clump on the side farthest from the lane.

"They say the smell of the fir is healthy, and does a man good," said Rolph. "I'll have a good sniff or two."

There was more of the odour of tobacco, though, than of the pines, as with his footsteps deadened by the soft, half-decayed vegetable matter, he threaded his way amongst the tall trunks.

"Humph! moon rising! see the gates!" said Rolph, with a satisfied air, as if the great yellow orb, slowly rising above the wood and darting horizontal rays through the pines, were illumining the path for his special benefit. Then he looked at his watch. "Ten minutes too soon. But I dare say she's waiting. If this place were mine I should have all these trees cut down for timber and firewood. Fetch a lot!"

The wondrous effects of black velvety darkness and golden lines of light were thrown away upon the young baronet, who saw in the pale gilding of the tree-trunks only so much to avoid.

All at once his thoughts took a turn in another direction, and unwittingly he began to ponder upon the intimacy that had grown up between the people at the Hall and the Alleynes.

"It's a great mistake, and I don't like it," Rolph said to himself. "That fellow hangs about after Glynne like some great dog. I shall have to speak to the old man about it. Glynne doesn't see it, of course, and I don't mean that she should, but it gets to be confoundedly unpleasant to a—to a thoughtful man—to a man of the world. Wiser, perhaps, to have a few words with the fellow himself, and tell him what I think of his conduct. I will too," he said, after a pause. "He is simply ignorant of the common decencies of society, or he wouldn't do it. I shall—What the devil's he doing here—come to watch?"

Rolph stopped short, completely astounded upon seeing, not two yards away, the statue-like figure of Alleyne, with arms folded, leaning against a tree, thoroughly intent upon his thoughts.

For some time neither Rolph nor Alleyne spoke, the latter being profoundly ignorant of the presence of the former.

The shadows of the fir wood, as well as those of Alleyne's mind, were to blame for this, for where Rolph had paused the moonbeams had not touched, and though Alleyne's eyes were turned in that direction, they were filmed by the black darkness of the future, a deep shadow that he could not pierce. But by degrees, as the great golden shield, whose every light or speck was as familiar to him as his daily life, swept slowly on, a broad bar of darkness passed to his left, revealing first a part, then the whole of Sir Robert Rolph's figure, as he stood scowling there, his hands in his pockets, and puff after puff of smoke coming from his lips.

Some few moments glided by before Alleyne realised the truth. He had been thinking so deeply—so bitterly of his rival, that it seemed as if his imagination had evoked this figure, and that his nerves had been so overstrained that this was some waking dream.

Then came the reaction, making him start violently, as Rolph emitted a tremendous cloud of smoke, and then said shortly, without taking his cigar from his lips,—

"How do?"

"Captain Rolph!" cried Alleyne, finding speech at last. "That's me. Well, what is it?" There was another pause, for what appeared to be an interminable time. Alleyne wished to speak, but his lips were sealed. Years of quiet, thoughtful life had made him, save when led on by some object in which he took deep interest, slow of speech, while now the dislike, more than the disgust this man caused him, seemed to have robbed him of all power of reply.

"Confounded cad!" thought Rolph; "he is watching;" and then, aloud, "Star-gazing and mooning?"

The bitterly contemptuous tone in which this was said stung Alleyne to the quick, and he replied, promptly,—

"No."

There was something in that tone that startled Rolph for the moment, but he was of too blunt and heavy a nature to detect the subtle meaning a tone of voice might convey, and, seizing the opportunity that had come to him, he ran at it with the clumsiness of a bull at some object that offends its eye.

"Hang the cad, there couldn't be a better chance," he said to himself; and, adopting the attitude popular with cavalry officers not largely addicted to brains, he straddled as if on horseback, and setting his feet down as though he expected each heel to make the rowel of a spur to ring, he walked straight up to Alleyne, smoking furiously, and puffed a cloud almost into his face.

"Look here, Mr—Mr—er—Alleyne," he said, loudly, "I wanted to talk to you, and present time seems as suitable as

any other time.”

Alleyne had recovered himself, and bowed coldly.

“I was not aware that Captain Rolph had any communication to make to me,” he said quietly.

“S’pose not,” replied Rolph, offensively; “people of your class never do.—Hang the cad! He is spying so as to get a pull on me,” he muttered to himself.

“I’m just in the humour, and for two pins I’d give him as good a thrashing as I really could.”

“Will you proceed,” said Alleyne, in whose pale cheeks a couple of spots were coming, for it was impossible not to read the meaning of the other’s words and tone.

“When I please,” said Rolph, in the tone of voice he would have adopted towards some groom, or to one of the privates of his troop.

Alleyne bowed his head and stood waiting, for he said to himself—“I am in the wrong—I am bitterly to blame. Whatever he says, I will bear without a word.”

A deep silence followed, for, though Rolph pleased to speak, he could not quite make up his mind what to say. He did not wish to blurt out anything, he told himself, that should compromise his dignity, nor yet to let Alleyne off too easily. Hence, being unprepared, he was puzzled.

“Look here, you know,” he said at last, and angrily; for he was enraged with himself for his want of words, “you come a good deal to Sir John’s.”

“Yes, I am invited,” said Alleyne, quietly.

Rolph’s rehearsal was gone.

“I’ll let him have it,” he muttered; “I’m not going to fence and spar. Yes,” he cried aloud, “I know you are. Sir John’s foolishly liberal in that way; but you know, Mr Allen, or Alleyne, or whatever your name is, I’m not blind.”

Alleyne remained silent; and, being now wound up, Rolph swaggered and straddled about with an imaginary horse between his legs.

“Look here, you know, I don’t want to be hard on a man who is ready to own that he is in the wrong, and apologises, and keeps out of the way for the future; but this sort of thing won’t do. By Jove, no, it sha’n’t do, you know. I won’t have it. Do you hear? I won’t have it.”

Something seemed to rise to Moray Alleyne’s throat—some vital force to run through his nerves and muscles, making them twitch and quiver, as the young officer went on in an increasingly bullying tone. For some moments Alleyne, of the calm, peaceful existence, did not realise what it meant—what this sensation was; but at last it forced itself upon him that it was the madness of anger, the fierce desire of a furious man to seize an enemy and struggle with him till he is beaten down, crushed beneath the feet.

As he realised all this he wondered and shrank within himself, gazing straight before him with knitted brows and half-closed eyes.

“You see,” continued Rolph, “I always have my eyes open—make a point of keeping my eyes open, and it’s time you understood that, because Miss—”

“Silence!” cried Alleyne fiercely. “What! What do you mean?” cried Rolph, as if he was addressing some delinquent in his regiment.

“Confound it all! How dare you, sir! How dare you speak to me like that?”

“Say what you like, speak what you will to me,” said Alleyne, excitedly, “but let that name be held sacred. It must not be drawn into this quarrel.”

“How dare you, sir! How dare you!” roared Rolph. “What do you mean in dictating to me what I should say? Name held sacred? Drawn into this—what do you say—quarrel. Do you think I should stoop to quarrel with you?”

Alleyne raised one hand deprecatingly. “I’d have you to know, sir, that I am telling you that I am not blind,”—he repeated this as if to mend his observations—“I tell you to keep away from the Hall, and to recollect that because a certain lady has condescended to speak to you in the innocency of her heart—yes, innocency of her heart,” he repeated, for it was a phrase that pleased him, and sounded well—“it is not for you to dare to presume to talk to her as you do—to look at her as you do—or to come to the Hall as you do. I’ve watched you, and I’ve seen your looks and ways—confound your insolence! And now, look here, if ever you dare to presume to speak to Miss—to the lady, I mean, as you have addressed her before, I’ll take you, sir, and horsewhip you till you cannot stand. Do you hear, sir; do you hear? Till you cannot stand.”

Alleyne stood there without speaking, while this brutal tirade was going on. His breast heaved, and his breath was drawn heavily; but he gave no sign, and presuming upon the success that had attended his speaking, Rolph continued with all the offensiveness of tone and manner that he had acquired from his colonel, a rough, overbearing martinet of the old school.

"I cannot understand your presumption," continued Rolph. "I cannot understand of what you have been thinking, coming cringing over to the Hall, day after day, forcing your contemptible twaddle about stars and comets, and such far-fetched nonsense upon unwilling ears. Good heavens, sir! are you mad, or a fool?—I say, do you hear me—what are you, mad or a fool?"

Still Alleyne did not reply, but listened to his rival's words with so bitter a feeling of anguish at his heart, that it took all his self-command to keep him from groaning aloud.

And still Rolph went on, for, naturally sluggish of mind, it took some time to bring that mind, as he would have termed it, into action. Once started, however, he found abundance of words of a sort, and he kept on loudly, evidently pleased with what he was saying, till once more he completed the circle in which he had been galloping, and ended with,—

"You hear me—thrash you as I would a dog."

Rolph had run down, and, coughing to clear away the huskiness of his throat, he muttered to himself,—

"Cigar's out."

Hastily taking another from his pocket, he bit off the end, lit up, gave a few puffs, scowling at Alleyne the while, and then said loudly,—

"And now you understand, I think, sir?"

There were spurs imaginary jingling at Rolph's heels, and the steel scabbard of a sabre banging about his legs, as he turned and strode away, whistling.

And then there was silence amidst the tall columnar pines, which looked as if carved out of black marble, save where the moonlight streamed through, cutting them sharply as it were, leaving some with bright patches of light, and dividing others into sections of light and darkness. There was not even a sigh now in the dark branches overhead, not a sound but the heavy, hoarse breathing of Moray Alleyne, as he stood there fighting against the terrible emotion that made him quiver.

He had listened to the coarsely brutal language of this man of athleticism, borne his taunts, his insults, as beneath him to notice, for there was another and a greater mental pain whose contemplation seemed to madden him till his sufferings were greater than he could bear.

If it had been some bright, talented man—officer, civilian, cleric, anything, so that he had been worthy and great, he could have borne it; but for Glynne, whose sweet eyes seemed day by day to be growing fuller of wisdom, whose animated countenance was brightening over with a keener intelligence that told of the workings of a mind whose latent powers were beginning to dawn, to be pledged to this overbearing brutal man of thews and sinews, it was a sacrilege; and, after standing there, forgetful of his own wrongs, the insults that he had borne unmoved, he suddenly seemed to awaken to his agony; and, uttering a bitter cry, he flung himself face downwards upon the earth.

"Glynne, my darling—my own love!"

There was none to hear, none to heed, as he lay there clutching at the soft loose pine needles for a time, and then lying motionless, lost to everything—to time, to all but his own misery and despair.

Volume Two—Chapter Two.

Attraction.

A few moments later there was a faint rustling noise as of some one hurrying over the fir needles, and a lightly-cloaked figure came for an instant into the moonlight, but shrank back in among the tree-trunks.

"Rob!" was whispered—"Rob, are you there?" Alleyne started up on one elbow, and listened as the voice continued, —

"Don't play with me, dear. I couldn't help being late. Father seemed as if he would never go out."

There was a faint murmur among the heads of the pines, and the voice resumed.

"Rob, dear, don't—pray don't. I'm so nervous and frightened. Father might be watching me. I know you're there, for I heard you whistle."

Alleyne remained motionless. He wanted to speak but no words came; and he waited as the new-comer seemed to be listening till a faintly-heard whistling of an air came on the still night air from somewhere below in the sandy lane.

"Ah!" came from out of the darkness, sounding like an eager cry of joy; and she who uttered the cry darted off with all the quickness of one accustomed to the woods, taking almost instinctively the road pursued by Rolph, and overtaking him at the end of a few minutes.

"Rob—Rob!" she panted.

"Hush, stupid!" he growled. "You've come then at last. See any one among the trees?"

"No, dear, not a soul. Oh, Rob, I thought I should never be able to come to-night."

"Humph! Didn't want to, I suppose."

"Rob!"

Only one word, but the tone of reproach sounded piteous.

"Why weren't you waiting, then?—You were not up yonder, were you?" he added sharply.

"No, dear. I've only just got here. Father seemed as if he would never go out to-night, and it is a very, very long way to come."

"Hullo! How your heart beats. Why, Judy, you must go into training. You are out of condition. I can feel it thump."

"Don't, Rob, pray. I want to talk to you. It's dreadfully serious."

"Then I don't want to hear it."

"But you must, dear. Remember all you've said. Listen to me, pray."

"Well, go on. What is it?"

"Rob, dear, I'm in misery—in agony always. You're staying again at Brackley, and after all you said."

"Man can't do as he likes, stupid little goose; not in society. I must break it off gently."

There was a low moan out of the darkness where the two figures stood, and, added to the mysterious aspect of the lane where all was black below, but silvered above by the moonbeams.

"What a sigh," whispered Rolph.

"Rob, dear, pray. Be serious now. I want you to listen. You must break all that off."

"Of course. It's breaking itself off. Society flirtation, little goose; and if you'll only be good, all will come right."

"Oh, Rob, if you only knew!"

"Well, it was your fault. If you hadn't been so cold and stand-offish, I shouldn't have gone and proposed to her. Now, it must have time."

"You're deceiving me, dear; and it is cruel to one who makes every sacrifice for your sake."

"Are you going to preach like this for long? Because if so, I'm off."

"Rob!" in a piteous tone. "I've no one to turn to but you, and I'm in such trouble. What can I do if you forsake me. I came to-night because I want your help and counsel."

"Well, what is it?"

"Father would kill me if he knew I'd come."

"Ben Hayle's a fool. I thought he was fond of you."

"He is, dear. He worships me; but you've made me love you, Rob, and though I want to obey him I can't forget you. I can't keep away."

"Of course you can't. It's nature, little one."

"Rob, will you listen to me?"

"Yes. Be sharp then."

"Pray break that off then at once at Brackley, and come to father and ask him to let us be married directly."

"No hurry."

"No hurry?—If you knew what I'm suffering."

"There, there; don't worry, little one. It's all right, I tell you. Do you think I'm such a brute as to throw you over? See how I chucked Madge for your sake."

"Yes, dear, yes; I do believe in you," came with a sob, "in spite of all; and I have tried, and will try so hard, Rob, to make myself a lady worthy of you. I'd do anything sooner than you should be ashamed of me. But, Rob, dear—father—"

"Hang father!"

"Don't trifle, dear. You can't imagine what I have suffered, and what he suffers. All those two long weary months since we left the lodge it has been dreadful. He keeps on advertising and trying, but no one will engage him. It is as if

some one always whispered to gentlemen that he was once a poacher, and it makes him mad.”

“Well, I couldn’t help my mother turning him off.”

“Couldn’t help it, dear! Oh, Rob!”

“There you go again. Now, come, be sensible. I must get back soon.”

“To her!” cried Judith, wildly.

“Nonsense. Don’t be silly. She’s like a cold fish to me. It will all come right.”

“Yes, if you will come and speak to my father.”

“Can’t.”

“Rob, dear,” cried Judith in a sharp whisper; “you must, or it will be father’s ruin. He has begun to utter threats.”

“Threats? He’d better not.”

“It’s in his despair, dear. He says it’s your fault if he, in spite of his trying to be honest, is driven back to poaching.”

“He’d better take to it! Bah! Let him threaten. He knows better. Nice prospect for me to marry a poacher’s daughter.”

“Oh, Rob, how can you be so cruel. You don’t know.”

“Know what? Does he threaten anything else?”

“Yes,” came with a suppressed sob.

“What?”

“I dare not tell you. Yes, I must. I came on purpose to-night. Just when I felt that I would stay by him and not break his heart by doing what he does not want.”

“Talk sense, silly. People’s hearts don’t break. Only horses’, if you ride them too hard.”

Judith uttered a low sob.

“Well, what does he say?”

“That you are the cause of all his trouble, and that you shall make amends, or—”

“Or what?”

“I dare not tell you,” sobbed the girl, passionately. “But, Rob, you will have pity on him—on me, dear, and make him happy again.”

“Look here,” said Rolph, roughly. “Ben Hayle had better mind what he is about. Men have been sent out of the country for less than that, or—well, something of the kind. I’m not the man to be bullied by my mother’s keeper, so let’s have no more of that. Now, that’s enough for one meeting. You wrote to Aldershot for me to meet you, and the letter was sent to me at Brackley, of course. So I came expecting to find you pretty and loving, instead of which your head’s full of cock-and-bull nonsense, and you’re either finding fault or telling me about your father’s bullying. Let him bully. I shall keep my promise to you when I find it convenient. Nice tramp for me to come at this time of night.”

“It’s a long walk from Lindham here in the dark, Rob, dear,” said the girl.

“Oh, yes, but you’ve nothing to do. There, I’ll think about Ben Hayle and his getting a place, but I don’t want you to be far away, Judy.—Now, don’t be absurd.—What are you struggling about?—Hang the girl, it’s like trying to hold a deer. Judy! You’re not gone. Come here. I can see you by that tree.”

There was a distant rustling, and Captain Rolph uttered an oath.

“Why, she has gone!”

It was quite true. Judith was running fast in the direction of the cottages miles away in the wild common land of Lindham, and Rolph turned upon his heel and strode back toward Brackley.

“Time I had one of the old man’s brandy-and-sodas,” he growled. “Better have stopped and talked to my saint. Ben Hayle going back to poaching! Threaten me with mischief if I don’t marry her! I wish he would take to it again.”

Rolph walked on faster, getting excited by his thoughts, and, after hurrying along for a few hundred yards, he said aloud,—

“And get caught.”

“Now for a run,” he added, a minute later. “This has been a pleasant evening and no mistake. Ah, well, all comes right in the end.”

Volume Two—Chapter Three.

A Search.

About a couple of hours earlier there was a ring at the gaunt-looking gate at the Firs, and that ring caused Mrs Alleyne’s Eliza to start as if galvanised, and to draw her feet sharply over the sanded floor, and beneath her chair.

Otherwise Eliza did not move. She had been darning black stockings, and as her feet went under her chair, she sat there with the light—a yellow and dim tallow dip, set up in a great tin candlestick—staring before her, lips and eyes wide open, one hand and arm covered with a black worsted stocking, the fingers belonging to the other arm holding up a stocking needle, motionless, as if she were so much stone.

Anon, the bell, which hid in a little pent-house of its own high up on the ivied wall, jangled again, and a shock of terror ran through Eliza’s body once more, but only for her to relapse into the former cataleptic state.

Then came a third brazen clanging; and this time the kitchen door opened, and Eliza uttered a squeal.

“Why, Eliza,” cried Lucy, “were you asleep? The gate bell has rung three times. Go and see who it is.”

“Oh, please, miss, I dursn’t,” said Eliza with a shiver.

“Oh, how can you be so foolish!” cried Lucy. “There, bring the light, and I’ll come with you.”

“There—there was a poor girl murdered once, miss,” stammered Eliza, “at a gate. Please, miss, I dursn’t go.”

“Then I must go myself,” cried Lucy. “Don’t be so silly. Mamma will be dreadfully cross if you don’t come.”

Eliza seemed to think that it would be better to risk being murdered at the gate than encounter Mrs Alleyne’s anger, so she started up, caught at the tin candlestick with trembling hand, and then unbolted the kitchen door loudly, just as the bell was about to be pulled for the fourth time.

“You speak, please, miss,” whispered the girl. “I dursn’t. Pray say something before you open the gate.”

“Who’s there,” cried Lucy.

“Only me, Miss Alleyne,” said a well-known voice. “I was coming across the common, and thought I’d call and see how your brother is.”

Lucy eagerly began to unfasten the great gate, but for some reason, probably best known to herself, she stopped suddenly, coloured a little, and said—almost sharply,—

“Quick, Eliza, why don’t you open the gate?”

Thus adjured, the maiden unfastened the ponderous lock, and admitted Philip Oldroyd, who shook hands warmly with Lucy, and then seemed as if he were about to change her hand over to his left, and feel her pulse with his right.

“We always have the gate locked at dusk,” said Lucy, “the place stands so lonely, and—”

“You feel a little nervous,” said Oldroyd, smiling, as they walked up to the house.

“Oh, no!” said Lucy, eagerly; “I never think there is anything to mind, but the maid is terribly alarmed lest we should be attacked by night. My brother is out,” she hastened to say, to fill up a rather awkward pause. “He is taking one of your prescriptions,” she added, archly.

“Wise man,” cried Oldroyd, as they passed round to the front door and went in. “I suppose he will not be long?”

“Oh, no!” said Lucy, eagerly; “if you will come in and wait, he is sure to be back soon.”

Then she hesitated, and hastened to speak again, feeling quite uncomfortable and guilty, as if she had been saying something unmaidenly—as if she had been displaying an eagerness for the young doctor to stop—when all the time she told herself, it was perfectly immaterial, and she did not care in the least.

“Of course I can’t be sure,” she added, growing a little quicker of speech; “but I think he will not be long. He has gone round by the pine wood.”

“Then I should meet him if I went that way,” said Oldroyd, who had also become rather awkward and hesitant.

“Oh, yes; I think you would be sure to meet him,” cried Lucy eagerly.

“Thanks,” said Oldroyd, who felt rather vexed that she should be eager to get rid of him; “then perhaps I had better go.”

“But of course I can’t tell which way he will come back,” cried Lucy, hastily; “and you might miss him.”

“To be sure, yes,” said Oldroyd, taking heart again; “so I might, and then not see him at all.” And he looked anxiously at Lucy’s troubled face over the tin candlestick, ornamented with drops of tallow that had fallen upon its sides, while Eliza slowly closed the front door, and gazed with her lips apart from one to the other.

Lucy was all repentance again, for in a flash her conscience had told her that she had seemed eager, and pressed the

doctor to stay.

An awkward pause ensued, one which neither the visitor nor Lucy seemed able to break. Each tried very hard to find something to say, but in vain.

“How stupid of me!” thought Lucy, angrily.

“What’s come to me?” thought Oldroyd; the only idea beside being that he ought to ask Lucy about her health, only he could not, for it would seem so professional. So he looked helplessly at her, and she returned his look half indignantly, while the candle was held on one side, and Eliza gaped at them wonderingly.

Mrs Alleyne ended the awkward pause by opening the dining-room door, and standing there framed like a silhouette.

“Oh, is it you, Mr Oldroyd?” she said, quietly.

“Yes, good evening,” exclaimed the young doctor, quickly, like one released from a spell; “as I told Miss Alleyne here, I was coming close by, and I thought I would call and see how Mr Alleyne is.”

“We are very glad to see you,” said Mrs Alleyne, with grave courtesy. “Pray come in, Mr Oldroyd,” and Lucy uttered a low sigh of satisfaction.

“Of course this is not a professional visit, Mrs Alleyne,” said Oldroyd; and then he wished he had not said it, for Mrs Alleyne’s face showed the lines a little more deeply, and there was a slight twitching about her lips.

“I am sorry that Mr Alleyne has not yet returned,” she said, and as soon as they were seated, she smiled, and tried to remove the restraint that had fallen upon them in the dreary room.

“I am very grateful to you, Mr Oldroyd,” she said; “my son is wonderfully better.”

“And would be in a position to laugh all doctors in the face, if he would carry out my prescriptions a little more fully,” said Oldroyd. “But we must not be too hard upon him. I think it is a great thing to wean him from his studies as we have.”

“You dreadfully conceited man,” thought Lucy. “How dare you have the shamelessness to think you have done all this! I know better. No man could have done it—there.”

“Did you speak, Miss Alleyne?” said Oldroyd, looking round suddenly, and finding Lucy’s eyes intent upon him.

“I? No,” cried Lucy, flushing; and then biting her lips with annoyance, because her cheeks burned, “I was listening to you and mamma.”

“It is quite time Moray returned,” said Mrs Alleyne, anxiously glancing towards the closed window.

“Yes, mamma; we shall hear his step directly,” said Lucy.

“He does not generally stay so long,” continued Mrs Alleyne, going to the window to draw aside the curtain and look out. “Did he say which way he would go, Lucy?”

“Yes, mamma. I asked him, and he said as far as the fir wood.”

“Ah, yes,” responded Mrs Alleyne; “he says he can think so much more easily among the great trees—that his mind seems able to plunge into the depths of the vast abysses of the heavens.”

“I don’t believe he does think about stars at all,” thought Lucy. “I believe he goes there to stare across the park, and think about Glynne.”

A feeling of elation made the girl’s heart glow, and her eyes sparkle, as she more and more began to nurse this, one of the greatest ideas of her heart. It was an exceedingly immoral proceeding on her part, for she knew that Glynne was engaged to be married to Captain Rolph; but him she utterly detested, she told herself, and that it was an entire mistake; in fact, she assured herself that it would be an act of the greatest benevolence, and one for which she would receive the thanks of both parties all through her lifetime—if she could succeed in breaking off the engagement and marrying Glynne to her brother.

The conversation went on, but it was checked from time to time by Mrs Alleyne again rising to go to the window, and this movement on her part always had the effect of making Lucy’s eyes drop immediately upon her work; and, though she had been the minute before frankly meeting Oldroyd’s gaze in conversation, such remarks as he addressed to her now were answered with her look averted, as she busied herself over her sewing.

“Moray never stayed so late as this before,” said Mrs Alleyne, suddenly, turning her pale face on those who were so wrapped in their own thoughts that they had almost forgotten the absentee.

“No, mamma,” cried Lucy, reproaching herself for her want of interest; “he is an hour later.”

“It is getting on towards two hours beyond his time,” cried Mrs Alleyne, in despairing tones. “I am very uneasy.”

“Oh, but he has only gone a little farther than usual, mamma, dear,” cried Lucy; “pray don’t be uneasy.”

“I cannot help it, my child,” cried Mrs Alleyne; “he who is so punctual in all his habits would never stay away like this. Is he likely to meet poachers?”

“Let me go and try if I can meet him,” said Oldroyd, jumping up. “Poachers wouldn’t touch him.”

“Yes, do, Mr Oldroyd. I will go with you,” cried Lucy, forgetting in her excitement that such a proposal was hardly etiquette. But neither mother nor daughter, in their anxiety, seemed to have the slightest idea of there being anything extraordinary at such a time.

“It won’t do,” Oldroyd had been saying to himself, “even if it should prove that I’m not a conceited ass to think such things, and she—bless her sweet, bright little face—ever willing to think anything of me, I should be a complete scoundrel to try and win her. Let me see, what did I make last year by my practice? Twenty-eight pounds fifteen, and nine pounds of it still owing, and likely to be owing, for I shall never get a *sou*. Then this year, what shall I take? Well, perhaps another five pounds on account of her brother’s illness. I must be mad.”

“Yes,” he said, after a pause, “I must be mad, and must have been worse to come down here to this out-of-the-way place, where there is not the most remote chance of my getting together a practice. No, it won’t do, I must play misogynist, and be as cold towards the bright little thing as if I were a monk.”

As these thoughts ran through his mind, others came to crowd them out—thoughts of a snug little home, made bright by a sweet face looking out from door or window to see him coming back after a long, tiring round. What was enough for one was enough for two—so people argued. That was right enough as regarded a house, but doubtful when it came to food, and absurd if you went as far as clothing.

“No, it would never do,” he said to himself, “I could not take her from her home to my poor, shabby place.”

But as he thought this he involuntarily looked round Mrs Alleyne’s dining-room, that lady being at the window, and he could not help thinking that, after all, his cottage-like home was infinitely preferable to this great, gaunt, dingy place, where anything suggestive of any comfort was out of the question.

“Yes, she would be more comfortable,” he muttered; “and—there, I’m going mad again. I will not think such things.”

Just then Lucy came in ready for starting, and all Philip Oldroyd’s good intentions might have been dressed for departure as well. Certainly, they all took flight, as he followed the eager little maiden into the hall.

“Pray—pray let me have news of him directly you find him, Mr Oldroyd,” cried Mrs Alleyne, piteously. “Run back yourself. You cannot tell what I suffer. Something must have happened.”

“You shall know about him directly, Mrs Alleyne,” replied Oldroyd. “But pray make your mind easy, nothing can have happened to him here. The worst is that he may have gone to the Hall.”

“No, he would not have gone there without first letting me know.”

“Don’t come to the gate, mamma,” cried Lucy. “There, go in; Mr Oldroyd will take care of me, and we’ll soon bring the truant back, only pray be satisfied. Come, Mr Oldroyd, let us run.”

The next minute they were outside the gate, and hurrying down the slope to the common, over whose rugged surface Lucy walked so fast that Oldroyd had to step out boldly. Here the sandy road was reached, and they went on, saying but little, wanting to say but little, for, in spite of all, there was a strange new ecstatic feeling in Lucy’s bosom; while, in spite of his honesty something kept whispering to Oldroyd that it would be very pleasant if they were unable to find Alleyne for hours to come.

He was not to be gratified in this, though, for at the end of a quarter of an hour’s walking, when they came opposite to the big clump of pines, Lucy proposed that they should go up there.

“I know how fond he is of this place,” she said, rather excitedly; “and as its clearer now, I should not be at all surprised to find him here watching the moon, or the rising of some of the stars.”

“We’ll go if you wish it,” said Oldroyd, “but it seems a very unlikely place at a time like this.”

“Ah, but my brother is very curious about such things,” said Lucy, as she left the road, and together they climbed up till all at once she uttered a faint cry—

“Look! there—there he is!”

“Why, Alleyne! Is that you?” cried Oldroyd, as in the full moonlight they saw a dark figure rise from the foot of a pine, and then come slowly towards them silently, and in the same vacant fashion as one in a dream.

“Moray, why don’t you speak?” cried Lucy, piteously. “Why, you’ve not been to sleep, have you?” and she caught his arm.

“Sleep?” he said, in a strangely absent manner.

“Yes, asleep? Poor mamma has been fretting herself to death about you, and thinking I don’t know what. Make haste.”

“Are you unwell, Alleyne?” said Oldroyd, quietly; and the other looked at him wistfully.

“No—no,” he said at length; “quite well—quite well. I have been thinking—that is all. Let us make haste back.”

Lucy and Oldroyd exchanged meaning glances, and then the former bit her lip, angry at having seemed to take the young doctor into her confidence; and after that but little was said till they reached The Firs, where Mrs Alleyne was

pacing the hall, ready to fling her long, thin arms round her son's neck, and hold him in her embrace as she tenderly reproached him for the anxiety he had caused.

"She doesn't seem to trouble much about little Lucy," thought the doctor. "Well, so much the more easy for any one who wanted her for a wife."

"That couldn't be me," he said, at the end of a few minutes, and then—

"I wonder what all this means about Alleyne. He must have been having an interview with someone in that Grove. Miss Day, for a hundred. Humph! She must have said something he did not like, or he would not look like this."

Then, to the great satisfaction of all, the doctor took his leave, and walked home declaring he would not think of Lucy any more, with the result that the more he strove, the more her pleasant little face made itself plain before him, her eyes looking into his, and illustrating the book he tried to read on every page with a most remarkable sameness, but a repetition that did not tire him in the least.

Volume Two—Chapter Four.

A Collision.

Mrs Rolph did not see much of her son, who divided his time between Brackley and Aldershot, when he was not away to attend some athletic meeting. But she was quite content, and paid her calls upon Glynne in company with Marjorie, who sat and beamed upon Sir John's daughter, and lost not an opportunity for getting her arm about the waist of her cousin's betrothed, being so intensely affectionate that Glynne stared at her wonderingly at times, and then tried to reciprocate the love bestowed upon her, failed dismally, and often asked Lucy whether she liked Miss Emlin? to receive a short, sharp shake of the head in return.

"Sha'n't say," Lucy replied one day. "If I do, you'll think I'm jealous."

Rolph was not aware of the fact, for Marjorie generally avoided him, and behaved as if she were putting the past farther back; but all the same, she watched her cousin furtively on every possible occasion whenever he was at home or staying at Brackley; and to cover her proceedings, she developed an intense love for botany, and more than once encountered Major Day with Lucy and Glynne, and compared notes. But the major never displayed any great desire to impart information, or to induce the young lady to take up his particular branch.

"Pity Rolph didn't marry her," muttered the old man. "Foxy doesn't like Glynne at all."

Madge's botanical studies had a good deal to do with the *gynias*, and with watching Rolph, who was not aware that his pleasant vices were making of themselves the proverbial rods to scourge him, and unfortunately injure others as well. For Marjorie's brain was busy; and as she watched him, she made herself acquainted with every movement, noting when he rode over to Brackley or took a walk out into the woods—walks which made her writhe, for she gave her cousin the credit of making his way toward Lindham, out by the solitary collection of houses on the road to nowhere, the spot where Ben Hayle had made his new home.

At these times Marjorie hung upon the tenterhooks of agony and suspense till he returned, when there was a warm glow of satisfaction in her breast if his looks showed that his visit had been unsuccessful.

Sometimes though, she was stung by her jealousy into believing that he obtained interviews with Judith, for he would come back looking more satisfied and content.

She watched him one day, and saw him take the path down through the wood, and she also watched his return.

In a few days he went again in the same direction, and on the next morning she started off before he had left the house, and turned down through the woods to an opening miles away, where, in happier days, she had been wont to gather blackberries; and here she knew she could easily hide in the sandy hollows, and see anyone going toward Lindham—herself unseen.

It was a lonely nook, where, in bygone days, a number of the firs had been cut down, and a sandpit, or rather sand-pits had been formed. These had become disused, the rabbits had taken possession, and, as sun and air penetrated freely, a new growth of furze, heather and broom grew up among the hollows and knolls.

What her plans were she kept hidden, but a looker-on would have said that she had carefully prepared a mine, and that some day, she would spring that mine upon her cousin with a result that would completely overturn his projects, but whether to her own advantage remained to be seen.

As Marjorie approached, the rabbits took flight, and their white tails could be seen disappearing into their burrows, a certain sign that no one had been by before her; and in a few minutes she was safely ensconced in a deep hollow surrounded by brambles, after she had taken the precaution to lay a few fern leaves in the bottom of a little basket, and rapidly pick a few weeds to give colour to her presence there.

The time glided on, and all was so still that a stone-chat came and sat upon a twig close at hand, watching her curiously. Then the rabbits stole out one by one from their burrows, and began to race here and there, indulging in playful bounds as if under the impression that it was evening; but though Marjorie strained her ears to listen, there was no sound of approaching steps, and at last she sat there with her brow full of lines, and her eyes staring angrily from beneath her contracted brows.

“He will not come to-day,” she muttered. “What shall I do?”

“Oh!” she cried, in a harsh whisper, after a long pause, as she crushed together the nearest tuft of leaves, “I could kill her.”

She winced slightly, and then glanced contemptuously at her glove, which was torn, and in three places her white palm was pierced, scratched and bleeding, for she had grasped a twig or two of bramble.

The blood on her hand seemed to have a peculiar fascination for her, and she sat there with her eyes half-shut, watching the long red lines made by snatching her hand away, and at the two tiny beads, which gradually increased till she touched them in turn with the tip of her glove, and then carelessly wiped them away.

“‘He cometh not,’” she said to herself, with a curious laugh.

Rap! And then, from different parts of the hollow, came the same sharp, clear sound, as rabbit after rabbit struck the ground with its foot, giving the alarm and sending all within hearing scuttling into their holes.

Marjorie had been long enough in the country to know the meaning of that noise, and, with her eyes now wide and wild-looking, she listened for the step which had startled the little animals—one plain to them before it grew clear to her.

No step. Not a sound, and her face was a study, could it have been seen, in its intense eagerness for what seemed, in the silence, minutes, while she retained her breath.

“Hah!”

One long, weary exclamation, and a bitter look of disappointment crossed her eager face.

The next moment it was strained again, and her eyes flashed like those of some wild animal whose life depends upon the acuteness of its perceptions.

There was a faint rustle.

Then silence.

Then a faintly-heard scratching noise, as of a thorn passing over a garment.

“He’s coming,” thought Marjorie, “coming, and this way;” and she leaned forward in time to see a figure, bent down so low that it seemed to be going on all fours, dart silently from behind one clump of brambles away to her left, and glide into the shelter of another.

So silently was this act performed that for the moment the watcher asked herself if she had not been deceived.

The answer came directly in the re-appearance of the figure, gliding into sight and creeping on till it was in shelter, hiding not a dozen yards from where she crouched; and she shrank back with her heart beginning to beat heavily, while she knew that the blood was coming and going in her cheeks.

“No; I’m not afraid of Caleb Kent,” she thought to herself; and her eyes flashed again, and in imagination she seemed to see once more the opening where the lodge stood. Her face grew pale, and a curious shrinking sensation attacked her as she recalled Rolph’s face, his eyes searching hers with such a bitter look of contempt and scorn.

Then instantly she seemed to be gazing at herself in the library, clinging to her cousin, till he violently wrenched himself from her, leaving her hopeless and crushed; and she longed bitterly for the opportunity to make some one suffer for this.

“No,” she said to herself, “I am not afraid of Caleb Kent;” and she crouched there, seeing every movement, and in a few moments realised that some one must be coming, for, with the activity of a cat, the young half-gipsy, half-poacher, began to move softly back, as if to keep the clump of brambles between him and whoever it was that was passing.

Marjorie knew directly after that this must be the case, for she could hear the dull sound of a step, and she strained forward a little to try and see, but shrank back again with her heart beginning to beat rapidly, as she realised that, all intent upon the person passing in front, Caleb Kent had no thought for what might be behind, and he had begun to back rapidly away from the clump which had hidden him, to hide in the safer refuge already occupied.

She knew that the step must be her cousin’s, and that he was going over to Lindham to seek Judith.

“Suppose,” she asked herself, “he should come nearer and see her hiding—apparently in company with Caleb Kent—what would he say?”

She quivered with rage and mortification, and for the moment felt disposed to spring up and walk away, but refrained, for she knew that it would then seem as if she had been keeping an appointment with this man, and had been frightened into showing herself by her cousin’s coming.

The situation was horrible, and she knew that all she could do was to wait in the hope that, as soon as Rolph had gone by, Caleb would glide after him.

“What for?” she asked herself; and she turned cold at the answering thought.

He seemed to have no stout bludgeon, though. Perhaps he was only acting the spy; and as soon as Rolph had been to the cottage and returned, Caleb himself might have some intention of going there.

Marjorie's eyes glittered again as thought after thought came, boding ill to those she hated now with the bitterness of a jealous woman; and all at once, like a flash, a thought flooded her brain which sent the blood thrilling through every artery and vein.

"No," she thought, and she crouched there, compressing her nether lip between her white teeth. Then,—"Why not? What is she that she should rob me of my happiness, and of all I hold dear? But if—"

She drew in her breath with a faint hiss that was almost inaudible, but it was sufficient to make the poacher pause and look sharply to right and left, as he still crept backwards till he was beneath the shelter of the clump in the hollow which hid Marjorie, and within a few yards of where she was seated.

The sounds of passing steps were very near now. Then there was a faint cough, and Marjorie knew that her cousin was so close that, if he looked about him, he must see her in hiding with this vagabond of the village; and again the girl's veins tingled with the nervous sensation of anger and mortification.

She would have given ten years of her life to have been back at home; but she had brought all this upon herself, and she could only hope that Rolph would pass them without turning his head.

"Yes, go on," said a low, harsh voice, hardly above a whisper, and Marjorie started as she found herself an involuntary listener to the man's outspoken thoughts. "Only wait," he continued, and he, too, drew in his breath with a low, hissing sound.

The footsteps died completely away, and Marjorie sat there trembling. The thoughts which had seemed to electrify her, she felt now that she dare not foster; and she was longing for the man to go, when, as if he were influenced by her presence, he turned round suddenly to the right as in search of some one, then to the left, and, not satisfied, faced right about, his countenance full of wonderment and dread, which passed away directly, and he uttered a low, mocking laugh.

Marjorie shrank away for the moment, but, feeling that she must show no dread of this man who had surprised her in a situation which it would be vain to explain, she rose to go, but Caleb seized her tightly by the arm.

"He did not come to meet you," the man said, with a look of malicious enjoyment, as if it was a pleasure to inflict some of the pain from which he suffered.

"What do you mean?" she cried imperiously, as she sought to release her wrist.

"Call to him to come back and help you," whispered Caleb.—"Why don't you?"

He laughed again as he drew himself up into a kneeling position, still holding her tightly,

"How dare you!" cried the girl, indignantly. "Loose my arm, fellow!"

"Why? Not I. You will not call out for fear the captain there should think you were watching to see him go to Hayle's cottage and pretty Judith."

He began his speech in a light, bantering way, but as he finished his face was flushed and angry, and his breath came thick and fast, while, still clutching the arm he held, he wrenched his head round and knelt there, gazing in the direction taken by Rolph.

The thought which had held possession of Marjorie's breast twice, now came back with renewed power, and, casting all feeling of dread to the winds as she read her companion's face, she snatched at the opportunity.

That Caleb hated Rolph was plain enough; there was a scar upon his lip now that had been made by the hand of one whom he feared as well as hated; and above all, after his fashion, Marjorie knew that he loved Judith.

Here was the instrument to her hand. Why had she not thought of making use of it before?

It was as if she were for the moment possessed, as, without trying now to release herself, she leaned forward and whispered in the young man's ear,—

"You coward!"

He turned upon her in astonishment.

"I say you are a coward," she repeated. "Why do you let him go and take her from you?"

There was an animal-like snap of the teeth, as he snarled out,—

"Why do you let him go?"

"Because I am a woman. I am not a man, and strong like you."

"Curse him! I'll kill him," he snarled.

"What good would that do?"

"Eh?"

"If I were a man like you, do you know how I would act?"

"No," he said; "how could I?" and his lips parted, to show his white teeth in a peculiar laugh, before he gave a quick look to right and left, to satisfy himself that they were not seen.

"I'd have revenge."

"How? With a gun?"

"And be hung for murder. No!"

She leaned towards him, and she too gave a furtive look round, as, with her face flushed strangely, she whispered a few words to him—words that he listened to with his eyes half-closed, and then he turned upon her quickly.

"Why? To bring him back to you?" he said, with a mocking laugh. "You love him?"

"I hate him," she said slowly.

"Yes," he said; "and you hate Judy Hayle, too, like the gipsy women hate sometimes. Why don't you stop it?"

"Because I am helpless," she said bitterly. "Loose my arm. I knew it: you are a coward."

"Am I?" he said, with an ugly smile. "Is this a trap?"

"If you think so, let it be," she said contemptuously; and she tried again to shake her arm free, but the grasp upon it tightened.

"Perhaps I am a coward," he said; "but I will. He wouldn't marry her then, and it would be serving him out. Not for nothing, though," he added, with a laugh. "What will you give me?"

"Pah!" she said contemptuously; "how much do you want?"

He laughed and leaned forward, gazing full in her face.

"Perhaps I shall get into trouble again for it," he said, "and be shut up for a year—perhaps for more. It's to play your game as well as mine, and I must be paid well."

"Well, I will pay you," she said. "Tell me what you want."

"A kiss," he said; and before she could realise what he had said, his left arm was about her waist, and he held her tightly to him. "A kiss from a lady who is handsomer than Judy Hayle," he whispered.

"How dare you!" she cried, in a low voice.

"No," he said, laughing, "you won't call for help. Come, it isn't much to give me, and I swear I will."

Marjorie gazed at him wildly, as she realised her position; there, alone, in this man's power, and no one at hand to defend her. Then, utterly careless of herself, as she thought of the bitter revenge she had planned, she held back her face, and, with a faint laugh and her voice trembling, she said,—

"No, I will not call for help. There is no need. Keep your word and I will pay you—as you wish."

The blood crimsoned her cheeks as she spoke.

"No," he said, with a laugh; "you shall pay me now," and the next moment his arms were fast round her, and his lips pressed to hers.

Marjorie started away, angry and indignant, but her furious jealousy made her diplomatise, and she stood smiling at the good-looking, gipsy-like ne'er-do-weel, and said laughingly,—

"That was not fair; I promised you that as a reward, and now you have cheated me and will not keep your word."

"Yes, I will," he cried, as he seized her again eagerly; but she kept him back. "I'll do anything you ask me. Curse Judith Hayle! She isn't half so beautiful as you."

Madge's heart beat heavily, for admiration was pleasant, even from this low-class scoundrel. His words were genuine, as she could see from his eager gaze, the play of his features, and the earnestness in his voice.

"I've made a slave," she said to herself, forgetting for a moment the cost, "and he'll do everything I bid him."

"Don't talk nonsense," she said, playfully. "You do not suppose I believe what you say."

"What!" he cried, in a low, excited whisper, "not believe me. Here, tell me anything else to do. Why, I'd kill anyone if you'll look at me like that."

"I do not want you to kill anyone, and do not want you even to look or speak to me again if you are so rude as that. You forget that I am a lady."

“No, I don’t,” he cried, as he feasted on her with his eyes. “You’re lovely. I never saw a girl so beautiful as you are before.”

He tried to catch her in his embrace again, but she waved him off.

“There,” she said coldly, “that will do. I see I must ask someone else to do what I want.”

“No, no, don’t,” he whispered. “I didn’t mean to make you cross. I didn’t want to offend you, but when you looked at me like you did, with your shiny eyes, I couldn’t help myself. I was obliged.”

“Silence! How dare you,” she cried indignantly, as, with her heart throbbing with delight, she felt how very strong a hold she was getting upon Caleb’s will. “You forget yourself, sir.”

“No, I don’t; its only because—because—you’re so handsome. There, be cross with me if you like. I couldn’t help it.”

“And now I suppose you will go and boast in the village taproom that you met the captain’s cousin, and insulted her out in the wood.”

“Do you think I’m a fool, miss?” he said sharply. “Do you think I’d ever go and tell on a girl? Why, I shouldn’t tell on a common servant or a farmer’s lass, let alone on a handsome lady like you.”

“I don’t believe you,” she said, half turning away.

“Yes, do, miss, please do,” he cried earnestly, “you may trust me. I’d sooner go and hang myself than tell anybody—there!”

She turned her eyes upon him, and her feeling of delight increased as she realised the truth of all that Caleb said. Then, as he looked up at her now, with the appealing, beseeching aspect of a dog in his countenance, she made a pretence of hesitating.

“No,” she said. “I’m afraid I cannot trust you.”

“Yes, do, miss, do.”

“If I do you will insult me again.”

“I didn’t know it was insulting of you to love you,” he said sullenly.

“Then I tell you it was, sir. If you had waited it would have been different.”

He did not speak, but she could see that he was still feasting upon her with his eyes, and the worship in his looks was pleasant after Rolph’s cold rebuffs.

“Well,” she cried, “why are you looking at me like that?”

He started and smiled.

“I can’t help it,” he said, “You are so different to every other girl I know.”

“Except Judith Hayle,” she said contemptuously.

“You’re not like her a bit,” he said thoughtfully. “She’s very nice looking, and I used to think a deal of her.”

“Oh, yes, she’s lovely,” said Madge with a spiteful laugh.

“Yes,” said Caleb, thoughtfully, “so she is,” and he stood looking at the girl without comprehending the sarcasm in her words. “But she hasn’t got eyes like you have, and she isn’t so white, and,” he whispered, approaching her more closely, “if you’ll only be kind to me, and smile at me like you did, and speak soft to me, I’ll be like your dawg.”

He looked as if he would, and Marjorie saw it. She had been on the watch, expecting that he would seize her again, but nothing seemed further from his thoughts. It was exactly as he said—he was ready to be like her dog, and had she told him then, he would have cast himself at her feet, and let her plant her foot upon his neck in token of his subjugation.

“Well,” she said, “I think I will trust you.”

“You will?” he cried.

“Yes, if you are obedient, and promise me that you will never dare to be so rude again.”

“I’ll promise anything,” he cried huskily, “but—”

“But what, sir?”

“You’ll keep your word and pay me?” he said with a laugh.

“Wait and see,” she said indifferently. “I am going back now.”

“But how am I to tell you?” he said.

"I shall be sure to know."

"And how shall I see you again?"

"You will not want to see me again," she said archly.

"Not want to see you," he whispered. "Why, I'd go round the world, across the seas, anywhere, to hear you talk to me, and look at your eyes. Tell me when I shall see you again."

"Oh, I don't know," she said carelessly, "perhaps some fine day you'll see me walking in the wood."

"Yes—yes," he said eagerly. "I'll always be about watching for you as I would for a hare."

"One of my cousin's," she said, with a contemptuous laugh.

"They're not his," cried Caleb, quietly, "they're wild beasts, and as much mine as anybody's."

"We will not discuss that," she said coldly. "Good-bye, and I hope you will keep your word."

"I've sweared it to myself," he said, "and I shall do it. Don't go yet."

"Why not?"

"Because I could stand and look at you, like, all day, and it will not seem the same when you are gone."

"Why, I thought you were a poacher."

"Well, I suppose I am. What o' that?"

"You talk quite like a courtier?"

"Do I?" he said eagerly. "Well, you did it; you made me like you."

"I?"

"Yes. I don't know how it was, but you've made me feel as if I'd do anything for you."

"Ah, well, we shall see," said Marjorie, as she fixed her eyes on his, glorying in her triumph, and feeling that every word spoken was the honest truth. Then, giving him a careless nod, she was turning away.

"Don't go like that," said Caleb, huskily.

"What do you mean?"

"Say one kind word to me first."

"Well," said Madge, showing her white teeth in a contemptuous smile, as his eyes were fixed upon hers, just as her cousin's Gordon setter's had been a score of times. "Poor fellow, then," she said mockingly, and she held out her little hand, as she would have stretched it forth to pat one of the dogs.

He took it in his brown, sinewy fingers, bent over it, and held it against his cheek. Then, quick as lightning, he had grasped it with a grip like steel, snatched her from where she stood, and almost before she could notice it, he was holding her in a crouching position down behind the bushes, one arm tightly about her waist, and his right hand over her mouth.

She was too much taken by surprise for the moment to struggle or attempt to cry out. Then, as her eyes were fixed upon him fiercely, she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and his lips pressed upon her ear.

"Don't move, don't speak," whispered the man, "he mustn't see you along o' me."

Madge strained her sense of hearing, but all was perfectly still, and, concluding that it was a trick, she gathered herself together for a strong effort to get free, when there was a sharp crack as of a broken twig. Then the low brushing sound of dead strands of grass against a man's leg; and, directly after Rolph came into view, plainly seen through the brambles, and as he came nearer Marjorie grew faint.

If he should see her—like that—clasped in this man's arms!

Rolph came nearer and nearer, his way leading him so close to where his cousin crouched that it seemed impossible that he could go by without seeing her, held there by a man whom he would look upon as the scum of the earth. The agony of shame and mortification she suffered was intense, the greater because her presence here was due to the fact that she had vowed that, in spite of all, she would yet be Rolph's wife, the mistress of The Warren.

As her cousin came on, and she felt Caleb's arm tightening about her, a strange giddiness made her brain swim, and the objects about her grew misty; but clearly seen in advance of this mist was her cousin's face, his eyes fixed upon the very spot where she was hiding, and plunging through the leaves to search her out, to drag her forth and upbraid her with being a disgrace to her sex, a woman utterly lost to all sense of shame. And all the time, throb, throb, throb, with heavy beat, she could feel Caleb Kent's heart, and a twitching sensation in the muscle of his arm, as, influenced by the man's thoughts of flight or violence, he loosened his grip, or held her more tightly still.

“He must see us,” thought Marjorie. “Oh, if I could only die!”

Close up now, and as he came nearer Rolph struck sharply with his stick at a loose strand which projected half across his path.

He must see them; he could not help seeing them, thought Marjorie; and then her heart stood still, and the mist began to close her in, for, to her horror, the culmination of her shame seemed to have arrived. Rolph stopped short, leaned over, apparently to part the brambles and gaze through them at the hiding pair, and then muttered something half aloud as he reached over more and more till his face was not six feet from his cousin’s, staring up at him with her eyes full of horror.

A guilty conscience needs no accuser; so runs the old proverbial saying.

Rolph had caught sight of an extra large blackberry and he had reached out and picked it, more from habit, fostered by a country life, than desire, and then passed on.

A long time appeared to elapse, during which Marjorie lay listening to steps which thundered upon her ear, before a voice, that sounded as if it came from far away, whispered,—

“It’s all right, now. I don’t think he saw.”

Marjorie looked at the speaker strangely, and then turned away, plunging into the thickest part of the wood to try and grow calm before making her way home, and in perfect unconsciousness of the fact that, not twenty yards away, Caleb Kent was following her, gliding from tree to tree, and always keeping her in sight.

Sometimes she stopped to rest her hand upon one of the pine trunks, apparently wrapt in thought; and Caleb Kent drew a long breath and told himself that she was thinking about him. Then she walked swiftly on again till she was at the very edge of the wood, where she stepped down into the sandy lane where he could not follow; but, quickly, almost as a squirrel, he mounted a tall spruce by its short, dense, ladder-like branches, to where, high up, he could still keep the girl in sight, elated by his adventure, and little thinking that she was asking herself whether it would be very difficult to kill Caleb Kent next time she met him in the woods, and so silence for ever a tongue whose utterances might ruin her beyond recovery.

“Something to drink—something to drink,” she kept on thinking. “To drink my health.”

Her eyes brightened, and her strange look told of an excitement within her which made every pulse throb and bound.

“It would be so easy,” she said to herself. But the feeling of elation passed away as she recalled the man’s furtive, suspicious nature, and, in imagination, saw him fixing his keen eyes upon her, and asking her to drink first.

Volume Two—Chapter Five.

The Setting of a Dog’s Star.

The gentlemen were seated over their claret at the Hall, and the party had become very quiet. Sir John had been preaching on the subject of the value of a cross of the big, coarse, wool-bearing Lincolnshire sheep with the Southdown, as being likely to prove advantageous, the Lincolnshire sheep giving increased wool-bearing qualities, while the lamb would inherit the fine properties of its mother’s mutton.

At the words mutton and Southdown lamb, Rolph had pricked up his ears for a moment, since they had suggested under-done chops and cuts out of good haunches, with the gravy in grand supplies of stamina to an athlete; but the suggestion came at the wrong end of the dinner, and, with a yawn, the captain had wished Sir John and his pigs and sheep at Jericho, and begun thinking of his coming match with the Bayswater Stag for a hundred pounds a side, a race for which he told himself he was in training now, though his proceedings in the way of wines and foods would have horrified a trainer and frightened his backers into fits of despair.

When Sir John had had his innings, the major began to talk about the translation of a paper by Friés, on the persistency of certain forms of parasitic fungi in the lower plants. To make himself a little more comprehendible to his companions, he kept introducing the word mushroom into his discourse, with the effect of bringing back Rolph’s wandering attention, and rousing Sir John from the doze into which he was falling.

Both gentlemen saw mushrooms directly, through a medium of claret, and while the major was thinking of spores, mycelium, and rapid generation, Sir John and the captain saw mushrooms growing, mushrooms cooked, mushrooms in rich sauces, but always of a deep purply claret colour, that was pleasant to the eye.

“Hang ’em, they’ll drive me mad between ’em,” thought Rolph. “I wonder how much of this sort of thing a man could stand. Offend the old buffers or no, I must go and have a cigar.”

“Yes, what is it?” said Sir John, starting out of a doze.

“Morton would like to speak to you, Sir John.”

“Morton; what does he want?” said Sir John. “Send him in.”

A good deal of shoe wiping was heard outside, and a fine-looking, elderly man, whose velveteens proclaimed his profession, entered, to bow to all three gentlemen in turn.

"Sorry to trouble you, Sir John, but I've got information that a party from out Woodstay way, sir, are coming netting and snaring to-night."

"Confound their impudence!" cried Sir John, leaping from his chair. "What the deuce do you mean, standing staring there like a fool, man? Why don't you get the helpers and the watchers together, and go and stop the scoundrels?"

"Men all waiting, Sir John," said the keeper, quietly, "but I thought you and the captain would like to be there, and the major could give us a bit of advice as to plans, Sir John."

"Quite right, Morton. Of course. Quite right. Take a glass of wine. Here's a claret glass. You won't have claret though, I suppose."

"Thank ye, kindly, Sir John, but you give me a glass of port last time."

"And you haven't forgotten it, Morton? Quite right. It's a fine port. Help yourself, man. We'll change, and be with you directly. You'll come, Rolph?"

"By George, yes," cried the captain, whose face had flushed with excitement. "I'm ready there."

"You'll come, Jem?"

"To be sure—to be sure," said the major, rubbing his hands. "We'll have a bit of tactics here."

Ten minutes later, Sir John and the major, each carrying a heavy staff, and Rolph, armed with a gun, were following the keeper along one of the paths leading to the fir woods, and with a great mastiff dog close at the keeper's heels.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the keeper, touching his hat, as they drew near to where a knot of men were gathered waiting for them, "but I wouldn't use that gun."

"Oh, it's only loaded with Number 7, Morton," said the captain. "I sha'n't fire; but if I did, it would only pepper them."

The man drew back, muttering to himself, "I saw a chap shot dead with Number 7, and they wasn't chilled shot, neither. I've done my duty, though."

There were six men waiting, all armed with short staves, and looking a steady set of fellows as Sir John cast his eye over them, and now increased to ten by the coming of the little party from the Hall, they looked more than a match for any gang of poachers likely to be met, and he said so.

"I don't know, Sir John," said the keeper, sturdily. "I haven't much faith in 'em. If it warn't for the show they'll make, I'd as soon trust to you, Sir John, the major, the captain, and Nero here. They're safe to run, some of 'em, if it comes to a fight. That chap of the captain's, Thompson, has got arms like pipe shanks, and two of the helpers about as much pluck as a cuckoo."

"Oh, they'll fight if it comes to the proof, I daresay," said Sir John. "How are you, my lads; how are you?" he continued, as they came up. "Now, then, if we come across the scoundrels, we must take all we can. There's no excuse for poaching. I'd give any man out of work in the parish something to do on the farm. So it's as bad as stealing, and I'll have no mercy on them. Now, Morton, what are you going to do?"

"Well, Sir John, from what I can understand, they're coming with their nets and dogs to scour the meadows and the cut clover patches. There's a sight of young birds there, as I know. They've got to know of it, too, somehow; and I propose, if the major thinks it right, to 'vide ourselves in three. You and me, Sir John, with one man and the dog, and the major and the captain take the other two parties, and lay up till we see 'em come."

"But how shall we know which way they'll come?" said Sir John.

"They'll come over the common from Woodstay way, Sir John, through the fir wood, and down at once into the long meadow, safe. We'll take one side, the major the other, and Captain Rolph the bottom of the meadow. We'll let them get well to work, and then when I whistle all close in, and get as many of 'em as we can. We shall be sure of their nets anyhow, but when I whistle they'll scatter, and I don't suppose we shall catch more'n one or two."

"Capital plan," said the major. "Why, you would have made a good general, Morton."

"Thank ye, sir," said the keeper, touching his hat. "All ready there? Long Meadow."

It was a soft, dark night, with not a breath of wind to chase the heavy clouds that shrouded the sky. There was no talking—nothing to be heard but the dull tramp of feet, and the rustling noise made by the herbage and heather brushing against the leather leggings worn by the men who followed the lead of the keeper and his dog.

There was about half a mile to go to reach the indicated spot, and the blood of both Rolph and the major seemed to course a little more rapidly through their veins as the one hailed the prospect of a bit of excitement with something like delight, and the other recalled night marches and perilous episodes in his old Indian campaigning life, and then sighed as he compared his present elderly self with the smart, dashing young officer he used to know.

"Halt here!" said Sir John, interrupting the musings of his brother; and from where they stood, they could dimly make out the extent of the long open space, with fir plantations on either side, a patch of alder in the damp, boggy space where they stood, and about two hundred yards away, right at the top of the slight slope, there was something black to be seen against the sky—something black, that by daylight would have resolved itself into a slope of tall firs.

This was the part that the poachers were expected to traverse, and the three parties were therefore stationed according to the plan, and for three hours they waited in utter silence, hidden in the plantations and the alder clump.

Sir John had begun to mutter at the end of the first hour, to grumble at the end of the second, and he was growling fiercely at the end of the third, when the keeper suddenly started up.

“What is it?” said Sir John, as the dog uttered a low whine.

“They’ve circumvented us, Sir John,” replied the keeper, angrily. “They’ve trapped me into the belief that they were coming here to-night, and they’ve been netting Barrows, I’ll be bound.”

“Confound the scoundrels!” cried Sir John. “What an idiot you must have been!”

“Yes, Sir John, I was,” said the keeper, calmly; “but they won’t have more than finished, and they’ve got to get home. I may be too many for them yet.”

Hastily summoning the party on his left, the keeper led them to the weary, cramped party on his right.

“This way; quick!” he said; and the sluggish blood began to flow once more with the excitement, as he led them rapidly along the meadow, right up the fir slope through the trees, and out into the lane on the other side.

Here he paused and listened for a few moments, and then started off once more to where another clump of firs made the aspect of the night more dark.

Beneath the trees it was blacker, but the keeper well knew his way, and at the end of a few minutes he had spread out his forces some fifteen yards apart, with a whispered word to be on the alert.

“They’re sure to come through here,” he whispered, “Down on the first man you see. We shall hear you, and will come and help.”

General like, the keeper had selected the middle of the line for himself, and placed the trustiest men near where he believed that the poachers would come, Rolph being on his right, the major and Sir John upon his left.

“They won’t come—it’s all a hoax,” said Sir John, who was tired of waiting, and the words were hardly out of his lips before the mastiff uttered a muttered growl, and directly after there was the tramp of feet over the pine needles which, as it came nearer, told plainly of there being a strongish gang at work.

Sir John’s party kept perfectly quiet, save that a couple of the men began to close up so as to be ready when the signal was given, while apparently quite free from apprehension, the poachers came on talking in a low voice, till they were close upon Sir John, when the keeper gave a shrill whistle, sprang up, and shouted to his men.

“Stand back all of you,” cried a stern voice.

“Give up, you scoundrels, the game’s over,” cried Sir John. “Close in, my lads.”

He dashed forward at once, and the major and keeper well seconded his efforts, but the latter received a heavy blow on the forehead, and went down, felled like an ox, the major was tripped up, and the man whom Sir John attacked proved too much for him, getting him down and kneeling upon his chest.

“Shoot them if they come, and then step forrard,” cried a shrill harsh voice, and four reports followed, the poachers sending the shot rattling in amongst the branches over the watchers’ heads, the pine needles and twigs pattering down, and the result was that Thompson, Captain Rolph’s man, began to retire very rapidly in one direction, closely followed by two more, and while others from the right flank also beat a retreat.

The scuffle that took place to right and left was soon over, the keeper’s followers not caring to risk their lives in an encounter with armed and desperate men. There was the sound of blows and another shot or two from the poachers, who were eight or nine in number, under the guidance of the man who had felled the keeper, and got Sir John down.

“It’s all right, my lads,” growled a voice. “Tie ’em well and let’s be off.”

“Here, rope!” said a fresh voice; and then there was another scuffle, as Sir John and the major were forced over on their faces, and their wrists tied behind them.

“Here, help! Rolph, Rolph!” cried Sir John.

“Hold your row, or—”

There was a dull sound like the blow of the butt of a gun on a man’s head, and Sir John uttered a furious oath.

“I’ll have you before me, yet, you dog!” he cried.

“And commit me for trial then,” said the man with a laugh. “Not this time. Now, my lads, ready?”

“Ay.”

“Off!”

“Halt!”

There was a fierce murmur at this last command, uttered in a good ringing military voice, and Sir John's heart leaped, and the major thought better of the speaker than he had ever thought before, as they both recognised the voice.

"Down with him, lads, he's only one," growled another.

"Halt, or by Gad I'll fire," cried Rolph again.

It all happened in an instant. There was the sound of a blow, which the captain received on his left arm; of another which came full upon his head, and then there was a flash, cutting the darkness and lighting up the faces of a group of men, a ringing report, and a moan, as Rolph fell back heavily to the ground.

What followed was a hurried muttering of voices amid painful, hoarse breathing, and, in the darkness, the major could just make out that men were lifting a burden.

"Who's hurt?" cried Sir John. "Do you hear?—who's hurt?"

There was no answer, only the trampling of feet rapidly receding; and it was the major who now spoke.

"Jack," he cried, "I can't move; I'm tied, I'm afraid it's Rolph."

"God forbid!" groaned Sir John.

"Curse the brutes! Here, my arm's smashed," muttered someone, struggling to his feet. "Hi, Sir John!—Major!"

"You, Rolph? Thank heaven!" cried Sir John. "I was afraid you were killed. Where's Morton?"

"Here, Sir John," said a faint voice.

"Don't say you're shot, man."

"No, Sir John. Crack on the head."

"Then who is hurt?" said the major. "Here, someone, untie or cut this line."

"I'm a bit hurt," said Rolph; "arm bruised, and a touch on the head, too."

"But someone must have been shot. Did you fire?" said Sir John.

"I think I did. Yes," said Rolph, "I got a crack on the arm, and I had a finger on the trigger."

"Then someone is down," cried Sir John. "Where are our men?"

"Gone for help, I think," said the major drily, as Rolph succeeded in loosening Sir John's hands.

"The cowardly scoundrels!" roared Sir John. "Here, let's pursue the poachers."

"No, no," said the major. "We're defeated this time, Jack, and they've retired. Thank you, Morton. I think we four made a good fight of it, and—ah, poor fellow!" he cried, bending down. "Nero, Nero, good dog then."

In the darkness they could just see the great dog make an effort to reach the major's hand, but the attempt resulted in a painful moan; a shudder, a faint struggle, and death.

"I'll swear it was not my shot killed him," cried Rolph excitedly.

"Say no more about it," said Sir John; "it was an accident. I'd sooner one of the scoundrels had had it in his skin, though. I wouldn't have taken fifty pounds for that dog."

"Poor old fellow!" said the major, who was kneeling beside the dog, and he stroked the great ears; "but," he added softly to himself, "I've had enough of blood: thank God it was not a man."

A series of loud whistles brought back some of the scattered forces, the men meeting with such an ovation from Sir John that they began to think they had better have had it out honourably with the poachers; and then a stout sapling was cut down, and the dog's paws being tied, he was carried home to the stable-yard on the shoulders of two watchers.

After this, there was much beer drinking in the servant's-hall, and much discussion in the library, where a piece of sticking-plaister was sufficient to remedy Rolph's wound, his arm was bathed, and Glynne did not faint.

Rolph soon after retired for the night, the major noting that he was looking very pale and uneasy. Twice over he went and looked at himself in the glass, and once he shuddered and stood staring over his shoulder, as if expecting to see someone there.

"Man can't help his gun going off in the excitement of an action," he said slowly. "What a fool I was not to own up that I had shot the big dog."

"Well, they shouldn't poach," he muttered at last; and, lighting a cigar, he sat smoking for an hour before going to bed to sleep soundly, awake fairly fresh the next morning, and go out for what he termed "a breather."

Volume Two—Chapter Six.

Errant Courses.

Lucy Alleyne was very pretty. Everybody said so—that she was pretty. No one said that she was beautiful. Now, Lucy was well aware of what people said, and, without being conceited, she very well knew that what people said was true. In fact, she often admired her pretty little *retroussé* nose and creamy skin in the glass, and, with a latent idea that she ought to preserve her good looks as much as possible for some one. She thought of the favoured person as "some one," and tried in every way possible to lead a healthy life.

To attain the above end, she strove hard to improve her complexion. It did not need improving, being perfect in its shades of pink and creamy white, that somehow put him who gazed upon her in mind of a *Gloire de Dijon* rose; but she tried to improve it all the same, laughingly telling herself that she would wash it in morning dew, or rather let Nature perform the operation, as she went for a good early walk.

The pine woods and copses looked as if trouble could never come within their shades, and the last thing any one would have dreamed of would have been the possibility of men meeting there with sticks, bludgeons, and guns, ready to resist capture on the one side, to effect it on the other, and, if needs be, use their weapons to the staining of the earth with blood.

No news of the past night's encounter had reached The Firs. Moray Alleyne, while watching the crossing of a star in the zenith over certain threads of cobweb in the field of his transit instrument had heard the reports of guns; but he was too much intent upon his work to pay heed to what was by no means an unusual circumstance. Lucy, too, had started into wakefulness once, thinking she heard a sound, but only to sink back to her rest once more; and as she walked that morning she saw no sign of struggle, though, had she turned off to the right amongst the pines, she might have found one or two ugly traces, as if a burden had had been laid down by those who bore it while they rested for a few minutes, and while a bit of rough surgery was being performed.

The lovely silvery mists were hanging about in the little valleys, or curling around the tops, as if spreading veils over the sombre pines, patches of which, as seen in the early morning sunshine, resembled the dark green and purple plaid of some Scottish clan; and as Lucy reached the edge of the far-stretching common land, dazzled by the brilliancy of the sunshine, and elated by the purity of the morning air, she paused to enjoy the beauty of the lovely scene around.

"How stupid people are!" she said half aloud. "How can they call this place desolate and ugly. Why, there's something growing everywhere, and the gorse and broom are simply lovely."

There was a soft moisture in her pretty eyes, as they rested on the blue-looking distant hills, the purple stretches of heather, and the rich green lawnlike patches of meadow land, saved from the wilds around. Between the hills there were dark shadowy spots, upon them brilliant bits of sunshine, while on all sides the gauzy, silvery vapours floated low down, waiting for the sun, as it increased in power, to drink them up, and after them the millions of iridescent tiny globules that whitened the herbage like frost.

The birds were singing from every patch of woodland in the distance; there was the monotonous "coo coo, coo—*coo, coo-hoo-coo*!" of a wood-pigeon in the pine tops singing his love-song that he always ends in the middle, and far out over the heathery common lark after lark was circling round and rising, in a wide spiral, up and up into the blue sky as it poured forth the never-wearying strain.

"People are as stupid and as dense as can be," said Lucy. "Ours is a grim-looking home, I know, but oh! how beautiful the country is—I wouldn't live anywhere else for the world."

There seemed to be no reason for a blush to come into Lucy's cheeks at this declaration, but one certainly did come, like a ruddy cloud over their soft outline, as she glanced back at the blank-looking pile with the hideous brick additions made by Alleyne for his instruments and observations. Not so much as a thread of smoke rose yet, from either of the chimneys, for Eliza was only at the point that necessitated a vexed rub occasionally at her nose with the woody part of a blacklead brush; Mrs Alleyne was dreaming of her son; and her son, who sought his pillow a couple of hours before—after a long watch of his star as it climbed to the zenith and then went down—to lie and think of Glynne Day, and ask himself whether he was not a scoundrel to allow such thoughts to enter his breast.

"How good it is to get up so early," thought Lucy, aloud; and then she stepped lightly over the dewy grass, marked down the spot where several mushrooms were growing, and then stepped on to the sandy road.

"I wish Moray would get up early," she thought, "it would be so nice to have him for a companion; but, poor fellow, he must be tired of a morning. I know what I'll do," she cried suddenly. "I'll get Glynne to promise to meet me two or three times a week, whenever it's fine, and we'll go together."

Her cheeks flushed a little hot as she began to think about Glynne, and her thoughts ran somewhat in this fashion,—

"She doesn't know—she doesn't understand a bit, or she would never have consented. Oh! it's absolutely horrid, and I don't believe he cares for her a morsel more than she cares for him."

Lucy stooped down to pick a mushroom, and laid it aside ready to retrieve as she came back from her walk, for Mrs Alleyne approved of a dish for breakfast.

"Why, at the end of a year it would be horrible," cried Lucy, with emphasis. "Mrs Rolph! What would be the use of being married, if you were miserable, as I'm sure she would be."

"It isn't dishonourable; and if it is, I don't mind. I know he is beginning to worship her, and it's as plain as can be that she likes to sit and listen to him, and all he says about the stars. Why, she seems to grow and alter every day, and to become wiser, and to take more interest in everything he says and does."

"There, I don't care," she panted, half-tearfully, as she picked another mushroom; and, as if addressing someone who had had spoken chidingly, "I can't help it; he is my own dear brother, and I will help him as much as I can. Dishonourable? Not it. It is right, poor fellow! Why, she has come like so much sunshine in his life, and it is as plain as can be to see that she is gradually beginning to know what love really is."

As these thoughts left her heart, she looked guiltily round, but there was no one listening—nothing to take her attention, but a couple of glistening, wet, and silvery-looking mushrooms in the grass hard by.

"It's very dreadful of me to be thinking like this," she said to herself, as she finished culling the mushrooms, and began to make her way back to the road, "but I can't help it. I love Glynne, and I won't see my own brother made miserable, if I can do anything to make him happy. It's quite dreadful the way things are going, and dear Sir John ought to be ashamed of himself. I declare—Oh! how you made me start!"

This was addressed to wet-coated, dissipated rabbit, with a tail like a tuft of white cotton, which little animal started up from its hiding-place at her very feet, and went bounding and scuffling off amongst the heather and furze.

"I wish, oh, how I wish that things would go right," cried Lucy, with tears in her eyes. "I wish I could do something to make Glynne see that he thinks ten times more about his nasty races and matches than he does about her. I don't believe he loves her a bit. It's shameful. He's a beast!"

There was another pause, during which the larks went on singing, the wood-pigeon cooed, and there was a pleasant twittering in the nearest plantation.

"Poor Glynne! when she might be so happy with a man who really loves her, but who would die sooner than own to it. Oh, dear me! I wish a dreadful war would break out, and Captain Rolph's regiment be ordered out to India, and the Indians would kill him and eat him, or take him prisoner—I don't care what, so long as they didn't let him come back any more, and—"

Pat—pat—pat—pat—pat—pat—pat—pat—a regular beat from a short distance off, and evidently coming from round by the other side of a clump of larches, where the road curved and then went away level and straight for about a mile.

"Whatever is that?" thought Lucy, whose eyes grew rounder, and who stared wonderingly in the direction of the sound. "It can't be a rabbit, I'm quite sure."

She was perfectly right; it was not a rabbit, as she saw quite plainly the next minute, when a curious-looking figure in white, braided and trimmed with blue, but bare-armed, bare-legged and bare-headed, came suddenly into view, with head forward, fists clenched, and held up on a level with its chest, and running at a steady, well-sustained pace right in the middle of the sandy road.

It was a surprise for both.

"Captain Rolph!" exclaimed Lucy, as the figure stopped short, panting heavily, and looking a good deal surprised.

"Miss Alleyne! Beg pardon. Didn't expect to see anybody so early. Really."

Lucy felt as if she would like to run away, but that she felt would be cowardly, so she stood her ground, and made, sensibly enough, the best of matters in what was decidedly a rather awkward encounter.

"I often come for an early walk," said the girl, coolly as to speech, though she felt rather hot. "Is this—is this for amateur theatricals?"

It would have been wiser not to allude to the captain's costume, but the words slipped out, and they came like a relief to him, for he, too, had felt tolerably confused. As it was his features expanded into a broad grin, and he then laughed aloud.

"Theatricals? Why, bless your innocence, no. I am in training for a race—foot-race—ten miles—man who does it in shortest time gets the cup. I give him—"

"Him?" said Lucy, for her companion had paused.

"Yes, him," said the captain. "Champion to run against."

"Run against?" said Lucy, glancing at a great blue bruise upon the captain's arm and a piece of sticking-plaister upon his forehead. "Do you hurt yourself like that when you run against men?"

"Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the captain. "I beg pardon, but, really, you are such a daisy. So innocent, you know. That was done last night out in the woods. Bit of a row with some poacher chaps. One of them hit me with a stick on the head. That's from the butt of a gun."

He gave the bruise on his bare arm a slap, and laughed, while Lucy coloured with shame and annoyance, but resolved to ignore the captain's rather peculiar appearance, and escape as soon as she could.

"I ought not to mind," she said to herself. "It's only rather French. Like the pictures one sees in the illustrated papers

about Trouville.”

“Were you fighting?”

“Well, yes,” he said indifferently, “bit of a scrimmage. Nothing to mind. People who preserve often meet with that sort of a thing. I did run against a fellow, though,” he continued, laughing. “But that’s not the sort of running against I meant. I’m going to do a foot-race. Matched against a low sort of fellow.”

“Oh!” said Lucy, looking straight before her.

“Professional, you know; but I’m going to run him—take the conceit out of the cad. Bad thing conceit.”

“Extremely,” said Lucy tightening her lips.

“Horrid. I’m going to give him fifty yards.”

“Oh!” said Lucy, gravely, as she took a step forward without looking at the captain. “But don’t let me hinder you. I was only taking my morning walk.”

“Don’t hinder me a bit,” said the captain. “I was just going to put on the finishing spurt, and end at that cross path. I’ve as good as done it, and I’m in prime condition.”

“Bad thing conceit,” said Lucy to herself.

“Fresh as a daisy.”

“Horrid,” said Lucy again to herself.

“I feel as if I could regularly run away from him. My legs are as hard as nails.”

“Indeed!”

“Oh, yes. I haven’t trained like this for nothing. Don’t you think you’ve hindered me. I sha’n’t trouble about it any more.”

All this while Lucy was trying to escape from her companion, but it was rather a wild idea to trudge away from a man whose legs were as hard as nails. As she walked on, though, she found herself wondering whether the finishing spurt that the captain talked of putting on was some kind of garment, as she kept steadily along, with, to her great disgust, the captain keeping coolly enough by her side, and evidently feeling quite at home, beginning to chat about the weather, the advantages of early rising, and the like.

“I declare,” thought Lucy, “if I met anyone, I should be ready to sink through the ground for shame. I wish he’d go.”

“Some people waste half their days in bed, Miss Alleyne. Glad to see you don’t. I’ve been up these two hours, and feel, as they say, as fit as a fiddle, and, if you’ll forgive me for saying so, you look just the same you do really, you know.”

He cast an admiring glance at her, which she noted, and for the moment it frightened her, then it fired a train, and a mischievous flash darted from her eyes.

This was delicious, and though her cheeks glowed a little, perhaps from the exercise, her heart gave a great leap, and began to rejoice.

“I knew he was not worthy of her,” she thought. “The wretch! I won’t run away, though I want to very badly.” And she walked calmly on by his side.

“Don’t you find this place dull?” said Rolph.

“Dull? oh dear no,” cried Lucy, looking brightly up in his face, and recalling at the same time that this must be at least the tenth time she had answered this question.

“I wish you’d let my mother call upon you, and you’d come up to the Hall a little oftener, Miss Alleyne, ’pon my honour I do.”

“Why, I do come as often as I am asked, Captain Rolph,” said Lucy with a mischievous look in her eyes.

“Do you, though? Well, never mind, come oftener.”

“Why?” said Lucy, with an innocent look of wonder in her round eyes.

“Why? because I want to see you, you know. It’s precious dull there sometimes.”

“What, with Glynne there?” cried Lucy.

“Oh yes, sometimes. She reads so much.”

“Fie, Captain Rolph!”

“No, no; nonsense. Oh, I say, though, I wish you would.”

“Really, Captain Rolph, I don’t understand you,” said Lucy, who was in a flutter of fright, mischief and triumph combined.

“Oh yes, you do,” he said, “but hold hard a minute. Back directly.”

He ran from her out to where something was hanging on a broken branch of a pine, and returned directly, putting on a flannel cricketing cap, and a long, hooded ulster, which, when buttoned up, gave him somewhat the aspect of a friar of orders grey, who had left his beads at home.

“You do understand me,” he said, not noticing the mirthful twinkle in Lucy’s eye at his absurd appearance. “Oh yes, you do. It’s all right. I say, Lucy Alleyne, what a one you are.”

Lucy’s eyebrows went up a little at this remark, but she did not assume displeasure, she only looked at him inquiringly.

“Oh, it’s all right,” he said again. “I am glad I met you, it’s so precious dull down here.”

“What, when you have all your training to see to, Captain Rolph.”

“Oh, yes; awfully dull. You see Glynne doesn’t take any interest in a fellow’s pursuits. She used to at first, but now it’s always books.”

“But you should teach her to be interested, Captain Rolph.”

“Oh, I say, hang it all, Lucy Alleyne, can’t you drop that captaining of a fellow when we’re out here *tête-à-tête*. It’s all very well up at the Hall but not here, and so early in the morning, we needn’t be quite so formal, eh?”

“Just as you like,” said Lucy, with the malicious twinkle in her eyes on the increase.

“That’s right,” cried Rolph; “and, I say, you know, come, own up—you did, didn’t you?”

“Did what?” cried Lucy.

“Know I was training this morning.”

“Indeed, no,” cried Lucy, indignantly, with a look that in no wise abashed the captain.

“Oh, come now, that won’t do,” cried Rolph. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I’m not a bit ashamed,” cried Lucy stoutly; and then to herself, “Oh yes, I am—horribly. What a fright, to be sure!”

“That’s right,” cried Rolph, “but I know you did come, and I say I’m awfully flattered, I am, indeed. I wish, you know, you’d take a little more interest in our matches and engagements: it would make it so much pleasanter for a fellow.”

“Would it?” said Lucy.

“Would it? Why, of course it would. You see I should feel more like those chaps used, in the good old times, you know, when they used to bring the wreaths and prizes they had won, and lay ’em at ladies’ feet, only that was confoundedly silly, of course. I don’t believe in that romantic sort of work.”

“Oh, but that was at the feet of their lady-loves,” said Lucy, quickly.

“Never mind about that,” replied Rolph; “must have someone to talk to about my engagements. It’s half the fun.”

“Go and talk to Glynne, then,” said Lucy.

“That’s no use, I tell you. She doesn’t care a *sou* for the best bit of time made in anything. Here, I believe,” he said, warmly, “if that what’s-his-name chap, who said he’d put a girdle round the globe in less than no time, had done it, and come back to Glynne and told her so, she’d just lift up her eyes—”

“Her beautiful eyes,” said Lucy, interrupting.

“Oh, yes, she’s got nice eyes enough,” said Rolph, sulkily; “but she’d only have raised ’em for a moment and looked at him, and said—‘Have you really.’ Here, I say, Puck’s the chap I mean.”

“I don’t think Glynne’s very fond of athletic sports,” said Lucy.

“No, but you are; I know you are. Come, it’s of no use to deny it. I say I am glad.”

“Why, the monster’s going to make love to me,” said Lucy to herself.

“You are now, aren’t you?”

“Well, I don’t dislike them,” said Lucy; “not very much.”

“Not you; and, I say, I may talk to you a bit about my engagements, mayn’t I?”

“Really, Captain Rolph,” replied Lucy, demurely, “I hardly know what to say to such a proposal as this. To how many ladies are you engaged?”

“Ladies? Engaged? Oh, come now! I say, you know, you don’t mean that. I say, you’re chaffing me, you know.”

“But you said engaged, and I knew you were engaged to Glynne Day,” cried Lucy, innocently.

“Oh, but you know I meant engagements to run at athletic meetings. Of course I’m only engaged to Glynne, but that’s no reason why a man shouldn’t have a bit of a chat to any one else—any one pretty and sympathetic, and who took an interest in a fellow’s pursuits. I say, I’ve got a wonderful match on, Lucy.”

“How dare he call me Lucy!” she thought; and an indignant flash from her eyes fell upon a white-topped button mushroom beside the road. “A pretty wretch to be engaged to poor Glynne. Oh, how stupid she must be!”

The mushroom was not snatched up, and Rolph went on talking, with his hands far down in the pockets of his ulster.

“It’s no end of a good thing, and I’m sure to win. It’s to pick up five hundred stones put five yards apart, and bring ’em back and put ’em in a basket one at a time; so that, you see, I have to do—twice five yards is ten yards the first time, and then twice ten yards the second time; and then twice twenty yards is forty yards the third time, and then twice forty yards is eighty yards the fourth time, and—Here, I say, I’m getting into a knot, I could do it if I had a pencil.”

“But I thought you would have to run.”

“Yes; so I have. I mean to tot up on a piece of paper. It’s five yards more twice over each time, you know, and mounts up tremendously before you’re done; but I’ve made up my mind to do it, and I will.”

“All that’s very brave of you,” cried Lucy, looking him most shamelessly full in the eyes, and keeping her own very still to conceal the twitching mischief that was seeking to make puckers and dimples in all parts of her pretty face.

“Well,” he said, heavily, “you can’t quite call it brave. It’s plucky, though,” he added, with a self-satisfied smile. “There are not many fellows in my position who would do it.”

“Oh, no, I suppose not,” said Lucy, with truthful earnestness this time; and then to herself: “He’s worse than I thought.”

“Now that’s what I like, you know,” exclaimed Rolph. “That’s what I want—a sort of sympathy, you know. To feel that when I’m doing my best to win some cup or belt there’s one somewhere who takes an interest in it, and is glad for me to win. Do you see?”

“Oh, of course I am glad for you to win, if it pleases you,” said Lucy, demurely.

“But it doesn’t please me if it doesn’t please you,” cried Rolph. “I’ve won such a heap of times, that I don’t care for it much, unless there should be some one I could come and tell about it all.”

“Then why not tell Glynne?” said Lucy, opening her limpid eyes, and gazing full in the captain’s face.

“Because it’s of no use,” cried Rolph. “I’ve tried till I’m sick of trying. I want to tell you.”

“Oh, but you mustn’t tell me,” said Lucy.

“Oh, yes I must, and I’m going to begin now. I shall tell you all my ventures, and what I win, and when I am going to train; and—I say, Lucy, you did come out this morning to see me train?”

“Indeed, I did not,” she cried; “and even if I had, I should not tell you so.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” said Rolph, laughing. “I’m satisfied.”

“What a monster for poor Glynne to be engaged to. I believe, if I were to encourage him, he’d break off his engagement.”

“I am glad I met you,” said Rolph, suddenly, and he went a little closer to Lucy, who started aside into the wet grass, and glanced hastily round. “Why, what are you doing?” he said.

“I wanted to pick that mushroom,” she said.

“Oh, never mind the mushrooms, you’ll make your little feet wet, and I want to talk to you. I say, I’m going to train again to-morrow morning. You’ll come, won’t you. Pray do!—Who’s this?”

Both started, for, having approached unheard, his pony’s paces muffled by the turf, Philip Oldroyd cantered by them, gazing hard at Lucy, and raising his hat stiffly to Rolph, as he went past.

“Confound him! Where did he spring from?” cried Rolph. “Why, he quite startled you,” he continued, for Lucy’s face, which had flushed crimson, now turned of a pale waxen hue.

“Oh, no; it is nothing,” she said, as a tremor ran through her frame, and she hesitated as to what she should do, ending by exclaiming suddenly that she must go back home at once.

“But you’ll come and see me train to-morrow morning,” said Rolph.

“No, no. Oh, no. I could not,” cried Lucy; and she turned and hurried away.

"But you will come," said Rolph, gazing after her. "I'll lay two to one—five to one—fifty to one—she comes. She's caught—wired—netted. Pretty little rustic-looking thing. I rather like the little lassie; she's so fresh and innocent. I wonder what dignified Madame Glynne would say. Bet a hundred to one little Lucy's thinking about me now, and making up her mind to come."

He was right; Lucy was thinking about him, and wishing he had been at the bottom of the sea that morning before he had met her.

"Oh, what will Mr Oldroyd think?" she sobbed, as the tears ran down her face. "It's nothing to him, and he's nothing to me; but it's horrible for him to have seen me walking out at this time in the morning, and *alone*, with that stupid, common, racing, betting creature, whom I absolutely abominate."

She walked on, weeping silently for a few minutes before resuming her self-reproaches.

"I'm afraid it was very wicked and wrong and forward of me, but I did so want to know whether he really cared for Glynne. And he doesn't—he doesn't—he does not," she sobbed passionately. "He's a wicked, bad, empty-headed, deceitful monster; and he'd make Glynne wretched all her life. Why, he was making love to me, and talking slightingly of her all the time."

Here there was another burst of sobs, in the midst of which, and the accompanying blinding tears, she stooped down to pick another mushroom, but only to viciously throw it away, for it to fall bottom upwards impaled upon the sharp thorns of a green furze bush close at hand.

"I don't care," she cried; "they may think what they like, both of them, and they may say what they like. I was trying to fight my poor, dear, injured, darling brother's battle, and to make things happier for him, and if I'm a martyr through it, I will be, and I don't care a pin."

She was walking on, blinded by the veil of tears that fell from her eyes, seeing nothing, hearing nothing of the song of birds and the whirr and hum of the insect world. The morning was now glorious, and the wild, desolate common land was full of beauty; but Lucy's heart was sore with trouble, and outburst followed outburst as she went homeward.

"I've found him out, though, after all, and it's worth every pain I may feel, and Glynne shall know what a wretch he is, and then she'll turn to poor, dear Moray, and he'll be happy once again. Poor fellow, how he has suffered, and without a word, believing that there was no hope for him when there is; and I don't care, I'm growing reckless now; I'd even let Glynne see how unworthy Captain Rolph is, by going to meet him. It doesn't matter a bit, people will believe I'm weak and silly; and if the captain were to boast that he had won me, everybody would believe him. Oh, it's dreadful, dreadful, I want to do mischief to some one else and—and—and—but I don't care, not a bit. Yes, I do," she sobbed bitterly. "Everybody will think me a weak, foolish, untrustworthy girl, and it will break my heart, and—oh!"

Lucy stopped short, tear-blinded, having nearly run against an obstacle in the way.

The obstacle was Lucy's mental definition of "everybody," who would think slightingly of her now.

For "everybody" was seated upon a pony, waiting evidently for her to come.

Volume Two—Chapter Seven.

Starlight Doings.

It was astonishing how great the interest in the stars had now become in the neighbourhood of Brackley. Glynne was studying hard so as to learn something of the wondrous orbs of whose astounding nature Moray Alleyne loved to speak; and now Philip Oldroyd had told himself that it would be far better if he were not quite so ignorant on matters astronomical.

The result was that he had purchased a book or two giving accounts of the Royal Observatory, the peculiarities of the different instruments used, the various objects most studied; and in these works he was coaching himself up as fast as he could on the present night—having "a comfortable read" as he called it, before going to bed—when there came a bit of a novelty for him, a sudden summons to go and see a patient.

"What's the matter?" he said, going to the door to answer the call, after a glance at his watch, to see that it was half-past twelve.

"Well, sir," said the messenger, Caleb Kent, "it's mate o' mine hurt hissen like, somehow. Met of a fall, I think."

"Fall, eh? Where is he hurt?"

"Mostlings 'bout the 'ead, sir, but he's a bit touched all over."

"What did he fall off—a cart?"

"No, sir, it warn't off a cart. Hadn't you better come and see him, sir?"

"Of course, my man, but I don't want to go away from home, and then find I might have taken something, and saved my patient a great deal of suffering."

"Yes, sir; quite right, sir," said the man mysteriously; "well, you see, sir, I can't talk about it like. It weer a fall certainly, but some one made him fall."

"Oh, a fight, eh?"

"Yes, sir; there was a bit of a fight."

"Well, if your mate has been fighting, is he bad enough to want a doctor?"

"He's down bad, sir. It warn't fisties."

"Sticks?"

The man nodded.

"Anything worse?"

"Well, sir, I didn't mean to speak about it, but it weer."

"I think I have it," thought Oldroyd. "The man has been shot in a poaching affray. Where is it?" he said aloud.

"Lars cottage through Lindham, sir. Tile roof."

"Six miles away?"

"Yes, sir; 'bout six miles."

As Oldroyd spoke, he was busily thrusting a case or two and some lint into his pockets, and filling a couple of small phials; after which he buttoned up his coat and put out his lamp.

"Now, then, my man, I must just call at the mill, and then I'm ready for you."

"Going to walk, sir?" said the messenger.

"No; I'm going to get the miller's pony. I'm sorry I can't offer to drive you back."

"Never you mind about me, sir. I can get over the ground," said the man; and following Oldroyd down the lane, he stopped with him at a long low cottage, close beside the dammed up river, where a couple of sharp raps caused a casement to be opened.

"You, doctor?" said a voice; and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, there was the word "catch," and Oldroyd cleverly caught a key attached by a string to a very large horse-chestnut. Then the casement was closed, and the two went round to the stable, where a stout pony's slumbers were interrupted, and the patient beast saddled and bridled and led out, ready to spread its four legs as far apart as possible when the young doctor mounted as if afraid of being pulled over by his weight.

"Now, then," said Oldroyd, relocking the door, "forward as fast as you like. When you're tired I'll get down."

"Oh, I sha'n't be tired," said the man, quietly; and he started off at a regular dog-trot. "That there pony'll go anywhere, sir, so I shall take the short cuts."

"Mind the boggy bits, my man."

"You needn't be skeard about them, sir; that there pony wouldn't near one if you tried to make him."

Oldroyd nodded, and the man trotted to the front, the pony following, and, in spite of two or three proposals that they should change places, the guide kept on in the same untiring manner.

Here and there, though, when they had passed the common, and were ascending the hills, the man took hold of the pony's mane, and trudged by the side; and during these times Oldroyd learned all about the fight in the fir wood.

"Whose place was it at?" said Oldroyd at last.

"Sir John Day's, sir."

After that they proceeded in silence till they reached the first houses of a long, straggling hamlet, when a thought occurred to Oldroyd to which he at once gave utterance.

"I say, my man, why didn't you go to Doctor Blunt? He was two miles nearer to you than I am."

Caleb laughed hoarsely, and shook his head.

Oldroyd checked his willing little mount at a long, low cottage beside the road, and went down the strip of garden. Three men were at the door, and they made way for him, touching their hats in a surly fashion as he came up.

"Know how he is?" said Oldroyd, sharply.

"Bout gone, sir. Glad you've come," said one of the men; and Oldroyd raised the latch and went into the low-ceiled kitchen, where a tallow candle was burning in a lantern, but there was no one there.

“Here’s the doctor, miss,” said the man who had before spoken, crossing to a doorway opening at once upon a staircase, when a frightened-looking girl, with red eyes and a scared look upon her countenance, came hurrying downstairs.

“Would you please to come up, sir,” she said. “Oh. I am so glad you’ve come.”

Oldroyd followed her up the creaking staircase, and had to stoop to enter the sloping-ceiled room, where, with another pale, scared woman kneeling beside the bed, and a long, snuffed candle upon an old chest of drawers, giving a doleful, ghastly light, lay a big, black-whiskered, shaggy-haired man, his face pinched and white, and plenty of tokens about of the terrible wound he had received.

Oldroyd went at once to the bed, made a hurried examination, took out his case, and for the next half hour he was busy trying to staunch the bleeding, and place some effectual bandages upon the wound.

All this time the man never opened his eyes, but lay with his teeth clenched, and lips nipped so closely together, that they seemed to form a thin line across the lower part of his face. Oldroyd knew that he must be giving the man terrible pain, but he did not shrink, bearing it all stoically, if he was conscious, though there were times when his attendant thought he must be perfectly insensible to what was going on.

The women obeyed the slightest hint, and worked hard; but all the while Oldroyd felt that he had been called upon too late, and that the man must sink from utter exhaustion.

To his surprise, however, just as he finished his task, and was bending over his patient counting the pulsation in the wrist, the man unclosed his eyes, and looked up at him.

“Well, doctor,” he said, coolly; “what’s it to be—go or stay?”

“Life, I hope,” replied Oldroyd, as he read the energy and determination of the man’s nature. This was not one who would give up without a struggle, for his bearing during the past half hour had been heroic.

“Glad of it,” sighed the wounded man. “I haven’t done yet; and to-night’s work has given me a fresh job on hand.”

“Now, keep perfectly still and do not speak,” said Oldroyd, sternly. “Everything depends upon your being at rest. Sleep if you can. I will stop till morning to see that the bleeding does not break out again.”

“Thankye, doctor,” said the man gruffly; and just then a pair of warm lips were pressed upon Oldroyd’s hand, and he turned sharply.

“Hallo!” he said. “I’ve been so busy that I did not notice you. I’ve seen your face before.”

“Yes, sir; I met you once near The Warren—Mrs Rolph’s.”

“Thought I’d seen you. But you—are you his wife?”

“No,” said the girl, smiling faintly. “This is my father.”

“What an absurd blunder. Why, of course, I remember now. I did not know him again. It’s Mrs Rolph’s keeper.”

The flush that came into the girl’s face was visible even by the faint light of the miserable tallow candle, as Oldroyd went on in a low voice,—

“Poor fellow! I misjudged him. I took him for a poacher, and its the other way on. The scoundrels! No, no, don’t give way,” whispered Oldroyd, as the girl let her face fall into her hands and began to sob convulsively. “There, there: cheer up. We won’t let him die. You and I will pull him through, please God. Hush! quietness is everything. Go and tell those men to be still, and say I shall not want the pony till six or seven o’clock. One of them must be ready, though, in case I want a messenger to run to the town.”

Oldroyd’s words had their effect, for a dead silence fell upon the place, and the injured man soon slept quietly, lying so still, that Judith, after her return, sought the young doctor’s eyes from time to time, asking dumbly whether he was sure that something terrible had not occurred.

At such times Oldroyd rose, bent over his patient and satisfied himself that all was going well before turning to his fellow-watcher and giving her an encouraging smile.

Then there would be a weary sigh, that told of relief from an anxiety full of dread, and the night wore on.

For a time, Oldroyd, as he sat there in that dreary room, glancing occasionally at the dull, unsnuffed candle, fancied that the men had stolen away, but he would soon know that he was wrong, for the faint odour of their bad tobacco came stealing up through the window, and he knew as well as if he were present that they were sitting about on the fence or lounging against the walls of the cottage.

Between three and four, the critical time of the twenty-four hours, when life is at its lowest ebb, a sigh came from the bed, and the sufferer grew restless to a degree that made Oldroyd begin to be doubtful, but the little uneasy fit passed off, and there was utter silence once again.

Philip Oldroyd’s thoughts wandered far during this time of watching; now his imagination raised for his mental gaze the scene of the desperate encounter, and he seemed to see the blows struck, hear the oaths and fierce cries, succeeded by the report of the gun, and the groan of the injured man as he fell.

Then that scene seemed to pass away, and the room at The Firs came into sight, with its grim, blank look, the stiff figure of Mrs Alleyne; calm, deeply absorbed Alleyne; and the sunshine of the whole place, Lucy, who seemed to turn what was blank and repulsive into all that was bright and gay.

As he thought on of Lucy all the gloom and ghastliness of that wretched cottage garret faded away, a pleasant glow of satisfaction came over him, and he sat there building dreamy castles of a bright and prosperous kind, and putting Lucy in each, forgetting for the time the poverty of his practice, his own comparatively hopeless state, and the chances that she, whom he now owned that he worshipped, would be carried off by some one more successful in the world.

Did he love Lucy? Yes, he told himself, he was afraid he did—afraid, for it seemed so hopeless an affair. Did she love him? No, he dared not think that, but at one time, during the most weary portion of the watching, he could not help wishing that she might fall ill, and the duty be his to bring her back to health and strength.

He was angry with himself directly after, though he owned that such a trouble might fill her with gratitude towards him, and gratitude was a step towards love.

In the midst of these thoughts Oldroyd made himself more angry still, for he inadvertently sighed, with the effect of making the women start, and Judith gaze at him wonderingly. To take off their attention he softly shifted his seat, and began once more to think of his patient and his chances of life.

The poor fellow was sleeping easily, and so far there were no signs of the feverish symptoms that follow wounds.

The night wore on; the candle burned down in the socket, and was replaced by another, which in its turn burned out, and its successor was growing short when the twitterings of the birds were heard, and the ghostly dawn came stealing into that cheerless, whitewashed room, whose occupants' faces seemed to have taken their hue from the ceiling.

The injured man still slept, and his breathing was low and regular, encouraged by which the countenances of the women were beginning to lose their despairing, scared aspect, as they glanced from doctor to patient, and back again.

At last the cold and pallid light of the room gave place to a warm red glow, and Oldroyd went softly to the window to see the rising sun, thinking the while what a dreary life was his, called from his comfortable home to come some six miles in the dead of the night to such a ghastly scene as this, and then to sit and watch, his payment probably the thanks of the poor people he had served.

The east was one glow of orange and gold, and the beauty of the scene, with the dewy grass and trees glittering in the morning light, chased away the mental shadows of the night.

“Not so bad a life after all,” he said to himself. “Money's very nice, but a man can't devote his life to greed. What a glorious morning, and how I should like a cup of tea.”

He turned to look at his patient, and found that the woman had gone, while Judith now asked him in an imploring whisper if there was any hope.

“Hope? Yes,” he replied, “it would have killed some men, but look at your father's physique. Why, he is as strong as a horse. Take care of him and keep him quiet. Let him sleep all he can.”

Judith glanced at the wounded man, and then at Oldroyd, to whisper at last piteously, and after a good deal of hesitation,—

“The police, sir: if they come, they mustn't take him away, must they?”

“Take him away?” said Oldroyd, wonderingly, “certainly not. I say he must not be moved. Here, I'll write it down for you. It would be his death.”

He drew out his pocket-book to write a certificate as to the man's state, and Judith took it, with an air approaching veneration, to fold it and place it in her bosom.

Just then the woman returned, and, after a whispering with Judith, asked Oldroyd to come down.

He glanced once more at his patient, and then followed the girl downstairs, where, in a rough but cleanly way, a cup of tea had been prepared and some bread and butter.

These proved to be so good that, feeling better for the refreshment, Oldroyd could not help noticing that, but for the traces of violent grief, Judith would have been extremely pretty.

“Will father get better, sir?” said the girl, pleadingly.

“Better? Yes, my girl,” said Oldroyd, wondering at the rustic maiden's good looks. “There, there, don't be foolish,” he continued, as the girl caught his hand to kiss it.

She shrank away, and coloured a little, when Oldroyd hastened to add more pleasantly,—

“I think he'll soon be better.”

She gave him a bright, grateful look through her tears, and then hurriedly shrank away.

“Hah! that’s better,” he said to himself, as he went on with his simple meal. “A cup of tea, and a little sunshine, what a difference they do make in a man’s sensations. Humph! past six. No bed for me till to-night,” he exclaimed, as he glanced at his watch; and rising, he went softly upstairs once more, to find that his patient was still sleeping, with Judith watching by his pillow.

Oldroyd just nodded to her, and made a motion with one finger that she should come to his side.

“I’ll ride over in the afternoon,” he whispered; and then he went quietly down, said “good-morning” to the woman waiting, and with the sensation upon him that the night’s work did not seem so horrible now that the sun had risen, he stepped out.

Volume Two—Chapter Eight.

Why the Slugs Ate Lucy’s Mushrooms.

Three men, one of whom was the last night’s messenger, Caleb Kent, a stranger to Oldroyd, were lounging about by the cottage gate as the doctor stepped out, and their looks asked the question they longed to have answered.

“I think he’ll get over it, my men,” said Oldroyd. “It’s a narrow escape for him, though, if he does pull through.”

The men exchanged glances.

“I suppose you’ll have the police over before long, and—What’s the matter?”

The men were looking sharply down the road.

“I mean they’ll want to question him about the scoundrels who did this work.”

“It warn’t no scoundrels, did it, doctor,” said Caleb Kent, with a vicious snarl.

“But I took it that the keeper had been shot by poachers.”

“It were Cap’n Rolph shot him,” said Caleb, fiercely.

“Dear me! What a sad accident.”

“Accident?” cried Caleb Kent, with an ugly laugh. “Why, I see him lift his gun and take aim. It was just as I was going to hit at him.”

“Nonsense, my lad: his own master.”

“Arn’t no master of his’n now. Sacked nigh three months ago.”

Oldroyd stared.

“Here, I’m getting confused, my man. That poor fellow upstairs is a keeper, isn’t he?”

“Was, sir,” said Caleb Kent, with a grin; “but he arn’t now. He was out with us after the fezzans last night.”

“Hold your tongue,” growled one of the other men.

“Sha’n’t. What for? Doctor won’t tell on us.”

“Then it is as I thought. You are a gang of poachers, and the man upstairs is hand and glove with you.”

“Well, why not, sir. They sacked him, and no one wouldn’t have him, because he used once to do a bit o’ nights hisself ’fore he turned keeper. Man can’t starve when there’s hares and fezzans about.”

“Went a bit like out o’ spite,” said Caleb. “Hadn’t been out with us before.”

“Humph! and you come and fetch me and tell me this,” said Oldroyd. “How do you know that I shall not go and give notice to the police?”

“Cause we know’d better. Caleb here was going to fetch old Blunt from the town; but I says if you fetch him, he’ll go back and tell the police.”

“And how do you know that I shall not?” said Oldroyd, tartly.

“Gent as goes out of his way to tent a poor labrer’s wife when her chap’s out o’ work, and does so much for the old folks, arn’t likely to do such a dirty trick as that. Eh, mates?”

“Humph! you seem to have a pretty good opinion of me,” said Oldroyd.

“Yes, sir, we knows a gen’leman when we sees one. We’ll pay you, sir, all right. You won’t let out on us, seeing how bad the poor fellow is.”

Oldroyd was silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then he turned sharply upon Caleb Kent.

“Look here, sir,” he said; “you’ve got a tongue and it runs rather too fast. You made an ugly charge against that man’s late master.”

“I said I see him shute him,” said Caleb.

“And you did not see anything of the kind.”

“You gents allus stick up for each other,” muttered Caleb.

“You could not see what took place in the darkness and excitement of a fight, so hold your tongue. Such a charge would make endless mischief, and it must be a mistake.”

“All right, sir,” said Caleb.

“It would upset that poor girl, too, if she heard such a thing.”

“Yes, it would upset her sure enough if she heard,” said Caleb, with a peculiar smile, and he walked away.

“I ought to give you fellows a lecture on the danger of night poaching,” continued Oldroyd.

“Don’t, sir, please,” said one of the men, with a laugh, “for it wouldn’t do no good. ’Sides; we might want to hing a brace o’ fezzans or a hare up agin your door now and then.”

“Here, don’t you do anything of the kind, my lads,” cried Oldroyd. “I forbid it, mind. Now get me my pony.”

“All right, sir; we’ll mind what you says,” said the man who had spoken, looking mirthfully round at his companions, one of whom at once accompanied him to a low shed where the pony was munching some hay. The willing little beast was saddled while Oldroyd walked up and down the path with an abundance of sweet-scented and gay old-fashioned flowers on either side. Carnations and scarlet lychnis, and many-headed sun flowers and the like, were bright in the morning sunshine, for all seemed to have been well tended; but, all at once, he came upon a terrible tell-tale bit of evidence of the last night’s work upon the red bricks that formed the path—one that made him scrape off a little mould from the bed with his foot, and spread it over the ugly patch.

“The cottage looks simple and innocent enough, with its roses, to be the home of peace,” he muttered. “Ah! how man does spoil his life for the sake of coin. Thank you, my lad—that’s right,” he added, as his last night’s messenger brought the pony to the gate.

He mounted, and thrust a coin, that he could not spare, into his temporary ostler’s hand.

“Let him go. Fine morning, isn’t it?”

But Caleb held on sturdily by the pony’s bridle, and thrust the piece back with an air of sturdy independence.

“No, thankye, sir,” he said. “Me and my mates don’t want paying by a gentleman as comes to help one of us. ’Sides which, we’re a-going to pay you; aren’t we, lads?”

“Ay, that’s so,” growled the others. “Don’t take it.”

With the cleverness of a pickpocket, but the reverse action—say of a negative and not a positive pickpocket—the florin was thrust into Oldroyd’s vest, and the man drew back, leaving the doctor to pursue his way.

“Poachers even are not so black as they are painted,” he said to himself as he cantered along, and then he fell to thinking of the girl he had seen that morning. “They’ve better daughters than you would have suspected, more affectionate wives, the best of neighbours, and companions as honest and faithful as one could wish; and, all the while, they are a set of confounded scoundrels and thieves, for it’s just as dishonest to shoot and steal a man’s carefully-raised foreign birds—his pheasants—as it is to break into a hen-roost. As to partridges and hares, of course they are wild things; but, so long as they lived and bred on one’s land, they must be as genuine property as the apples and pears that grow upon a fellow’s trees. Yes, poachers are thieves; and I daresay my friend there, with the shot-hole in his body, is as great a scoundrel as the worst.”

He laughed as he cantered along the soft green beside the road.

“My practice is improving. I shall have my connection amongst the rogues and vagabonds mightily increased, for I certainly shall not go and inform the police: not my business to do that. They’re punished enough, even if I pull him through. And I shall,” he said aloud. “I must and will, for the sake of his pretty daughter. I wonder whether they’ll pay me after all,” he went on, as the pony ambled over the grass, and the naturally sordid ideas of the man often pressed for money and struggling for his income, came uppermost. “When people are in the first throes of excitement and gratitude for the help Doctor Bolus has rendered them, they almost worship him, and they’ll give, or rather they will promise, anything; but when time has had his turn, and the gratitude has begun to cool, it’s a different thing altogether; and, last of all, when the bill goes in—oh dear, for poor human nature, if the case had been left alone, A, B, C, or D would have got better without help.

“Well, never mind,” he said merrily, for the refreshment and the delicious morning air were telling upon his spirits, “the world goes round and round all the same, and human nature is one of the things that cannot be changed.”

He had to turn the pony out on to the road here, for the long green strands of the brambles were hanging right out over the grass, and catching at his legs as he cantered by. The soft mists were floating away as he began to descend the hilly slope, still at his feet the landscape seemed to be half hidden by clouds, through which hillocks, and hedge,

and trees were visible, with here and there a house or a brown patch of the rough common land; and right away on the other side, stood up, grim and depressing of aspect, the ugly brick house upon the big hillock of sand, with the various and grim-looking edifices that Moray Alleyne had raised. Forming a background were the sombre fir trees with the column-topped slope and hill; and, even at that distance, he could make out, here and there, portions of the sandy lane that skirted the pine slope, which formed so striking an object in the surrounding landscape.

So beautiful was the scene in the early morning, so varied the tints, that Oldroyd checked his pony, and told himself that he could not do better than pause and admire the landscape. But somehow his eyes lit upon the ugliest object there, focused themselves so as to get the most photographic idea upon the polished plate of his memory, and there they stayed, for he saw nothing else but Mrs Alleyne's gloomy house.

This, however, is not quite the fact, for in a most absurd way—for a young medical man who had been telling himself a hundred times over that it would be insanity for him to think of marrying—he furnished that gloomy picture with one figure that seemed to him to turn the whole place into a palace of beauty, of whose aspect he could never tire.

"Go along!" he exclaimed aloud at last, as if to himself for his absurd thoughts; but the pony took the order as being applied to the beast of burden present, and went off at once in a good canter, one that gained spirit from the fact that he knew the way and that way was homewards.

So absorbed was Oldroyd that he left the sturdy little animal to itself, and it went pretty swiftly over the driest bits of close, velvety turf, cleverly avoiding the bigger furze clumps, and reaching at last the lighter ground where the fir trees grew. Then it snorted and would have increased its pace, but there were awkward stumps here and there, and slippery places, such as the cleverest pony could not avoid, so the rider drew rein, and let the little steed amble gently along.

All at once Philip Oldroyd's heart seemed to stand still, and he checked the pony suddenly, sitting breathless and half stunned, gazing straight before him at a couple of figures passing along the road.

He drew a long breath that hissed between his closed teeth; and even a pearl diver might have envied his power of retaining that breath, so long was it before he exhaled it again.

Then he turned his pony's head, bent down his darkened face till his chin rested upon his breast, and rode forward again; but the pony began to resist a change which suggested going right away from home. He drummed its ribs fiercely with his heels, and pressed it on, but only to turn its head directly after, forcing himself into a state of composure as he rode quietly by Lucy Alleyne and Rolph, and saluted them as he passed.

It was hard work to ride on like that, without looking back, but he mastered himself and went quickly on for some distance before drawing rein, and sitting like a statue upon the pony, which began to graze, and only lifted its head and gave a momentary glance at Lucy, when, sobbing as if she would break her heart, the little lady nearly ran up against the waiting rider and his steed.

"Mr Oldroyd!" cried Lucy, after giving vent to that astonished, frightened "Oh!"

"Yes, Miss Alleyne," he said coldly, "Mr Oldroyd."

"Why—why are you stopping me like that? Oh, I beg your pardon; good-morning!" she cried hastily, and in a quick, furtive way she swept the tears from her eyes, and wiped her pretty little nose, which crying was turning of a pinky hue.

"Was I stopping you?" he said, speaking mechanically, and glancing straight before him. "I have been out all night with a patient six miles away."

"Indeed!" said Lucy, hastily; "yes, it is a beautiful morning."

She went by him without trusting herself to look in his face.

"If I did so, I should burst out sobbing," she said to herself.

But by the time Lucy had gone half a score yards, Oldroyd was by her side, the pony keeping step with her, pace for pace, while the little woman's breast was heaving with love, sorrow and despair.

"What will he think? what will he think?" she kept saying to herself as she longed to lay her hands in his, and to tell him that it was no fault of hers, but an accident that Captain Rolph had met her during her walk.

But she could not tell him—she dared not. It was like a confession that she cared for his opinion more than for that of anybody in the world. It would be unmaidenly, and degrading, and strange; and there was nothing for her to do but assume anger and annoyance, and treat Oldroyd as if he had been playing the part of spy.

A very weak conclusion, no doubt, but it was the only one at which, in her misery, she arrived.

The sun was shining now from a pure, blue sky, the birds were darting beneath the trees, where the long spider webs hung, strung with jewels, that flashed and glowed as they were passing fast away. There was a delicious aroma, too, in the soft breeze that floated from among the gloomy pines; but to those who went on, side by side, it was as if the morning had become overcast; all was stormy and grey, and life was in future to be one long course of desolation and despair. Nature was at her best, and all was beautiful; but Lucy could not see a ray of hope in the far-off future. Philip Oldroyd could see a gloomy, wasted life—the life of a man who had trusted and believed; but to find that the woman was weak and vain as the rest of her sex.

They had relapsed into silence, and were going on pretty swiftly towards The Firs, but their proceedings did not seem to either to be at all strange. Lucy's destination was, of course, home, and Oldroyd appeared resolved to accompany her; why, he knew not, and it did not trouble him after the first few minutes, seeming quite natural that he should take her to task, and he determined, as a punishment, to see her safely back. She did not deserve it, of that she was sure, but there was something comfortable and satisfactory in being thus silently scolded by one much wiser and stronger than herself.

Oldroyd wished to speak. He had a good deal to say—so he felt, but not a word escaped him till they reached the steep path that ran up to the gates at The Firs, when he drew rein, and made way for Lucy to pass.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," faltered Lucy, looking at him wistfully.

He looked down into her eyes from where he sat, with his very heart ready to leap from his breast towards her; but, as he gazed, he saw again the sunny sandy road with the velvety grass, and golden-bloomed furze on either side; the long, sloping bank with its columnar pines, and the dark background of sombre green, while in front was Lucy, the girl in whom he had so believed, walking with Rolph; and then all was bitterness and cloud once more.

"He was marked," thought Oldroyd; "there was a patch of plaister on his forehead. Hang it all! could he have shot that man?"

The doctor's heart beat fast, for, in a confused fashion, light, the glimmering light upon a reflector when an image plays about the focus of a telescope, he saw difficulties dragging Captain Rolph away from that neighbourhood: a man dying of his wounds, and Lucy Alleyne turning from her idol in utter disgust.

But he shook his head.

"Nothing to me," he cried, with a bitter laugh, as he rode away. "The old story—Nature asserting herself once more. A fine figure, grand muscles, a chest that is deep and round, and the noble bovine front of a bull, and you have the demi-god gentle woman makes her worship. Ah, well, it was time I awakened from a silly dream. Good-bye, little Lucy, good-bye! Next time I come to see your brother, I'll wear the armoured jerkin of common sense. What a weak idiot I have been."

There were no mushrooms that morning for Mrs Alleyne's breakfast; those which Lucy should have brought home lying by the wayside, whereat the slugs rejoiced and had a glorious banquet all to themselves.

Volume Two—Chapter Nine.

The Major Happens to be there.

A poaching affray was too common an affair in the neighbourhood of Brackley to make much stir. Sir John went in for two or three discussions with his keepers, and the rural policeman had been summoned, this worthy feeling sure that he would be able—in his own words—to put his hand upon the parties; but though the officer might have had the ability to put his hand upon the parties, he did not do so, or if he did, he forgot to close it. Then the dog was buried, and as a set off, Sir John had a fire made of the nets and stakes that had been taken from the gang; these, and their spoil of several brace of pheasants and partridges and a few hares, having been left behind in their hurried flight.

So, as it happened, the active and intelligent constable made no discoveries; but Rolph did, and whereas the one would have revelled in the hopes of promotion, and in seeing his name several times in the county paper; the other, when he had made his discovery, said only—and to himself—that it was "doosid awkward," and held his peace.

"I never did see such a girl as you are to read," said Rolph, entering the drawing-room one afternoon, when he had ridden over from Aldershot; "at it again."

He spoke lightly and merrily, and Glynne hastily put aside her book, and rose from her chair.

"Did you want me to go out for a ride, Robert?" she said rather eagerly.

"Well, no; not this afternoon."

The smile Glynne had called up, and which came with an unbidden flush, died out slowly, and a look of calmness, even of relief, dawned upon her countenance as the young man went on.

"Thought you wouldn't mind if we didn't go this afternoon. Looks a bit doubtful, too. Quite fine, now, but the weather does change so rapidly."

"Does it?" said Glynne, looking at him rather wistfully.

"Yes. I think it's the pine woods. High trees. Attract moisture. Don't say it is, dear. I'm not big at that sort of thing, but we do have a deal of rain here."

"Why, papa was complaining the other day about want of water," said Glynne, smiling.

"Ah, that was for his turnips. They want rain. You won't be disappointed?"

"I?—oh, no," said Glynne, quietly.

“Think I’ll do a bit of training this afternoon. I’m not quite up to the mark.”

“Are you always going to train so much, dear?” said Glynne, thoughtfully.

“Always? Eh? Always? Oh, no; of course not; but it’s a man’s duty to get himself up to the very highest pitch of health and strength. But if you’d set your mind upon a ride, we’ll go.”

“I?—oh, no,” said Glynne. “I thought you wished it, dear.”

“That’s all right then,” said Rolph, cheerfully. “By-bye, beauty,” he said, kissing her. “I say, Glynne, ’pon my word, I think you are the most lovely woman I ever saw.”

She smiled at him as he turned at the doorway, nodding back at her, and she remained fixed to the spot as the captain, cigar in mouth, passed directly after, turning to kiss his hand as he saw her dimly through the window.

For Glynne did not run across the room to stand and watch him till he was out of sight, but remained where he had left her, with a couple of dull red spots glowing in her cheeks for a time, and then dying slowly out, leaving her very pale.

Glynne was thinking deeply, and it was evident that her thoughts were giving her pain, for her eyes darkened, then half-closed, and she slowly walked up and down the room a few times, and then returned to her chair, to bend over, rest her head upon her hand, and sit gazing straight before her at the soft carpet, remaining almost motionless for quite half-an-hour, when she sighed deeply, took up her book, and continued reading.

Rolph went right off at once through the park and out across the long meadow and into the fir wood, where, as if led by some feeling of attraction, he made for the spot where the encounter had taken place a week before, and stopped for a few minutes to gaze at the ground, as if he expected to see the traces still there.

“Tchah!” he exclaimed, impatiently; “it was an accident. Guns will go off sometimes.”

He wrenched himself away, walking on amongst the trees rapidly for a time, and then stopped to relight his cigar, whose near end was a good deal gnawed and shortened.

“Tchah!” he ejaculated again. “I won’t think of it. Just as well blame oneself, if a fellow in one’s troop goes down, and breaks his leg in a charge.”

He puffed furiously at his cigar as he went on, and then forgot it again, so that it went out, and he threw it away impatiently, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked as fast as the nature of the ground would permit.

For, evidently with the idea of giving himself a very severe course of training, he kept in the woods where the pathways were rugged and winding and so little frequented that at times the young growth crossed, switching his hat or face, and often having to be beaten back by the hands which he unwillingly withdrew from his pockets.

Rolph probably meant to reach some particular spot before he turned, for twice over he crossed a lane, and instead of taking advantage of the better path afforded, he plunged again into the woods and went on.

At the end of an hour he came upon another lane more solitary and unused than those he had passed. It was a mere track occasionally used by the woodcutters for a timber wagon, and the marks of the broad wheels were here and there visible in the white sand, which as a rule trickled down into all depressions, fine as that in an hour-glass, and hid the marks left by man.

“Rather warm,” muttered Rolph as he was crossing the sandy track; and he was in the act of charging up the bank on the other side, when there was a cheery hail, and as he turned with an angry ejaculation, he became aware of the fact that Sir John was coming along the lane upon one of his ponies, whose tread was unheard in the soft sand.

“Why, hullo, Rob, where are you going?” cried the baronet. “You look like a lost man in a forest.”

“Do I? oh, only having a good breather. Getting a little too much fat. Must keep myself down. Ride very heavy with all my accoutrements.”

“Hah! Yes. You’re a big fellow,” said Sir John, looking at him rather fixedly. “Why didn’t you have the horses out, then, and take Glynne for a ride?”

“Glynne? By Jove, sir, I did propose it, only she had got a book in the drawing-room.”

“Damn the books!” cried Sir John, pettishly. “She reads too much. But, hang it all, Rob, my lad, don’t let her grow into a bookworm because she’s engaged. She’s not half the girl she was before this fixture, as you’d call it, was made.”

“Well, really, I—”

“Yes, yes, I know what you’d say. You do your best. But, hang it all, don’t let her mope, and be always indoors. Plenty of time for that when there are half-a-dozen children in the nursery, eh? Coming back my way?”

“No. Oh, no,” cried Rolph, hastily; “I must finish my walk. I shall take a short cut back. Been for a ride?”

“I? Pooh! I don’t go for rides, my lad. I’ve been to see my sheep on the hills, and I’ve another lot to see. There, good-bye till dinner-time, if you won’t come.”

He touched his pony’s ribs and cantered off. Rolph plunging into the wood, and hastily glancing at his watch as he

hurried on.

“Lovers are different to what they were when I was a young fellow,” said Sir John. “We were a bit chivalrous and attentive then. Pooh! So they are now. There’s no harm in the lad. It isn’t such a bad thing to keep his body in a state of perfection—real perfection of health and strength. Makes a young fellow moral and pure-minded; but I wish he would devote himself more to Glynne. Take her out more; she looks too pale.”

“Hang him! I wish he had been at Jericho,” muttered the subject of Sir John’s thoughts. “Let’s see, I can keep along all the way in the woods now. I sha’n’t meet any one there.”

The prophecy concerning people held good for a quarter of an hour or so, and then, turning rapidly into an open fir glade, Rolph found out that being prophetic does not pay without a long preliminary preparation, and an ingenious consideration of probabilities and the like, for he suddenly came plump upon the major, stooping down, trowel in hand—so suddenly, in fact, that he nearly fell over him, and the two started back, the one with a muttered oath, the other with words of surprise.

“Why, I didn’t expect to find you in this out-of-the-way place,” said the major.

“By Jove, that’s just what I was going to say,” cried Rolph.

“Not raw beef-steaks this time, is it?” said the major with a grim look full of contempt.

“Steaks—raw steaks. I don’t understand you.”

“This is rough woodland; you are not training now, are you?” said the major, carefully placing what looked like a handful of dirty little blackish potatoes in his fishing creel.

“Training? Well, yes, of course I am. Keeping myself up to the mark,” retorted Rolph. “A soldier, in my opinion, ought to be the very perfection of manly strength.”

“Well, yes,” said the major, rubbing the soil off one of his dirty little truffles, and then polishing his bright little steel trowel with a piece of newspaper, “but the men of my time did pretty well with no other training than their military drill.”

“*Autres*—I forget the rest,” said Rolph. “I never was good at French. It means other fellows had other manners in other times, major. Got a good haul of toadstools?”

“No, sir, I have not got a good haul of toadstools to-day; but I have unearthed a few truffles. Should you like a dish for dinner?”

“Thanks, no. Not coming my way, I suppose?”

“No,” said the major. “I think I shall trudge back.”

“Ho!” exclaimed Rolph. “Well, then, I’ll say *ta-ta*, till dinner-time;” and he went off at a good swinging pace.

“Almost looks as if they were watching me,” muttered the young officer, as he trudged on. “Tchah! no! The old boys wouldn’t do that, either of them;” and he turned into one of the thickest portions of the wood.

The major kept on rubbing his little steel trowel till long after it was dry, and then slowly sheathed it, as if it were a sword, before going thoughtfully on hunting up various specimens of the singular plants that he made his study.

“It’s very curious,” he mused, “very. Women are unmistakably enigmas, and I suppose that things must take their course. Bless me! I must want some of his training. It’s very warm.”

He stopped, took out his handkerchief, a genuine Indian bandanna, that he had brought home himself years ago, and now very soft and pleasant to the touch, but decidedly the worse for wear. He wiped his face, took off his hat, and had a good dab at his forehead, and then, after a few minutes’ search round the bole of a huge beech, whose bark was ornamented with patches of lovely cream and grey lichens, he stopped short to look at a great broad buttress-like root, which spread itself in so tempting a way that it suggested a comfortable garden seat, a great favourite of the major’s. Then, with a smile of satisfaction, the old man sat down, shuffled himself about a little, and finally found it so agreeable, with his back resting against the tree, that he fell into a placid state of musing on the various specimens he had collected; from them he began to think of his niece, then of Lucy Alleyne, and then of Rolph, returning to his niece by a natural sequence, and then thinking extremely deeply of nothing.

It was wonderfully quiet out there in the woods. Now and then a bird chirped, and the harsh caw of a rook, softened by distance, was heard. Anon there came a tap on the ground, as if something had fallen from high up in the big tree, and then, after a pause, there was a rustle and swishing about of twigs and leaves, as something bounded from bough to bough, ran lightly along the bigger branches, and finally stopped, gazing with bright, dark eyes at the sleeping intruder. The latter made no sign, so after a while, the squirrel gave its beautiful, bushy tail a few twitches, uttered a low, impatient sound that resembled the chopping of wood on a block, and then scurried down the bole of the tree, picked up something, and ran off.

Soon after a rabbit came cantering among the leaves, sat up, raising it ears stiffly above its head, drooped its fore paws, and stared in turn at the sleeper, till, gaining confidence from his motionless position, it played about, ran round, gave two or three leaps from the ground, and then proceeded to nibble at various succulent herbs that grew just outside the drip from the branches of the beech.

The rabbit disappeared in turn, and after picking up a worm that had slipped out of the ground, consequent upon the rabbit having given a few scratches, in one place, a round-eyed robin flitted to a low, bare twig of the beech, and sat inspecting the major, as if he were one of the children lost in the wood, and it was necessary to calculate how many leaves it would take to cover him before the task was commenced.

The delicious, scented silence of the wood continued for long enough, and then closely following each other, with a peculiarly silent flight, half-a-dozen grey birds came down a green arcade straight for the great beech, where one of them, with vivid blue edges to its wings, all lined with black, and a fierce black pair of moustachios, set up its loose, speckled, warm grey crest, and uttered a most demonically harsh cry of "*schah-tchah-tchah*!" taking flight at once, followed by its companions, giving vent to the same harsh scream in reply, and making the major start from his nap, spring up, and stare about.

"Jays!" he cried. "Bless my soul, I must have been asleep."

He pulled out his watch, glanced at it, muttered something about "a good hour," which really was under the mark, and then, after a glance at his specimens and a re-arrangement of his creel, he started to trudge back to the Hall, but stopped and hesitated.

"Too far that way," he said. "I'll try the road and the common."

He glanced at the tiny pocket compass attached to his watch-chain, and started off once more in a fresh direction, one which he knew would bring him out on the road near Lindham. The path he soon found was one evidently rarely used, and deliciously soft and mossy to his feet, as, refreshed by his nap, he went steadily on, following the windings till he stopped short wonderingly, surprised by eye and ear, for as he went round a sudden turn it was to find himself within a yard or two of a girl seated on the mossy ground, her arms clasping her knees, and her face bent down upon them, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"My good girl," cried the chivalrous major eagerly.

Before he could say more, the woman's head was raised, so that in the glance he obtained he saw that she was young, dark and handsome, in spite of her red and swollen eyes, dishevelled, dark hair, and countenance generally disfigured by a passionate burst of crying.

For a moment the girl seemed about to bound up and run; but she checked the impulse, clasped her knees once more, and hid her face upon them.

"Why, I ought to know your face," said the major. "Mr Rolph's keeper's daughter, if I am not mistaken?"

There was no reply, only a closer hiding of the face, and a shiver.

"Can I do anything for you?" said the major kindly. "Is anything the matter?"

"No. Go away!" cried the girl in low, muffled tones.

"But you are in trouble."

"Go away!" cried the girl fiercely; and this she reiterated so bitterly that the major shrugged his shoulders and moved off a step or two.

"Are you sure I cannot assist you?" said the major, hesitating about leaving the girl in her trouble.

"Go away, I tell you."

"Well then, will you tell me where to find the Lindham road?"

For answer she averted her head from him and pointed in one direction. This he followed, found the road and the open common, coming out close to a cottage to which he directed his steps in search of a cup of water.

The door was half open, and as soon as his steps approached, an old woman's sharp voice exclaimed,—

"Ah, you've come back then, you hussy! Who was that came and called you out, eh?"

"You are making a mistake," said the major quietly. "I came to ask if I could have a glass of water?"

"Oh yes, come in, whoever you are, if you ar'n't afraid to see an ugly old woman lying in bed. I thought it was my grandchild. Who are you?"

"I come from Brackley," said the major, smiling down at the crotchety old thing in the bed.

"Do you? oh, then I know you. Your one of old Sir John Day's boys. Be you the one who went sojering?"

"Yes, I'm the one," said the major, smiling.

"Ah, you've growed since then. My master pointed you out to me one day on your pony. Yes, to be sure, you was curly-headed then. There, you can take some water; it's in the brown pitcher, and yonder's a mug. It was fresh from the well two hours ago. That gal had just fetched it when some one throwed a stone at the door, and she went out to see who threw it, she said. Ah, she don't cheat me, a hussy. She knowed, and I mean to know. It was some chap, that's who it was, some chap—Caleb Kent maybe—and I'm not going to have her come pretending to do for me, and be running after gipsy chaps."

"No, you must take care of the young folks," said the major. "What beautiful water!"

"Yes, my master dug that well himself, down to the stone, and it's beautiful water. Have another mug? That's right. You needn't give me anything for it without you like; but a shilling comes in very useful to get a bit o' tea. I often wish we could grow tea in one's own garden."

"It would be handy," said the major. "There's half-a-crown for you, old lady. It's a shame that you should not have your bit of tea. Good-bye."

"Good-bye to you, and thank you kindly," cried the old woman; "and if you see that slut of a girl just you send her on to me."

"I will," he said. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," shrieked the old woman; and as the major passed out of the gate, the shrill voice came after him, "Mind you send her on if you see her."

The words reached a second pair of ears, those of Judith, who flushed up hot and angry as she found herself once more in the presence of the major.

"You've been telling her about me," she cried fiercely. "It's cowardly; it's cruel."

She stood up before him so flushed and handsome that the major felt as it were the whole of her little story.

"No," he said quietly, "I have not told your grandmother about you; she has been telling me."

With an angry, indignant look the girl swept by him and entered the cottage.

"Poor lass, she is very handsome," said the major to himself, "and it seems as if her bit of life romance is not going so smoothly as it should. Hah! that was a capital drop of water; it gives one life. Crying in the woods, eh—after a signal that the old lady heard. Gipsy lad, eh? Bad sign—bad sign. Ah, well," he added, with a sigh, "I'm getting too old a man to think of love affairs; but, somehow, I often wonder now that I did not marry."

That thought came to him several times as he walked homeward over the boggy common, and rose again more strongly as he came in sight of The Firs and the grim, black mansion on the hillock. Fort Science, as he had jestingly called it, looked at times bright and sunny, and then dull, repulsive and cold.

The major reached home after his very long walk rather out of spirits; and his valet, unasked, fetched him a cup of tea.

Volume Two—Chapter Ten.

Lucy Examines the Examiner.

"I wish you would be more open with me, Moray," said Lucy to her brother.

He was gazing through one of his glasses intently upon some celestial object, for the night was falling fast, and first one and then another star came twinkling out in the cold grey of the north-east.

Alleyne raised his head slowly and looked at his sister's pretty enquiring face for a few moments, and then resumed his task.

"Don't understand you," he said quietly.

"Now, Moray, you must," cried Lucy, pettishly; "you have only one sister, and you ought to tell her everything."

As she spoke, in a playful, childish way, she began tying knots in her brother's long beard, and made an attempt to join a couple of threads behind his head, but without result, the crisp curly hairs being about half-an-inch too short.

Alleyne paid no heed to her playful tricks for a time, and she went on,—

"If I were a man—which, thank goodness, I am not—I'd try to be learned, and wise, and clever, but I'd be manly as well, and strong and active, and able to follow all out-door pursuits."

"Like Captain Rolph," said Alleyne, with a smile, half reproach, half satire.

"No," cried Lucy, emphatically; "he is all animalism. He has all the strength that I like to see, and nothing more. No, the man I should like to be, would combine all that energy with the wisdom of one who thinks, and uses his brains. Captain Rolph, indeed!"

What was meant for a withering, burning look of scorn appeared on Lucy's lips; but it was only pretty and provocative; it would not have scorched a child.

"No, dear, the man I should like to be would be something very different from him. There, I don't care what you say to the contrary, you love Glynne, and I shall tell her so."

"You love your brother too well ever to degrade him in the eyes of your friend, Lucy," said Alleyne, drawing her to

him, and stroking her hair. “Even if—if—”

“There, do say it out, Moray. If you did or do love her. I do wish you wouldn’t be so girlish and weak.”

“Am I girlish and weak?” he said thoughtfully.

“Yes, and dreamy and strange, when you, who are such a big fine-looking fellow, might be all that a woman could love.”

“All that a woman could love?” he said thoughtfully.

“Yes; instead of which you neglect yourself and go shabby and rough, and let your hair grow long. Oh, if I only could make you do what I liked. Come now, confess; you are very fond of Glynne?”

He looked at her dreamily for a while, but did not reply. It was as though his thoughts were busy upon something she had said before, and it was not until Lucy was about to speak that he checked her.

“Yes,” he said, “you are right; I have given up everything to my studies. I have neglected myself, my mother, you, Lucy. What would you say if I were to change?”

“Oh, Moray!” she cried, catching his hands; “and will you?—for Glynne’s sake.”

“Hush!” he cried sternly; and his brows knit, as he looked down angrily in her face. “Lucy, you wish me to be strong; if I am to be, you must never speak like that again. I have been weak, and in my weakness I have listened to your girlish prattle about your friend. Have you forgotten that she is to be—Captain Rolph’s wife?”

“No,” cried Lucy impetuously, “I have not forgotten; I never can forget it; but if she ever is his wife, she will bitterly repent it to the end.”

“Hush!” he exclaimed again, and his eyes grew more stern, and there was a quiver of his lip. “Let there be an end of this.”

“But do you not see that he is unworthy of her—that his tastes are low and contemptible; that he cannot appreciate her in the least, and—and besides, dear, he—he—is not honest and faithful.”

“How do you know this?” cried Alleyne sternly.

Lucy flushed crimson.

“I know it by his ways—by his words,” she said, recovering herself, and speaking with spirit, “I like Glynne; I love her, dear, and it pains me more than I can say, to see her drifting towards such a fate. Why, Moray, see how she has changed of late—see how she has taken to your studies, how she hangs upon every word you say, how—oh, Moray!”

She stopped in affright, for he clutched her arm with a violence that caused her intense pain. His brow was rugged, and an angry glare shot from his eyes, while when he spoke, it was in a low husky voice.

“Lucy,” he said, “once for all, never use such words as these to me again. There, there, little bird, I’m not very angry; but listen to me,” and he drew her to his side in a tender caressing way. “Is this just—is this right? You ask me to be more manly and less of the dreaming student that I have been so long, and you ask me to start upon my new career with a dishonourable act—to try and presume upon the interest your friend has taken in my pursuit to tempt her from her duties to the man who is to be her husband. There, let this be forgotten; but I will do what you wish.”

“You will, Moray?” cried Lucy, who was now sobbing.

“Yes,” he cried, as he hid from himself the motive power that was energising his life. “Yes, I will now be a man. I will show you—the world—that one can be a great student and thinker, and at the same time a man of that world—a gentleman of this present day. The man who calculates the distance of one of the glorious orbs I have made my study, rarely is as others are in manners and discourse—educated in the ordinary pursuits of life—without making himself ridiculous if he mounts a horse—absurd if he has to stand in competition with his peers. Yes, you are right, Lucy, I have been a dreaming recluse; now the dreams shall be put away, and I will awaken into this new life.”

Lucy clapped her hands, and, flinging her arms round her brother kissed him affectionately, and then drew her face back to gaze in his.

“Why, Moray,” she cried proudly, “there isn’t such a man for miles as you would be, if you did as others do.”

He laughed as he kissed her, and then gently put her away.

“There,” he said, “go now. I have something here—a calculation I must finish.”

“And now you are going back to your figures again?” she cried pettishly.

“Yes, for a time,” he replied; “but I will not forget my promise.”

“You will not?” she cried.

“I give you my word,” he said, and kissing him affectionately once again, Lucy left the observatory.

“He has forbidden me to speak,” she said to herself, with a glow of triumph in her eyes, “but it will come about all the

same. He loves Glynne with all his heart, and the love of such a man as he is cannot change. Glynne is beginning, too; and when she quite finds it out, she will never go and swear faith to that miserable Rolph. I am going to wait and let things arrange themselves, as I'm sure they will."

The object of her thoughts was not going on with the astronomical calculation, but pacing the observatory to and fro, with his brow knit, and a feverish energy burning in his brain.

Volume Two—Chapter Eleven.

The Doctor Brings Alleyne down.

About an hour later Oldroyd called; and, as the bell jangled at the gate and Eliza went slowly down, Lucy's face turned crimson, and she ran to the window and listened, to hear the enquiry,—"Is your mistress in?"

That was enough. The whole scene of that particular morning walk came back with a repetition of the agony of mind. She saw Rolph in his ludicrous undress, striding along the sandy road; she heard again his maundering civilities, and she saw, too, the figure of Oldroyd seated upon the miller's pony, passing them, and afterwards blocking the way.

It was he, now, seated upon the same pony; and, without waiting to hear Eliza's answer, Lucy fled to her bedroom and locked herself in, to begin sobbing and crying in the most ridiculous manner.

"No, sir," said Eliza, with a bob; "she've gone to town shopping, but Miss Lucy's in the drawing-room."

Eliza smiled to herself as she said this, giving herself the credit of having managed a splendid little bit of diplomacy, for, according to her code, young gents ought to have opportunities to talk to young ladies whenever there was a chance. She was, however, terribly taken aback by the young doctor's words.

"Thank you, yes, but I don't want to see her,"—words which, had she heard them, would have made Lucy's sobs come more quickly. "Is Mr Alleyne in?"

"Yes, sir, he's in the observatory."

"I'll come in then," said Oldroyd; and he dismounted, and threw the rein over the ring hook in the yard wall.

"If you please, sir," said the maid, who did not like to lose an opportunity now that a medical man was in the house, "I don't think I'm very well."

"Eh, not well?" said Oldroyd, pausing in the hall, "why you appear as rosy and bonny as a girl can look."

"Thankye, sir," said the girl, with a bob; "but I'm dreadful poorly, all the same."

"Why, what's the matter?"

For answer Eliza put her hands behind her, and seemed as if she were indulging in the school-girl trick of what is called "making a face" at the doctor, for she closed her eyes, opened her mouth, wrinkled her brow, and put out a very long red tongue, which quivered and curled up at the point.

"That'll do," said Oldroyd, hiding a smile; and the tongue shot back, Eliza's eyes opened, her mouth closed, and the wrinkles disappeared from her face.

"Will that do, sir?"

"Yes; your tongue's beautifully healthy, your eyes are bright, and your skin moist and cool. Why, what's the matter?"

"Please sir, I'm quite well of a night," said Eliza, with another bob, "but I do have such dreadful dreams."

"Oh!" said Oldroyd, drawing in a long breath, "I see. Did you have a bad dream last night?"

"Oh yes, sir, please. I dreamed as a poacher were going to murder me, and I couldn't run away."

"Let me see; you had supper last night at half-past nine, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bread and Dutch cheese?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, you want a little medicine," said Oldroyd quietly. "I'll send you some."

"And please, sir, how am I to take it?"

"Oh, you'll find that on the bottle, and mind this: you are not to eat any more cheese for supper, but you may have as much butter as you like, and stale bread."

"Thank you, sir. Will you go in, sir?"

"Yes, I'll go up," said Oldroyd, and then to himself, "What humbugs we doctors are; but we are obliged to be. If I told

the girl only to leave off eating cheese she would think she was ill-used, and as likely as not she would get a holiday on purpose to go over to the town and see another man."

He tapped sharply on the door with the handle of his whip, and in response to the loud "Come in," entered, to find Alleyne standing amongst his instruments.

"Ah, Oldroyd," he said, holding out his hand, which the other took, "glad to see you."

"And I'm glad to see you—looking so much better," said Oldroyd. "Why, man, your brain has been working in a new direction; your eyes don't look so dreamy, and the balance is getting right. Come, confess, don't you feel more energetic than you did?"

"Ten times," said Alleyne frankly.

"Then you'll end by being a firm believer in my system—cure without drugs, eh?"

"Indeed I shall," said Alleyne, smiling.

"And to show how consistent I am," said Oldroyd, "I've just promised to send your maid a bottle of medicine. But come, sir, I'm just off among the hills to see a patient. It's a lovely day; only about six miles. Come with me, and I'll leave the pony and walk."

Alleyne shook his head.

"No," he said, "I should be very poor company for you, Oldroyd—yes, I will go," he cried, recollecting himself. "Wait a minute and I'll be back."

"All right," replied the doctor, who amused himself peeping among the various glasses till Alleyne came back in a closely-fitting shooting jacket, for which he had changed the long, loose dressing-gown he had worn.

"That's better," cried Oldroyd, approvingly; "why, Alleyne, you will be worth two of the patients I saw a few months ago if you go on like this."

Alleyne smiled sadly, and took a soft felt hat from its peg; and as he did so, he sent his hand again to his long, wild hair, and thought of his sister's words, the colour coming into his cheeks, as he said in an assumed easy-going manner,—

"It's time I had my hair cut."

"Well, not to put too fine a point upon it, Alleyne, it really is. I like short hair, it is so comfortable on a windy day."

The colour stayed in Alleyne's cheeks, for, in spite of himself, he felt a little nettled that his companion should have noticed this portion of his personal appearance; but he said nothing, and they went out into the yard, where, unfastening the pony, Oldroyd threw the rein over the docile little creature's neck and then tied it to a loop in the saddle, after which the pony followed them like a dog, till they reached its stable, where it was left.

"Now," cried Oldroyd, "what do you say to a good tonic?"

"Do I need one?" said Alleyne, looking at him wistfully.

"Badly. I don't mean physic, man," laughed Oldroyd, "but a strong dose of fresh air off the hills."

Alleyne laughed, and they started off across the boggy heath, avoiding the soft places, and, wherever the ground was firm, striding along at a good brisk pace over the elastic turf, which seemed to communicate its springiness to their limbs, while the sweet breeze sent a fresh light into their eyes.

Over the common and up the hilly lanes, where, as they went more slowly, Oldroyd told the history of his patient up at the common, the result of which was an animated discussion upon the game, laws, and Oldroyd began wondering at the change that had come over his companion. He had taken in a new accession of nervous force, which lent animation to his remarks, and, as he noted all this, Oldroyd began wondering, for he frankly told himself that there must have been other influences at work to make this change.

"Isn't that Captain Rolph?" he said suddenly, as they turned into a long lane that ran through one of the pine woods on the slope of a hill.

"Rolph?" said Alleyne quietly, as he glanced in the direction of a distant horseman, coming towards them. "Yes—no—I cannot say."

"I should say—yes, from his military seat in the saddle," said Oldroyd. "Well, if it be or no, he doesn't mean to meet us. He has gone through the wood."

For, as he spoke, the coming horseman drew rein turned his horse's head, leaped a ditch, and disappeared amongst the pines.

"What does he want up here?" said Oldroyd to himself, and then aloud, "Been having a good 'breather' round the hills," he continued. "Sort of thing you ought to cultivate, Alleyne. Nothing like horse exercise."

"Horses are costly, and the money I should spend upon a horse would be valuable to me for some optical instrument," said Alleyne, speaking cheerfully, though all the while he was slightly excited by the sight of the

horseman they had supposed to be Rolph; but this wore off in a few minutes, and they soon came in sight of the cottages, while before them a tall figure, graceful in appearance, in spite of the homely dress, had suddenly crossed a stile, hurried in the same direction, and turned in at the cottage gate.

"Mademoiselle Judith," said Oldroyd; "a very pretty girl with a very ugly name. Hallo! We are in trouble."

"I don't know what's come to you. Here's your poor father so bad he can't lift hand or foot, and you always running off to Mother Wattley's or picking flowers. Flowers indeed! Better stop and mind your father."

This in very much strident tones from the cottage whose gate they were entering; and then a sudden softening as Oldroyd and Alleyne darkened the doorway, and the nurse dropped a curtsey.

"Didn't know you was so close, sir. I was only saying a word to Judith—oh, she's gone."

"How is Hayle to-day?" said Oldroyd, as the girl stepped out at the back door.

"Well, sir, thank you kindly, I think he's better; he talks stronger like, and he took a basin of hare soup to-day, well, that he did, and it was nice and strong."

"Hare soup, eh?" said Oldroyd, with a queer look at Alleyne.

"Yes, sir, hare soup; he said as how he was sick o' rabbits, and Caleb Kent kindly brought in a fine hare for him, and —"

She stopped short, looking guiltily at the young doctor, and two red spots came in her yellow sunken cheeks.

"You're letting the cat—I mean the hare—out of the bag," said Oldroyd drily. "One of Sir John Day's hares?"

"Oh, sir!" faltered the woman, "it's nothing to him; and I'm only the nurse."

"There, I don't want to know," said Oldroyd. "Can I go up?"

"Oh yes, sir, please," cried the woman, who was only too glad to change the conversation after her lapse, "you'll find him nice and tidy."

"Care to come and see my patient, Alleyne?" said Oldroyd.

"Thanks, yes, I may as well," and he followed the doctor up into the low room, where the truth of the woman's assertions were plainly to be seen. The wounded man, lying upon coarse linen that was exquisitely clean, while the partially covered boards were as white as constant scrubbing could make them.

"Well, Hayle, how are you going on? I've brought a friend of mine to see you."

The man whose eyes and cheeks were terribly sunken, and who looked worn out with his late journey to the very gates of death, from which he was slowly struggling back, raised one big gnarled hand heavily to his forelock, and let it fall again upon the bed.

"Steady, sir, steady. Glad to see you, sir, glad to see him, sir. He's welcome like. Sit you down, sir; sit you down."

Alleyne took the stool that was nearest and sat down watching the man curiously, as Oldroyd examined his bandages, and then asked a few questions.

"You're going on right enough," he said at last. "Capitally."

"But I'm so weak, sir," said the great helpless fellow, piteously. "I'm feeble as a child. I can hardly just hold my hand to my head."

"Well, what can you expect?" said Oldroyd. "You lost nearly every drop of blood in your body, and it will take time to build you up again—to fill you up again," he added, smiling.

"Yes sir, of course, sir; but can't you give me a bottle or two of nothing as will set me to rights? We'll pay you, you know, sir, don't you be afraid o' that."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that," said Oldroyd, smiling, "but I can give you nothing better than I am giving you. The best medicine you can have now is plenty of strong soup, the same as you had this morning."

"Did she tell you I had soup this morning, sir?"

"Yes—hare soup," said Oldroyd meaningly.

"Did that woman say hare soup, sir?"

"Yes, and that you were tired of rabbits. I say, Hayle, I ought to tell Sir John's keepers."

"Eh, but you won't, sir," said the man quietly.

"Why not?"

"'Cause you're too much of a gen'leman, sir, and so would your friend be, or else you wouldn't have brought him.

She needn't have let out about it, though. I'm lying helpless-like here, and they talk and do just as they like. Was my Judith downstairs, sir?"

"Yes," said Oldroyd.

"That's a comfort," said the man, with a sigh of content. "Young, sir, and very pretty," he added apologetically, to Alleyne; "makes me a bit anxious about her, don't you see, being laid-by like. You'll come and see me again soon, doctor?"

"Yes, and I must soon have a bottle or two of port wine for you. I can't ask Sir John Day, can I?"

"No, sir, don't ask he," said the man, with a faint smile. "Let's play as fair as we can. If you say I'm to have some wine, we'll get it; but I'd a deal rayther have a drop of beer."

"I daresay you would, my friend," cried Oldroyd, smiling; "but no beer for a long time to come. Alleyne, would you mind going down now, and sending me up the nurse?"

Alleyne rose, and, going down, sent up the woman to find himself alone with the girl of whom they had been speaking.

Student though he was, the study of woman was one that had never come beneath Alleyne's ken, and he found himself—for perhaps the first time in his life—interested, and wondering how it was that so handsome and attractive a girl could be leading so humble a cottage life as hers.

Judith, too, seemed attracted towards him, and once or twice she opened her lips and was about to speak, but a step overhead, or the movement of a chair, made her shrink away and begin busying herself in arranging chairs or the ornaments upon the chimney-piece, which she dusted and wiped.

"So you've been flower-gathering," said Alleyne, to break a rather awkward silence.

"Yes, sir, and—" but just then Oldroyd was heard speaking at the top of the stairs, and Judith seemed to shrink within herself as he came down.

"Ah, Miss Judith, you there? Well, your father is getting on splendidly. Take care of him. Ready, Alleyne?"

His companion rose, said good-morning to Judith, and stepped out, while Oldroyd obeyed a sign made by the girl, and stayed behind.

"Well," he said, looking at her curiously.

"I'm so anxious about father, sir," she said, in a low voice. "Now that he is getting better, will there be any trouble? I mean about the keepers, and—and"—she faltered—"the police."

"No," said Oldroyd, looking fixedly at the girl, till she coloured warmly beneath his stern gaze, "everything seems to have settled down, and I don't think there is anything to fear for him. Let me speak plainly, my dear. Lookers on see most of the game."

"I—I don't understand you, sir," she said, colouring.

"Then try to. It seems to me that, to use a strong expression, some one has been squared. There are friends at court. Now, take my advice: as soon as father is quite well, take him into your confidence, and persuade him to go quite away. I'm sure it would be better for you both. Good-day."

The doctor nodded and went off after Alleyne, while Judith sat down to bury her face in her hands and sob as if her heart would break.

Volume Two—Chapter Twelve.

Venus more in the Field of View.

Lucy's life about this time was not a happy one. Mrs Alleyne was cold and distant, Moray was growing more silent day by day, taking exercise as a duty, working or walking furiously, as if eager to get the duty done, so as to be able to drown harassing thoughts in his studies; hence he saw little of, and said little to his sister. The major looked stern when he met her, and Lucy's sensitive little bosom heaved when she noticed his distant ways. Sir John, too, appeared abrupt and distant, not so friendly as of old, or else she thought so; and certainly Glynne was not so cordial, seeming to avoid her, and rarely now sending over one of her old affectionate notes imploring her to come to lunch and spend the day.

"Philip Oldroyd always looks at me as if I were a school-girl," Lucy used to cry impetuously when she was alone, "and as if about to scold me for not wanting to learn my lessons. How dare he look at me like that, just as if there was anything between us, and he had a right!"

Then Lucy would have a long cry and take herself to task for speaking of the doctor as *Philip* Oldroyd, and, after a good sob, feel better.

Rolph was the only one of her acquaintances who seemed to be pleasant with her, and his pleasantry she disliked, avoiding him when she went out for a walk, but generally finding him in the way, ready to place himself at her side,

and walk wherever she did.

Lucy planted barbed verbal arrows in the young officer's thick hide, but the only effect of these pungent little attacks was to tickle him. He was not hurt in the slightest degree. In fact he enjoyed it under the impression that Lucy admired him immensely, and was ready to fall at his feet at any time, and declare her love.

"She doesn't know anything," he had mused. "Her sleepy brother noticed nothing, and as for the doctor—curse the doctor, let him mind his own business, or I'll wring his neck. I could," he added thoughtfully, "and I would."

"Bah! it's only a bit of flirtation, and the little thing is so clever and sharp and piquant that she's quite a treat after a course of mushrooms with the major, and pigs and turnips with Sir John. If Alleyne should meet us—well, I met his sister, Glynne's friend, and we were chatting—about Glynne of course. And as to the doctor, well, curse the doctor, as aforesaid. I believe the beast's jealous, and I'll make him worse before I'm done."

In Rolph's musings about Lucy he used to call her "little pickles" and "the sauce." Once he got as far as "Cayenne," a name that pleased him immensely, making up his mind, what little he had, to call her by one of those epithets—some day—when they grew a little more warmly intimate.

On the other hand, when Lucy went out walking, it was with the stern determination to severely snub the captain, pleasant as she told herself it would be to read Philip Oldroyd a good severe lesson, letting him see that she was not neglected; and then for the moment all her promises were forgotten, till she was going home again, when the only consolation she could find for her lapse was that her intentions had been of the most stringent kind; that she could not help meeting the captain, and that she really had tried all she could to avoid him; while there was the satisfaction of knowing that she was offering herself up as a kind of sacrifice upon the altar of duty for her brother's welfare.

"Sooner or later dear Glynne must find out what a wretch that Rolph is, and then I shall be blamed—she'll hate me; but all will be made happy for poor Moray."

The consequence of all this was that poor Lucy about this time felt what an American would term very "mean" and ashamed of herself; mingled with this, too, was a great deal of sentiment. She was going to be a martyr—she supposed that she would die, the fact being that Lucy was very sick—sick at heart, and there was only one doctor in the world who could put her right.

Of course the thoughts turn here to the magnates of Harley and Brook and Grosvenor Street, and of Cavendish Square, but it was none of these. The prescription that would cure Lucy's ailment was of the unwritten kind: it could only be spoken. The doctor to speak it was Philip Oldroyd, and its effect instantaneous, and this Lucy very well knew. But, like all her kind, she had a tremendous antipathy to physic, and, telling herself that she hated the doctor and all his works, she went on suffering in silence like the young lady named Viola, immortalised by one Shakespeare, and grievously sick of the same complaint.

It came like a surprise to Lucy one morning to receive a note from Glynne, written in a playful, half-chiding strain, full of reproach, and charging her with forgetting so old a friend.

"When it's all her fault!" exclaimed Lucy, as she read on, to find Glynne was coming on that afternoon. "But Captain Rolph is sure to come with her, and that will spoil all. I declare I'll go out. No, I won't. I'll stop, and I'll be a martyr again, and stay and talk to him if it will make poor Moray happy, for I don't care what becomes of me now."

Somehow, though, Lucy looked very cheerful that day, her eyes flashing with excitement; and it was evident that she was making plans for putting into execution at the earliest opportunity.

As it happened, Mrs Alleyne announced that she was going over to the town on business, and directly after the early dinner a chaise hired from one of the farmers was brought round, and the dignified lady took her place beside the boy who was to drive.

"Heigho!" sighed Lucy, as she stood watching the gig with its clumsy, ill-groomed horse, and the shock-headed boy who drove, and compared the turnout with the spic-and-span well-ordered vehicles that were in use at Brackley; and then she went down the garden thinking how nice it was to have money, or rather its products, and of how sad it was that Moray's pursuits should always be making such heavy demands upon their income, and never pay anything back.

In spite of the dreariness of the outer walls of the house, the garden at The Firs had its beauties.

It was not without its claims to be called a wilderness still, but it was a pleasant kind of wilderness now, since it had been put in order, for it sloped down as steeply as the scarped side of some fortified town, and from the zigzagged paths a splendid view could be had over the wild common in fine weather, though it was a look-out over desolation in the wintry wet.

For a great change had been wrought in this piece of ground since Moray had delved in it, and bent his back to weed and fill barrows with the accumulated growth of years. There was quite a charm about the place, and the garden seat or two, roughly made out of rustic materials, had been placed in the most tempting of positions, shaded by the old trees that had been planted generations back, but which the sandy soil had kept stunted and dense.

But the place did not charm Lucy; it only made her feel more desolate and low spirited, for turn which way she would, she knew that while the rough laborious work had been done by her brother, Oldroyd's was the brain that had suggested all the improvements, his the hand that had cut back the wild tangle of brambles, that overgrown mass of ivy, placed the chairs and seats in these selected nooks where the best views could be had, and nailed up the clematis and jasmine that the western gales had torn from their hold.

Go where she would, there was something to remind her of Oldroyd, and at last she grew, in spite of her self-command, so excited that she stopped short in dismay.

“I shall make myself ill,” she cried, half aloud; “and if I am ill, mamma will send for Mr Oldroyd; and, oh!”

Lucy actually blushed with anger, and then turned pale with dread, as in imagination she saw herself turned into Philip Oldroyd’s patient, and being ordered to put out her tongue, hold forth her hand that her pulse might be felt, and have him coming to see her once, perhaps twice, every day.

With the customary inconsistency of young ladies in her state, she exclaimed, in an angry tone, full of protestation,—

“Oh, it would be horrible!” and directly after she hurried indoors.

In due time Glynne arrived, and sent the pony carriage back, saying that she would walk home.

It was a long time since she had visited at The Firs, for of late the thought of Moray Alleyne’s name and his observatory had produced a strange shrinking sensation in Glynne’s breast, and it was not until she had mentally accused herself of having behaved very badly to Lucy in neglecting her so much that she had made up her mind to drive over; but now that the girls did meet the greeting between them was very warm, and the embrace in which they indulged long and affectionate.

“Why, you look pale, Glynne, dear,” cried Lucy, forgetting her own troubles, in genuine delight at seeing her old friend as in the days of their great intimacy.

“And you, Lucy, you are quite thin,” retorted Glynne. “You are not ill?”

“Oh, no!” cried Lucy, laughing. “I was never better; but, really, Glynne, you don’t seem quite well.”

Glynne’s reply was as earnest an assurance that she never enjoyed better health than at that present moment; and as she made this assurance she was watching Lucy narrowly, and thinking that, on the strength of the rumours she had heard from time to time, she ought to be full of resentment and dislike for her old friend, while, strange to say, she felt nothing of the kind.

“Mamma will be so sorry that she was away, Glynne,” said Lucy at last, in the regular course of conversation. “She likes you so very much.”

“Does she?” said Glynne, dreamily.

“Oh yes; she talks about you a great deal, but Moray somehow never mentions your name.”

“Indeed!” said Glynne quietly, “why should he?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Lucy, watching her anxiously, and wondering whether she knew how often Captain Rolph had met her out in the lanes, and by the common side. “He seemed to like you so very much, and to take such great interest in you when you used to meet.”

Lucy watched her friend curiously, but Glynne’s countenance did not tell of the thoughts that were busy within her brain.

“Poor fellow!” continued Lucy, “he thinks of scarcely anything but his studies.”

Lucy was very fond of Glynne, she felt all the young girlish enthusiasm of her age for the graceful statuesque maiden; while in her heart of hearts Glynne had often wished she were as bright and light-hearted and merry as Lucy. All the same though, now, excellent friends as they were, there was suspicion between them, and dread, and a curious self-consciousness of guilt that made the situation feel strange; and over and over again Glynne thought it was time to go—that she had better leave, and still she stayed.

“You never say anything to me now about your engagement, dear,” said Lucy at last, and as the words left her lips the guilty colour flushed into her cheeks, and she said to herself, “Oh! how dare I say such a thing?”

“No,” said Glynne, quietly and calmly, opening her great eyes widely and gazing full in those of her friend, but seeing nothing of the present, only trying to read her own life in the future, what time she felt a strange sensation of wonder at her position. “No: I never talk about it to any one,” she said at last; “there is no need.”

“No need?” exclaimed Lucy with a gasp; and she looked quite guilty, as she bent towards Glynne ready to burst into tears, and confess that she was very very sorry for what she had done—that she utterly detested Captain Rolph, and that if she had seemed to encourage him, it was in the interest of her brother and friend.

But Glynne’s calm matter-of-fact manner kept her back, and she sat and stared with her pretty little face expressing puzzledom in every line.

“No; I do not care to talk about it,” said Glynne calmly, “there is no need to discuss that which is settled.”

“Settled, Glynne?”

“Well, inevitable,” said Glynne coldly. “When am I to congratulate you, Lucy?” she added, with a grave smile.

“Is she bantering me?” thought Lucy; and then quickly, “Congratulate me? there is not much likelihood of that, Glynne, dear. Poor girls without portion or position rarely find husbands.”

“Indeed!” said Glynne gravely. “Surely a portion, as you call it, is not necessary for genuine happiness?”

“No, no, of course not, dear,” cried Lucy hastily. “But I know what you mean, and I’ll answer you. No—emphatically no: there is nobody.”

“Nobody?”

“Nobody!” cried Lucy, shaking her head vigorously. “Don’t look at me like that, dear,” she continued, imploringly, for she was most earnest now in her effort to make Glynne believe, if she suspected any flirtation with Rolph, that her old friend was speaking in all sincerity and truth. “If there were anything, dear, I should be unsettled until I had told you.”

She rose quickly, laid her hands upon Glynne’s shoulders, and kissed her forehead, remaining standing by her side.

“I am glad to hear you say so, Lucy,” replied Glynne, gazing frankly in her eyes, “for I was afraid that there was some estrangement springing up between us.”

“Yes,” cried Lucy, “you feel as I have felt. It is because you have not spoken out candidly and freely as you used to speak to me, dear.”

Glynne’s forehead contracted slightly, for she winced a little before the charge, one which recalled a bitter struggle through which she had passed, and the final conquest which she felt that she had gained.

She opened her lips to speak, but no words came, for as often as friendship for Lucy urged confession, shame acted as a bar, and stopped the eager speech that was ready for escape.

No: she felt she could not speak. A cloud had come for a time across her life; but it was now gone, and she was at rest. She could not—she dared not tell Lucy her inmost thoughts, for if she did she knew that she would be condemning herself to a hard fight with a special advocate, one who would gain an easy victory in a cause which she dreaded to own had the deepest sympathy of her heart.

Just at that moment Eliza entered hastily.

“Oh, if you please, Miss, I’m very sorry, but—”

The girl stopped short. She had made up her speech on her way to the room, but had forgotten the presence of the visitor, so she broke down, with her mouth open, feeling exceedingly shamefaced and guilty, for she knew that the simple domestic trouble about which she had come was not one that ought to be blurted forth before company.

“Will you excuse me, dear?” said Lucy, and, crossing to Eliza, she followed that young lady out of the room, to hear the history of a disaster in the cooking department; some ordinary preparation, expressly designed for that most unthankful of partakers, Moray Alleyne, being spoiled.

Hardly had Lucy left her alone, and Glynne drawn a breath of relief at having time given to compose herself, than a shadow crossed the window, there was a quick step outside, and the next moment there was a hand upon the glass door that led out towards the observatory, as Alleyne entered the room.

Volume Two—Chapter Thirteen.

And Retires Behind a Cloud.

“Miss Day! you here?” cried Alleyne, as she rose from her seat, and then as each involuntarily shrank from the other, there was a dead silence in the room—a silence so painful that the thick heavy breathing of the man became perfectly audible, and the rustle of Glynne’s dress, when she drew back, seemed to be loud and strange.

Glynne had fully intended that the next time she encountered Alleyne she would be perfectly calm, and would speak to him with the quietest and most friendly ease. That which had passed was a folly, a blindness that had been a secret in each of their hearts, for granting that which had made its way to hers, she was womanly enough of perception to feel that she had inspired Lucy’s brother with a hopeless passion, one that he was too true and honourable a gentleman ever to declare.

This was Glynne’s belief; and, strong in her faith in self, she had planned to act in the future so that Alleyne should find her Lucy’s cordial friend—a woman who should win his reverence so that she would be for ever sacred in his eyes.

But she had not reckoned upon being thrown with him like this; and, as he stood before her, there came a hot flush of shame to fill her cheeks, her forehead and neck with colour, but only to be succeeded by a freezing sensation of despair and dread, which sent the life-blood coursing back to her very heart, leaving her trembling as if from some sudden chill.

And Alleyne?

For weeks past he had been fighting to school his madness, as he called it—his sacrilegious madness—for he told himself that Glynne should be as sacred to him as if she were already Rolph’s honoured wife, while now, coming suddenly upon her as he had, and seeing the agitation which his presence caused, every good resolution was swept away. He did not see Rolph’s promised wife before him; he did not see the woman whom he had, in his inmost heart,

vowed a hundred times to look upon as the idol of some dream of love, an unsubstantial fancy, whom he could never see; but she who stood there was Glynne Day, the woman who had just taught him what it was to love. For all these years he had been the slave of science. His every thought had been given to the work of his most powerful mistress, and then the slave had revolted. Again and again he had told himself that he had resumed his allegiance, that science was his queen once more, and that he should never again stray from her paths. That he had had his lesson, as men before him; but that he had fought bravely, manfully, and conquered; and now, as soon as he stood in presence of Glynne, his shallow defences were all swept away—he was at her mercy.

As they stood gazing at each other, Alleyne made another effort.

"I will be strong—a man who can master self. I will not give way," he said to himself; and even as he hugged these thoughts it was as if some mocking voice were at his elbow, whispering to him these questions,—

"Was it right that this sweet, pure-minded woman, whose thoughts were every day growing broader and higher, and who had taught him what it really was to love, should become the wife of that thoughtless, brainless creature, whose highest aim was to win the applause of a senseless mob to the neglect of everything that was great and good?

"She loves you—she who was so calm and fancy free, has she not seemed to open—unfold that pure chalice of her heart before you, to fill it to the brim with thoughts of you? Has she not eagerly sought to follow, however distantly, in your steps; read the books you advised; thirsted for the knowledge that dropped from your lips; thrown aside the trivialities of life to take to the solid sciences you love? And why—why?—because she loves you."

Every promise self-made, every energetic determination to be stern in his watch over self was forgotten in these moments; and it was only by a strenuous effort that he mastered himself enough to keep back for the time the flow of words that were thronging to his lips.

As it was, he walked straight to her, and caught her hand in his—a cold, trembling hand, which Glynne felt that she could not draw back. The stern commanding look in his eyes completely mastered her, and for the moment she felt that she was his very slave.

"I must speak with you," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "I cannot talk here; come out beneath the sky, where the air is free and clear, Glynne, I must speak with you now."

She made no reply, but yielded the hand he had caught in his and pressed in his emotion, till it gave her intense pain, and walked by his side as if fascinated. She was very pale now, and her temples throbbed, but no word came to her lips. She could not speak.

Alleyne walked swiftly from the room, threw open the door, and led Glynne past the window, and down one of the sloping paths, towards where a seat had been placed during the past few months, never with the intention of its being occupied by Glynne. While he spoke, and as they were on their way, Lucy came back into the room.

"Pray forgive me, Glynne. I—Oh!" Lucy stopped short, with an ejaculation full of surprise and pleasure. "It *is* coming right!" she exclaimed—"it is coming right! Oh, I must not listen to them. How absurd. I could not hear them if I tried. I ought not to watch them either. But I can't help it. It can't be very wrong. He's my own dear brother, and I'm sure I love Glynne like a sister, and I'm sure I pray that good may come of all this, for it would be madness for her to think of keeping to her engagement with that dreadful—"

Lucy stopped short, with her eyes dilated and fixed. She had heard a sound, and turned sharply to feel as if turned to stone; but long ere this Glynne had been led by Alleyne to the seat, and silence had fallen between them.

The same strange sensation of fascination was upon Glynne. She was terror-stricken, and yet happy; she was ready to turn and flee the moment the influence ceased to hold her there, but meanwhile she felt as if in a dream, and allowed her companion to place her in the seat beneath the clustering ivy, which was one mass of darkening berries, while he stood before her with his hands clasped, his forehead wrinkled, evidently the prey to some fierce emotion.

"He loves me," whispered Glynne's heart, and there was a sweet sensation of joy to thrill her nerves, but only to be broken down the next moment at the call of duty; and she sat motionless, listening as he said, roughly and hoarsely, —

"I never thought to have spoken these word to you, Glynne. I believed that I was master of myself. But they will come —I must tell you. I should not—I feel I should not, but I must—I must. Glynne—forgive me—have pity on me—I love you more than I can say."

The spell was broken as he caught her hands in his. The sense of being fascinated had passed away, leaving Glynne Day in the full possession of her faculties, and the thought of the duty she owed another, as she started to her feet, saying words that came to her lips, not from her heart, but she knew not how they were inspired, as she spoke with all the angry dignity of an outraged woman.

"How dare you?" she exclaimed, in a tone that made him shrink from her. "How dare you speak to me, your sister's friend, like this? It is an insult, Mr Alleyne, and that you know."

"How dare I?" he cried, recovering himself. "An insult? No, no! you do not mean this. Glynne, for pity's sake, do not speak to me such words as these."

"Mr Alleyne, I can but repeat them," she said excitedly, "it is an insult, or you must be mad."

"I thank you," he said, changing his tone of voice, and speaking calmly, evidently by a tremendous effort over himself. "Yes, I must be mad—you here?"

“Yes, I am here,” cried Rolph fiercely, for he had come up behind them unobserved with Lucy, who had vainly tried to stop him, following, looking white, and trembling visibly. “What is the meaning of this? Glynne, why are you here? What has this man been saying?”

There was no reply. Alleyne standing stern and frowning, and Glynne looking wildly from one to the other unable to speak.

“I heard you say something about an insult,” cried Rolph hotly; “has the blackguard dared—”

“Take me back home, Robert,” said Glynne, in a strangely altered voice.

“Then tell me first,” cried Rolph. “How dare he speak to you, what does he mean?”

He took hold of Glynne’s arm, and shook it impatiently as he spoke, but she made no reply, only looked wistfully from Rolph to Alleyne and back.

“Take me home,” she said again.

“Yes, yes, I will; but if this scoundrel has—”

“How dare you call my brother a scoundrel?” cried Lucy, firing up. “You of all persons in the world.”

Rolph turned to her sharply, and she pointed down the path, towards the gate.

“Go!” she said; “go directly, or I shall be tempted to tell Glynne all that I could tell her. Leave our place at once.”

Rolph glared at her for a moment, but turned from her directly, as too insignificant for his notice, and once more he exclaimed,—

“I insist on knowing what this man has said to you, Glynne—”

He did not finish his sentence, but, in the brutality of his health and strength, he looked with such lofty contempt upon the man whom he was calling in his heart “grub,” “bookworm,” that as Alleyne stood there bent and silent, gazing before him, straining every nerve to maintain his composure before Glynne, the struggle seemed too hard.

How mean and contemptible he must look before her, he thought—how degraded; and as he stood there silent and determined not to resent Rolph’s greatest indignity, his teeth were pressed firmly together, and his veins gathered and knotted themselves in his brow.

There was something exceedingly animal in Rolph’s aspect and manner at this time, so much that it was impossible to help comparing him to an angry combative dog. He snuffed and growled audibly; he showed his teeth; and his eyes literally glared as he appeared ready to dash at his enemy, and engage in a fierce struggle in defence of what he looked upon as his just rights.

Had Alleyne made any sign of resistance, Rolph would have called upon his brute force, and struck him; but the idea of resenting Rolph’s violence of word and look did not occur to Alleyne. He had sinned, he felt, socially against Glynne; he had allowed his passion to master him, and he told himself he was receiving but his due.

The painful scene was at last brought to an end, when once more Rolph turned to Glynne, saying angrily,—

“Why don’t you speak? Why don’t you tell me what is wrong?”

He shook her arm violently, and as he spoke Alleyne felt a thrill of passionate anger run through him that this man should dare to act thus, and to address the gentle, graceful woman before him in such a tone. It was maddening, and a prophetic instinct made him imagine the treatment Glynne would receive when she had been this man’s wife for years.

At last Glynne found words, and said hastily,—

“Mr Alleyne made a private communication to me. He said words that he must now regret. That is all. It was a mistake. Let us leave here. Take me to my father—at once.”

Rolph took Glynne’s hand, and drew it beneath his arm, glaring at Alleyne the while like some angry dog; but though Lucy stood there, fierce and excited, and longing to dash into the fray as she looked from Rolph to Glynne and back, her brother did not even raise his eyes. A strange thrill of rage, resentment and despair ran through him, but he could not trust himself to meet Rolph’s eye. He stood with his brow knit, motionless, as if stunned by the incidents of the past few minutes, and no words left his lips till he was alone with Lucy, who threw herself sobbing in his arms.

End of Volume Two.

Volume Three—Chapter One.

Gemini, with Mars in View.

With his grey hair starting out all over his head in a peculiarly fierce way, Major Day was standing and musing just at the edge of the wood, and a few yards from the path, very busy with one of those tortoise-shell framed lenses so

popular with botanists, one of those with its three glasses of various powers, which, when superposed, form a combination of great magnifying strength.

Major Day had come upon a tree whose beautifully smooth bark was dappled with patches of brilliant amethystine fungus, a portion of which he had carefully slipped off with a penknife, for the purpose of examining the peculiarities of its structure under the glass.

The old gentleman was so rapt in his pursuit that he did not notice approaching footsteps till Sir John came close up, making holes in the soft earth with his walking-stick, and talking angrily to himself as he hurried along.

The brothers caught sight of each other almost at the same moment, Sir John stopping short and sticking his cane in the ground, as if to anchor himself, and the major slowly lowering his lens.

“Hullo, Jem, what have you found?” cried Sir John; “the potato disease?”

“No,” replied the major, smiling, “only a very lovely kind of *Tremella*.”

“Oh, have you?” growled Sir John.

“Yes. Would you like to examine it?” said the major.

“Who, I? No thank you, old fellow, I’m busy.”

“Where are you going, Jack?” said the major, as a thought just occurred to him.

“Over yonder—‘The Firs.’”

“To Fort Science, eh?” said the major, smiling; but only to look serious again directly. “Why, Jack, what for? Why are you going?”

“There, there, don’t interfere, Jem; it would not interest you. Precious unpleasant business, I can tell you. I must go, though.”

“What is the matter, Jack?”

“There, there, my dear fellow, what is the use of worrying me about it. Go on hunting for *pezizas*, or whatever you call them. This is a domestic matter, and doesn’t concern you.”

“Yes it does concern me, Jack,” replied the major. “You are going about that communication which Rolph made to us last night after dinner.”

“Well, hang it all, Jem, suppose I am; surely, as Glynne’s father, if I want to see the man who insulted her, and talk to him, there’s no occasion for you to interfere.”

“Jack, you are out of temper,” said the major. “You are going to make a—”

“Fool of myself, eh? There, say it, man, say it,” cried the baronet hastily.

“I shall not say anything of the kind, Jack,” replied the major good-humouredly; “but let’s talk sensibly, old fellow.”

“Yes, of course, sensibly,” cried Sir John sharply. “You are going to turn advocate and speak on that telescopic scoundrel’s behalf. What the dickens do you mean by sticking yourself here when I’m going out on business!”

“Tchut! tchut, Jack! don’t be so confoundedly peppery,” cried the major. “Now, look here, boy, what are you going to do?”

“Going to do? I’m going to horsewhip that fellow, and make him write a humble letter of apology to Rob. If he doesn’t, Rob shall call him out.”

“Now, my dear Jack, don’t talk nonsense!” cried the major.

“Nonsense, sir? It isn’t nonsense. It’s all very fine for you, with your scientific humbug, to be making friends with the star-gazing scoundrel. You fellows always hang together and back each other up. But look here, Jem, I’m not going to be meddled with in this matter. You have interfered enough.”

“I only want you, as a gentleman, to behave like a gentleman to Mr Alleyne.”

“You leave me alone for that, Jem. Insolence! The poor girl came home all of a tremble. She’s quite white this morning, and looks as if she ought to have a doctor to her. It’s your fault too, Jem, ’pon my word it is.”

“My fault, my dear brother,” said the major earnestly; “indeed, no. I would not say a word that should interfere with Glynne’s happiness.”

“But you did, sir; you did when she was first engaged.”

“Only to you, Jack. I did not like the engagement, and I don’t like it; but I have always since I got over the first shock—”

“Hang it, Jem, don’t talk like that, man. Anyone would think that you had been stricken down by some terrible

trouble.”

“It was and has been a terrible trouble to me, Jack,” said the major quietly. “But there, I have done. Don’t be angry with me. Let’s talk about what you are going to do.”

All this time Sir John had been moving slowly in the direction of The Firs, with the major’s hand resting upon his arm.

“There’s no occasion to talk about it that I see; I’m going to have a few words with that Mr Alleyne, and this I conceive it to be my duty to do. There, there’s an end to it.”

“Well, but is it wise?” said the major. “It seems that Mr Alleyne has formed a deep attachment to Glynne.”

“Such insolence! A man in his position!”

“And, carried away by his feelings, he declared his love for her.”

“As if such a man as he has a right to force himself upon a girl in Glynne’s position. It is preposterous.”

“It was in bad taste—a mistake, for a man who knew of Glynne’s engagement to speak as he did. But young men do not always think before they speak, nor old ones neither, Jack.”

“Tchah! nonsense. There, go on and hunt fungi. Be off now, Jem.”

“Be off? No; I’m coming with you as far as The Firs.”

“What! Coming with me?”

“Yes; I shall come and be present at the meeting. I don’t want my brother to forget himself.”

“Jem!”

“There, my dear Jack, it is of no use for you to be cross—I mean what I say. It will not do for you to get into one of your passions.”

“My passions?”

“Yes, your passions. It will cause trouble with Alleyne.”

“A scoundrel!”

“No, he is not a scoundrel, Jack. It will upset his little sister.”

“A confounded jade!” cried Sir John. “If I had known what I know now, the minx should never have entered my doors.”

“Steady, Jack.”

“I am steady, sir. A little heartless flirt, setting her cap at every man she sees. Rolph won’t own to it, but I have it on very good authority that the poor fellow could not stir without that vixen being on the watch for him, and meeting him somewhere.”

The major was silent.

“And all the time she knew that he was engaged to Glynne, and she was professing to be the best of friends to the poor child.”

The major drew his breath very hard.

“There, you’d better be off now, Jem,” cried Sir John. “I’m going just to let that fellow Alleyne have a bit of my mind, and then I shall be better.”

“But Mrs Alleyne is a most estimable lady. Had you not better give the matter up? Let it slide, my dear Jack. These troubles soon die a natural death.”

“I’m going to kill this one, Jem. Then we’ll bury it,” said Sir John grimly. “Now, you be off. I sha’n’t upset Mrs Alleyne. I won’t see her.”

“Nor yet Lucy Alleyne?”

“Not if she keeps out of my way. Ugh! I haven’t patience with the smooth-spoken little minx. It’s horrible: such depravity in one so young.”

The major sighed, and kept tightly hold of his brother’s arm. Two or three times over he had turned rather red in the face, the flush playing to and fro as if an angry storm were arising, but he mastered himself, and held his squadron of angry words well in hand.

“Now, look here, Jem,” said the baronet at last, as they came in sight of The Firs, “I don’t want to be hampered with you. Do go back.”

“My dear Jack, as an old soldier, let me tell you that it is next to impossible to make an advance without being

hampered with baggage and the commissariat. You may call me which you please, but if you are going to attack the people at The Firs, you must have me on your back, so take it as calmly as you can."

Sir John uttered an angry grunt, and was disposed to explode, but, by a strong effort, he got over his fit.

"If you will insist upon having a finger in the pie, come on then," he cried.

"Yes, I'll come on," said the major, "and I know I need say no more to you about being calm and gentlemanly. There, I won't say another syllable."

In fact neither spoke a word till they had climbed up the sandy path and reached the gate at The Firs, where Sir John set the bell clanging loudly, and Eliza hurried down.

Yes; master was at home, and missus and Miss Lucy, the girl hastened to reply.

"I want to see Mr Alleyne," said Sir John sharply, and Eliza showed them into the drawing-room, up and down whose faded carpet Sir John walked, fuming, while the major bent down over a few pretty little water-colour sketches, evidently the work of Lucy at some idle time.

Meanwhile Eliza had hurriedly made a communication to Mrs Alleyne, and terribly alarmed Lucy, who was for preventing Alleyne from meeting the brothers.

"No," said Mrs Alleyne sternly, "he must see them. If he is to blame, let him frankly own it. If the fault be on their side, let them apologise to my son."

The result was that at her earnest prayer Lucy was allowed to run into the observatory to her brother, to prepare him for the visitors.

"Sir John—Major Day," said Alleyne, calmly. "I will come to them. No: let them be shown in here."

Perhaps he felt that he would be stronger on his own ground, surrounded by his instruments, than in the chilly drawing-room, where he knew he was out of place.

"But, Moray, dear, you will not be angry and passionate. You will not quarrel with Sir John."

"Angry?" said Alleyne calmly. "I cannot tell. He might say things to me that will make me angry; but do not be afraid, I shall not quarrel."

"You promise me that, dear?"

"I promise you."

Lucy threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and then ran out of the observatory, into which Sir John and the major were introduced a few minutes later.

Alleyne was right. He was stronger in his own place, for, surrounded as he was by the various strange implements used in his studies, he seemed to Sir John someone far more imposing than the simple dreamy man, whom he had come, as he called it, to put down.

Alleyne came from where he was standing with his hand resting upon some papers, and, bowing formally, he pointed to chairs, for it needed no words to tell that this was no friendly visit.

"I've called, Mr Alleyne," said Sir John, giving his stick a twist, and then a thump down upon the floor, "to ask for some explanation."

The major laid a warning hand upon his arm, for Sir John's voice was increasing in volume. In fact he had been impressed with the fact that his task was not so easy a one as he had imagined, and hence he was glad to have the sound of his own words to help work up the passion necessary to carry out his purpose.

He lowered his tone directly, though, in obedience to his brother's hint, and continued his discourse angrily, but still as a gentleman should; and he afterwards owned to his brother that he forgot all about the horse-whipping he had designed from the moment he entered the room.

"Those telescopes and the quicksilver trough and instruments put it all out of mind, Jem," he afterwards said. "One couldn't thrash a man who looks like a sage; whose every word and tone seems to say that he is your superior."

Sir John finished a sufficiently angry tirade, in which he pointed out that Alleyne had met with gentlemanly courtesy, that he had been treated with every confidence, and made the friend of the family. Miss Day had made a companion of his sister, and nothing had been wanting on his part; while, on the other hand, Alleyne's conduct, Sir John said, had culminated in what was little better than an outrage.

"There, sir," he exclaimed, by way of a finish, with his face very red and with a tremendous thump of his stick upon the floor. "Now, what have you to say?"

Alleyne stood before them deadly pale, and with a fine dew glistening upon his forehead; but there was no look of shame or dread upon his face, which rather bore the aspect of one lately smitten by some severe mental blow from which he had not yet recovered.

He gazed straight before him without meeting the eyes of either of his visitors, as if thinking of what reply he should

find to a question that stung him to the heart. Then his eyes fell, and the wrinkles that formed in his brow made him look, at least, ten years older.

Just then, as Sir John was chafing, and without thoroughly owning to it, wishing that he had let matters rest, the major said softly,—

“I thought I would come over with my brother, Mr Alleyne. I am sorry that this visit was deemed necessary.”

“Hang it all, Jem, don’t take sides with the enemy! And you a soldier, too.”

“I take no sides, John,” replied the major, quietly. “Had we not better end this interview?”

“I am waiting to hear what Mr Alleyne has to say to the father of the lady he insulted,” cried the baronet warmly; and these words acted like a spur to Alleyne, who turned upon him proudly.

“It was no insult, Sir John, to tell her that I loved her,” he said.

“But I say it was, sir, knowing as you did that she was engaged to Captain Rolph. Confound it all, sir, it was positively disgraceful. I am her father, sir, and I demand an apology—a full apology at once.”

Alleyne looked at him for a few moments in silence, and then, with his lips quivering, he spoke in a low deep voice,—

“Tell her, Sir John, that in answer to your demand I humbly ask forgiveness if I have given her pain. I regret my words most bitterly, and that I would they had been unsaid—that I ask her pardon.”

“That is enough, I think,” said Sir John, with a show of importance in his speech, but with a look in his eye that betokened more and more his dissatisfaction with his task.

“Quite,” said the major gravely. “If an apology was necessary, Mr Alleyne has made the *amende honorable*.”

“Exactly,” said Sir John impatiently, as if he were on the magisterial bench, and some poacher had been brought before him. “And now, sir, what am I to say to Captain Rolph?”

The major laid his hand upon his brother’s arm, but he could not check his words, and he turned round directly after, almost startled by the vehemence with which Alleyne spoke, with his keen eyes first upon one brother, then upon the other.

“Tell Captain Rolph, gentlemen, if he wishes for an apology to come and ask it of me himself.”

“Sir,” began Sir John; but the major quickly interposed.

“Mr Alleyne is quite right, John,” he said. “He has apologised to the father of the lady he is accused of insulting; that ought to be sufficient. If Rolph feels aggrieved, it should be his duty to himself apply for redress.”

“But—” began Sir John.

“That will do, my dear John,” said the major firmly. “You have performed the duty you came to fulfil; now let us go. Mr Alleyne, for my part, I am very sorry this has happened—good-day.”

Alleyne bowed, and Sir John, who was feeling beaten, allowed the major to lead him out of the house, the latter feeling quite relieved when they were in the lane, for he had been dreading the coming of Mrs Alleyne or Lucy for the last ten minutes of their visit.

“Hah!” he ejaculated, breathing more freely, “I am glad that is over.”

“But it isn’t over,” cried Sir John, who was exceedingly unsettled in his mind. “Why, Jem, your confounded interference has spoiled the whole affair.”

“Nonsense, Jack, he apologised very handsomely; what more would you have?”

“What more would I have! How am I to face Rob? What am I to say when he asks me what apology the fellow made?”

“My dear Jack,” said the major, “I may be wrong, but I look upon Mr Alleyne as a thorough gentleman.”

“Oh, do you?”

“Yes, my boy, I do; and it is very unseemly, to my way of thinking, for you to be speaking of him as ‘that fellow’ or ‘the fellow.’ If your chosen son-in-law were one half as much of a gentleman in his conduct I should feel a great deal more happy over this match.”

Sir John’s face flushed of a deeper red, and it looked as if fierce words would ensue between the brothers; but as much ire as could dwell in Sir John’s genial spirit had been used up in the encounter with Alleyne, and it required many hours for the reserve to be refilled.

Hence, then, he bore in silence several rather plain remarks uttered by his brother, and walked back to the park, where they encountered Rolph coming rapidly down the long drive.

“Seems in a hurry to hear our news,” said Sir John.

"Pshaw!" ejaculated the major; "he has not seen us. He is training for something or another."

"Nonsense, Jem. How spitefully you speak. He is coming to meet us, I tell you."

Sir John's words did not carry conviction with them, for it was strange that if the captain were coming to meet them, he should be running in a very peculiar manner, with his fists clenched and his eyes bent upon the ground; and, in fact, as he reached something white, which proved to be a pocket handkerchief tied to a cane stuck in the ground, he turned suddenly, and ran off in the opposite direction.

"Humph!" grumbled Sir John; "it does look as if he were having a run."

"Very much," said the major, "five hundred yards run along the carriage drive. What is he training for now?"

"Tchah!" ejaculated Sir John; "don't ask me. Here, hi! Rob! Hang the fellow: is he deaf?"

Rolph seemed to be. He ran, growing more distant every moment, while, as Sir John trudged on, he was evidently fretting and fuming, the more, too, that the major seemed to be in a malicious spirit, and to enjoy worrying him about his choice.

"Poor fellow!" he said; "he is overdone with impatience to hear the result of your visit, and can only keep down his excitement by running hard."

"Look here, Jem, if you want to quarrel, say so, and I'll take another path to the house, for I'm not in the humour to have words."

"I am," said the major, "a good many. I feel as if there is nothing that would agree with me better than a deuced good quarrel with somebody."

"Then hang it, man, why didn't you quarrel with Alleyne—take your niece's part?"

"Alleyne is not a man I could quarrel with," said the major sharply. "There, I'll go and have a few words with Rolph about the cool way in which he takes a quarrel that you look upon as almost vital."

"No, no, for goodness sake don't do anything of the kind," cried Sir John sharply, and he caught his brother by the shoulder. "My dear Jem, don't be absurd."

The major muttered something that was inaudible, and struck right across the park towards the house, by the lawn, while Sir John, feeling out of humour with his brother, with Rolph, and even with himself, went on along the carriage drive to encounter his prospective son-in-law after a few minutes, perspiring and panting after running fifteen hundred yards towards a mile.

"Hullo! back?" panted Rolph.

"Yes," said Sir John abruptly.

"Well, what did he say?"

"I'll tell you after dinner," replied Sir John sourly; "your training must be too important to be left."

"What did he mean?" said Rolph to himself as he stood watching Sir John's retreating form. "Why, the old boy looks as if he had been huffed. Bah! I wish he wouldn't come and stop me when I'm running; he has given me quite a chill."

Volume Three—Chapter Two.

The Stars at the Nadir.

"I will see him again, Mrs Alleyne, and try a little more persuasion; perhaps he will yield."

"But are you sure you are right, Mr Oldroyd? I know my son's constitution so well. Would it be better to go to some specialist?"

"My dear madam, I would advise you directly to persuade him to go up to town and see any of our magnates, but it would be so much money wasted."

"But he seems so ill again!" sighed Mrs Alleyne.

"He does, indeed, but this illness is one of the simplest of ailments. It needs no doctor to tell you what it is. Really, Mrs Alleyne, if you will set maternal anxiety aside for one moment, and look at your son as you would at a stranger, you will see directly what is wrong. It is only an aggravated form of the complaint for which you consulted me before."

"If I could only feel so," sighed Mrs Alleyne.

"Really, madam, you may," replied Oldroyd. "When you first called me in, you know what I prescribed, and how much better he grew. I prescribe the same again. If we set Nature and her simple laws at defiance, she will punish us."

"But he grows worse," sighed Mrs Alleyne. "He devotes himself more and more to his studies, and it is hard work to

get him out of the observatory. He says he has some discovery on the way, and to make that he is turning himself into an old man. Will you go and see him now?”

Oldroyd bowed his acquiescence, and rose to go.

“You had better go alone,” said Mrs Alleyne, “as if you had called in as a friend. He is very sensitive and strange at times, and I should not like him to think that I had sent for you.”

“It would be as well not,” said Oldroyd; and, taking the familiar way, he was crossing the hall, when he came suddenly upon Lucy, who stopped short, turned very red, turned hastily, and hurried through the next door, which closed after her with quite a bang.

Oldroyd’s brow filled with lines, and he drew a long breath as he went on to the door of the observatory, knocked, and, receiving no answer, turned the handle gently and stepped in, closing the door behind him.

He stood for a few minutes in what seemed to be intense darkness; but as his eyes grew more accustomed to the great place, he could see that through the closed shutters a white stream of light came here and there, and on one side there was a very small, closely-shaded lamp, which threw a ring of softened yellow light down upon a sheet of paper covered with figures. Saving these faint traces of light all was gloom and obscurity, through which loomed out in a weirdly, grotesque fashion the great tubes and pedestals and wheels of the various instruments that stood in the place. On one side, too, a bright ray of light shone from a spot near the floor, and, after a moment or two, Oldroyd recalled that there stood the large trough of mercury, glittering like a mirror, and now reflecting a ray of light as if it were a star.

The silence was perfect, not a breath could be heard, and it was some few minutes before Oldroyd made out that his friend was seated on the other side of the table that bore the shaded lamp, his head resting upon his hand, perfectly motionless, but whether asleep or thinking it was impossible to say.

Oldroyd had not seen the astronomer for some weeks. There had been no falling off from the friendly feeling existing between them, but Alleyne had completely secluded himself since the encounter with Rolph in the fir wood, and, for reasons of his own, Oldroyd had refrained from calling, the principal cause being, as he told himself, a desire not to encounter Lucy.

He stood waiting for a short time watching the dimly-seen figure, and half-expecting that it would move and speak; but the minutes sped on, and the dead silence continued till Oldroyd, as he gave another look round the gloomy place, black as night in the early part of the afternoon of a sunny day, could not help saying to himself—“How can a man expect health when he shuts himself up in such a tomb?”

He crossed the place cautiously, and with outstretched hands, lest he should fall over a chair or philosophical instrument; but though he made some little noise, Alleyne did not stir, even when his visitor was close up to the table, looking down upon the head resting upon the dimly-seen hand.

“He must be asleep, worn out with watching,” thought Oldroyd; and he remained silent again for a few minutes, waiting for his friend to move. But Alleyne remained motionless; and now the visitor could see that his hair was rough and untended, and that he was in a loose kind of dressing-gown.

“Alleyne! Alleyne!” said Oldroyd at last, but there was no movement. “Alleyne!” cried Oldroyd, louder now, but without result, and, feeling startled, he caught the shade from the lamp, so that the light might fall upon the heavily-bearded face.

As he did so, Alleyne moved, slowly raising his head, and letting his hand drop till he was gazing full at his visitor.

“Were you asleep?” said Oldroyd uneasily, “or are you ill?”

“Asleep?—ill?” replied Alleyne, in a low, dreamy voice, his eyes blinking uneasily in the light, as he displayed a white and ghastly face to his visitor, one that was startling in its aspect. “No, I am quite well. I was thinking.”

Oldroyd was not ignorant of his friend’s trouble, but he was surprised and shocked at the change that had taken place in so short a time; and laying his hand upon Alleyne’s shoulder, and closely scanning the deeply-lined, ashy face, he said quietly,—

“May I open a shutter or two, and admit the light?”

“Light?—shutter?” said Alleyne dreamily; “is it morning?”

“Yes; glorious sunny morning, man. There, now we can see each other,” cried Oldroyd cheerfully, as he threw back one or two shutters. “Why, Alleyne, how you do stick to the work.”

“Yes—yes,” in a low, dreamy voice. “There is so much to do, and one gets on so slowly.”

“Big problem on, I suppose, as usual, eh?”

“Yes; a difficult problem,” said Alleyne vacantly. “These things take time.”

“Ah, I suppose so,” replied Oldroyd. “How’s the garden getting on now?”

“Garden?—the garden! Oh, yes; I had forgotten. Very well, I think; but I have been too much occupied for the past few weeks—months—weeks to attend to it myself.”

"I suppose so. One has to work hard to do more than one's fellows, eh?"

Alleyne looked at him blankly.

"Yes, one has to work hard," he replied.

"I thought, perhaps, as you have been shut up so much lately, you would come and have a round with me," continued Oldroyd. "It is a splendid day."

Alleyne looked at him dreamily, as if he felt that something of the brightness of the outer day had accompanied his friend into the room, but he merely shook his head.

"Oh, nonsense, man!" cried Oldroyd, speaking with energy. "You work too hard. I am sure you do."

"I am obliged," said Alleyne gravely. "It is the only rest I have."

He seemed to be growing more animated already, and to be fully awakened to the presence of his friend, for his next words possessed more energy, when, in reply to a little more persuasion, he exclaimed,—

"Don't ask me, Oldroyd. I have, I tell you, too much to do."

It seemed useless to press him further, and the doctor felt that it would be unwise, perhaps, to say more, so he took a seat and waited for Alleyne to speak again, apparently like any idler who might have called, but really observant of him all the time.

It was a curious study the manner in which these two men bore their trouble. Each was a student in a different field, and each had sought relief in his own particular subject, with the result that the one had grown old and careworn and neglectful of self in a few weeks, while the other was only more grave and energetic than before.

It may have been that the love of one was deeper than that of the other, though that was doubtful. It rather seemed to be that while Alleyne was cut to the heart by the bitterness of the rebuff that he had met, a certain amount of resentment against one whom he looked upon as a light and trivial flirt had softened Oldroyd's blow.

But, to the latter's surprise, his friend and patient made no further remark. He sat gazing at vacancy for a few moments, and then allowed his head to rest once more upon his hand, as if about to go to sleep; but at the first movement made by Oldroyd he looked up again, and replaced the shade upon his lamp.

"Life is so short," he said, with a grave smile; "time goes so very fast, Oldroyd, I must get on. You will excuse me, I know."

"Yes, I must be getting on as well. I shall call in upon you oftener than I have lately. You will perhaps come out with me again sometimes."

"Out with you! To see your patient the poacher?"

"Oh, no," replied Oldroyd, smiling. "He is quite well again now. I have not been there these two months; but I can soon find an object for a walk."

"A walk? Yes, perhaps. We shall see. Will you close the shutters when you go. I must have darkness for such work as this."

"Yes, I'll close them," said Oldroyd quietly; and crossing the room he did what he had been requested before walking out of the observatory, leaving Alleyne absorbed once more in his thoughts, and too intent to raise his head as his visitor bade him good-day.

By accident or design, Oldroyd encountered Lucy once more in crossing the hall, bowing to her gravely, his salute being received with chilling courtesy by the young lady, who again hurried away, truth to tell, to ascend to her bedroom and cry over the unhappy way in which her life course was being turned.

"Well," said Mrs Alleyne anxiously, as she advanced to meet Oldroyd, "what do you think?"

"Exactly what I thought before I saw your son, madam. He is again setting Nature at defiance and suffering for the sin."

"And what is to be done?"

Oldroyd shook his head as he thought of the medicine that would have cured Alleyne's complaint—a remedy that appeared to be unattainable, watched as it were by a military dragon of the name of Rolph, and all the young doctor could say for the anxious mother's comfort was on leaving,—

"We must wait."

Volume Three—Chapter Three.

A Discovery.

"Lucy, I have something very particular to say to you," said Mrs Alleyne one morning directly after breakfast, over

which she had sat very stern and cold of mien.

"Mamma!" exclaimed Lucy, flushing.

"I desire that you be perfectly frank with me. I insist upon knowing everything at once."

Lucy's pretty face fired up a deeper crimson for a few moments under this examination. Then she grew pale as she rose from her seat and stood confronting her mother.

"I do not think I quite understand you, mamma," she faltered.

"Lucy!"

The thrill of maternal indignation made the old brown silk dress once more give forth a slight electric kind of rustle as this one word was spoken, and Mrs Alleyne's eyes seemed to lance her child.

"A guilty conscience, Lucy, needs no accuser," said Mrs Alleyne, in a bitterly contemptuous tone. "You know perfectly well what I mean."

Lucy glanced half-timidly, half-wonderingly at her mother, but remained silent.

"I will not refuse you my permission to go your daily walks in future, but I must ask you to give me your word that such proceedings as have been reported to me of late shall be at an end."

Lucy opened her lips to speak, but Mrs Alleyne held up her hand.

"If you are going to say that you do not know what I mean, pray hesitate. I refer to your meetings with Captain Rolph."

Lucy's shame and dismay had been swept away by a feeling of resentment now, and, giving her little foot a pettish stamp, she exclaimed,—

"The country side is free to Captain Rolph as well as to me, mamma. I know him from meeting him at the hall. I cannot help it if he speaks to me when I am out."

"But you can help making appointments with him," retorted Mrs Alleyne.

"I never did, mamma. I declare I never did," cried Lucy with spirit.

"But you go in places where he is likely to be seen; and even if he were an eligible suitor for your hand, is this the way a child of mine should behave? Giving open countenance to the wretched tittle-tattle of this out-of-the-way place."

"And pray, who has been talking about me?" cried Lucy angrily.

"The poor people at the cottages—the servants. It is commonly known. I spoke to Mr Oldroyd yesterday."

"And what did he dare to say?" cried Lucy, flaming up.

"He would not say anything, but from his manner it was plain to see that he knew."

"Oh!" sighed Lucy, with an expiration that betokened intense relief.

"I have not yet spoken to Moray, but I feel that it is my duty to tell him all, and to bid him call Captain Rolph to account for what looks to me like a very ungentlemanly pursuit, and one that you must have encouraged."

Lucy wanted to exclaim that she had not encouraged him; but here her conscience interposed, and she remained silent, while Mrs Alleyne went on in her cold, austere manner.

"Far be it from me," she said, "to wish to check any natural impulses of your young life. It might cause a feeling akin to jealousy, but I should not murmur, Lucy, at your forming some attachment. I should even rejoice if Moray were to love and marry some sweet girl. It would work a change in him and drive away the strange morbid fancies which he shows at times. But clandestine proceedings with such an offensive, repellent person as that Captain Rolph I cannot countenance. I'm sure when Moray knows—"

"But Moray must not know, mamma."

"And pray why not, Lucy?"

"Has he not been ill and troubled enough without being made anxious about such a piece of nonsense as this?"

"But I am hearing of it from all sides; and, see here."

Mrs Alleyne handed a letter to her daughter, and Lucy turned it over in her trembling fingers while she stood flushed and indignant before her mother.

"All I can say is," said Mrs Alleyne, "that if you have carried on this wretched flirtation with the betrothed of the girl you called your friend, it is most disgraceful."

“I tell you again, mamma, it is not true,” cried Lucy passionately. “Oh, why will you not believe me!”

“Read that letter,” said Mrs Alleyne sternly.

Lucy’s eyes fell upon the paper, and then she snatched them away, but only to look at it again and read the stereotyped form of anonymous letter from a true friend, asking whether Mrs Alleyne was aware that her daughter was in the habit of meeting Captain Rolph at night, etc., etc., etc.

“How can anyone write such a scandalous untruth!” cried Lucy passionately; “and it is cruel—cruel in the extreme of you, mamma, to think for a moment that it is true.”

“That what is true?” said a deep, grave voice.

Mother and daughter turned quickly to see that Alleyne had come in during their altercation, and he now stretched out his hand for the letter.

Lucy looked up in the white, stern face, almost with a fright, and then shrinkingly, as if he were her judge, placed the letter in his hands, and shrank back to watch his countenance, as he read it slowly through, weighing every word before turning to Mrs Alleyne.

“Did you receive this?” he said.

“Yes, Moray; but I did not mean to let it trouble you, my son.”

“Leave Lucy with me for a few minutes, mother,” said Alleyne sternly.

“But, Moray, my son—”

“I wish it, mother,” he said coldly; and, taking her hand, he was about to lead her to the door, but he altered his mind, and, with old-fashioned courtesy, took her to her chair, after which he deliberately tore up the letter and burned the scraps before turning to his sister.

“Come with me, Lucy,” he said in his deep, grave tones. “I wish to speak with you.”

He held the door open, and Lucy passed out before him, trembling and agitated, as if she were going to her trial, while Alleyne quietly closed each door after them, and followed her into the observatory, where he sat down and held out his hand, looking up at the poor girl with so tender and pitying an aspect that she uttered a sobbing cry, caught his hands in hers, and, throwing herself on her knees at his feet, burst into a passion of weeping.

“Poor little woman,” he said tenderly, as he drew her more and more to him, till her head rested upon his breast, and with one hand he gently stroked the glossy hair. “Come, Lucy, I am not your judge, only your brother: tell me—is that true?”

“No—no—no—no! Moray, it is false as false can be. I have not seen or spoken to Captain Rolph for months.”

“But you did see and speak to him alone, little woman?” he said, looking paler and older and as if every word was a trouble to him to utter.

“Yes, dear, I did, for—for—Oh, Moray, I will—I will speak,” she sobbed, in a passionate burst of tears. “You are so big and kind and good, I will tell you everything.”

“Tell me, then,” he said, patting her head, as if she were his child. “You did love this man?”

“Moray!”

Only that word; but it was so full of scorn, contempt, and reproach also to the questioner, that it carried conviction with it, and, taking Lucy’s face between his hands, Alleyne bent down and kissed her tenderly.

“I am very glad, dear,” he said quietly, “more glad than I dare say to you; but tell me—you used to meet him frequently?”

“Yes, yes, Moray, I did—I did, dear. It was wicked and false of me. I ought not to have done what I did, but—but—oh, Moray—will you forgive me if I tell you all?”

He remained silent for a few moments, gazing sternly down into his sister’s eyes, and then said softly,—

“Yes, Lucy, I will forgive you anything that you have done.”

“I—I—thought it was for the best,” she sobbed—“I thought I should be serving you, Moray, dear.”

“How? serving me?”

“Yes, yes, I knew—I felt all that you felt, and seemed to read all your thoughts, and I wanted—I wanted—oh, Moray, dear, forgive me for causing you pain in what I say, I wanted Glynne to love you as I saw that you loved her.”

His brow knit tightly, and he drew a long and gasping breath, but he controlled himself, and in a low, almost inaudible voice, he whispered,—

“Go on.”

"I was out walking one morning," continued Lucy, "and Captain Rolph met me, and—a woman sees anything so quickly—he began paying me compliments, and flirting, and he seemed so false and careless of Glynne that I thought there would be no harm in encouraging him a little, and letting him think I was impressed, so that Glynne might find out how worthless and common he is, and then send him about his business, Moray, dear. And then when her eyes were opened, she might—might—Oh, Moray, dear, I don't like to say it. But I went on like that, and he used to see me whenever I was out. He watched for me, and he doesn't care a bit for Glynne, and I don't believe he did for me; I never even let him touch my hand, and it's all months ago now, and oh, Moray, Moray, I'm a wicked, wicked girl, and everybody thinks ill of me, even mamma, and I've never been happy since."

"And so you did all this, little woman, for me?"

"Yes, yes, dear, I—I thought I was doing right."

"And I thought that you cared for Oldroyd, Lucy, and—"

"No, no: I hate him," she cried passionately, and her cheeks turned scarlet for the sinful little words.

"And you are very unhappy, my child?" he continued.

"Yes, yes, yes, miserably unhappy, dear. I wish we were thousands of miles away, and all dead and buried, and never—and never likely to see this horrid place again."

"And I have been so rapt in my studies—in myself," he said, colouring slightly, as if ashamed to accept the screen of the slightest subterfuge. "I have neglected you, little Lucy," he went on, tenderly caressing her. "And this wretched anonymous letter, evidently from some spiteful woman, is all false, dear?"

"Every word, Moray. I have not spoken to Captain Rolph since that day he came here, and—"

"Hush! hush!" said Alleyne softly; and his face grew very thin and old. "Think no more about the letter. Wipe your eyes, my child. I'm glad—very glad you do not care for this man."

"I care for that animal!" cried Lucy scornfully. "Oh, Moray, how could you think it of me?"

"Because—"

The words were on Moray Alleyne's lips to say, "Women are such strange creatures!" but he checked himself, and said softly,—"Let it pass, my child. There, there, wipe those poor, wet, red eyes. I'll go and speak to our mother. This vexed her, for she thought you had been a little weak and foolish. She is jealous, dear, and proud and watchful of our every act. It is her great love for us. There, there, kiss me; and go to your room for a while. Everything will be well when you come down again."

"Will it, Moray?" whispered Lucy, nestling more closely to him. "Is my brave, strong, noble brother going to be himself once more?"

She held herself from him so that she might gaze full in his face, but he kept his eyes averted.

"Moray, I am so little and weak," she whispered, "but I have my pride. You must not let a disappointment eat out all the pleasure of your life."

"Hush!" he said softly.

"I will speak," she cried. "Moray, my own brother, you must not break your great true heart because a handsome woman has played with you for a time, and then thrown you aside for a worthless, foolish man."

He fixed his eyes upon her now, and said sadly, as he smiled in her face,—

"Wrong, little sister, wrong. I was mad, and forgot myself. She was promised to another before we had met."

"Yes, Moray, dear, but—"

"Silence! No more," he said sternly. "Never refer to this again."

"Oh, but, Moray, darling, let me—"

"Hush!" he said, laying his finger tenderly, half-playfully, upon her lip, and then removing it to kiss her affectionately. "All that is dead and gone, Lucy. We must not dig up the dry bones of our old sorrows to revive them once again. I have long been promised to a mistress whom I forsook for a time—to whom I was unfaithful. She has forgiven me, dear, and taken me back to her arms. Urania is my heart's love," he continued, smiling, "and I am going to be a faithful spouse. There, there, little sister, go now, and I will make your peace with our mother, or rather ask her to make her peace with you."

He led her to the door and dismissed her with another kiss, after which he stood watching her ascend the stairs, and saw her stop on the landing to kiss her hand to him. Then he sought his mother, with whom he had a serious interview, leaving her at the end of an hour to return to his chair in the observatory, when he took up a pen, as if to write, but only let it fall; and, forgetful of everything but his own sorrow, sat there dreaming, old-looking and strange till the sun went down.

He used to tell himself afterwards that on such nights as these he was tempted by his own peculiar devil who haunted him, pointing out to him his folly, weakness and pride in shutting himself up there, when he had but to go to

Glynne and tell her that she was selling herself to a man who was behaving to her like a scoundrel.

If he treated her like this before marriage, when his feelings towards her should be of the warmest and best, when he was in the spring-tide of his youth, what would his conduct be afterwards, when he had grown tired and careless?

He could not help it. That night Alleyne made his way to the fir mount once more, to go to the very edge and stand beneath the natural east window of the great wind-swept temple, and there lean against one of the ruddy bronze pillars to gaze across at The Hall.

But not to gaze at the lights, for there was one dark spot which he well knew now from Lucy's description. It was where the little wistaria-covered conservatory stood out beside her bedroom window, with the great cable-like stems running up to form a natural rope ladder by which a lover might steal up in the darkness of some soft summer night, as lovers had ere now, but only when willing arms waited them and a soft sweet cooing voice had whispered "Come."

It was as if a voice whispered this to him night after night, and it came to him mockingly as he stood there then.

There was yet time it seemed to say. Glynne would turn to him if she knew of those scenes in the lane, and his rival would be discomfited. Sir John, too, would hail him as a friend and benefactor, receiving him with open arms for saving his daughter from such a fate.

And then Alleyne paced the great dark aisle, avoiding, as if by instinct, the various trunks that stood in his way, while he forced his spirit into a state of calmness and the temptation behind him, for such an act was to him impossible. It had all been a mad dream on his part, and it was not for him to play the part of informer and expose Rolph's falsity to the father of the woman he was to wed.

Volume Three—Chapter Four.

Still in the Clouds.

There was no mistaking the figures, no possibility of erring in judgment upon the meaning of the meeting? and Oldroyd could not help admiring the physical beauty of the group as the lovely background of hedgerow and woodland gave effect to the scene.

The group was composed of two. The poacher's daughter and Rolph, who, with his arms tightly clasping the girl's tall undulating form, had drawn her, apparently by no means unwillingly to his breast, against which she nestled with her hands resting upon his shoulders. The girl's face was half hidden, while Rolph was smiling down upon her, whispering something to which she lent a willing ear, and then, raising her face, she was offering her pouting lips to his, when her half-closed eyes suddenly became widely opened, her whole form rigid, and, thrusting Rolph back, she slipped from his arms, bounded through a gap in the woodland hedge like some wild creature, and disappeared amongst the trees.

Rolph caught sight of the on-coming figure almost at the same moment, the spasmodic start given by Judith warning him that there was something wrong. He seemed for a moment as if about to yield to the more easy way out of his difficulty, and leap into the wood, but he stood his ground, and, as Oldroyd came slowly on, said to him,—

"How do, doctor? Perhaps you've got a light? I want one for my cigar. Thanks."

His coolness was staggering.

"Is it a fact about that girl's father being still at home and out of work?"

"Yes," replied Oldroyd shortly. "He has been at the point of death."

"Has he, though?" said Rolph. "I'm glad of that. One don't like to be imposed upon, and to find that when one has given money in charity that it has been a regular do. Nice day. Good-morning."

"Knows I can't tell tales, damn him! I'm no spy," muttered Oldroyd, as he ambled along on the miller's pony. "I've got quite enough to do to study my own profession, and to try and cure my patients without worrying myself in the slightest degree about other people's business, but I can't help it if they will be holding clandestine meetings just under my noble Roman nose—Go on, Peter."

Peter lifted his head and whisked his tail; then he lowered his head, and kept his end quiescent, as he went on at the old pace, while the young doctor continued musing about the interview that he had been called upon to witness.

"I should not have been out here if old Mother Wattley had not been taken ill once more, for the last time, poor old soul. I believe she'll live to a hundred. I was obliged to come, though. I don't suppose anybody passes along this lane above once a month. I'm the only one who has come down this week, and of course I must be there just when the athlete was having an interview with Judith Hayle. Humph! there are other poachers in the world besides those who go after rabbits, hares and pheasants."

Oldroyd drummed the sides of his little charger as he rode on along a very narrow pathway through the wood that he had to cross to get to old Mrs Wattley's, and he looked anything but a picturesque object as a cavalier, for either he was too big or his steed too small—the latter, a little shaggy, rarely-groomed creature, being more accustomed to drag loads of corn for his master from the town than to act as hack for the principal medical man of the neighbourhood.

Peter pricked up his ears as soon as they were through the wood, and turned off, unguided, to the right, where, on as lonely and deserted a spot as could have been selected, being built in fact upon a spare corner between the road and the next property, stood the cottage inhabited by old Mrs Wattley. Report said that Timothy Wattley had built himself a shed there many years before, this being a sort of common land. The shed had been contrived by the insertion of four fir-poles at the angles, some others being tied across to form a roof, while sides and top were of freshly cut furze.

Time went on, and the windy side of Tim Wattley's shed was coated with mud. More time went by, and a thatched roof appeared. Then came a real brick chimney and a proper door, and so on, and so on, till, in the course of years, the shed grew into quite a respectable cottage, with separate rooms—two—and a real iron fireplace.

Then report said that instead of walking over to church on Sunday mornings, Timothy Wattley used to send his wife, while he idled round his little scrap of a garden, pushing the hedge out a bit more and a bit more with his heavy boot, and all so gradually that the process was unnoticed, while when the old man died after forty years' possession of the place, the patch upon which he had first set up his fir-pole and furze shed had grown into a freehold of an acre and a half, properly hedged in, and of which the widow could not be dispossessed.

It was at the rough little gate of the cottage that Peter the pony stopped short, and began nibbling the most tender shoots of the hedge that he could find. Oldroyd dismounted and secured the reins before going up to the door; tapping, and then going straight in, lowering his head to avoid a blow from the cross-piece that might have been fixed by a dwarf.

"Ah, doctor," came from the large bed which nearly filled up the little room, and on which lay the comfortable-looking, puckered, apple-faced old woman, "you've been a long time coming. If I had been some rich folks up at Brackley or somers-else, you'd have been here long enough ago."

"My dear Mrs Wattley," cried Oldroyd; "nothing of the kind. I took the pony and rode over as soon as I had your message, and I could not have done more if you had been the queen."

"Then it's that dratted boy went and forgot it yesterday morning. Oh, if ever I grow well and strong again, I'll let him know!"

"Did you send a message yesterday morning, then?"

"Ay, did I, when that young dog was going over to the town; and he forgot it, then."

"I only had the message, as I tell you, to-day."

"An' me lying in tarmint all yes'day, and all night listening to the poachers out with their guns. Eh, but it's sorry work wi' them and the keepers, and not one on 'em man enough to leave a hare or a fezzan with a poor old woman who's hidden away many a lot of game for them in her time. Eh, but it's hard work, lying in my aggynies the long night through, and my neighbour coming to set up with me and nuss me, and going off to sleep, and snoring like a bad-ringed hog."

"Ah, then your neighbour sat up with you last night, did she?" said Oldroyd.

"Sat up with me? Snored up with me, and nearly drove me wild, my aggynies was that bad. Then she goes and sends Judy to tidy me up after braxfas, and a nice tidying up it was, with her all agog to get away and meet someone I'll be bound. I dunno who it be, but she's allus courting somers in the wood. Ah, I went courting once, but now it's all aggynies."

"And so you're in great pain, are you, Mrs Wattley?"

"Aggynies I tellee, aggynies."

"Ah, it's rheumatism, old lady, rheumatism."

"There man, as if I didn't know that. Think I've had these aggynies a-coming on at every change of the wind, and not know as it's rheumatiz, why, as I says to Miss Lucy Alling, there, as comes over from the big house a'side the common yonder, and brought me a few bits o' chicking, and sits herself down in that very chair, 'I've had 'em too many years now, my dear, not to know as they're rheumatiz. I'll ask Doctor Oldroyd,' I says, 'to give me some of they old iles as used to be got when I was younger than I am.' Fine things they was for the rheumatiz, but they don't seem to be able to get 'em now."

Oldroyd moved uneasily in his seat, as he learned how lately Lucy had been there, and that she had occupied the very chair he was in. Then he hastily proceeded to cross-examine the poor old woman about her troubles, every answer he received going to prove that, for an old lady over ninety, Mrs Wattley was about as well preserved and healthy a specimen of humanity as it would be possible to find.

"Ah, well," said Oldroyd at last, "I daresay I shall be able to give you a little comfort. You'll have to take some medicine, though."

"Nay, nay, I want the iles, and I want 'em rubbed in," cried the old lady. "Nothing ever did me so much good as they iles; and I know what it all means—waiting three or four days afore I gets the medson to take."

"Now, what is this," said Oldroyd, smiling; "I have brought it with me."

As he spoke he took a bottle from the breast of his coat.

“Then it’s pyson, and you’re going to give it to get rid of me, just a cause you parish doctors won’t take the trouble to attend poor people. I know; you want to get rid of me, you do.”

“How can you talk like that? Have I ever neglected you?”

“Well, p’r’aps not so much as him as was here afore you did. He neglecket me shameful. But you’ve got tired of me, and you want to see me put under ground.”

“What makes you say that?” said Oldroyd, laughing.

“’Cause you want me to take that physic as isn’t proper for me.”

“Why you comical, prejudiced old woman,” he said, “it is the best thing I can give you.”

“Oh, no, it isn’t. I know better,” cried the old lady. “Don’t tell me. I may be ninety, but I a’n’t lived to ninety without knowing as one physic a’n’t good for everything.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” cried Oldroyd, laughing. “You think I haven’t got the right stuff for you.”

“Ah, it’s nothing to laugh at, young man. I’m not a fool. How could you know what was the matter with me before you come, and so bring the stuff? I a’n’t a cow, as only wants one kind of physic all its life.”

“Nay, I did know what was the matter with you,” cried Oldroyd, taking the poor, prejudiced old things hand, to speak kindly and seriously though with a little politic flattery. “The boy came to me and said you were ill, and I immediately, knowing you as I do, said to myself—now with such a constitution as Mrs Wattley has, there can only be one of two things the matter with her; someone has carelessly left a door or window open, and given her cold; or else she has got a touch of rheumatism.”

“And so you brought physic for a cold,” said the old woman sharply.

“No. I knew you would be too careful to let anyone neglect your doors and windows.”

“That I would,” cried the old lady. “I fetched that Judy back with a flea in her ear only the day afore yesterday. I shouted till she came back and shut my door after her—a slut. She thinks of nothing but young men.”

“You see I was right,” continued Oldroyd. “I felt sure it was not cold, and, on looking out, saw that the wind had got round to the east, so I mixed up his prescription, the best thing there is for rheumatism, and came on at once.”

“Is it as good as the iles, young man?”

“Far better; and I’m sure you will find relief.”

“Well, you are right about the wind, for I felt it in my bones as soon as it got round; so, p’r’aps you’re right about the physic. I dunno, though, you’re only a boy, and not likely to know much. It’s a pity they send such young fellows as you to take charge of a parish. But the guardians don’t care a bit. They’d like to see all the old uns go under, the sooner the better. Not as I’m beholden to ’em for aught but a drop o’ physic. I can do without ’em, I daresay, for a good many years yet.”

“To be sure you can,” said Oldroyd, smiling rather gravely, as he looked at the ancient face before him.

“Ay, I can do without ’em; and now, look here, young man, you set me right again. I’ve got four shillings put aside, and I’ll give you that.”

“I daresay I can set you right again without the four shillings,” said Oldroyd, “but not if you begin by calling me a boy.”

“There’s naught to be ashamed of in being a boy,” cried the old woman sharply. “I wish I was a gal now, and could begin all over again.”

“No, there’s nothing to be ashamed of, old lady, but you must trust me, and take my medicine.”

“I won’t—I won’t swallow a drop, if you don’t take your oath it’s quite right, and will do me good, and won’t pyson me.”

For answer Oldroyd rose from his seat, and took a cup from a shelf, into which he poured a portion of the medicine.

“There, it’s no use, young man, I won’t take a dose.”

“Look here,” cried Oldroyd; and putting the cup to his lips, he swallowed all that was at the bottom.

“You’re going to spit it out again as soon as you get outside.”

“Nonsense!” cried Oldroyd, laughing heartily as he poured out a fresh portion. “There, there, take it, and get well again.”

“You’re sure it’s right, and that it won’t hurt me?”

“I’m sure it will comfort you, and correct what is wrong.”

She watched him with her bright old eyes full of suspicion, and ended by taking the cup very doubtfully and swallowing its contents with a childlike shudder.

“There, give me a bit of sugar out of that basin, young man,” she cried emphatically; and, upon her desire being gratified, she settled herself down again in bed with a satisfied sigh.

“Ah, I feel better now,” she said. “I suppose you are not quite so young as you look, are you?”

“Really, Mrs Wattley, I don’t know,” replied Oldroyd, smiling.

“Perhaps you ar’n’t,” she continued looking at him critically. “I daresay you’re clever enough, or else you wouldn’t be here; but we ladies don’t like to have a single man to see us when we are ill. You ought to be married, you know.”

“Do you think so?” said Oldroyd, looking rather conscious, as he thought of his prospects, matrimonially and financially.

“Yes, I do think so,” said the old lady tartly, and in a very dictatorial manner. “Look here, young man, there’s little Miss Lucy, who comes to see me now and then. Marry her, and if you behave yourself, perhaps I’ll leave you my cottage and ground. I sha’n’t leave ’em to Judy, for she don’t deserve ’em a bit.”

“Leave them to your relatives, old lady; and suppose we turn back to the rheumatism,” said Oldroyd, half-amused and half-annoyed by his patient’s remarks.

“Ay, we’ll talk about that by-and-by. I want to talk about you. My rheumatics is better a’ready—that’s done me a mint o’ good, young man, and I shouldn’t mind seeing you married, for it would be a deal better for you, and I daresay I should call you in a bit more oftener. What, are you going?”

“Yes; I have the pony waiting, and I must get back.”

“Humph! I didn’t know as you could afford to keep a pony, young man. Why don’t you walk?—keep you better and stronger—and save your money. Ah, well! you may go then; and mind what I said to you. You may as well have the bit of land and Miss Lucy, but you won’t get it yet, so don’t think it. My father was a hundred and two when he died, and I’m only just past ninety, so don’t expect too much.”

“I will not,” said Oldroyd, smiling at the helpless old creature, and thinking how contentedly she bore her fate of living quite alone by the roadside, and with the nearest cottage far away.

“You’ll come and see me to-morrow?” said the old lady, as the doctor stood at the door. “You’re not so busy that you can’t spare time, so don’t you try to tell me that.”

“No, I shall not be too busy,” replied Oldroyd; “I’ll come.”

“And mind you recollect about her. She would just suit you; she nusses so nicely, and—”

Philip Oldroyd did not hear the end of the speech, for he closed the door, frowning with annoyance; and, mounting his pony, rode slowly back towards home.

“I shall not meet them again, I suppose,” he said to himself, as he neared the spot where he had seen Rolph and Judith on his way to the cottage; and, quite satisfied upon this point, he was riding softly on along the turf by the side of the road when, as he turned a corner, he came suddenly upon two men—the one ruddy and sun-browned, the other pale, close shaven, and sunken of eye.

“Hayle and Captain Rolph,” said the doctor between his teeth, “what does that mean?”

He rode on to pass close by the pair, both of whom looked up, the one to give him a haughty nod of the head, the other to touch his hat and say,—“How do, doctor?”

“The parson is said to know most about the affairs of people in a parish,” thought Oldroyd; “but that will not do. It’s a mistake. We are the knowing ones. Why, I could give quite a history of what is going on around us—if I liked. Your parson kens, as the north-country folk say, a’ aboot their morals, but we doctors are well up in the mental and bodily state too. Now then, who next? Bound to say, if I take the short cut through the firs and along the grass drives, I shall meet the old major toadstool hunting, and possibly Miss Day with him.”

Oldroyd’s ideas ran upon someone else; but he put the thoughts aside, and went on very moodily for a few minutes before his thoughts reverted to their former channel.

“Safe to meet them,” he muttered, with a bitter laugh. “Well, the captain is otherwise engaged to-day. The young lady with the gentleman as I came, and papa and the gentleman as I return. Well—go on Peter—I have enough to do with my own professional affairs, and giving advice gratis on moral matters is not in my department. No mention of them in the pharmacopoeia.”

Peter responded to his rider’s adjuration to go on in his customary way—to wit, he raised his head and whisked his tail, and went on, but without the slightest increase of speed. Oldroyd turned him out of the lane, through one of the game preserves, and he rode thoughtfully on for a couple of miles, with the peculiar smell of the bracken pervading the air as Peter crushed the stems beneath his hoofs. At times, as he rode through some opening where the sun beat down heavily, there was the pungent, lemony, resinous odour of the pines wafted to his nostrils, and once it was so strong that the doctor pulled up to inhale it.

“What a lunatic I was,” he thought, “to come and settle down in a place like this. Nature wants no doctors here; she does all the work herself—except the accidents,” he added laughingly. “Poor old Hayle yonder; I don’t think she would have made so good a job of him.”

He rode on again through the hot afternoon sunshine, going more and more out of his way; but he did not see the major with his creel, neither did the lady attendant upon some of his walks make his sore heart begin beating.

He had just come to the conclusion that he had ridden all this way round for nothing, when, as he wound round a mossy carpeted drive, he saw in the distance, framed in with green against a background of sky, a couple of figures, of which one, a lady, was holding out something to the other, a gipsy-looking fellow, which he took and thrust into his pocket, becoming conscious at the same moment of the doctor’s approach.

“Looks like my young poaching friend, Caleb Kent,” thought Oldroyd, as the man touched his cap obsequiously and plunged at once in through the thick undergrowth and was gone, while the lady drew herself up and came toward him.

Oldroyd’s acquaintanceship was of the most distant kind, and he merely raised his hat as he passed, noting that the face, which looked haughtily in his, was flushed and hot as his bow was returned.

“Why, that young scoundrel has been begging. Met her alone out here in this wood,” thought Oldroyd, when he had ridden on for a few yards; and, on the impulse of the moment, he dragged the unwilling pony’s head round, and, to the little animal’s astonishment, struck his heels into its ribs and forced it to canter after the lady they had passed.

She did not hear the approach for a few minutes, but was walking on hurriedly with her head bent down, till, the soft beat of the pony’s hoofs close behind rousing her, she turned suddenly a wild and startled face.

“I beg your pardon—Miss Emlin of The Warren, I believe?” said Oldroyd, raising his hat again.

There was a distant bow.

“You will excuse my interference,” he continued; “but these woods are lonely, and I could not help seeing that man had accosted you.”

Marjorie’s face was like wax now in its pallor.

“I thought so,” said Oldroyd to himself. Then aloud,—“He was begging, and frightened you?”

“The man asked me for money, and I gave him some. No; he did not frighten me.”

A flush now came in the girl’s face, and she said eagerly,—

“Did you pass a gentleman—my cousin, Captain Rolph—in the woods?”

“Yes; about a couple of miles away. I beg pardon for my interference,” there was an exchange of bows; and each passed on.

“What a fool I am!” muttered Oldroyd. “Like a man. Jumps at the chance of playing the knight-errant. Only begged a copper or two of her; a loafing scoundrel. Phew!” he whistled, “my cousin! I’m afraid that my cousin is going to be pulled up sharp; and quite right too. Looks like a piece of jealousy there. And the fellow’s engaged. Well, it’s not my business. Go on, Peter, old man.”

Peter wagged his tail, but still there was no increase of speed; for, if ponies can think, Peter was cogitating on the fact that if he made haste home there would be time for him to go with Sinkins, the carpenter, to fetch a piece of oak from the wood; and he felt that he had done enough for one day.

Volume Three—Chapter Five.

Perturbations.

Had Oldroyd been a little sooner, he would have formed a different opinion about Caleb Kent and his appealing to Marjorie for alms.

For that day, Marjorie had come down dressed for a walk—a saunter, to find a few botanical specimens, she told Mrs Rolph, who smiled and was quite content, so long as her niece settled down and made no trouble of the loss of her lover.

Marjorie did saunter as long as she was in sight, and then went off through the fir woods rapidly, her eyes losing their soft, spaniel-like, far-away look which she so often turned upon Rolph, and growing fierce and determined as she stepped out, full of the object she had in view.

For she had good reason to believe that Rolph had gone in the direction she was taking, and the desire was strong within her to come upon him suddenly, and at a time when she felt she would succeed in getting the whip-hand of him, and holding him at her mercy.

She had been walking nearly an hour fairly fast; but now, as if guided by instinct, she turned into a green, mossy path, one of the many cut among the stubbs for the sportsmen’s benefit, whether hunting or shooting their purpose was the same, and advancing now more cautiously she was looking sharply from side to side when the hazels were

suddenly parted, and, with his white teeth glistening in the sunshine, and his dark eyes flashing, there stood Caleb Kent not two yards away; then not one, as he caught her wrist in his hot, brown hands, and, with a laugh, placed his face close to hers.

“You’ve been a long time coming,” he said, “but you promised, and I’ve come.”

For a few moments Marjorie stood gazing wildly at the man before her, with her brain reeling, and a strange sickening sensation attacking her, which rendered her speechless. Her lips moved, but no sound came, while the words which had passed between them thundered in her ears like the echoes of all that had been said.

Then a re-action took place, and, drawing herself up, she said quietly,—

“Well, what do you want—money?”

“No; I can get money for myself,” he said, with a laugh. “I’ve come back to you.”

She shrank from him now with a look of disgust, and shivered as she thought of the past, but recovering herself she turned upon him.

“How dare you!” she cried, with a look intended to keep him at bay.

Caleb laughed.

“Well, you are a strange girl,” he said; “hot one day, cold the next. But I don’t care; say what you like, dear.”

Marjorie started as if she had been stung at this last word, for, more than anything which had passed, it made her feel how she had fallen.

“You want to play with me and hold me off; and you are going to say you didn’t mean it.”

With an action quick as that of some wild creature, he caught her wrist again, and looked at her mockingly, but with a flashing in his eyes which made her shiver and glance quickly round.

“No,” he said, with a laugh; “no one can see. But, look here,” he whispered earnestly, “I’ve been thinking about you ever since. You don’t care for them here, and their money and fine clothes. Come away along with me—it’ll be free like—right away from everyone who knows you, and I’ll be real good to you, dear, ’pon my soul I will.”

“Loose my wrist! How dare you!” cried Marjorie; and in her alarm she wondered now that she could have been so mad with one whom she thought she could sway with a look, but who was beginning to sway her.

“How dare I? because you like me to hold you,” he whispered. “Do you think I’m a fool? Look here; you used to love him, but you hate him now, and you love me. Well, I used to love Hayle’s girl; I was mad after her, but since I’ve seen you I don’t care a straw for her, not even if I never see her again.”

“Will you loose my wrist?” cried Marjorie, in a low, angry voice.

“No—not till I like.”

“Am I to call for assistance and have you punished, sir?”

“If you like,” he said mockingly. “There, that will do. What’s the good of all this nonsense? Don’t play with me. I say you’re a lady—a beautiful lady—and I never saw a woman I liked half so well. Look here; come along with me. I’ll be like your dog, and do everything you ask me. I’ll kill him if you tell me, and Judith Hayle, too. There, you wouldn’t find one of your sort ready like that.”

Frantic with dread, Marjorie looked wildly round as she strove to free her wrist.

“Why, what a struggling little thing you are,” he whispered. “Can’t you see that I like you, and wouldn’t hurt you for the world? What’s the good of holding off like this? No one can see you; there isn’t anybody within a couple of miles of where we are, and you promised me another kiss.”

“Let me go,” cried Marjorie hoarsely. “I did not mean it. I was half wild when I said that to you. Look here; take my watch and my rings, and I have some money here. I did not mean all that. Let go or I will call for help.”

“Well,” he said coolly, “call for help. I’m not afraid; you are, and you won’t call—I know better than that. Look here, you know what you said.”

She looked sharply round and shuddered.

“Yes,” she said huskily, “but I was mad and foolish then. It was in an angry fit. I didn’t mean it.”

“Didn’t you?” he said, looking at her with a cunning smile. “How easily you people can lie. You did mean it, and you made me a promise, and you’re going to keep it.”

“No, no,” she cried wildly.

“You are,” he said, “and I’m going to be paid. I’m only waiting for my chance.”

“I tell you no,” cried Marjorie. “I did not mean it.”

"You meant it then, and you mean it now, and I'm going to keep my word when I can. I'm not a fool. Do you think I don't know why it all is? Not so blind as all that, my dear. It's plucky of you, and I like you the better for it, and some day you'll tell me how glad you are that—pst! someone coming," he whispered, completely altering his manner and tone bowing obsequiously, and whining out an appeal to the dear kind lady to bestow a trifle on a poor young man out of work.

That night Marjorie lay awake thinking, half-repentant, half-glad; the latter feeling increasing till there was a glow of triumph in her eyes as she seemed to be gazing down upon Glynne, cast off by her cousin, her enemy and rival no longer, but an unhappy despairing object humbled at her feet.

Volume Three—Chapter Six.

Facing the Unknown.

The time was drawing nigh, and Sir John and his brother were sitting over their wine, when the former began upon matters connected with the wedding. Rolph had only left them that day, and was to return the next morning to meet them at the church, in company with a brother officer, ready to act as his best man. Then the wedding over, the happy pair were to start for the Continent; and Brackley would be left to the brothers, both of whom looked blank and dispirited as they asked themselves what they were to do when the light of the place had gone.

And that was how the conversation first began. Sir John sighing, and saying that he should miss Glynne very much indeed.

"Of course, I give lots of attention to my pigs and sheep, and the rest of them," he said dolefully; "but Brackley won't be the same, Jem, old fellow, when she's gone. I shall miss her dreadfully."

"Yes," said the major, raising his claret to his lips, and setting the glass down again untouched, "we shall miss her dreadfully."

Then, after a long conversation, Sir John had touched upon the subject of his brother's treatment of the bridegroom, and his conduct at the wedding.

They sat sipping their claret for some time, Sir John being very silent; and at last the long pause was followed by the major saying,—

"Well, don't let's leave our darling. I suppose I may say 'our darling,' Jack?"

"My dear brother!" exclaimed Sir John, grasping his hand.

"I say then, don't let's leave our darling alone any longer. We shall have plenty of time to sip our wine of nights when we are alone, Jack. Let's go and let her pour out tea for us for what will pretty well be the last time."

"Hah! yes!" said Sir John, rising slowly, "for pretty well the last time, Jem, and—and—"

Sir John stopped short, for his voice broke, and the nerves in his fine florid face quivered.

The major laid one hand upon his brother's shoulder in good old schoolboy fashion, caught his right hand in his own, and remained gripping it warmly—a strong, firm, sympathetic grip, full of brotherly feeling; but he spoke no word.

Sir John was the first to break the silence. "Thank you, Jem," he said, "thank you, Jem. It's very weak and childish of me at my time of life, but it touches me home; it touches me the harder, too, that she is my only child; and—and—and, Jem, my lad, don't jump upon me—I must own it to you now, and I will—I feel that I am making a great mistake."

"Thank God!" cried the major fervently.

"Jem!"

"I say, thank God," cried the major, "that you see the truth at last, Jack, before it is too late."

"No, no, Jem," said Sir John sadly; "I have not seen it before it is too late. It is too late. We cannot alter it now. I am in honour bound. I cannot interfere."

"Hang honour!" cried the major excitedly. "I'd give up all the honour in the world sooner than that girl's life should be blighted. Jack, Jack, my dear brother, we are old men now. We've had our fling of life. Let's think of our darling's happiness, and not of what the world thinks of us."

"Too late, Jem! too late!" said Sir John.

"I tell you it is not too late, Jack. Hang it man, I'll do anything. I'll challenge and shoot this confounded Rolph sooner than he shall have her."

"Don't talk nonsense, Jem—don't talk nonsense. I've sounded Glynne well, and it is too late."

"What! Do you mean to tell me that she would insist upon having him if you forbade it?" cried the major.

"She thinks that she is bound to him, and that it is impossible to retract, even if she wished."

"But doesn't she wish to run back from this wretched business?"

"No, she does not wish to run back from her promise."

"I don't believe it," cried the major, over whose white forehead the veins stood up like a pink network.

"It is true all the same," said Sir John sadly. "If she had but expressed the slightest wish, I'd have seen Rolph, even at this eleventh hour, and, as he would have called it, the match should be off."

"I will go and see her myself, Jack. I don't want to insult you, my dear brother, but she does look up to me and my opinion a little. Let me try and win her to my way of thinking, and let's get this wretched business stopped. She would never be happy, I am sure."

"Go and see her, Jem, by all means."

"You give me your leave?"

"I do."

The major uttered a sigh of relief, and smoothing his beard, and with his eyes beaming, he walked straight into the drawing-room, where Glynne was seated, looking very pale and beautiful, with her head resting upon her soft white hand, gazing full at the lamp. Marjorie and three lady friends were in the drawing-room, but they had evidently, out of respect for the young girl's saddened state, retired to the end of the room, where they were engaged in conversation in a low tone of voice.

Glynne did not stir as the major entered, for she was deep in thought; but she turned to him with a sweet, grave smile as he laid his hand upon hers.

"Will you come into the conservatory, my dear?" he said gently. "I want to talk to you."

She rose without a word, and laid her hand upon his arm, letting her uncle lead her into the great, softly-lit corridor of flowers; while, as the major realised the difficulties of the task he had before him, he grew silent, so that they had walked nearly to the end before he spoke.

"My dear child," he said, in a husky, hesitating voice, for, though he had often dashed with his men at the charge full into the dangers of the battlefield, he felt a peculiar sensation of nervous dread now at having to broach the business upon which he had come.

"My dear child," he began again.

"My dear uncle," she answered, tenderly.

"You know my feelings respecting your approaching marriage?"

She looked up at him sadly, and the tears stood in her eyes.

"Yes, uncle, dear, I know," she replied slowly.

"Well, your father has now come over to my side, and he gives me his consent to see you, to win from you—"

"Hush, uncle—dear uncle," said Glynne softly. "I know you love me—dearly, as if I were your own child."

"I do, I do indeed," he cried.

"Then pray spare me all these painful words."

"Plain words to save you pain in the future," he said tenderly.

"It is too late, uncle. I told my father that. It is too late."

"No, no, my darling, it is not too late," cried the major excitedly. "You are afraid of the talk and scandal. Bah! let them talk and scandalise till they get tired. What is it to us? Look here; we'll start for the Continent to-morrow, and stay away till this business is forgotten. A nine days' wonder, my child. There, there, you consent. By George, we'll be off to-night—*now*. I'll go and order the carriage at once. It will be round by the time you have got a few things together in a bag."

"Stop, uncle, dear uncle."

"No, no; your father will go with us, too."

Glynne shook her head, and, putting one arm round his neck, kissed the old man fondly.

"Hush, dear," she said; "you forget. I cannot—I will not hear another word. I am determined that I will hold to my promise."

"But, Glynne, my child," cried the major appealingly.

"It is too late—it is too late," responded Glynne. "And now, uncle, if you love me, spare me further suffering."

He waited for a few minutes, and resumed the attack, but without effect; and just as he was gazing despairingly in his niece's face Sir John entered, looking inquiringly at both, when Glynne went smilingly to his side at once, and laid her hands upon his breast.

"Dear father," she said tenderly, "let my last few hours at home be undisturbed by pain."

"My darling," said Sir John softly, "you are mistress here. Jem, old fellow, you have spoken."

"Delivered my charge, Jack, and failed. I retire broken from the field."

Glynne held out her hand to him, and when he took it she leaned towards him to kiss his lips.

About an hour later Mason the maid learned a secret which she afterwards confided to her intimates in the servants' hall.

Mason went up to Glynne's bedroom to carry there a lately-arrived packet containing a portion of her mistress's *trousseau*.

She had hardly entered the room when she noted that the door connecting it with Glynne's little study was ajar, and a sigh taught her that it was occupied.

"I'll take it in, and she'll open it at once," thought Mason, who was burning with curiosity to see the contents of the package; and, going lightly across to the door, she pressed it open, and then stood petrified at the scene before her.

For Glynne was kneeling before a chair with her face buried in her hands sobbing violently, while in piteous tones she breathed out the agony of her heart in the wild appeal,—

"Heaven help me and give me strength! It is more than I can bear."

Volume Three—Chapter Seven.

A Problem of Conjunction.

Want of exercise and incessant study had placed their effects on Alleyne. The greyness was showing in streaks in his hair, and the lines seemed deeper in his forehead, as Lucy came gently into the observatory where her brother was apparently intent upon some tremendous problem.

Lucy, too, looked thinner than of old. There was a careworn aspect in her face, and her eyes told tales of tears more often shed than is the custom with young ladies as a rule.

As she entered the observatory and closed the door, she stood gazing at her brother with her hands clasped, thinking of the money that had been expended upon his scientific pursuits, keeping them all exceedingly poor, and, for result, helping to make Alleyne a worn and old-looking man.

What a thing it seemed, she thought; how changed their home and all their simple life had become, and all through their proximity to Brackley.

"I wish we had gone away from here months upon months ago," she said to herself impatiently. "We might have been so happy anywhere else. And I thought, too, that everything was going to be so pleasant, with Glynne for my companion, only people seemed to have leagued themselves against us; and I'm sure there's no harm in either poor Moray or myself, only we couldn't help liking someone else. Heigho!"

"Who's that?" cried Alleyne, starting, for Lucy's sigh had been uttered aloud. "Oh, you, Lucy," he said, dropping his eyes again.

"I've only come to see you, dear, for a little while, Moray, darling, how late you were last night."

He started wildly, caught the hands she had laid caressingly upon his shoulders, and stared in her face.

"How did you know?" he cried hoarsely.

"Don't, dear; you hurt me."

He relaxed his grasp, and she felt him trembling.

"Don't be angry with me, Moray," she said, bursting into tears. "It was only because I loved you and suffered with you. I can't bear to see my darling brother like this."

"You—you were watching me?" he stammered.

"Don't call it by that unkind title, dear," she said. "I cannot bear it. I know how you grieve, and I have often sat at my window and seen you go out of a night, and waited till you came back. One night—don't be angry with me, Moray," she cried, throwing her arms about his neck—"I followed you to the Fir Mount, to see you were up there watching Glynne's window."

"Lucy! Last night?"

"No, no, dear," she cried in alarm. "Don't—don't be so fierce with me. It was only once."

He uttered a low, hoarse sigh as if of relief.

"It was one night when you had quite frightened me by being so despondent. I was afraid you meant to do yourself some mischief, and I stole out to see where you went. As soon as I understood why you had gone there, I came back."

"Was it so strange a thing for an astronomer to go out to a high place where he could see some planet rise?"

Lucy was silent for a few moments.

"No, dear," she said at last in a whisper, "nor for a man who loves to go and watch the house that holds all that is dear to him in life. But, Moray, dear, what is the matter with your hand?"

"Nothing," he said, hastily thrusting his bandaged hand into his pocket. "Only a cut—from a knife—nothing more. There—that will do. Why did you come?"

"It is the twenty-fifth, Moray. I thought I'd come and remind you."

"Twenty-fifth," he said hurriedly; "twenty-fifth?"

"Yes, dear, Glynne Day's wedding."

She regretted speaking the next instant, as she saw her brother's head go down upon his hand; but he looked up at her directly, and, to her surprise, with a peculiar smile.

"Thank you for reminding me, dear," he said. "I hope she will be very happy."

"I don't," cried Lucy petulantly, "and I'm sure she won't be. Oh, how could she be so foolish as to engage herself to such a man as that!"

Alleyne did not reply, but sat gazing before him at a broad band of sunlight which cut right across the portion of the great room where he was seated. It seemed to him that Glynne was the bright bar of light that had been thrown across the dark, shadowy life that he had led; and to make the idea more real, the passing of a cloud cut the ray suddenly, and the great, chill room, with its uncouth instruments, its piles of scientific lumber, and its dust, was gloomy once again.

The bright ray had come and gone. It was but a memory now, and Alleyne uttered a sigh of relief, for he told himself that the past was dead, and he must divide it from his present existence by a broad, well-marked line.

"Have you nothing to say, Moray?" whispered Lucy at last. "Do you not understand? Are you not going to make one more effort to make her change her purpose."

"My dear Lucy!" he said tenderly.

That was all, but he took her in his arms and kissed her, as if she were still the little child whom he used to pet and play with years before.

As soon as he released her she stood looking at him with her brows knit for a few moments, and then said,—

"Moray, should you mind very much if I were to go?"

"Go?" he said dreamily. "Go?"

"Yes; to see Glynne married."

She saw a twitching of the nerves of his face as he realised her meaning, and was regretting her question, when he said softly,—

"No, my dear, no. Go if you wish it. Yes, go."

He turned from her and resumed his work, making figures rapidly on a sheet of paper before him, and as he evidently wished to be alone, she stole softly out of the room.

Half-an-hour later Alleyne, who had left his work as soon as Lucy quitted him, and gone to a window which overlooked the road, saw his sister, very plainly dressed in white, go along the lane towards Brackley Church.

He did not stir, but stood watching till the white dress disappeared among the tall columnar fir trees.

Then came another figure going in the same direction, and in his moody, despairing state, Alleyne hardly noted for a few moments who it was, till the figure stopped short to turn and talk to a tall, gaunt-looking man, whom Alleyne recognised as Hayle, the man he had seen when Oldroyd was attending him, and it was the latter now speaking.

After a few minutes conversation, Alleyne saw Hayle shake his head, and go in one direction, while Oldroyd went in the other, that taken by Lucy, toward the church.

Then Alleyne turned from the window with a blank look of despair in his eyes, a strange vacant wildness of aspect in his drawn and haggard countenance. He walked to and fro. He threw himself into his great chair, but only to spring

up again and pace the room with eager, hurried steps.

He sank helplessly down upon his chair once more, and rested his throbbing brow upon his hands, his misery so acute that he felt that he was going mad; but as the time went on, a dull feeling of lethargy came over him, and he sat there crouched together till Mrs Alleyne came into the room and touched him with her cold, thin hand, when he started.

"My boy!" she said tenderly, as she laid her hands upon his shoulders, "is it so hard to bear?"

"Hard? Yes, cruelly hard," he said, with a sigh of misery.

"And in turn we have to bear these agonies," she said softly. "I have known them, too, my boy, hours of despair when life all looked too black to be faced, and there seemed to be nothing to do but die."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"Yes, my boy, these troubles have been mine at times, and I have thought like this—thought as you have thought since that woman came between us to blast our hearth."

"Hush!" he cried, almost fiercely. "Not one disloyal word against her, mother. It was my ill-balanced nature led me wrong, and she never came between you and me."

"Forgive me, my boy," cried Mrs Alleyne, as he took her in his arms. "I know, I know. Always my own true loving son. But it seems so hard that she should have treated you as she did."

"Hush, mother! Hush!" he replied. "She was not to blame."

"Not to blame?" retorted Mrs Alleyne. "You defend her, but, had she not led you on by her soft words and wiles, you had never come to think of her like this. But she will repent: so sure as she marries that man, she will bitterly repent."

"You are giving me cruel pain, mother," said Alleyne sadly.

"My boy! my own brave boy!" cried Mrs Alleyne, clinging to him. "I will say no more! I will be silent, indeed. No word on the subject shall ever leave my lips again. There: forgive me."

"Forgive you, mother!" he said softly, as he drew her more closely, and kissed her lips, "I have nothing to forgive. You felt what you thought to be a just indignation on my behalf. It is so easy to think those we love must be in the right, so hard to see when we alone are in the wrong. There, let us talk about it no more, for—Why, Lucy! what is the matter?"

Lucy hurried into the observatory, looking hot and excited, threw herself into a chair, sobbing hysterically, and for some time not a word could be obtained from her.

Mrs Alleyne was the first to get an answer, as she at last exclaimed,—

"Then someone has insulted you?"

"No, no!" she cried; and then more emphatically, "No! Glynne, Glynne!"

Then her sobs choked her utterance, and she hid her face in her hands, sobbing in the most violently hysterical manner, till, utterly exhausted, she lay back in the chair so still and reduced that Alleyne grew alarmed, and, hurrying out of the room, he set off for Oldroyd.

"Miss Alleyne? Taken ill?" cried the young doctor excitedly. "I'll be with you directly. Has she heard of that terrible business?"

"Business? What business?" faltered Alleyne. "What! haven't you heard?" cried Oldroyd in amazement. "Why, about Miss Day."

Alleyne gazed at him enquiringly, and Oldroyd leaned forward and said a few words in Alleyne's ear, making him sink back silent and ghastly into a chair.

Volume Three—Chapter Eight.

The Fallen Star.

"There, I think everything is in train," said Sir John, as he and his brother sat together over a final cigar before retiring for the night, for Glynne and the friends staying in the house had gone to their rooms, and the brothers were at last alone.

"Yes, Jack, all seems ready for action."

"Except you, Jem."

"I?—I'm ready."

"No; you ought to have had a new suit, Jem."

"No; I said I would not," cried the major; "and I've kept to that, and that alone. I've given way in everything else. Let me alone there."

"All right; all right. I say no more. Change the subject, Jem; we won't have words to-night. Glynne looks lovely; doesn't she?"

"Fit bride for a god," said the major. "Bless her!"

"Amen. Calm, satisfied and happy in her choice."

"H'm."

The major coughed a little.

"She does, Jem," cried Sir John hastily. "Everybody said so to-night. I should have liked that little lassie, Lucy Alleyne, to have been asked to be a bridesmaid though; but after what has passed it was as well not."

"Yes," said the major gruffly, "just as well not."

"Pretty girl that Marjorie Emlin. Best looking bridesmaid we shall have."

"Humph! yes. Can't say I like her, Jack."

"Prejudiced? old man."

"Perhaps so; but those white-faced red-haired girls always have a foxey look to me. There, there, I've done, and I'll play cavalier to her to-morrow if I get the chance."

"That you will, Jem, I know. Trust you soldiers for that. Sad dogs. Why, Jem, old chap, I never said anything to you before," chuckled Sir John, "but 'pon my soul, I thought once you were going to make play and get married before Glynne."

The major moved uneasily in his chair, and suppressed a sigh.

"Nice little girl, Jem," continued Sir John. "I liked her myself; but only a woman. There were rumours about her. You didn't hear, I suppose?"

"Yes, I did," said the major, biting hard at his cigar.

"Well, no wonder. It was enough to make the best girl in the world a little wild. Shut up in that dreary house by herself, for you can't call it anything else."

"Yes; dull life for a young girl," assented the major, "Never heard—er—er—who it was?"

"I? Wouldn't listen to the confounded scandal. Some damned chatter about her getting up at daylight to go and meet a man. Did you?"

"Hah!" said the major, drawing a deep breath; "I wouldn't hear."

"Right, Jem, right. By the way, I think we've got every one here who ought to come, and we'll make the day go off with a swing, old fellow. Is there any fellow I ought to have asked on Miss Emlin's account?"

"No," said the major grimly; "you've got him for another purpose."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"She wanted Rolph herself."

"Impossible! Why, the girl's devotedly attached to Glynne, affectionate in the extreme. See what a beautiful diamond bracelet she has given her."

"Yes, that kind of girl always is. It's a way they have of showing their spite."

"Nonsense! Who told you that rubbish?"

"The young lady's aunt—Rob's mother."

"The deuce!"

"But she was quite right. She said such an union was better avoided, and that her niece had long ago acquiesced in the wisdom of the arrangement. There, my cigar's nearly out, and I'm ready for bed."

"Don't hurry. I was thinking again of how well Glynne looked when she said good-night."

"Lovely," said the major, with a sigh.

"Rolph, too," cried Sir John enthusiastically, and as if he had wound himself up to make the best of everything. "By George, what a specimen of a man and a soldier he looked when he went to-night. Isn't he grand, Jem? Wouldn't you

have liked to have three or four hundred such fellows in the Indian war?”

“Yes; in the ranks,” said the major.

“Jem!”

“All right. He’s a grand specimen of humanity, and as he says hard as a brick.”

“Sorry to lose her, poor darling; but glad now when it’s over, and all this mob of company gone. Have another cigar?”

“No; past twelve, and I want to get a good night’s rest before this comes off. Good-night, Jack! God bless you, lad! Happiness for our darling shall be my prayer to-night.”

Sir John started from his seat, and caught his brother’s hands. His lips moved, but no words came for some moments, and a couple of tears trickled slowly down his cheeks.

“Thank you, Jem,” he said at last hoarsely, and the brothers separated without another word.

The butler came yawning into the little office-study to put out the lamp, and half-an-hour later the house, full as it was of relatives and wedding guests, was silent as the grave.

The clock over the stables chimed the quarters and struck the hours, while everyone slept soundly except Marjorie Emlin, who lay motionless, thinking of the coming day, and burnt up as if by a fever.

Only a few hours now and her last hope gone, and as she lay there a curious jangling sound as of the wedding bells being rung derisively by demons seemed to drive her mad.

A few hours before she had been hanging about Glynne, smiling and talking of the happy days to come, and of how dear and good and brave a fellow Rob was, and how they must both try now to wean him from his love of athletic sports, till Glynne grew weary and frowned a little, seeking her father’s society as much as attention to the friends staying in the house would allow.

Then came the good-night of all, and silence fell upon the house.

Major Day slept soundly enough, but his dreams were troubled. Lucy Alleyne had a good deal to do with them, and he lay confused, and fighting hard to go after her, and bring her back, for she was getting into a bad habit of eloping every morning at daybreak, a habit which he felt ought to be stopped, but it was impossible he felt to bring it to an end.

He was in the height of his trouble and perspiring freely when the object of Lucy’s affections seized him roughly by the shoulder and shook him.

“Jem, Jem, wake up, man; wake up!”

The major started up in bed, and the light confused him, but he made out that his brother was there half dressed holding a bell glass flat candlestick over him.

“What’s the matter?”

“Don’t know. Slip on your dressing-gown. Someone ill, I’m afraid.”

“Tut, tut, tut!” ejaculated the major, hurrying on trousers and dressing-gown in prompt military fashion, while his brother explained.

“I was fast asleep and awoke by a cry. A few moments after it came again, and I slipped on some things, got a light, and came out into the corridor.”

“Fancy.”

“No, I’m sure of it. Ready?”

“Nearly.”

“Let’s go and see then. I don’t like to be prowling about the house alone in the night.”

“Why?” said the major gruffly. “Because it’s your own?”

“Don’t banter. I feel sure that the cry came from Miss Emlin’s room.”

“Well, why not ring for the maids?”

“Because I consider it to be my duty to see if anything is the matter first. Ready?”

“Yes.”

“Come on.”

Sir John led the way out into the corridor, and the brothers listened with their shadows thrown grotesquely on the walls; but all was perfectly silent, and the major looked enquiringly at his brother.

“Well,” he said; “isn’t it a pity to disturb the house?”

“Come this way.”

Sir John led the way to one of the doors, stopped listening a few moments, and then knocked softly.

No answer, and he knocked again.

“Yes,” came in a quick musical voice; “who is there?”

“I, my dear,” said Sir John. “Don’t be alarmed. I thought I heard a cry come from your room. Are you quite well?”

“Oh, yes, thank you. I must have cried out in my sleep then. I’m afraid I do sometimes.”

“Thank you, my child. Sorry to have disturbed you. Good-night, my dear.”

“Good-night, Sir John.”

“Humph! Satisfied?” said the major gruffly.

“No, come along.”

Sir John tapped at another door, but the inmate of the room made no reply.

“Hang it all. Jack, don’t rouse up all the house,” whispered the major. “There’s nothing the matter, or someone else would have heard it.”

Just at that moment the deep baying of a dog was heard from the yard, followed by a long, low howl.

“There is something the matter,” cried Sir John, “or the dog wouldn’t make that noise. Here, let’s wake Glynne, and let her go round and see who’s ill.”

“No, no, don’t do that, man,” cried the major.

But his brother was already at his child’s door, where he knocked sharply.

“Glynne, Glynne, my dear.”

A low smothered cry, coming as if from a distance, was the response, and the dog’s baying recommenced.

Volume Three—Chapter Nine.

Torn from her Sphere.

The act was simultaneous.

Moved as if by the same set of nerves, Sir John Day and his brother dashed themselves against the door again and again, but the panelling was strong, and it was evidently well fastened within, and, for the time being, the door refused to yield. Then, as the brothers literally hurled themselves against it in their rage of disappointment, the fastenings gave way, and the door flew back with a crash, while Sir John fell forward into the darkness upon his knees.

“Quick, Jem, the light,” he cried, as he gathered himself up; but the major had forestalled him, and stepped back to take the candlestick from where it had been set down.

He had just passed the threshold, casting the light before him into the chamber, when Sir John’s hand was clapped upon his shoulder, and the candlestick snatched from his hand.

“Stand back, Jem, and guard the door. I am her father.”

The old officer promptly obeyed, and the door was swung to upon him, as others were being opened along the passage, and excited enquiries began to be heard on every hand.

For Sir John, in his one quick glance, as the light flashed into the room, had seen that which caused his prompt action. The door leading into Glynne’s little studio was wide open, and the current of soft, moist night air which struck his cheek told that the conservatory and its windows must be open too.

All this came to him in a flash as, after swinging to the door he had forced, Sir John ran to where, dishevelled, and with her face bleeding and distorted by the savage manner in which her cries for help had been stopped, lay Glynne by the bedside. She was insensible now, though a faint groan escaped her as he tenderly raised her from the carpet, and laid her upon the bed, a pang of combined rage and horror shooting through him as he felt one arm drop in a strangely unnatural way, which told that the bone had snapped.

One glance round, as he battled with his agony, showed how terrible a struggle had taken place; chairs were overturned, a little table, with its load of feminine knick-knacks, lay upon its side, and on every hand there were traces of the strife.

Sir John, who was trembling violently, grasped all this as he hurried back to the door, to find that the whole house had now been alarmed, and people were gathering fast.

"Find Morris, Jem," said Sir John, in a hoarse voice. "Quick! send for Oldroyd."

"Yes," said the major, with military promptitude; "but, one word—Glynne?"

Sir John made an impatient gesture, and his brother ran down the corridor at once, the frightened women giving way at his approach, while their host looked sharply round at the scared faces of those present.

"Ah, Mason," he cried, "go in to your mistress."

"Sir John, what can I do?" cried a piteous voice. "Dearest Glynne, pray, pray let me help."

He turned sharply upon the speaker to see Marjorie, with her beautiful hair lightly looped up, but resting upon her long pale blue *peignoir*, and as the wild, troubled eyes met his, Sir John softened a little towards her.

"Thank you," he said hastily. "It is no place for you, my child. Yes: go to her. You are a woman, and your gentle face should be at her side."

Marjorie darted into the room after Mason, and Sir John barred the door against further entrance.

"Here, Miss Emlin," he whispered, "secure the door from within. No one enters till the doctor comes."

Then, gathering presence of mind, he hurriedly responded to the enquiries being made, and in a few minutes the passage was once more clear.

The major returned then, and his eyes looked searchingly into his brother's.

"This way," said Sir John. "Her maid and Miss Emlin are with her. We can do nothing there."

Major Day made an impatient gesture, but his old discipline prevailed, and he followed his brother to the studio door, which opened upon the corridor.

But it, too, was fastened, and Sir John stepped back to the bedroom door and tapped sharply.

There was a rustling sound within, and the door was held ajar by Mason, whose face looked scared and drawn, while a low, piteous moan came to their ears.

"Quick!" said Sir John. "Go round and open the other door. Shut this first, and admit no one, I say, but the doctor."

The door was closed with a chain, and they heard the slipping back of the bolts of the little studio, Sir John waiting to give the maid time to go back into the bed-chamber before he opened the door, and entered with his brother.

All was in its customary state here, but the conservatory door was open, and, upon entering there, it was to find that the window was wide, and a long strand of the wistaria lay upon the floor, as if it had been torn off by someone who had mounted from below, or else had become entangled by the climber's dress, and fallen from it when the inside of the window was reached.

The major was at his brother's side, and together they looked out, holding a candle down to see plainly enough that the leaves and tender twigs of the beautiful climber that wreathed the place had been broken and torn down in several places, the big cable-like twisted main stem having evidently been utilised as a rope ladder by whoever had climbed up.

The brothers looked at each other.

"Her favourite creeper, Jem," said Sir John, with a groan—"her destruction."

"Jack?" whispered the major, in an appealing voice. Only the one word, but so full of question that Sir John bent toward him and whispered a few words.

The major turned away, and marched for the door, but his brother overtook him.

"To my room."

"What for?"

"My pistols."

"Jem!"

"I'll shoot him like a dog."

Sir John's hand closed tightly upon his brother's arm, and they glared at each other in silence for a few moments, while twice over there came a feeble groan through the door from the adjoining chamber.

"No," said Sir John at last, with his voice trembling from emotion; "I am her father. It is my task, or her betrothed's. Jem," he whispered excitedly, "what am I to say to Rolph? Jem," he whispered again, with the hands which clung to his brother trembling violently, "you—you don't think—they were to be married to-day—he came to her window last

night?"

"No," said the major sternly; "give the devil his clue. It was not he."

There was silence in the little room, about which lay the many little books and drawings favoured by her who lay moaning and insensible in the next room. Here was a sketch of the father; there one of the uncle; close by, arch and mocking of aspect, a clever representation of Lucy Alleyne; and, in a fit of fury, the major strode to the wall, tore it down, and stamped it under foot.

"What cursed stroke of fate brought them here?" he said hoarsely.

"Hush! This is no time for loud anger, Jem. We must act—like men—for her sake, old fellow! My God, Jem! what sin have I committed that the punishment should be struck at me through her? My poor, poor girl!"

He sank into a chair, sobbing like a child; but as his brother's hand was laid upon his shoulder, he sprang up again.

"Yes," he said huskily. "I'm ready. We need not search. We know enough. But, Jem, we must be silent. I can't have all the horrible scandal spread abroad. We must, for her sake, hush it up."

"Hush it up!" said the major bitterly. "Jack, the news is being spread already. You sent one messenger out a quarter-of-an-hour ago."

Just then the door leading into the bedroom opened, and Marjorie appeared, quite calm and self-possessed.

"Brandy or sal-volatile!" she said in a quick, decisive whisper. "She is coming to, but deadly faint and weak."

Half-an-hour later, Oldroyd was there, and busy in attendance till daybreak; while Sir John and his brother sat waiting till he joined them in the library—the calm, business-like doctor, apparently with no thought outside the condition of his patient.

He came into the room, bowed, looked from one brother to the other, and waited to be questioned.

Sir John's lips parted, but no words came, and he turned his eyes imploringly to his brother, who drew himself up and began in his prompt military way; but his brief question was almost inaudible towards the end.

"How is she?"

"Suffering terribly from shock, sir, and exhaustion. Her left arm is fractured above the elbow; but it is the mental strain we have to fear."

"You will stay of course?" said the major.

"I only came to you for a few moments, gentlemen, and am going back to my patient now."

No further question was asked, and the brothers were left alone, to sit in silence till the major said,—

"You must send some kind of message over to The Warren, Jack."

"Eh? Yes, yes, I suppose so," said Sir John bitterly; "and get rid of these people in the house. Do that for me, Jem. I'm broken, lad—twenty years older since we shook hands last night. Who's there?" he cried with a start, as there was a tap at the door.

Whoever knocked took this for a command to enter; and, looking very pale and wild-eyed, but perfectly self-possessed, Marjorie entered and fixed her eyes on Sir John.

"Will you kindly order the carriage?"

"Yes—yes, my dear," he said. "Thank you for what you have done; but you wish to leave us?"

She looked at the old man half-wonderingly before answering.

"A message must be sent to my cousin," she said in her sweet, musical voice; "the wedding cannot take place to-day."

"No, no; of course not," cried the major.

"And I thought it would be kinder to him, poor fellow, for me to be the bearer of these terrible tidings. A letter would be so cold and dreadful. Oh, Sir John," she cried with a hysterical sob, as she flung herself at his knees, "it is too horrible to speak of. Poor darling Glynne! My poor cousin! It will drive him mad!"

"Hush, my dear; be calm; try and be calm," whispered Sir John, laying his hand gently upon her head.

"Yes," she said amidst her sobs, "I am trying so hard, dear Sir John, for everybody's sake. My poor aunt! It will nearly kill her. I thought it would be so much better if I went myself to break the dreadful news."

"Yes," said Sir John, raising her. "Heaven bless you for your forethought. It is a time when we want a gentle woman's help."

He looked at his brother, who read his wish.

“I will order the carriage round,” he said. “In an hour?”

“No, no, as soon as possible,” said Marjorie wildly. “They must not hear the news from the village. Poor, poor, darling Glynne!” she cried, bursting into a fresh burst of sobs, which made her words almost inaudible. “All her jewels gone, too. She must have been trying to protect them when the wretches struck her down.”

Within half-an-hour Marjorie was on her way back to The Warren; and soon after breakfast, of the wedding guests not one was left, while the news rapidly spread that “Doctor” Oldroyd had been fetched suddenly in the night to Brackley, where he found Sir John’s daughter in a violent fever, and that she was now delirious, and in danger of being taken to the church as a bride, indeed, but as the bride of death.

Volume Three—Chapter Ten.

The Little Orb Turns Round.

There was but one thought in the minds of father and uncle at Brackley, and that was to silence busy tongues, get Glynne sufficiently well to move, and go right away abroad; and in Oldroyd they had a willing coadjutor, and one who seemed not to have a thought beyond his profession.

The major had been half mad, and ready to follow the bent of his suspicions again and again; but robbery as well as outrage appeared to have influenced the man who had escaped unseen, since the greater part of the valuable jewels, including a diamond bracelet given by Marjorie to the bride, were missing, and he felt that he was wrong.

Sir John prevailed.

“Jem,” he said, “if I knew who it was I’d shoot him ike a dog—curse him! No: I couldn’t wait to fire, I’d strangle him; but I can’t have this published abroad if we can hush it up. I won’t have my child dragged into a witness box to give evidence against the devil who has wrought us this ill. We must bear it, Jem, and wait.”

“But, my dear Jack—”

“But, my dear Jem—I am her father. What would our darling wish if she could speak to us—if we could speak to her upon what it would be best to do?”

The major bowed his head, and as far as possible a veil was drawn over the events of that night.

Rumour was pretty busy during the next month, during which period several stories were afloat, but only one bore the stamp of truth—that, out of despair some said, Captain Rolph obtained leave of absence, and went off to Norway, shooting, while Mrs Rolph and her niece accompanied him as far as Hull, and then continued their journey to Scarboro’.

That was perfectly true, Mrs Rolph having her hands pretty full with Marjorie, who also turned ill having bad, nervous, hysterical fits, and refusing absolutely to go outside The Warren door without having tight hold of Mrs Rolph’s arm; and even then she was constantly turning her eyes wildly round as if in expectation of seeing someone start out from behind bush or hedge.

“The shock to her system,” Mrs Rolph used to say to herself, and she became increasingly gentle toward the girl whose nerves had been shattered by the affair at The Hall.

By this time the shutters were all closed at Brackley, for, after Sir John had been severely blamed for not getting down some big physician when Glynne’s brain fever was at its worst, people came to the conclusion that he knew what he was about, for if ever a clever practitioner did settle down in a place, it was “Doctor” Oldroyd, who had cured the young lady in a wonderfully short space of time. For the month at its end found the Days in Italy, where Glynne had been recommended to go on account of her health.

Oldroyd consequently was on the road to fame—that is the fame which extended for a radius of six miles; but his pockets were very little the heavier, and he still looked upon men who kept banking accounts with a feeling akin to awe.

Change in the neighbourhood of Brackley extended no further. The blunt-eyed, resident policeman, somehow never managed to come across the poachers who made raids upon The Warren and upon Brackley during the absence of their owners; while over at Lindham, the doctor learned from old Mother Wattley, who grew more chatty and apparently younger, under her skilful medical man’s care, that Ben Hayle—‘my son-in-law’—had taken an acre of land, and was ‘goin’ to make a fortun’ there as a florist; but when Oldroyd met the ex-keeper one day, and went over the garden with him, it seemed improbable that it would even pay the rent.

“Better turn to your old business, Hayle,” said Oldroyd.

“Easier said than done, sir,” replied the man. “Old master gave me my chance when I was a young fool, and liked to do a bit o’ poaching, believing honestly then that all birds were wild, and that I had as good a right to them as anybody. But I soon found out the difference when I had to rear them, and I served him honest, and Mrs Rolph too, all those years, till she discharged me because of the captain’s liking for my Judith.”

“But surely there were other places to be found by a man with a good character.”

“Didn’t seem like it, sir. I tried till I was beat out, and then, in a kind of despairing fit, I went out with some of the lads,

and you know what I got for my pains."

"Yes," said the doctor, "and it ought to be a lesson for you, Hayle."

"Yes, sir, it ought; but you see, once a man takes to that kind of work it's hard to keep from it."

"But, my good fellow, you may be laid by the heels in gaol at any time. I wondered you were not taken over that affair."

"So I should have been, if I'd had any other doctor, sir," said Hayle, with a meaning smile, "and the police had been a little sharper. But you didn't chatter, and our fellows didn't, and so I got off."

"But think, now; you, the father of a young girl like Miss Hayle, what would her feelings be if you were sent to prison like that young fellow—what's his name—was."

"Caleb Kent, sir?"

"Yes. What's become of him? I haven't seen him lately."

"Racketing about somewhere, sir. Me and him had a quarrel or two about my Judith. He was always hanging after her; and it got so bad, at last, that I promised him a charge o' shot in his jacket if he ever came anigh our place again. He saw I meant it, sir, and he has left the poor girl in peace."

"Well, I must be off, Hayle."

"Thankye for calling, sir. Been to see the old mother-in-law?"

"Yes; she keeps wonderfully well."

"You mean you keep her wonderfully well, sir. Poor old girl, she's not a bad one in her way."

"No, and there's nothing the matter with her but old age."

"Hear that the missus is coming back to The Warren, sir?"

"Yes, and that the Brackley people are on their way too. Look here, Hayle, shall I put in a word for you to Sir John?"

"No thankye, doctor, let me bide; things 'll come right in time. Think there'll be a wedding at the Hall, now, sir? They tell me Miss Day's got well and strong again."

"I've enough to do with my people when they want me, Hayle," said the doctor, drily, "and I never interfere about their private matters; but, as you ask me that question, I should say decidedly not."

The ex-keeper smiled, as if the doctor's words coincided with his own thoughts, and he stood watching Oldroyd, as he rode off, getting a peep at Judith seated by the window working hard as he went by, the girl's face looking pale and waxen in the shade.

"Fretting a bit, by the look of her, and those dark rings," said Oldroyd, as he rode away. "How much happier a place the world would be if there were no marrying and giving in marriage—no making love at all. Causes more worry, I think, than the drink."

Volume Three—Chapter Eleven.

Drawn Together.

"Well, dearest," said Mrs Rolph, "have you been all round?"

Rolph, who was leaning back in his chair in the library at The Warren, reading a sporting paper, uttered a growl.

"Not satisfactory, dear?"

"Satisfactory! the place has gone to rack and ruin. I don't believe those cursed poachers have left a head of game on the estate; but I know who's at the bottom of it, and he'd better look out."

"I'm very sorry, dear," said Mrs Rolph, going behind her son's chair to stroke his hair. "The garden looks very nice; both Madge and I thought so. Why didn't you run over now and then to see that the keeper was doing his duty."

"Run over?" cried Rolph, savagely; "who was going to run over here for every fool one met to be pointing his cursed finger at you, and saying, 'There goes the fellow who didn't get married.'"

"My dearest boy," said Mrs Rolph, soothingly, as she laid her cheek on the top of his head, "don't fret about that now. You know it's nearly eighteen months ago."

"I don't care if it's eighteen hundred months ago—and do leave off, mother, you know I hate having my hair plastered down."

Mrs Rolph kissed the place where her cheek had been laid, and then drew back, showing that the complaint had not

been merited, for, so far from the hair being plastered down, there was scarcely any to plaster, Rolph's head being cropped close in athletic and on anti-Samsonic principles as regarded strength.

"It was very, very hard for you, my dearest, and it is most unfortunate that they should have chosen the same time to return as we did. You—er—heard that they are back?"

"Of course I did, and if you'd any respect for your son, you'd sell this cursed hole, and go somewhere else."

"Don't—don't ask me to do that, Rob, dear," said Mrs Rolph. "I know your poor father looked forward to your succeeding to it and keeping it up."

"I hate the place," growled Rolph rustling his paper; and Mrs Rolph looked pleased, but she said nothing for some time. Then, very gently,—

"Rob, dearest, you are going to stay now you are here?"

"No; I'm going to Hounslow to-morrow."

"Not so soon as that, dear," said Mrs Rolph, pleadingly, as she laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Why not? What's the good of staying here?"

"To please your mother, dearest, and—Madge, who is in a terribly weak state I had great difficulty in getting her back here."

Rolph moved angrily, and crumpled up the paper, but Mrs Rolph bent down and kissed him.

"There, all right," he said, "only don't bother me about it so. I can't forget that other cursed muddle, if you can."

"No, my dear, of course not, but you should try to. And, Rob, dear, be a little more thoughtful about dearest Madge. She has, I know, suffered cruelly in the past, and does so now at times when you seem neglectful—no, no, don't start, dear; I know you are not, but girls are exacting, and do love to spoil men by trying to keep them at their feet."

"Like spaniels or pugs," growled Rolph, the latter being the more appropriate.

"Yes, dear, but she will grow wiser in that direction, and you cannot be surprised at her anxiety. Rob, dearest, you must not blame her for her worship of one whom she looks upon as a demigod—the perfection of all that is manly and strong."

"Oh, no; it's all right, mother," said Rolph, who felt flattered by the maternal and girlish adulation; "I'll behave like a lamb."

"You'll behave like my own true, brave son, dearest, and make me very happy. When shall it be, Rob?"

"Eh? The marriage?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs Rolph, kneeling at his side and passing an arm about him.

"Has Madge been at you about it?"

"For shame, dearest! She would die sooner than speak. You know how she gave up to what you fancied would make you happy before. Never a word, never a murmur; and she took that poor unfortunate girl, Glynne, to her heart as a sister."

"Damn it all, mother, do let that cursed business rest," cried Rolph impatiently.

"Yes, dearest, of course; pray forgive me."

"Oh, all right! But—er—Madge—she hasn't seen her—hasn't been over there?"

"No, my love, of course not. There must be no further communication between our families. It was Sir John's own wish, as you know. No one could have behaved more honourably, or with more chivalrous consideration than he did over the horribly distressing circumstances. But that's all dead, past and forgotten now, and you need not fear any allusions being made in the place. It was quite wonderful how little was ever known outside the house. But there, no more past; let's have present and future. Time is flying, Rob, dearest, and I'm getting an old woman now."

"And a deuced fine, handsome old woman, too," said Rolph, with an unwonted show of affection, for he passed his arm about her, and kissed her warmly. "I tell you what it is, old lady, I only wish I could meet with one like you—a fine, handsome, elderly body, with no confounded damn-nonsense about her. I'd propose in a minute."

"My dearest boy, what absurd stuff you do talk, when the most beautiful girl for miles round is waiting patiently for you to say,—'Come, and I will recompense you with my life's devotion for all your long suffering, and the agony of years.'"

"Just what I'm likely to say, mother," said Rolph, grimly.

"But you will in your heart."

"All right, I'll try. She will let me have my own way. But I say, mother, she has grown precious thin and old-looking

while you have been on the Continent.”

“What wonder, dearest boy. Can a woman suffer, as she has about you for two years now, without showing the lines of care. But what of them. It will be your pleasant duty to smooth them all out, and you can, dearest, and so easily. A month after she is yours she will not look the same.”

Mrs Rolph’s words were spoken in all sincerity, and there was a great deal in them as to their probabilities, but not in the direction she meant.

“Rob, dearest,” she whispered caressingly, soon after, “when shall it be?”

“Don’t know.”

“To set your mother’s heart at rest—and hers.”

“Oh, very well, when you like; but hold hard a minute.”

“Rob!” cried Mrs Rolph in dismay, for her heart was beating fast with hope, and his words had arrested the throbbing.

“I can’t have two of my important meetings interfered with. I’ve the Bray Bridge handicap, and a glove fight I must attend.”

“Rob, my darling!”

“But I must go to them. The confounded service takes up so much of my time, that I’ve neglected my athletics shamefully.”

Marjorie came in from the garden just then, and as she appeared at the French window, the careworn, hunted look in her eyes, and a suggestion of twitching about the corners of her lips, fully justified her athletic cousin’s disparaging remarks.

“Ah, my darling!” cried Mrs Rolph, rising.

“I beg pardon, aunt dear. I did not know you and Rob were engaged.”

“Don’t go, dearest,” said Mrs Rolph, holding out her hands, her tone of voice making Marjories eyes dilate, and as she began to tremble violently, a deathly pallor overspread her cheeks, and she tottered and then sank sobbing in Mrs Rolph’s arms.

“My darling—my darling!” whispered her aunt. “There—there! Rob, dearest, help me!”

Rolph rose from his chair, half-pleased, half-amused by his mother’s action, as she shifted the burden to his great muscular arms.

“Help her to the couch, my love. Why, she is all of a tremble. I’ll go and fetch my salts. Rob, dearest, can’t you bring back the colour to her cheeks?”

She moved slowly toward the door in quite a stage exit, smiling with satisfaction as she saw her son make no effort to place the trembling woman upon the couch, but holding her to his breast, while, slowly and timidly, her hands rose to his neck, gained faith and courage, and by the time the door closed upon the pair, Madge was clinging tightly, and for the first time for two years felt that the arms which encircled her held her firmly.

“Rob!” she cried wildly, as she raised her head to gaze wildly in his eyes.

“All right, pussy,” he said. “The mater says we are to forget all the past, and forgive, and all that sort of thing, and the event is to be a fixture, short notice and no flam.”

“You mean it, Rob—darling?”

“Of course,” he cried; and his lips closed upon hers.

“There,” he said, after a time; “now let’s go and have a quiet walk and talk.”

“In the garden? Yes!”

“Hang the garden! outside. I don’t want the old girl to be hanging about us, patting us on the back and watching for every kiss.”

“No, no,” she whispered, as she clung to him, as if fearing to lose him before she had him fast. “Except for this, Rob, dear, I wish we had not come back to The Warren.”

“Hallo!” he cried, boisterously; “jealous of Judy, pet? Why, I haven’t seen her for months? That’s all over, and I’m going to be your own good boy.”

“It wasn’t that, Rob. I was afraid.”

“What of? Losing me? Oh, you’re safe now,” he cried, with a boisterous laugh.

“No, dear Rob; it was not that, but of something else.”

"What, Brackley?" he said roughly, and with an angry scowl.

"Oh, no, Rob," she cried, with a frightened look and a shudder as she covered his lips with hers. "Don't, pray, speak of that. It is too horrible. I didn't mean that."

"What then?"

"It was nothing about you, Rob, dearest. It was about myself. I was frightened, but no, not *now*," she whispered caressingly, as she nestled to him. "I shall always have your brave, strong, giant's arms to be round me, to protect me against everybody."

"Of course," he said, complacently, as he smiled down at her. "But what are you afraid of?"

"Oh; nothing," she whispered; "it's because I'm weak and foolish. Oh, Rob, how grand it must be to feel big, and strong and brave. It was some time before we went away, I was out walking, and a man came out from among the hazel bushes."

"Eh?" growled Rolph.

"It was that dreadful poacher who used to be about, and he asked for money, and I gave him some, dear, and then he became insulting, and tried to catch me in his arms, but I shrieked out and he ran away."

"Caleb Kent?" growled Rolph.

"I think that is what he was called," said Marjorie timidly; "but I need not be afraid of him now, need I, Rob?"

"You may be afraid for him," said Rolph, fiercely; "for so sure as ever we meet any night, and he is poaching, I shall have an accident with my gun."

"But you won't kill him, Rob. Don't do that, dearest; it would be too dreadful."

"No; I won't kill him if I can help it. That would be too bad, eh? I won't nail his ears to the pump."

"Ah, my darlings! here still," said Mrs Rolph, who entered, smiling, but with the tears trickling down her cheeks. "Madge, my child, what has become of my salts—you know, the cut-glass bottle with the gold top."

"Never mind the salts, mother," said Rolph, boisterously; "sugar has done it. I've quite brought Madge to—haven't I, pussy?"

"Oh, Rob, dearest," cried Madge, hiding her face upon his breast, and shuddering slightly as she nestled there, as if a cold breath of wind had passed over to threaten the blasting of her budding hopes.

"It's all right, mother, and—there as soon as you like. Come, little wifey to be, begin your duties at once. Big strong husbands want plenty of food when they are not training. They are like the lawyers who need refreshers. I'm choking for a pint of Bass. No, no, mother; let her ring. Satisfied?"

"Rob, my darling, you've made me a happy woman at last—so proud, so very proud of my darling son."

"All right," cried Rolph, gruffly; "but, look here, I'm not going to figure at Brackley over a business like this. I'm off back to barracks."

"So soon, Rob," cried Madge, and the scared look came into her eyes again, as she involuntarily glanced at the window as if expecting to see Caleb Kent peering in.

"Madge, my darling! Look at her, Rob."

"Bah! what a cowardly, nervous little puss it is," cried Rolph, taking her in his arms, and she clung to him sobbing hysterically. "Look here, mother; you'd better take a house, or furnished apartments in town at once, and we'll get the business done there. Madge is afraid of bogies. Weak and hysterical, and that sort of thing. Get her away; the place is dull, and the poachers are hanging about here a good deal."

Marjorie uttered a faint shriek which was perfectly real.

"Take us away at once, Rob, dear," she whispered passionately; "I can't bear to be separated from you now."

"All right," he said. "I'll stop and take care of you till you're ready to start, and see you safe in town. You can go to a hotel for a day or two. Will that do?"

"Yes, dear; admirably," cried Mrs Rolph, eagerly; and Marjorie uttered a sigh of consent that was like a moan of pain.

Volume Three—Chapter Twelve.

Re the Focus.

News reaches the servants' hall sooner than it does the drawing-room, and before long it was known at Brackley that a wedding was in the air.

Cook let it off in triumph one day at dinner. She had been very silent for some time, and then began to smile, till Morris, the butler, who had noted the peculiarities of this lady for years, suddenly exclaimed,—"Now then, what is it? Out with it, cook!"

"Oh, don't ask me; it's nothing."

"Yes, it is," said the butler, with a wink directed all round the table. "What are you laughing at?"

"It does seem so rum," cried cook, laughing silently till her face was peony-like in hue.

"Well, you might give us a bit, cook," said the major's valet. "What is it?"

"They've—they've found the focus again," cried cook, laughing now quite hysterically.

"Eh? Where?" cried Morris.

"Over at The Warren."

"What," cried the butler severely; "made it up? Cook, I should be sorry to say unpleasant things to any lady, but if you were a man, I should tell you that you were an old fool."

"Well, I'm sure!" cried cook, "that's polite, when I heered it only this morning from the butcher, who'd just come straight from The Warren, where he heered it all."

"What? That Captain Rolph had made it up with our Miss Glynne? Rubbish, woman, rubbish! After the way he pitched the poor girl over and went off shooting, that could never be."

"If people would not be quite so clever," said cook, addressing the assembled staff of servants round the table, "and would not jump at things before they know, perhaps they'd get on a little better in life. As if I didn't know that she'd never marry now. I said as the captain had made up matters with his cousin, that carrotty-headed girl who came to be bridesmaid."

"You don't mean it," cried Morris.

"It's a fact," said cook, "and it's to come off at once."

"What, her? Disgraceful!"

Cook smiled again, with the quiet confidence of knowledge, and ignoring the butler's remark, she fixed the maids in turn with her eye.

"Mrs Rolph has taken a furnished house in London for three months, and they're going to it next week, and as Perkins' man says, it do seem hard, after getting on for two years without delivering regular joints at the house for them to be off again."

"Well," said Mason, Glynne's maid, contemptuously, "I wish the lady joy of him. A low, common, racing and betting man. I wouldn't marry him if he was made of gold."

"Right, Mrs Mason," said Morris. "I don't know what Nature was thinking about to make him an officer. No disrespect meant to those in the stables, but to my mind, if Captain Rolph—and I saw a deal of him when he was here—had found his—his—"

"Focus," suggested cook, and there was a roar in which the butler joined, by way of smoothing matters over with his fellow-servant.

"I meant to say level, cook. He would have been a helper, or the driver of a cab. He was never fit for our young lady."

The servants' hall tattle proved to be quite correct, for within a week The Warren was vacant again, Rolph being back at barracks, and Mrs Rolph and her niece at a little house in one of the streets near Lowndes Square, busily occupied in preparing the lady's *trousseau*, for the marriage was to take place within a month.

It was not long after that the news reached The Firs, and Lucy became very thoughtful, and ended by feeling glad. She hardly knew why, but she was pleased at the idea of Captain Rolph being married and out of the way.

And now, by no means for the first time, a great longing came over Lucy to see Glynne Day again. She knew that the family had been for a year and a half in Italy, and only heard by accident that they had returned to Brackley, so quietly was everything arranged. Then, as the days glided by, and she heard no more news, the longing to see Glynne again intensified.

She felt the tears come into her eyes and trickle down her cheeks as she thought of the terrible catastrophe—never even alluded to at The Firs—a horror which had saved her from being Rolph's wife, but at what a cost!

"Poor Moray!" she sighed more than once in her solitary communings. "Poor Glynne! and they might have been by now happy husband and wife. It is too horrible—too dreadful. How could Fate be so cruel!"

Lucy shivered at times as she mentally called up the careworn, beautiful, white face of her old friend, who had never been seen outside the walls of the house, so far as she could learn, since her return. And at last, trembling the while, as if her act were a sin, instead of true womanly love and charity, she wrote a simple little letter to Glynne, asking to see her, for that she loved her very dearly, and that the past was nothing to them, and ought not to separate two

who had always been dear friends.

She posted the letter secretly, feeling that mother and brother would oppose the act, and that day the rustic postman was half-a-crown the richer upon his promising to retain and deliver into her own hands any letter addressed to her which might arrive.

Then she waited patiently for days in the grim, cheerless home, where her brother seemed to be settling down into a thoughtful, dreamy man, who was ageing rapidly, and whose eyes always looked full of some terrible trouble, which was eating away his life, while, if possible, Mrs Alleyne looked older, thinner, and more careworn than of yore.

Oldroyd came at intervals professionally, but there was a peculiar distance observed between him and Lucy, who treated him with petulant angry resentment, and he was reserved and cold.

But his visits did no good. There were no walks with the doctor, no garden flowers bloomed at the astronomer's touch. Alleyne studied harder than ever, and his name rose in reputation among the scientific, but he received no visitors, paid no calls, and only asked for one thing from those of his household—to be let alone.

A week had elapsed before the postman, with a great deal of mysterious action, slipped a note into Lucy's hand, making her run to her room trembling and feeling guilty, to hold the letter open, illegible for the tears which veiled her eyes.

At last, though, she read the few brief lines which it contained:—

"Think of the past, Lucy, as of happy days spent with one who loved you, and who is now dead. Better that we should never meet again. Better, perhaps, if I had never lived. God bless *you*, dear. Good-bye."

Poor Lucy was too ill to appear at dinner that day, and for several more she did not stir out. Then Mrs Alleyne insisted upon her going for a walk, and, as if drawn by fate, she went straight toward the fir mount to climb to the top, where she could sit down and gaze at Brackley, and try to make out Glynne, who might be walking in the garden.

No: she saw no tall white figure there, and she felt that unless she borrowed some "optick tube" from her brother's observatory, she was not likely to see her friend a mile away, and she stood there low-spirited and tearful.

"If I could only see her, and say,—'Glynne, sister, what is all that terrible trouble to us? You are still the only friend I ever loved,' and clasp her in my arms, and let her tears mingle with mine. Oh, please God," she said, softly, speaking like a little child, as she sank upon her knees amongst the thickly-shed pine needles, and clasped her hands, "let there be no more sorrow for my poor, dear friend; make her happy once again."

That fir-clad hill became Lucy's favourite resort by day, as it had been her brother's in the past, by night; and she went again and again, till one afternoon, following out an old habit, she was stooping to pick a plant from where it grew, when she became aware of someone approaching, and she started and coloured, and then recovered herself, and rose erect and slightly resentful, for Major Day, looking very sad and old stood before her, raising his hat.

"May I see what you have there?" he said gravely.

"I think it is an *Amanita*," said Lucy, trying hard to speak firmly, as she held out the whitish-looking fungus toward the old botanist, as if it had been a tiny Japanese parasol.

Major Day fixed his *pince-nez* on the organ it was made to pinch, and, taking the curious vegetable, carefully examined it, turning it over and over before saying decisively,—

"Yes, exactly; *Amanita Vernus*, a very poisonous species, Miss Alleyne. I—er—I am very glad to see that you keep up your knowledge of this interesting branch of botany. I have been paying a good deal of attention to it in Italy this past autumn and winter."

"Indeed," said Lucy.

"Yes, my dear—Miss Alleyne," said the major, correcting himself. "The Italians are great eaters of fungi. My brother found Rome and Florence very dull. Of course he was longing to be back amongst his farming stock. Great student of the improvement of cattle, Miss Alleyne. I found the country about Rome and Florence most interesting. It would have been far more so if I had had a sympathetic companion."

"I must—I will tell him everything," thought Lucy; and then the colour came, and she felt that it would be impossible, and that her only course was to allow time to smooth away this little burr.

"Are you finding truffles?" she said, with assumed cheerfulness.

He looked at her in a curiously wistful manner for a few moments, and that look was agony to Lucy, as her conscience told her that she had had a fall from the high niche to which she had risen in the major's estimation.

"Yes," he said, slowly, and there was an unwonted coldness and gravity in his manner; "at my old pursuit, Miss Alleyne—at my old pursuit. So you have not quite given it up?"

"Oh no," cried Lucy, trying to pass over the coldness, which chilled her warm young heart. "I have been collecting several times lately, and—"

Lucy stopped short, for the major was looking at her keenly, as if recalling the fact that when she had been mushrooming she had encountered Rolph sauntering about with a cigar in his mouth.

“Yes,” said the major, quietly; “and were you very successful?”

It was a very simple question, just such a one as anyone might ask to help a hesitating speaker who had come to a standstill; but to Lucy it seemed so different from what she had been accustomed to hear from the major’s lips. His manner had always been tenderly paternal towards her; there had been such openness and full confidence between them, and such a warm pressure of hand to hand. Now this was gone, and there was a cold and dreary gap.

“Successful?” said Lucy, with her voice trembling and her face beginning to work. “Yes—no—I—Have you many truffles, Major Day?”

This last with an effort to master her emotion, and its effect, as she spoke sharply and quickly, was to give her time to recover herself, and the major a respite from what had threatened to be a painful scene.

“Yes, yes; a fair number,” he said, as if he were addressing one who was a comparative stranger, but towards whom he wished to behave with the greatest deference. “They are very small, though—very small; not like those they dig in France. May I send you a few, my—Miss Alleyne?”

Lucy shook her head, for her emotion mastered her this time. That alteration from what was to have been “my dear” to “Miss Alleyne” was too much for her, and she bowed hastily and hurried away.

But the major hastened after her, and overtook her in the lane.

“Miss Alleyne—Lucy,” he cried. “One moment, please.”

“Major Day!” she cried, in surprise.

“And your very good old friend, my dear. Since I saw you last I have been thinking a great deal, and many things which troubled me before we left home have gradually assumed an entirely fresh aspect. I was hasty, and, to be frank, I used to think ill of you, and my conscience is so full of reproach that I—if you’ll excuse me—I—I must beg your pardon.”

“Beg my pardon, Major Day?” said Lucy, and she turned red and white by turns as she began to tremble.

“Yes, my dear, and ask you to forgive me.”

“Forgive you, Major Day?”

“Yes, my dear, I fear I was too ready to believe you were weak and foolish, and did not give you credit for being what you are, and—there, there, my dear, I surrender at discretion, I leave it to your generosity to let me march off with colours flying.”

“Dear Major Day! I didn’t deserve that you should think so ill of me,” sobbed Lucy passionately, and laying her hands in the old man’s she made no resistance as he drew her towards him, and kissed her forehead, just when, according to his unlucky custom, Oldroyd came into sight.

At the moment when the major bent down and pressed his lips on little Lucy’s white forehead, the pony’s head was directed straight towards them; the next instant he had sprung round like a weather-cock, and his head was directed towards home, but only for a few moments, before it was dragged round again, and the doctor come slowly ambling towards them, looking indignant and fierce.

“Then we are to be the best of friends again, eh, my dear, and I am quite forgiven?”

“Oh, yes, dear Major Day,” said Lucy; “but please don’t think so ill of me again.”

“I’m a dreadful old scoundrel ever to have thought ill of you at all,” cried the major. “There, we must forget all the past. Ah, doctor, how are you? When are you coming up to the hall? My brother will be glad to see you, I’m sure.”

“I hope Sir John is not unwell?” said Oldroyd, trying to wither Lucy with a look, and bringing back upon himself such an indignant flash that he metaphorically curled up, as he muttered something to himself about the daring impudence some women could display.

“Unwell? dear me, no,” said the major. “A little pulled down by too much inaction abroad; nothing hurts him though much. I mean come as a visitor. How is the health of the neighbourhood, eh?”

“Excellent, Major Day, that is, excepting Mr Alleyne’s.”

“What! Mr Alleyne ill? Bless my soul! you did not say anything about it, my dear.”

“My dear! my dear!” muttered Oldroyd between his teeth; “always my dear. Surely the old idiot is not going to marry the wicked little flirt.”

“I had not had time, Major Day,” said Lucy eagerly, “but I don’t think dear Moray is any worse than usual.”

“Worse than usual? Then he has been unwell?”

“He is ill,” replied Lucy, “but it has been coming on so slowly that I am afraid we do not notice it so much as we should.”

“But is he confined to his bed?”

"Oh, no!" cried Lucy. "He is going on with his studies just as usual."

"I'll come over and see him. I meant to come, but I—er—I hesitated, my dear. Do you think he would be pleased if I called?"

"I'm sure he would, Major Day," cried Lucy. "Pray come soon."

"Indeed, I will, perhaps to-morrow. Are you going my way?"

"No, major, I am going back to The Firs. I do not like to be away when Mr Oldroyd is going to see my brother."

The major shook hands warmly, and went his way, saying to himself,—

"What did she mean? She did not like to be away when Mr Oldroyd visited her brother? What she said, of course. Ah, how prone men are to put a second meaning to other people's words. How ready I was to think ill of the little lassie and her brother; and I am as ready now to own that she is innocence itself. I used to think, though, that she cared for Oldroyd."

Meanwhile, Lucy was walking straight along by the side of the road, back towards The Firs, with Oldroyd, on his disreputable-looking steed, a yard or two upon her left.

By quitting the road and cutting across the open boggy land, amidst the furze and whortleberry scrub Lucy could have saved a quarter-of-a-mile, and left her companion behind; or even if he had elected to follow her, the softness of the soil and the constant recurrence of swampy patches about, which one on foot could easily avoid, would have necessitated so much care that he would have been left far behind.

But Lucy trudged steadily on with her pretty little face trying to look stern and hard, but failing dis—no, not dismally, for hers was a type of countenance from which the prettiness could not be eliminated try how one would.

Oldroyd was angry—bitterly angry. But he was in love. Once more jealous fear had attacked him. For had not he plainly seen Lucy's face held up in the most matter-of-fact manner for the major to bend down and kiss? Certainly he was an old man, old enough to be her grandfather, and the kiss had been given when he who witnessed it was two or three hundred yards away; but there was the fact and Oldroyd felt furious.

All this time had passed since he had felt that he was growing very fond of Lucy, and his affection had been nipped and blackened like the top of a spring potato, by an unkindly frost, consequent upon the Rolph affair, while still like the spring potato, though the first shoots had been nipped, it was only for more and stronger ones to form and grow faster and faster than before. But Lucy had made no sign.

And so they went on towards The Firs on that delicious spring day, when the larks were singing overhead, the young growth of the pines shed a sweet odour of lemon to be wafted across the road, and at every step, Lucy's little feet crushed down a daisy, but the bright-eyed flower lifted its head again as soon as she had passed and did not seem to be trampled in the least. Oldroyd did as Lucy did—stared straight before him, letting the reins—a much mended pair—rest on the pony's neck; while Peter hung his head in a sleepy, contemplative way, and sometimes walked, sometimes slowly ambled on, as if moved by his spirit to keep abreast of Lucy.

Oldroyd's brow knit closely as he mentally wrote out a prescription to meet his new case, and then mentally tore it up again, ending by at last turning quite fiercely towards Lucy, giving the pony's ribs a couple of kicks as he snatched up the reins to force it forward, and then, as she started half frightened by his near approach, he said to her in a reproachful voice,—

"How can you behave so cruelly to me, Lucy?" According to all canons the rule in such a case was for Lucy to start, open her eyes a little more widely, stare, and say,—

"Mr Oldroyd, I don't know what you mean!" But this was out on a common, and not in a west-end drawing-room. Her heart was full, and she was not disposed just then to fence and screen herself with maidenly conventionalities. She knew well enough that Philip Oldroyd loved her very dearly, almost as dearly, she owned in her heart of hearts, as she loved him, and that he was alluding broadly to her conduct with Rolph, her long display of resentment, and also to her having given the major a kiss that day. He was very angry and jealous, but that did not annoy her in the least. It gave her pleasure. He spoke very sharply to her just then—viciously and bitterly; but she did not mind that either. It was piquant. It gave her a pleasant little thrill. There was a masterly sound about it, and she felt as if it was pleasant to be mastered just then, when she was in the most wilful and angry of moods.

"You know what I mean," he said, quickly, "you know how I love you."

"Oh!" said Lucy to herself very softly; but though every nerve tingled with pleasure, not a muscle stirred, and she kept her face averted.

"You know," continued Oldroyd, "how long I have loved you; but you take delight in trampling upon my best feelings. I suppose," he added bitterly, "it is because I am so poor."

"Indeed it is not!" cried Lucy with spirit, as she kept her back to him; "how can you think me so pitiful and mean!"

"Well, then, why do you treat me so badly?"

"I don't treat you badly."

This was very commonplace, and Lucy's continuous stare straight before her did not give it dignity.

“You do treat me badly—cruelly—worse,” exclaimed Oldroyd, kicking his pony’s ribs so viciously, that the poor brute resented it by shaking his head, and wagging his tail.

“You have treated me shamefully, Mr Oldroyd,” cried Lucy.

It was getting terribly commonplace now.

“Indeed I have not,” he replied. “How could I help feeling hurt when I saw you as I did with that horse-jockey foot-racing animal?”

“You might have known that I had a reason for it, and that I was behaving so on behalf of my friend,” said Lucy.

“How was I to be able to analyse the secrets of your heart?” said Oldroyd, romantically.

“Then you looked insultingly at me just now, when dear old grandfatherly Major Day spoke to me, and behaved to me as he did. Why—oh, I haven’t patience with myself for speaking about it all as I do. It is degrading and weak; and what right, sir,” she panted, “have you to ask me for such explanations?”

“I do it in all humbleness, Lucy,” he whispered, with his voice softening. “I have nothing to say in my defence, only that I love you so dearly that it cuts me to the heart to think that—that—oh, my darling, look at me like that again.”

It was all in a moment. Lucy’s eyes had ceased to flash, and had darted out such a confession of forgiveness, and love, and tenderness, all mingled, as made Oldroyd forget all about the laws of equitation, and fall off his pony on the wrong side, to catch Lucy’s hand in his and draw it tightly through his arm.

Peter began to nibble placidly at shoots, and everything was more commonplace than ever, for they walked slowly along by the roadside, with their heads down, perfectly silent; while the pony browsed along, with his head down, and the rein dragging on the ground, till after a bit he trod upon it, gave his head a snatch at the check, and broke it, making it very little worse than it was before.

And so they went on, with the larks singing overhead, the grass and daisies springing beneath their feet, and the world looking more beautiful than it ever did before; what time Glynne was sitting, pale, large-eyed, and thin, in her own room, reading hard—some heavy work, which she jealously placed aside whenever she had finished perusing; and Moray Alleyne was alone in his observatory, gaunt, grey, and strange, busy over the calculations respecting the star he had been watching for nights past, that bright particular star that seemed somehow connected with the woman he had ventured to love.

“Are you very angry, Mrs Alleyne?” said Oldroyd, as he took Lucy’s hand in his and walked with her to where the mistress of The Firs was seated, busily stitching, in the very perfection of neatness, the pleats of a new garment for her son.

“Angry?” said Mrs Alleyne, starting and flushing, and then turning pale as she dropped her work, and her hands began to tremble. “Does this mean—does this mean—?”

“That we love each other?” replied Oldroyd, glancing sidewise at Lucy. “Yes, madam, it does, and I feel dread and shame, I scarcely know what, when I speak to you like this, for I am so poor, and my prospects so extremely wanting in brightness.”

“We are used to being poor, Mr Oldroyd,” said Mrs Alleyne, sadly.

“Then you do not object?”

“Why should I?” said Mrs Alleyne. “It is natural that my child should some day form an attachment. She has, I presume, done so?”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes, mamma,” cried Lucy, “a long time now.”

“Then, knowing as I do, that the attachment is to a man of sterling worth,” said Mrs Alleyne softly, as she held out her hand, “what more could I wish?”

Oldroyd caught the hand in his and kissed it, hesitated a moment, and then bent down and kissed Mrs Alleyne’s thin pinched lips.

“It has given me the stimulus I wanted,” he said, proudly. “Mrs Alleyne, Lucy shall not be a poor man’s wife, but—Ah, Alleyne.”

“Ah, Oldroyd,” said the astronomer, in his soft, deep voice, and he smiled sadly; “come to prescribe for me again. And I’m better than ever now—but—is anything wrong?”

For the positions of the three occupants of the room he had entered struck him as being singular.

“Yes,” cried Oldroyd, “very wrong. I, being a poor surgeon and general practitioner, have been asking your mother’s consent to Lucy’s becoming my wife.”

“And Lucy?” said Alleyne softly.

“Oh, yes, Moray, dear Moray,” she cried, hiding her face in his breast.

“I am very glad, Oldroyd,” said Alleyne, quietly. “I have thought of it sometimes, and wondered whether it would

come to this, and—and I am very very glad.”

He held out his hand and grasped the young doctor’s very warmly, before kissing his sister, after which she escaped to her room, where she stayed for quite an hour before coming down shyly, and with a very happy look in her eyes.

Oldroyd was not gone. It was not likely. He had been staying with Alleyne in the observatory—watching his case as he told himself, but not succeeding in his self-deceit, and some kind of natural attraction led him back into the dining-room just as Lucy entered from the other door.

It must have been a further charge of natural attraction that led them straight into each other’s arms, for the first long embrace and kiss, from which Lucy started back at last, all shame-faced, rosy-red, and with the sensation that she had just been guilty of something very wicked indeed.

“Are you happy, Lucy?” said Oldroyd.

“No,” she said, looking at him earnestly, “and I shall not be till others are happy too.”

Volume Three—Chapter Thirteen.

As Through a Glass.

“Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,” says the poet; and there he stops, leaving the rest of the places under the pink little god’s *régime* to our imagination.

He was busy as ever at Brackley, with people in a humbler walk in life and there was an attraction there for a person who plays no prominent part in this narrative, to wit, Thompson, private dragoon in Her Majesty’s service, and valet and confidential man to Captain Rolph.

He had long fixed his affections possibly in military temporary fashion upon Mason, Glynne’s maid. These affections had glowed during the many visits to Warren and Hall, cooled down during the activities of service—rubbing down his master as he would a horse, and helping him to train—sinking for a year and a half or so after “the upset” at Brackley, and turning up again when the captain came back to The Warren to be hitched on again, as he termed it. For, truth to tell, it was known that Mason had one hundred and fourteen pounds deposited in consols with a certain old lady in Threadneedle Street.

Thompson felt glad then, when one day the captain said to him,—

“All packed up, isn’t it?” and he replied that the luggage was ready. Whereupon the captain told him that he would not want him for a month.

“And, by the way, go down to The Warren before my mother returns, and get my guns, a few books in my room, and the knick-knacks and clothes, and the rest.”

“Won’t you want ’em, sir, next time you’re going down?”

“Mind your own business, fool, and get the things.”

Thompson stood at attention, winked to himself, and thought of how near he would be to Brackley, and how, in spite of the past he would be sure of a welcome in the servants’ hall. A month would be long enough to “pull that off;” and though he did not put it in words, to pull Mason’s savings out of the great British bank.

But then there was Sinkins, the village carpenter and parish clerk, who often did jobs at the Hall, a man with whom he had come in contact more than a year before, over the preparations for Glynne’s wedding, and had seen talking to Mason more than once, and whom he held in utter contempt.

It is of no use to disguise the truth, for no matter whether Matthew Sinkins was in his Sunday best, or in his regular carpenter’s fustian, he always exhaled a peculiar odour of glue. Certainly it was often dashed with sawdust, suggestive of cellars and wine, or the fragrant resinous scent of newly cut satin shavings; but the glue overbore the rest, and maintained itself so persistently that, even during the week when Sinkins had the French polishing job at Brackley, and the naphtha and shellac clung to his clothes, there, making itself perceptible, was the regular good old carpenter’s shop smell of glue.

Thompson said to Mason that it was disgusting, but she told him frankly that it was a good, clean, wholesome smell, and far preferable to that of the stables.

This, with toss of the head soon after Thompson’s arrival, for, in spite of bygones he found on getting himself driven over from The Warren, quite a warm welcome from old friends, one and all being eager to talk over the past and learn everything that could be pumped out of Thompson respecting his master’s doings since that terrible night.

Thompson was in the stable-yard smoking a cigar—a very excellent cigar, that had cost somewhere about a shilling—rather an extravagance for a young man in his position of life, but as it was one out of his master’s box, the expense did not fall upon him; and had any one suggested that it was not honest for him to smoke the captain’s cigars he would have looked at him with astonishment, and asked whether he knew the meaning of the word perquisites.

It was a very excellent cigar, and being so it might have been supposed to have a soothing effect; but whatever may have been its sedative qualities they were not apparent, for Thompson’s face was gloomy, consequent upon his

having seen Matthew Sinkins go up to the side door with his basket of tools hanging from his shoulder, and kept in that position by the hammer being thrust through one of the handles, that handle being passed through its fellow.

“Him here, again?” exclaimed Thompson. “He’s always hanging about the place. Well, it’s as free for me as for him, I suppose. I shall go and see.”

Thompson who was a smart, dapper-looking swarthy man, with closely cut hair, very small mutton chop whiskers, and dark beady eyes, threw away the half-smoked cigar, gave a touch to his carefully-tied white cravat, glanced down at his brightly polished boots, and let his eyes rest upon his very closely fitting Bedford cord trousers before crossing the yard, whistling in a nonchalant manner, and walking into the servants’ hall, where Matthew Sinkins was waiting with his tool basket on the floor by his side.

“Hallo, chips!” said Thompson, condescendingly, “how’s trade?”

“Pretty tidy, Mr Thompson,” said the carpenter, slowly, and taking out the two-foot rule which dwelt in a long narrow pocket down one leg of his trousers, but sheathing it again directly, as if it were a weapon which he did not at present need.

“Glad of it,” said Thompson. “Haven’t they asked you to have a horn of ale?”

“Yes, Mr Thompson; oh, yes. Miss Mason has gone to get one for me from Mr Morris.”

“Oh! has she?” said Thompson; and this news was of so discomforting a nature that he was taken a little aback. “Job on?”

“Yes, Mr Thompson, I’m wanted. You’re here again, then. Thought you was going abroad.”

“No,” said Thompson, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and see-sawing himself to and fro, from toe to heel and back. “No, we’re not gone yet, Mr Sinkins; and if it’s any pleasure to you to know it, I don’t see any likelihood of our going for some time to come. What have you got to say to that?”

Mr Sinkin’s big hand went deliberately down the leg of his trousers, and he half drew out the rule again, as if he meant to measure the captain’s attendant, but he allowed the narrow strip of boxwood to glide back into its place and breathed hard.

“I say, what have you got to say to that, Mr Sinkins?” said Thompson, nodding his head a good deal, and unconsciously making himself wonderfully like a pugnacious bantam cock ruffling himself in the presence of a heavy, stolid, barn-door fowl.

“Got to say to it?” replied Sinkins, calmly.

“Yes, sir, got to say to it, sir,” cried Thompson, with an irritating air of superiority that appeared to suggest that he had got the carpenter in a corner now, from which he did not mean to let him escape until he had answered the question put to him so sharply.

Sinkins seemed to feel that his rule was necessary once again, but the boxwood was allowed to slip back as its master shook his head, and said in a slow serious way,—

“I haven’t got anything to say to it, Mr Thompson, sir.”

“Oh, you haven’t.”

“No, sir,” replied the carpenter stolidly. “If I was to say a lot to it, I don’t see as it would make any difference one way or the other.”

“No, sir, I should think it wouldn’t,” cried Thompson; and just then Miss Mason, the brisk-looking, dark-eyed, ale-bearing Hebe of two-and-twenty, came in, looking as if she were wearing an altered silk dress that had once been the property of Glynne Day.

“Oh, you are here, Mr Thompson, are you?” she said with a voice full of acidity.

“Yes, ma’am, I am here,” said Thompson, sharply.

“Perhaps you’ll come up as soon as you’ve drunk your ale, Mr Sinkins,” said Miss Mason, sweetly. “I’ll show you which room.”

Matthew placed the horn at his lips, and removed it so reluctantly that it ceased to be a horn of plenty, and he set it back upon the table with a sigh. He stooped then and took the handle of his hammer, lifting the tool basket, so that chisels and screws, and drivers, gimlets, saws, and planes, all jumbled up together, as they were swung round upon the strong man’s shoulder, but only to be swung off again and carried in the hand, as being more suitable in so grand a place as Brackley Hall.

“Are you quite ready, Mr Sinkins,” said Miss Mason, in a tone of voice that seemed quite affectionate.

“Yes, miss, I’m quite ready.”

“Come along, then, Mr Sinkins,” said Mason; and with what was meant for a haughty look at the captain’s man, she led the way through the door opening on to the back staircase, sending the said door back with unnecessary violence as Mr Thompson essayed to follow, but only essayed for fear of being ordered back.

“There’s something up,” he said. “That fellow’s seen something about master, and been tale-bearing. And so he’s to go up there all alone, easing and repairing doors as the old major’s ’most banged off the hinges in his passions, and she’s to stand by a-giving of him instructions, and all to aggravate and annoy me.”

He took a turn up and down the hall, screwing his doubled-up fist in his left hand, and grinding his teeth with rage.

“Yes; that’s what it’s for, just to aggravate and annoy me, and him smelling that awful of glue! Bah! It’s disgusting. A low, common, heavy-looking country bumpkin of a carpenter, as has never been hardly outside his village, and can only just sign his name with a square pencil, pointed up with a chisel. I say it’s disgusting.”

Thompson took another turn or two up and down the hall, to ease his wounded pride, and then went on again talking to himself till he caught sight of the empty, unoffending horn, which he smote with his doubled fist, striking out at it scientifically from the shoulder, and sent it flying to the other end of the hall.

“Here, what I want to know,” said Thompson, is this—“Am I going to pull this here off, or am I not?”

There was no answer to the question, so the man sat down astride of a form, as if it had been a horse, folded his arms exceedingly tight, and scowled at the door that had been shut against him, devoured by jealously, and picturing in his mind other matters beside the easing of doors and tightening of hinges, for he was measuring other people’s conduct, not by Mr Sinkins’ footrule, but by his own bushel.

“I can’t stand it,” he muttered at last. “I must have a quiet pipe.”

Striding out of the hall as if he were on duty, he marched right out across the park and into the lane, from whence he struck into the first opening in the fir woods where the shade seemed to calm him; and, taking out a pipe-case, he extracted a very black *bruyère* root pipe, filled it, stuck it in his mouth, and then, seeking for a match in his vest pocket, he lit it deftly by giving it a rub on the leg of his trousers, puffed his tobacco into incandescence, and then threw the glowing vesta, like a hand grenade, over his left shoulder.

There was a sharp ejaculation, and then,—“Confound your insolence, fellow!” Thompson started round, and found himself facing the major, trowel in one hand, malacca cane in the other.

“That light hit me in the face, sir. Do you know, sir, that you may set the woods on fire, sir?” cried the major. “What! Thompson! ’Tention! What the devil are you doing here?”

The man gave a sharp look to left and right, and then, from old habit, obeyed the imperious military order, and drew himself upright, staring straight before him—“eyes front.”

“You scoundrel!” cried the major, seizing him by the collar, and holding his cane threateningly, as the idea of some peril to his niece flashed across his mind. “You’ve brought a note or some message to the Hall.”

“No, sir! really, sir, I haven’t, sir.”

“Don’t dare to lie to me, you dog!” cried the major, with the stick moving up and down, and Thompson’s eyes following it, in the full belief that at any moment it might fall upon his shoulders.

“It’s gospel truth, sir,” he cried. “I haven’t got no note. How could I have?”

“Where’s your master?”

“Off, sir.”

“Off? What do you mean? Isn’t he at The Warren?”

“No, sir; he only sent me down to fetch his things.”

“Ah!” cried the major; “and here with some message.”

“No, sir, that he didn’t, sir. I come over here of my own self.”

“What do you mean by ‘off’?” cried the major. “You don’t go from here till you confess the truth. After what happened how dare you set foot on these grounds! I say, where is your master?”

“Gone abroad, sir.”

“Is that the truth?—Here, I was a bit hasty.—A sovereign, my lad.—Now, then, tell me. Your master sent you down here?”

“Only to The Warren, sir, to fetch his things, because he wasn’t coming down again.”

The major looked at him searchingly.

“Let me see,” he said, sharply; “he was to be married the other day, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, sir,” said Thompson, with a peculiar look as he held the sovereign in his pocket, and ran a finger nail round the milled edge.

“What do you mean by that, sir?” cried the major suspiciously, and the stick was raised again. “Wasn’t he married?”

"Well, he may have been since, sir, but that other didn't come off."

"What?"

"Well, sir, the fact is, master was going to be, but there was a little trouble, sir, about another lady who lived in these parts, and when it come out about the wedding as was to be very quiet in London, there was a bit of a fuss."

"Humph! well, that is nothing to me, my man. I made a mistake, and I ask your pardon."

"It's all right, sir, and thank you kindly," said Thompson. "It was Ben Hayle's daughter, sir, Miss Judith, who used to be at The Warren before they were sent away."

The major had turned his back to go, but the man's words arrested him, and, in spite of himself, he listened.

"Ben Hayle come to Long's, sir, in Bond Street, where we was staying, and got to see master. I was packing up, because master was going on the Continong next day, and there was a tremenjus row, all in whispers like, because I was in the next room, but Ben Hayle got louder and louder, and I couldn't help hearing all the last of it."

"There, that will do. I don't want to hear any more."

"No, sir, certainly not," said Thompson; "but master didn't go to the church with Miss Emlin, sir, and from what I heered he went abroad next night, sir."

"Alone?"

"No, sir," said Thompson, smiling.

"Poor Glynne!" muttered the major as he turned away. "The man is a disgrace to the service. An utter scoundrel. Gone abroad. No, he would not go alone."

Thompson, left in the wood, took out and looked at the sovereign, and concluded that he would not go to the Hall again.

Volume Three—Chapter Fourteen.

Far Seeing.

"Poor old soul, she can't be long for this world," said Oldroyd one day on receiving a message from Lindham, and, mounting Peter, he rode over across the commons to the old cottage.

"Oh, you've come at last, then," said the old woman, raising herself in bed and frowning heavily. "There, don't you go telling me no lies. I know where you've been wasting the parish time as you're paid for."

"Wasting the time?" said Oldroyd, laughing.

"Ah, it's nothing to make fun of. When I told you to take to Miss Lucy, I didn't mean you to go courting for months, but to marry her and done with it, so as she might be a bit useful, visiting and nursing some o' the sick folk on your rounds."

"Why, you dissatisfied old woman," cried Oldroyd merrily, "I rode over as soon as I got your message."

"Well, then, why don't you do me some good at once, and not stand talking. If you knowed the aggynies I suffer, you wouldn't stand talking. You heered the news?"

"What, about the French?"

"Tchut! What do I know about the French? I mean about my grandbairn."

"Miss Hayle? No."

"The captain took her off, and we thought he'd married her, you know, but he didn't."

"Poor girl!" said Oldroyd, sadly.

"Bah! I haven't patience with her. Got her head turned up at The Warren, being with that girl there; and then, in spite of all I said, and her father said, she must be always thinking of the captain, and breaking her heart when she heard he was going to marry first this one and then that. She got so that at last he had only to hold up his finger and say come, and away she went; and now she's back in London, left to shift for herself, with lots of fine clothes. She's writ home to her father for help. But we shall see—we shall see."

"A scoundrel!" exclaimed Oldroyd.

"Yes, he's a bad un," said the old woman, "a reg'lar bad un, but he'll get his deserts; you see if he don't. Ben Hayle arn't Sir John Day up at the Hall. He won't let my gentleman off so easy; you see if he do. Ah, it's a strange world, doctor, and I begin to think it gets worse and worse."

Oldroyd listened to a good deal more of the old lady's moralising about the state of the world, as he ministered to her

“aggynies,” and finally left, after undertaking to call again very soon.

“Mind, you shut the door!” shouted the old woman; “the haps don’t fit well. You must try it after you’ve let go.”

“I’ll mind,” said Oldroyd good-humouredly; and, mounting Peter, he was thoughtfully jogging homeward, when the pony stopped in front of a gate, on which a man was seated—the pony having apparently recognised an old patient, and paused for the doctor to have a chat.

“Do, sir?” said the man, getting down slowly and touching his hat.

“Ah, Hayle, glad to see you looking so strong again.”

“Ay, sir,” said the man, smiling sadly; “you ought to be proud o’ me, and make a show of what you’ve done for me. ’Bout your best job, warn’t I?”

“Well, I suppose you were, in surgery,” said Oldroyd, looking hard at the man’s pinched face and settled frown; “but, I say, my man, hadn’t you better drop that life now, and try something different?”

“Easier said than done, doctor,” replied Hayle grimly. “Give a dog a bad name and hang him. Nobody wouldn’t employ me. S’pose I said to you. ‘Change your life and turn parson.’ Wouldn’t be easy, would it?”

Oldroyd shook his head.

“Perhaps not,” he said; “but you’re too good a man for a poacher. Look here, Hayle; Morton has left and gone to Lord Bogmere’s. Sir John Day is very friendly to me. Let me go and state your case to him frankly.”

“Wouldn’t be no good, sir.”

“Don’t say that. He’s a thorough English gentleman, always ready to do anyone a good turn. I believe in you, Hayle; and if I say to him that you would gladly come and serve him faithfully, I should say so believing honestly that you would. Shall I speak to him?”

“Thank you kindly, sir, but not now. I’ve got too much else on my mind,” said Hayle, gazing at the doctor searchingly. “Been to see the old lady?”

“Yes.”

“Did—did she tell you any news?”

Oldroyd nodded.

“Ah, she would,” said the ex-keeper thoughtfully. “Hah! he’s a bad un; but I didn’t think he’d be quite so bad as that to her; for she’s a handsome gal, doctor—a handsome gal.”

“More’s the pity,” thought Oldroyd, though he did not speak.

“It’s well for him that I haven’t run again him, I can tell you. Don’t happen to know where the captain is, do you, sir?”

“No, I have not the least idea; and if I had, I don’t think I should tell you.”

“S’pose not, doctor,” said the man, with a strange laugh, “seeing what’s coming off.”

“Why; what are you going to do?”

“Do, sir,” said Hayle slowly, as he leaned on the gate, and looked down the dark path in the wood. “When I was a young man, and made up my mind to trap a hare or a fezzan, or p’raps only a rabbud, I trapped it. P’r’aps I didn’t the first time; p’raps I didn’t the second or third; but I kept on at it till I did, and I’m going to trap him.”

“What, Captain Rolph! Make him pay for the injury to your daughter?”

“I’m going to see if he’ll make it up to her first. If he won’t, I’ll make him pay.”

“Make it up! Do you mean marry her?”

“Yes; that’s what I mean, sir,” said Hayle slowly, and then, turning round to face the doctor, and fix him with his big dark eyes. “He shall pay his debt if he don’t marry her!”

“Do you mean in money—breach of promise?”

“No,” said the man, speaking to him fiercely. “No money wouldn’t pay my gal nor me. He took a fancy to her, and she liked him, and I forgive him for his cunning way of following her when I was laid by. I forgive him, too, for what he did to me. It was fair fight so far, but it was his gun as shot me that night. I didn’t bear no malice again him for all that, as long as he was square toward Judith; but he’s thrown her off, and I’m going to see him about it.”

“Man, man, what are you going to do?” cried Oldroyd.

“What am I going to do?” roared Hayle, blazing up into sudden fury. “You’re going to marry sweet young Miss Lucy, yonder. S’pose eighteen or nineteen years, by-and-by, doctor, there’s another Miss Lucy as you’re very proud on. You’re genteel people, we’re not; but the stuff’s all the same. I was proud o’ my Judith, same as you’ll be proud of

your Miss Lucy when she comes. What am I going to do? What would you do to the man as took her from you, and when his fancy was over sent her off?”

Oldroyd stood gazing at the fierce face before him.

“Doctor, when I heerd first as he’d thrown her over, I said to myself, ‘He’s a proud chap—proud of his strong body, and his running and racing: he shall know what it is to suffer now. Curse him, I’ll break him across my knee.’ Then I stopped and thought, doctor, and made up my mind that he should marry her, and if he don’t—”

Hayle stopped short, with his lips tightened and his fists clenched; and then, in a curiously furtive way, he turned his face aside, sprang lightly over the gate into the wood, and disappeared from the doctor’s sight.

“If I had done that fellow a deadly wrong I should not feel very happy and comfortable in my own mind,” said Oldroyd, as he looked in the direction in which the man had disappeared. “Ah, well, it’s no business of mine; and, thank goodness, I lead too busy a life to have many of the temptations talked of by good old Doctor Watts.”

“Now, then, I’ve taken my physic,” he added, after a few minutes’ thought, and with a cheery smile on his countenance, “so I’ll go and have my sugar. Go on, Peter.”

Peter went on, and, as if knowing where to go, took the doctor straight to The Firs.

Volume Three—Chapter Fifteen.

The Image Fades.

“Oh, how you startled me.”

“Can’t help being ugly,” said Oldroyd merrily. “Eliza said you had come in, and were down the garden, so I took the liberty of following.”

“Does mamma know?” said Lucy, with a guilty look at the house.

“I really can’t tell,” said Oldroyd, smiling. “I shall not look for her permission now, since I consider myself your duly qualified medical attendant, your life physician, I hope.”

“Really, Mr Oldroyd,” said Lucy, “you need not feel my pulse to-day.”

“Indeed, but I must,” he said; “and look into your eyes to see if they are clear.”

“What nonsense!” said Lucy. “I suppose next you’ll want me to put out my tongue.”

“No,” he said laughing, “your lips will do.”

“Philip! For shame! Anyone might have seen. You shouldn’t.”

“Save that I would not have anyone witness of so holy a joy as that kiss was to me,” whispered Oldroyd, “the whole world might see my love for you, little wife to be. There’s no shame in it, Lucy. I am so happy. And you?”

“I’m very, very miserable,” she cried, looking in his face with eyes that denied the fact.

“Then you are to tell me your trouble,” he whispered, fondly, “and I am to console you.”

“But I don’t think you can, Philip.”

“Well, let us hear,” he said. “What is the trouble?”

“It is about poor Moray.”

“Ah! Yes!” said Oldroyd slowly.

“And Glynne!”

“Whom you have just been to see, eh?”

“Yes.”

“I once knew a case,” said Oldroyd, “where two people were most tenderly attached to each other—the gentleman far more so than the lady; but they, loving as they did, were kept apart by foolish doubts and misconceptions and pride.”

“It is not true,” said Lucy sharply.

“That they were kept apart like that?”

“No; that—that—”

“The gentleman was more deeply touched than the lady? No; that part is not true. It was just the reverse.”

"And that is not true either," said Lucy archly.

"Well, we'll not argue the point," said Oldroyd, laughing. "But I'll go on. In their case no one interfered to set matters straight, and they only came right through the tender affection and good heart of the dearest little girl who ever lived."

"You may say that again, Philip," said Lucy, nestling to him, and looking up through a veil of tears; "but it isn't a bit true. I'm afraid I was very, very weak, and proud and foolish, and I feel now as if I could never forgive myself for much that I have done."

"I'll forgive you, and you shall forgive me," said Oldroyd. "And now I don't think I need go on speaking in parables. I only wanted to point out the difference. Our trouble arranged itself without the help of friends. That of someone else ought soon to be set right, with two such energetic people as ourselves to help."

"But sometimes interference makes matters worse," sighed Lucy.

"Yes; because those who see about these matters are ignorant pretenders. Now, we are both duly qualified practitioners, Lucy, and, I think, can settle the matter right off, and cure them both."

"But how? It is so dreadful."

"Lucy, Lucy!"

It was a sharp, agonised call, as of one in extreme anguish, and, startled by the cry, Lucy sprang up and ran towards the house, closely followed by Oldroyd.

"Mamma, dear mamma, what is it?" she cried.

"Your brother. Oh, thank heaven, Mr Oldroyd, you are here."

"What is it?" cried Oldroyd, catching Mrs Alleyne's white and trembling hand.

"I—I went—I ventured to go into the observatory just now, my son seemed so quiet, and—oh, heaven, what have I done that I should suffer this?"

It was a wild appeal, uttered by one in deep agony of spirit, as Mrs Alleyne reeled, and would have fallen, had not Oldroyd caught her in his arms, and gently lowered her on the carpet.

"Only fainting," he whispered. "Let her lie; loosen her dress, and bathe her face. I'll run on to your brother."

Satisfied that he was not wanted there, and, giving Lucy an encouraging nod, Oldroyd ran quickly along the passage to the observatory, whose door he found open, but almost in total darkness, for the shutters were carefully closed, and the shaded lamp gave so little light, save in one place on the far side of the table, that he was compelled to cross the great room cautiously, for fear of falling over some one or other of the philosophical instruments, whose places the student often changed.

On reaching the table, he could see that Alleyne was lying prone upon the well-worn rug before his chair; and, making his way to the window, Oldroyd tore open the shutters, admitting a burst of sunshine, and completely changing the aspect of the great dusty place.

Going back to the table, he took in the position at a glance. There were bottles there, in a little rack such a chemist would use, and one stood alone.

He caught it up, removed the stopper, then put it down with an impatient "Pish!" and was turning to the prostrate man, when, previously hidden by a book, another stopper caught his eye, and, drawing in his breath with a loud hiss, he sprang to Alleyne's side, to find that the fingers of his right hand tightly clasped a small cut-glass bottle, the one to which the stopper belonged.

"I was afraid so," muttered Oldroyd, with his eyes scanning the white, fixed countenance before him. "He must have taken it as he stood by the table, and fallen at once. Poor fellow! Poor fellow! He must have been mad."

These words were uttered as, with all the prompt decision of a medical man, Oldroyd was examining his friend; his first act being to ascertain what the little bottle had contained.

It was no easy task to free it from the stiffened fingers; but he tore it away at last, held it to the light, to his nostrils, and then set it quickly upon the table, with an impatient exclamation.

"And I call myself a practised doctor," he muttered, "and let my fancy carry me away as it did. Poor fellow! He must have felt it coming on, and tried that ammonia to keep off the sensation. Suffered from it before, perhaps," he continued, as he laid Alleyne's head more easily, tore open his handkerchief and collar; and then, after drawing up the lids and examining the pupils of his eyes, he hurriedly threw open both windows, and caught up a chart from a side table.

His next act was to ring the bell furiously, and then return to Alleyne's side and begin fanning his head vigorously.

It was Lucy who answered the bell, running in exclaiming,—

"Oh, Philip, what is it, pray?"

"Don't make a fuss, darling," he said, quickly. "Be a firm little woman. I want your help. Cold water, a big basin, sponge, brandy, vinegar. Quick?"

Lucy made an effort to compose herself, and the prompt order had its due effect, for she ran out, to return in a few minutes laden with all Oldroyd had demanded.

"That's right," he said, quickly; and in answer to Lucy's inquiring eyes, "A fit, dear. He has overdone it. Exhaustion. Brain symptoms. Over pressure. That's well. Now, the brandy. Here, you take this card and keep on fanning, while I bathe his head with the spirit and water. We must cool his head. Fan away. Be calm now. A doctor's wife must not cry. That's brave."

All the while he was applying the sponge, saturated with spirit and water, to Alleyne's temples, and checking Lucy when she seemed disposed to break down, the result being that she worked busily and well.

"Well done, brave little woman," he cried, encouragingly. "It is a regular fit of exhaustion, and we must not let it come to anything more. Give me the fan, dear. No, go on. I'll apply some more water. Evaporates quickly, you see, and relieves the brain. Spirit stimulates, even taken through the pores like that. Good heavens, what a mat of hair. Quick! Scissors. I must get rid of some of this."

He now took the extemporised fan from Lucy's fingers, using it energetically, while she rose from her knees, and ran to get a pair of her sharpest scissors, with which Oldroyd remorselessly sheared off the long unkempt locks from his patient's temples.

Meanwhile Alleyne lay there perfectly motionless, breathing heavily, and with a strange fixed look in his eyes. At times a slight spasm seemed to convulse him, but only to be succeeded by long intervals of rigidity, during which Lucy plied the fan, gazing at her brother with horror-stricken eyes, while Oldroyd continued the cold bathing in the most matter-of-fact manner.

"If we could get some ice," muttered Oldroyd, as as he laid a cool hand upon his patient's head; and just then Mrs Alleyne, looking very white and weak, came into the room.

"I am better now," she whispered. "It was very foolish of me. What can I do?"

"Nothing, at present," replied Oldroyd. "Yes; send to the Hall. I know they have ice there. Ask Sir John Day to let us have some at once."

Mrs Alleyne darted an agonised look at her son, and then glided out of the room, when Lucy looked up piteously at Oldroyd.

"Pray, pray, tell me the truth," she whispered; "does this mean—death?"

"Heaven forbid!" he replied, quickly. "It is a bad fit, but a man may have several such as this and live to seventy. Lucy, we were looking about for a means to a certain—keep on fanning, my dear, that's right—certain end."

"I don't understand you," she said piteously.

"Alleyne—Glynne—to bring them together. This is her work—thinking of her and over-toiling. Surely her place is here."

Lucy heaved a sigh, but she held her peace, and busily wafted the cool air to her brother's forehead.

Mrs Alleyne returned, to kneel down a short distance away, in obedience to a whisper from the doctor; and then an hour passed, and there was no change, while hope seemed to be slowly departing from poor Lucy's eyes.

Suddenly a horse's feet were heard coming at a gallop, and a minute or two later there was a tap at the door.

"I came on at once," said Sir John, entering on tiptoe. "My brother is having the ice well opened, and he will be over directly with one of the men. Now, Mr Oldroyd, what can I do? I have the cob outside. Shall I—don't be offended, you might like help—shall I gallop over and get Doctor Blunt."

"It is not necessary," said Oldroyd thoughtfully, "but it would be more satisfactory to all parties. I should be glad if you could go, Sir John."

"Yes; exactly. How is he?"

"There's no change, and not likely to be for some time," replied Oldroyd, quietly.

Sir John looked pityingly at Alleyne, turned to Mrs Alleyne, took her hand and pressed it gently. Then, bending over Lucy, he took her hand in his.

"Keep a good heart, my dear," he whispered. "He'll be better soon;" and going out on tiptoe, it hardly seemed a minute before the regular beat of his horse's hoofs could be heard dying away in the distance.

A few minutes later the rumble of wheels was heard, and directly after Eliza came to the door with a pail of ice.

"And Major Day's in the dining-room, please, ma'am," whispered the girl, in a broken voice; "and is master better, and can he do anything?"

"Go and speak to him, Lucy. Here, your handkerchief first. That's right!" said Oldroyd sharply. "Now, the smallest

pieces of the ice. That's right. Go and say—No change. Perhaps he'll sit down and wait."

As he spoke, with Mrs Alleyne's help, he was busily arranging the smaller fragments from the pail of ice in a couple of handkerchiefs, and applying them to his patient's head.

"There," he said, "that's better than all our fanning. Now, I hope to see some difference."

The change was long in coming, Alleyne remaining perfectly insensible for hour after hour. Towards evening the principal physician of the neighbourhood arrived, and was for some time with the sick man, returning afterwards to where Mrs Alleyne, Lucy, Sir John, and the major were, waiting impatiently for news.

He said he was not surprised at the seizure, upon learning the history of the case from his friend, Mr Oldroyd, upon whose treatment he could make no change whatever.

"Then you think the worst!" cried Mrs Alleyne piteously.

"Pardon me, my dear madam; not at all. There are cases that time alone can decide. The ailment has been growing for many months. Your son must have had premonitory warnings, attacks of faintness, and the like; for he had provided himself with a strong preparation of ammonia; but he has not been leading a life that would improve the general state of his health. Over-study and general mental anxiety have, no doubt, been the causes of this attack; and as it has taken months to reach this culmination, it will take a long time to bring him back to health."

"Then you think there is no danger?" said Sir John eagerly.

"I think there is great danger, Sir John; but I hope that we shall be able to successfully ward it off."

Oldroyd and Mrs Alleyne resumed their places by the patient, the observatory being turned into a sick chamber, and mattresses and bedding were brought down; and there the astronomer lay, in the midst of the trophies of his study, his instruments and his piles of notes; the great grim tubes pointing through the opened shutters at the far-off worlds, towards which it almost seemed as if—weary with the struggle to reach them while chained to earth—he was about to wing his flight.

Lucy came in on tiptoe to bend forward over her brother, but Oldroyd rose.

"Go back, dear," he said, "and get some refreshment. It is time you dined."

"Dined!—at a time like this!" she said reproachfully.

"Yes; at a time like this. It will be a case of long nights of watching. He must not be left, and we must have strength to attend him through it all. Leave it to me, dear, and do as I wish."

Lucy bent down and kissed his hand in token of obedience, and soon after joined Sir John and the major in the dining-room.

"Can I do anything else now?" said Sir John; "if not, I'll go. I promised Glynne to go back with news as soon as there was any to carry. Are you coming, Jem?"

"No," said the major quietly. "I'm going to stop and help, if it's only to see that Miss Lucy here has rest and food."

Volume Three—Chapter Sixteen.

Celestial Matters.

Sir John nodded and went straight back to Brackley to find Glynne dressed and impatiently pacing the drawing-room, pale even to ghastliness, and with eyes dilated and looking large and wild.

"How long you have been!" she panted, catching his hand. "Tell me quickly—how is he? Tell me the worst."

"The worst is that he is very bad. It is a serious seizure, my dear, but the doctors give hope."

"Father, this long waiting has been more than I could bear," she cried hysterically. "I felt as if I should go mad. Now take me there—at once."

"Take you—to The Firs?"

"Yes; now. The carriage is ready. I told them to have it waiting."

"But, Glynne—my darling, is it—is it quite right that you should go? Well, perhaps as Lucy's friend."

"I am not going as Lucy's friend, father," cried Glynne; "this is no time for paltry subterfuge. I am going to him who is stricken down. I must go; I cannot stay away."

Sir John looked serious, but beyond knitting his brows, he said nothing, only rang for the carriage, and then hurried away to fortify himself with a tumbler of claret and some biscuits.

In a few minutes they were being rapidly driven to The Firs, Glynne remaining perfectly silent till they were near the gates, when she laid her hand upon her father's.

“Don’t think me strange,” she said in a low voice. “I feel as if I must go to him now. I may never hear his voice again.”

They were shown into the drawing-room, where, at Oldroyd’s wish, Mrs Alleyne had been taken by Lucy to partake of some refreshment, and, as Glynne advanced into the dimly-lighted room, their neighbour rose from her seat and stood confronting her.

“Well?” she said bitterly; “have you come to see your work?”

Glynne did not speak, but catching at Mrs Alleyne’s hand, sank upon her knees, while Sir John drew back with Lucy.

“Why do you come here?” said Mrs Alleyne, after a pause, painful in its silence to all.

The door closed softly just then, and Glynne started and glanced round to see that she was alone with Mrs Alleyne. Then she uttered a low, weary cry.

“You do not know—you do not know how I have suffered, or you would not speak to me like this,” she whispered.

“Suffered!” retorted Mrs Alleyne, bitterly; “what have your sufferings been to his? Woman, you came upon this house like a curse, to play with his true, noble heart; and when you had, with your vile coquetry, won it, you tossed it from you with insult, leaving him to suffer patiently, till nature could bear no more; and now you have come to look upon the wreck you have made. But you were not to go unpunished. Do you hear me, woman—he, my brave, true son, is stricken to his death.”

“No, no, no,” cried Glynne, flinging her arms round Mrs Alleyne; “it is not true—he is not dying—he shall not die, for I love him; I love him with all my weary heart.”

“You?” cried Mrs Alleyne, striving to free herself from the frantic grasp that was about her.

“Yes; I—even now,” cried Glynne, rising and clinging to her firmly; “it is true that I loved him from the first. How could I help loving one so wise and true?”

“And yet you trifled with him,” cried Mrs Alleyne fiercely.

“No; it was with my own heart,” sobbed Glynne, “I did not know. What could I do? You know all. I seemed to wake at last standing upon the brink of an abyss;” and then, “Mrs Alleyne, is there to be no pardon for such as I? Was my act such a crime in the sight of Heaven that the rest of my life was to be blasted, for he loved me—he loved me with all his heart.”

Mrs Alleyne shuddered and shrank away. “Are you, too, pitiless?” cried Glynne. “You must know all—how he loved me, and loves me still. Has he told you all?”

“Told me—all? What do you mean?”

“Must I speak to you?” whispered Glynne hoarsely, as she sank upon her knees and clung to Mrs Alleyne’s dress, “I would have given the world to go back upon my promise, for I knew how he loved me, but in my blindness I said it was too late.”

“Yes; it was too late,” said Mrs Alleyne coldly. “But you will let me see him. Let me go to him. I ask no more. Let me be at his side, for it may be that I can save his life. Then—send me away, and let me have but one thought—that I have given life to him I loved. Mrs Alleyne, have I not suffered enough? Have some pity on me. Have pity on your son.”

Mrs Alleyne caught her by the shoulder and drew her nearer, so that she could gaze into the thin, white face; and, as she studied its lines of care, her fierce look softened, and she caught Glynne tightly to her breast, sobbing over her wildly, and crying from time to time, “My child!—my poor child!”

Some time had passed before they went in softly, hand in hand, to where Oldroyd sat by his patient’s head.

The doctor did not look in the least surprised, but nodded his head as if it was exactly what he had expected, and, after bending down over Alleyne for a moment, he left the room.

And so it was, that when reason began to resume its seat in Moray Alleyne’s mind, his eyes rested upon the pale, careworn face of Glynne. For she had stayed. There was no question of her leaving The Firs while the patient was in danger, and when the peril seemed past she still stayed, to glide large-eyed, pale and patient about the quiet chamber, Mrs Alleyne giving up to her, as her hand smoothed the pillow and lent support, when, feeble as an infant, Moray lay breathing the summer breeze which came perfumed through the pines.

It was when speech had returned that Glynne sat near him one evening, watching his white face with its grey silken hair, and the heavy beard which had been spared by the doctor when his patient was at the worst.

Neither had spoken for some time, but gazed, each with a strange yearning, in the other’s eyes. For it had been coming for days, and instinctively they knew that it must come that night—the end, and with it a long farewell, perhaps only to meet again upon the further shore.

Glynne was the first to speak, and it was in a whisper.

“Moray, when I knew that you were stricken down, I prayed that I might come to you, and struggle with the deadly

shade to save your life.”

He looked at her with a wistful gaze, and his lips trembled as he closed his eyes.

“My work is done now. Forgive me for coming. I cannot touch your hand again.”

“No,” he said sadly; and his voice was so low and deep that she bent forward to hear his words, and lowered her face into her hands that she might not let him see the agony and despair working, as she bent to her unhappy fate.

For there had been some vague, undefined idea floating through her brain, that he might have said one gentle, sorrowing, pitying sentence before she went—he, the man whom she knew now to have loved her tenderly and well. But he had acquiesced so readily. That simple little “no” had gone to her heart like a stiletto thrust. She, degraded as she was, could not take him by the hand again.

Then she started up to gaze at him wildly and reproachfully, for he repeated the negative, and added,—

“Better, may be, dear, that I had died, as perhaps I shall before long. But, before you go, take with you the knowledge that I loved you dearly from the first. Ah, Glynne, what might have been!”

“Yes, what might have been!” she said sadly. “Better too that I had died, as I have often prayed that I might; but I was mad to offer such a prayer, for my work in life was not at an end. I did not know then. I know now, and my task is done.”

He was silent then, and she rose to go.

“Good-bye,” she whispered. “We shall never meet again.”

She had glided to the door, and her hand was raised to the fastening, when he cried faintly,—

“Stop!”

A low sigh escaped her lips.

Was he, then, going to speak one loving word to soften the bitterness of the last farewell? Her eyes brightened at the thought, and she turned and took a step or two towards him, with outstretched hands, which fell to her sides as she uttered a groan full of the despair at her heart.

“No, no: don’t touch me,” he cried wildly. “You—innocent and sinned against—cannot take me by the hand again. Listen, Glynne, I must tell you before you go. It will be our secret, dear, for the confession to another, and my punishment, would mean fresh suffering and agony to you.”

“I—I do not understand you,” she faltered, as she looked at him wildly.

“No; it has been my secret until now. Glynne, dear, in my mad despair, I had gone to watch your window from the fir wood, as I had watched it scores of times before, and I said. ‘It is for the last time. To-morrow she belongs to him, and I will not degrade the idol of my love by thoughts that are not true.’ I reached the place sacred to me for my sorrow, but that night I could not rest there. It was as if something impelled me, against which I fought for hours before it mastered me, and as if by a strange magnetism—an evil planet attracted to a good—I was drawn nearer and nearer to the spot which contained all I held dear in life.”

A faint ejaculation, half wonder, half horror, escaped Glynne’s lips, and, with one quick movement she was close to his side, bending over him and gazing with wildly dilated eyes at the dimly-seen face upon the pillow, the faint smile upon his lips, as he referred to her in his astronomical simile, seeming almost repellent at such a time.

“I felt guilty, dear,” he went on, and she shivered while he turned his face a little toward the faint light of the window, and was silent for a few moments, while a fit of trembling came upon Glynne, and she had to catch at the bed and support herself.

“I was not master of myself, dear. I loved you, and in my madness, weak from my bitter struggle with the power which led me on, I stole like some guilty wretch across the park till I reached the garden, and there I once more paused to renew the fight—to master the desire to be near you for the last time and then go back.”

“Oh, Moray, Moray,” she cried, with a piteous moan, and she sank upon her knees, uttering low, hysterical sobs.

“My poor lost love!” he whispered faintly; and his hand was laid feebly upon her bent head, which sank lower at his touch. “It was in vain. I can hardly recall it dear, for I tell you I must have been mad, but I crept closer and closer till I was beneath your window, and could touch the long, rope-like stems that reached from where I stood praying for your happiness, and a wild and guilty joy thrilled me, for I touched the tendrils which clung around the chamber which held you, my love—my love!”

“Moray!” she cried wildly; and in ecstasy of horror, wonder, and confused thought mingled, she clasped her arms about his neck, and buried her burning face in his breast.

“Ah!” he sighed; and his trembling hands rose to press her head closer and closer to his fluttering heart.

A few moments only, and then she started from him.

“No, no,” she cried wildly, as she cast back the thought which, for a moment, she had gladly harboured. “Impossible! It could not be.”

"I speak the truth," he said gently. "I must tell you now—while there is time."

She clasped her hands, and her fingers seemed to grow into her flesh with the agonised pressure as she crouched there, trembling, by his bed, her lips apart, her throat dry, and her breath coming and going with a harsh laboured sound, while his came feebly, and his words were harder to hear in the darkness which now shrouded them.

"Yes," he sighed; "I must tell you before it is too late."

He was silent for a moment or two, and then went on, with every word sending a pang of agony and shame through his listener's ears.

"Glynne, dearest, since that night I have often prayed that I might die, but death is long in coming to those who ask its help. I had raised my hand to steal one leaf from the creeper, when it fell to my side. Yes," he said, with a hurried intensity now taking the place of his feeble whisper, "I remember—I see all clearly now. I had raised my hand, but it fell to my side, and a pang of horror shot through me, for there was the noise of struggling overhead, faint, half-stifled cries, and then the baying of a dog. For a moment I was dazed, then I turned to run to the door and raise an alarm, when a cry rang out again, and, for the first time, I knew that it came from your window above my head."

He stopped, panting heavily, and Glynne, trembling violently now, drew nearer and nearer to him, with the darkness closing in, and Alleyne's face dimly seen on the grey pillow.

"Listen," he went on; "it was dark—so dark that I could hardly see that your window was thrown wide; but it was as if a horrible scene were being flashed into my brain, as I ran back over the short grass to stand beneath and begin to climb up by the thick rope-like stems that ran above. Then, as I grasped them, they were shaken violently; a man who had climbed out slipped rapidly down, and I seized him. But he was lithe and active, as I was slow, heavy, and unused to such an effort. He shook himself free, but I grasped him again, and once more he escaped me. But again I tried to seize him, and this time he struck at me, and I felt a sharp blade pass through my hand.

"It gave him a few moments' start, but not more; and as he ran, a madman was at his heels. Yes, a madman, for the passion within me was not that of one in the full possession of his senses."

Alleyne paused for a few moments, and, as Glynne's hands once more, tremblingly and with a pleading gesture, stole to his breast, his, cold and dank in their touch, slowly pressed them to his heart, and held them there.

"Guilty," he murmured, "but for your sake, dearest, and there must be forgiveness. For my love was strong, and the maddening feeling within me burned, as in my rage I tore on after the dark shadow that was hurrying away."

He was silent again for a few minutes, and once more Glynne's head went down till her forehead rested upon the cold, dank hands which prisoned hers against the labouring heart beneath.

He spoke again, hurriedly and excitedly now, but the coherency of his narrative was at an end.

"Some day," he babbled hurriedly, "she shall know—my sweet, pure angel—what—who says that?—a lie—pure—pure as heaven above. No—never take her hand in mine—a murderer's hand.—Hah! dog—at last. Mother—Lucy—it has eaten my heart away—what do you say—her disgrace? I tell you she is pure as those above—but there is his blood upon my hands. I cannot—dare not go to her now. What—they have found him? Yes, I know you—Caleb Kent—no use to struggle—there—wretch—venomous hound—down into the black slime. Dead? Who said that? I did not know till I loosened my grasp. There, amongst the cotton rushes—my hands all wet and numbed—blood? No, the cold, black bog water. I killed him—I did not know till he was dead, mother. There, dear, I have told you. Nearly two years now. Let them find him. For her sake I could not speak. Can you say, dear, that it was guilt? There—some day she must know—some day, when we are old and grey, and life's passions have burned to their sad, grey ashes, and once more I can tell her how I loved."

He was silent again, and Glynne tried to raise her head, but he held it fast pressed down to his labouring breast. Then, feebly and hurriedly, he went on,—"These figures—all wrong—I cannot—so vast—so grand. Who's this?"

"I, Moray, my own, own love," she whispered, as she clung to him wildly now. "Ah!"

One long, deep sigh of content. "Some day—I must tell you—but look—there—so far—so vast—so grand—the dazzling stars—the tiny glittering point—then the faint golden dust—and beyond—the infinite. Who spoke? Glynne? Forgive me, dear—I loved you—so—"

"Help! help!"

Wild, agonised shrieks, and there were hurried footsteps. Mother, sister, and a light, which gleamed upon dilated eyes, gazing straight up into the infinite he had so long tried to pierce.

Volume Three—Chapter Seventeen.

The Last Look Around.

About two years after his marriage, Philip Oldroyd was some five miles from home on the capital cob, a present from Sir John, one of his own breeding, when temptation fell in his way, for the Queen's hounds came along in full cry, and after them a very full field.

“I must have a gallop for once in a way,” said the doctor, and, yielding to the temptation, away he went, till, feeling he had done enough, he was about to draw rein, when he saw that something was wrong on his left. Cantering up, he was directly after one of a group helping to free a lady from her fallen horse, which was struggling frantically to extricate itself from a ditch into which both had come down.

A gate was brought, the lady borne to the nearest cottage, and Oldroyd’s services eagerly accepted.

“Badly injured,” he said, after a rapid examination. “Someone had better ride over and get a carriage from the nearest place—an open carriage in which a hurdle and mattress can be laid. I’ll stay and do my best, but I should telegraph to town for Sir Randall Bray. An operation will be necessary. Are any of the lady’s friends here?”

“No; but I saw Major Rolph leading the field half-an-hour ago. This is Mrs Rolph.”

Oldroyd started, and bent down over the insensible woman for a moment, at the same time softly pressing back the thick, dark hair from her clammy brow, and there were the lineaments he had not before recognised; it was the face of the keeper’s daughter, softened and refined, though now terribly drawn with pain.

“Yes, doctor, she’s gettin’ over it,” said Hayle, one day when Oldroyd met him close to Brackley. “But she’s had a near shave. It’s you, though, as saved her life, same as you did mine.”

“I’m glad she’s better, I’m sure,” said Oldroyd. “And you—do you ever feel your old wound?”

“Oh, yes, just a twinge or two when the weather changes. But Sir John’s very kind, and things go very easy with me now, thanks to you, sir—thanks to you.”

“Oh, all right, Hayle, all right. Got a good show of pheasants this winter? Plenty left?”

“Heaps, sir. Oh, you may trust me. I look pretty sharp after ’em, I can tell you. I know, I do.”

The great dark fellow gave a solemn wink as he stood before Oldroyd, in his brown velveteen coat and buttons, with a capital double gun under his arm.

“Yes, I suppose you do,” said the doctor. “Game-keeping is better than poaching, eh?”

“When you’ve got a good master, sir. But, look here, sir, when are you coming over? Sir John said you were last week.”

“As soon as I can; too busy yet.”

“When you do, sir, you shall have as fine a bit o’ shooting as a gentleman could wish to have. Talk about a warm corner, sir; it shall be the best in the whole preserves.”

“Well, I’m glad your daughter is getting better. Is there any prospect of her coming down here?”

“Not a bit, sir, and I don’t know as I want her. They don’t want me, and I don’t want them. You see I’m not a fool, doctor. I know well enough that if I went seeing ’em, it would look bad before the servants. I shouldn’t be comfortable. I should want to go down in the kitchen to have my meals, so I don’t go.”

“Perhaps it is wise,” said Oldroyd. “I’m sure it is, sir. He’s made a lady of her, and, of course, he couldn’t make a gentleman of me. Judy sends me some money now and then, but I allus have it sent back. I couldn’t take his money. He don’t like me, and has never forgiven me, and I don’t like him. Poor lass! She’d have done better and been happier if she’d stopped at home, and took to some stout young chap of our lot.”

“Poacher?”

“Well, no, sir,” said the great dark fellow, smiling grimly; “keeper, sir. There’s not many poachers about here now. I told all I knowed as they must clear out, for I meant to do my dooty; and they saw that it was sense, for there’d be no chance for them again a man as knowed as much as I did, so they went off.”

“By the way, Hayle,” said the doctor, “didn’t you go to the major on the day before his appointed wedding?”

“Night, sir, night? I went to him straight as soon as I knew it for certain; but it was days before I could get to him. When I did get face to face with him, I says, ‘It’s my Judith, captain,’ I says, ‘or one of us is going to be hung for this night’s work.’ He blustered a bit, and tried to frighten me; but he couldn’t do that; and when he found I meant mischief, he gave in. He swore he’d marry her, but he cheated me then. Next time I got hold of him, there was no nonsense, I can tell you. He rang for his man to fetch the police, and I went off; but he never stirred after that without seeing me watching him, and at last he gave in out of sheer fright, and come to where I’d got Judith waiting, and he married her. If he hadn’t, I’d have—”

The man’s lips tightened, and he involuntarily cocked the double gun he carried, but only to lower it once more beneath his arm.

“I’m not a boasting man, sir,” said the keeper huskily; “but I loved that gal, and the man who did her harm was no better than so much varmin to me. I should have stopped at nothing, sir; I was that wound up. He’d give me nothing but treachery, leading my gal astray, making her lie and say she was going to nurse the old granny out there on the common, when it was only to go off in the woods to him. I told him of it all, and that I was a father—her father. I told him a rat would fight for its young, and that if he expected, because I was a common man, I was not going to do my duty by my gal, he was mistaken.

"'Why, what will you do?' he says.

"'Do?' I says to him; 'do you think I've forgotten that you shot me down out there in the fir wood that night?'

"'It was an accident,' he says.

"'It was no accident,' I says. 'There was light enough for me to see you take aim at me; and then, when I was lying half dead there in my bed, you took advantage of it to lead my child away. It's no use for you to pretend you didn't know. She told you fast enough that I was lying there, and that made it safe.'

"'Look here, sir,' I says at last, 'there shall be no more shilly-shally between you and me. As I say, I'll let bygones be bygones, if you'll do the right thing. If you don't—well, p'r'aps it won't be this year, nor next year. My chance will come some day, and then—'"

There was a pause, and Oldroyd marked the strange glare in the keeper's eyes as he drew in his breath with a loud hiss.

"Yes, doctor," he said, after looking round him for a few moments, as if in search of the object he named, "he'd have been like so much varmin to me, and if he hadn't married my poor lass, I should have shot him as I would a stoat."

Time ran on after its fashion, but few changes took place at Brackley. Sir John Day used to thank Oldroyd for introducing to him the best keeper who ever stepped, for Hayle was the higher in favour from his being a man who was a capital judge of stock, and one who could keep a good eye upon the farm when the squire went away year by year for a long stay abroad. When at home, Glynne was her uncle's constant companion in his botanical walks, and these generally ended in her being left at the cottage where Mrs Alleyne, widowed of son as well as husband, took up her residence in full view of the gloomy old Firs, lately taken by a famous astronomer, who vastly altered the former occupant's position by his eagerness to acquire Moray Alleyne's costly instruments which had been carefully cared for by his mother's hands.

At The Warren, Mrs Rolph, grown careworn and grey, resided still with her niece for companion, her son never having been there since Marjorie was left to her despair. The servants were not above talking, and rumours reached Brackley Hall that Mrs Rolph had cursed her son, and was never going to see him again, that it was a place no servant could stop in, for the old lady's temper was awful, and Miss Marjorie as mad as a March hare; while even Oldroyd hinted to his wife, after being called in, that Miss Emlin was rather flighty and strange.

"They never go out anywhere," he said; "and from what I saw, I should say they are always either quarrelling or making it up. Seem fond of one another though, all the same."

"But what do you mean by flighty and strange?" said Lucy. "You don't mean ready to flirt with men?"

Oldroyd burst into a hearty laugh, and caught up his youngest child.

"Don't be alarmed," he cried. "Never will I be false to thee. How does the song go? She's got the complaint that ladies have who have been crossed in love as folks call it. Seriously, dear, I should not be surprised if she did turn a little crazy."

"Oh, Phil; how horrible!"

"Yes; my dear," he said seriously, but with a humorous twinkle in his eye; "I understand these things. I knew a young doctor once who very nearly became a candidate for a private asylum."

"Phil!—Yes; what is it?"

"Messenger, ma'am, from Brackley. Would master be kind enough to step over."

"Oh, Phil, dear; Glynne is ill," cried Lucy, piteously. "I had a presentiment last night. Here, I'll take the children over to mamma, and come with you."

"Wait a moment," cried Oldroyd, and he ran out to speak to Sir John's groom and came back.

"All right," he said. "No one ill? Something about Hayle the keeper the man says. Wanted directly."

"Poor fellow's wound has broken out again," thought Oldroyd, as he jumped into the dog-cart the groom had waiting, and he questioned the man, who only knew that the keeper had come in to see Sir John that morning, and then he had been sent off to fetch the doctor.

"Terrible dry time, sir," said the man as the horse sped along toward the park. "We out of the stables had all to go and help the gardeners two whole days watering."

"Yes; the crops are suffering badly, my man."

"They just are, sir. The lake's half empty, and the fish getting sick, and Hayle says the boggy bits beyond the park where they get the snipe in winter's nearly all dried up."

"The conversation ended as the dog-cart was rattled up the lime avenue, and there, at the great porch, stood Sir John, the major, and Hayle the keeper."

"Morning! Glad you've come," said Sir John, shaking hands. "That will do, Smith."

The groom, who was eager to know what was the matter, drove sulkily round to the stables, while Sir John took the doctor's arm.

"Look here, Oldroyd," he said; "the keeper has made a discovery in the bog wood over yonder."

"Poacher shot!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Wait and see," said Sir John, who was looking pallid; while the major had a peculiarly stern look in his fierce face.

Oldroyd bowed, and they walked rapidly across the park, and through some of the preserves. Then in and out among the pines till an open moorland patch was reached, dotted here and there with scrubby pines, and here Sir John turned.

"Now, Hayle," he said; "you lead."

The keeper went in front, and Sir John followed; while the major came abreast of the doctor.

"We thought it better to have you with us, doctor," whispered the major. "It's a terrible business—a clearing up of a sad event from what I can see."

Oldroyd felt more mystified than ever, but he was soon to be illumined, for the keeper led them over the dry cotton rushes and rustling reeds to a dried up pool, half in the open, half hidden by a dense growth of alder.

Here he paused and pointed.

"On yonder, Sir John, about fifty yards."

The baronet walked straight forward, parting the growth with his stout stick, till he stopped short at the edge of a dried up pool, where the first thing Oldroyd saw was Marjorie Emlin seated on the edge, where a wiry tuft of rushes grew, with her feet amongst the dried confervae and crowfoot at the bottom of the pool. She had taken off her hat, and the sun turned her rich, tawny, red hair to gold as she bent over something which glittered in her hands; and this she transferred to one wrist as they came up.

It was not till they were close beside her that she turned her head, and nodded and smiled in a childish, vacant way, and then held up the glittering bracelet upon her wrist for them to admire.

"Better speak to her," whispered Sir John. "Hayle says she's quite mad."

Oldroyd stooped and picked up the hat and handed it to the girl.

"The sun is very powerful," he said; "had you not better put it on."

She snatched the hat with childish petulance, and then held up the bracelet again.

"It's the one she gave to Glynne," said Sir John involuntarily.

Marjorie looked at him sharply, and then pointed down at something covered partially by the dried scum of the pool.

"Quick, for God's sake, get her away, Oldroyd!" whispered the major, stepping between the wretched woman and the ghastly remains at her feet.

The task did not prove an easy one, for Marjorie resented the doctor's interference, and seemed determined to stay, but suddenly turned upon her heel and walked away, looking back once to smile and nod at the group standing by the bed of the dried up pool.

"I found her here, sir, this morning, soon after breakfast, and tried to persuade her to come away," said Hayle; "but, poor girl, she didn't seem to know me a bit, and I didn't like to go and tell Mrs Rolph, for I'm afraid she's crazed."

"He came on and told us, Oldroyd," said Sir John; "and we thought it would be better to have you here. How long is it since you were by here, Hayle?"

"Close upon three weeks, Sir John," said the keeper; "and there was a little water left in the pool then. Shall I try and find out who it is?"

Sir John looked at the remains with horror. "Better leave it to the police," he said. "They must be told, of course. Try, though, if there are any means of identification, and pick up the loose cases. Jem," he whispered, with a look of horror, "has judgment come upon this man as we see?"

The major made no reply, but eagerly watched the keeper who picked up case after case, rotted and stained by the mud in which they had lain. These were placed together, and then Hayle stooped to cut open a discoloured piece of velveteen which had once been brown.

From this he extracted a rusty knife, and a tobacco-box of brass, which set all at rest directly, for Hayle held the latter before Sir John.

"Don't want any further search to find out that, Sir John," he said sharply. "A man has been missing from these parts for years now, and there's his name."

Sir John looked at the tarnished metal box, with a shudder of disgust and horror for the memories it revived, and read

there roughly scratched upon the lid—“Caleb Kent.”

“Remember what I said to you one day, Lucy?” said Oldroyd, about a year later. “I think it was that day when I was called over to Brackley about something being found.”

“Oh, Phil, don’t bring that up,” cried Lucy, with a shudder; “but what do you mean?”

“About Miss Emlin. I’ve just come from there.”

“Yes, dear. Some fresh trouble?”

He nodded his head gravely.

“They’ve taken her to a private asylum. I did not say anything to you before, for fear of upsetting you, but she was not fit to be left with poor old Mrs Rolph, and she has tried to drown herself twice.”

The End.

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