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*A Novel,*

BY EMMA WARBURTON.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

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## CHAPTER I.

Oh, give me comfort, if you can!  
Oh, tell me where to fly!  
Oh, tell me if there can be hope,  
For one so lost as I!

SOUTHEY.

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The grey dawn was slowly and faintly breaking, with the calm, dull light of a winter's morning. The stormy wind had sunk to rest, the fire, no longer fanned by its heavy gusts, had nearly abated, and what more was required to extinguish it, was afforded by the arrival of the fire engine, which had been forwarded with the usual promptitude, though from the distance it had to travel, it arrived too late to be of any effectual service.

Mrs. Lesly's house had been the last to take fire, and was not so completely destroyed, as the smaller cottages in the more thickly populated parts of the village. Mr. Ware was rejoiced to see that the church remained uninjured—his own house, too, had escaped, and no fears were entertained for the Manor. Yet, in many parts, the fire still smouldered, though its fury was spent, and gave a light to the landscape, which rivalled that of the wintry dawn.

There was a small and pleasant nook by the road side, where on summer evenings, children would assemble to play. Here a group had collected, composed of men and women, surrounding the prostrate form of the unhappy bailiff. Mr. Ware was supporting his head, with that pity for the wretched and suffering which his sacred character made as necessary as his natural feelings rendered it pleasant. Satisfied, as he believed, of the safety of Mrs. Lesly and her children, he had not been tempted from the side of the man, whose remorse called for all that attention which he only could give, and who, if he moved, piteously entreated him not to leave him. Well indeed might he beg him to remain, for in the various groups which surrounded him, he could not discover a single friend. Subject to his tyranny during his day of power, each among them might have stood forward to convict him of some harsh unkindness, if not of actual cruelty and oppression. Amongst others was Martin, his shaggy eyebrows bent in triumph on the man who, unable to display his usual bearing of conscious authority, lay weak and powerless before him.

The stranger was seen advancing slowly across the green, with his hat slouched over his face, and his arms crossed upon his chest. All slightly moved to make room for him, and allowed him to stand without being too closely pressed—but, whether from a sense of his personal bravery in their service, or from an unconscious respect to his commanding manner—few stopped to enquire. On his pale countenance were marks of agitation—he looked indeed almost faint—and Mr. Ware, fearing he might have sustained some injury in his many daring exploits, offered him some of the brandy, which he had been giving to the most weary. He eagerly accepted the offer, and then, seeing that the group had become silent since he joined it, he turned to Mr. Ware.

"As a minister of holy peace, sir," he said, "let me suggest to you, that some means be taken to find out by whom this foul deed has been committed, for the intention may well meet with as much condemnation as if it had succeeded."

"A foul deed most assuredly," said Mr. Ware, rising from his stooping posture—"a foul deed most truly has been attempted this night, and it ought indeed to humble us," he added, as a tear glistened in his eye, "to think that there is one among us, brethren, capable of doing so terrible a thing as to endeavour to put a man to death, even though he were his worst enemy, much less to conceive so horrible a means, even while ruin was on our own hearth sides, and the hand of Providence raised to punish. Oh, I am grieved beyond words to tell, not so much that ye are poor, but that poverty has brought sin among you, as I know it has done. Have you not had warning enough to-night?"

A groan escaped from the stranger, and all turned round, but his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Now, my children," continued Mr. Ware, "let us cast off from ourselves this great sin, and tell all we know of it; and if he who has done it be amongst us, let him stand forward and suffer his punishment, as the only expiation he can offer."

"Not so," said the bailiff, raising himself with difficulty, and supporting himself on his arm, while he glanced timidly upon those who were about him; but carefully avoiding the stranger, whose dark eyes, from beneath his slouched hat, were bent upon him.

"And why," asked the latter, eagerly, "would you arrest the hand of justice?"

"Sir," said the bailiff, solemnly, "let the punishment rest upon him that deserves it. I am he. If it be wrong to think to take away my life—if it be sin to compass the death of any man—it is also sin

to tempt a man to do it. Many have been the galling words I have spoken, and the wicked, taunting things I have done. But, oh, my fellow men, forgive me now, as you hope to be forgiven. This terrible night has brought my sins to remembrance, and, if I live I am a changed man—but if I die—"

Here a tremor seized his whole frame.

"Then you will not tell us?" said the stranger, enquiringly.

"No, sir," said Rogers, meeting his eye for the first time. "You have saved my life—but even for that I cannot do as you say; and before the light of the sky above us, I swear that his name shall never pass my lips."

"I did not know there was as much good as that in him," muttered Martin.

"I cannot help approving such sentiments," said the stranger; "for they shew a forgiving spirit, under hard circumstances, and it may be the beginning of better things which is strongly called for—since it is unlikely, that your master would overlook your neglect of the trust he so implicitly confided in you. (Rogers groaned.) Nothing can defend you, but a hearty and sincere repentance; but I do say," said the soldier, as his eye kindled, "that it is a good beginning; and, sir, I, for one, am willing to withdraw any further investigation of this mysterious affair, since he who has suffered most, will not come forward with his evidence."

"The crime lies heavily on my heart," replied Mr. Ware; "but I am little inclined to enter on such a business, though I know it is only right that the criminal should be punished. If, however, he would come forward and plead guilty to this outrage, it would remove the suspicion which now rests on us all."

"No, no, sir," cried the bailiff; "let him keep his own counsel, for by confessing, he makes you all partners in his crime, if you do not punish him. Let it be between him and me, and let him take my life, if I ever deserve again to lose it at his hands."

"It may be possible," said the stranger; "that your master will accept your repentance, the first fruits of which we all witness. Is there any amongst us," said he, looking round, "who is so unforgiving, as to think Colonel Hargrave wrong, should he give this poor man, an opportunity of redeeming his moral character in the situation in which he has lost it. I, for one, should it be necessary, would say that he was right."

A murmur of approval ran round the group, though many, at the same time doubted if they would be consulted on the subject.

A light of renewed strength, and hope, shot over the bailiff's dejected face; but when he tried to speak, the revulsion of feeling was too much for him, and he burst into tears.

"Take him home," said the stranger, and as several men hastened to execute his order, he turned away, and walked slowly down the village. As he did so, he was attracted by the observations of several women who were standing talking together.

"Poor young thing," said one; "so soon cut off. Well, the rich oftentimes go before the poor. 'Tis a sad night, indeed," said another; "I thought she would not bear it."

This was said with that tone of real sympathy in illness or death, which the poor feel so readily and sincerely.

"What has happened?" he enquired, stopping and addressing the last speaker.

"Well may you ask," replied she; "for it is a sweet flower that has been cut down to-night. I was just coming down from the Manor house, where I went to see the children, and as I came back through the avenue, what should I see, but a light in old Molly's cottage. Now I knew she had been up at the Manor time enough for her fire to have gone out; and, says I, to myself, I'll just step in and see—so, up to the house I went, and what should I see sitting on the door steps, but an old man a crying like any thing. 'What's the matter?' says I; he didn't look up, but he said, sobbing like:

"'It's all over.'

"'What's over?' says I.

"'She's gone to rest,' says he.

"'Who d'ye mean?' says I.

"'Miss Amy,' says he, and then—but, bless my heart!"

The stranger had sprung from them, and hurried forwards.

"I believe he's a spirit," said the terrified speaker.

"Nau, Nau," said an old woman, "he's flesh and blood, for I touched 'en."

They had not much time, however, for further remark, for they were summoned by their husbands to leave gossiping, and come and assist them in doing all they could towards their comfort. Already Mrs. Hawkins, housekeeper at the manor, had been busy in allotting to them the

rooms over the stables, formerly occupied by the grooms and stable boys, and which were still neat and clean, and well aired, in the constant expectation of the Colonel's return, for the faithful servant was resolved, that, whenever her freakish master appeared, he should find her prepared for him. The accommodation thus afforded, was, however small, compared to the number of families, and, after dividing the whole of the servants' offices between them, she was obliged to quarter many in the better parts of the house; she was, therefore, not a little relieved, when she found that most of the farm houses in the neighbourhood had followed the good example set them, and freely opened their doors to the houseless.

The stranger might shortly afterwards be seen coming from the lodge, and hastening towards Mr. Ware, who was superintending the removal of Rogers to the rectory, where he hoped that during the hours of returning health, he might acquire an influence, which might turn his present feelings to good account.

"Sir," said he, as he joined him, "may I beg you to go to poor Miss Lesly."

"What has happened to her?" said Mr. Ware, anxiously.

"The child is dead," replied the stranger.

"Dead!" exclaimed Mr. Ware, in surprise, "I heard she was safe, poor child. How I wish I had seen her."

He did not speak again till they reached the lodge, and then leaving his companion without, he entered the chamber of death. There lay his little favorite on her couch, which had been arranged with studious care. By her side knelt Mabel, her head buried in her hands, her hair loose and disordered, and looking almost as lifeless as the child she mourned.

Miss Ware was in the room, and hurried to meet her brother with an affectionate kiss, for she had not seen him for some hours.

"I am glad you are come, Edmund," said she, "for I can do nothing for the poor girl—she will not even speak to me."

"Do not even try to comfort her," said her brother, taking her hand, kindly; "we who are grateful for each other's safety can well enter into her feelings. Send away these good friends, and keep only one with you, and then stay with her a little while; but do not rouse her yet—I will come again and see her."

His sister, always prompt in following his advice, choosing one steady woman to be with her, dismissed the rest (who had crowded in with the hope of being of service) with thanks for their attention.

Mr. Ware then joined the stranger, and walked on towards the rectory; he said:—

"I can do nothing for her yet—but my sister is with her. It is too soon to offer comfort—for it seems like mockery in the first moments of anguish. You seem to take an interest in our favorite."

"It is impossible to be insensible to such heartrending scenes," he returned, laconically, as if to check further remark.

"We are much indebted, sir, for your exertions last night," said Mr. Ware, at length.

"Pray mention nothing of that," he said, evasively.

"But how can I help it—is it in the nature of man to receive favors with a thankless heart?"

"It is."

"Yes, but not, I trust, so soon after they have been conferred. I own that benefits are often, much too often forgotten—but you wrong us, if you believe we could so return a favor bestowed by a stranger. You shall receive my thanks, at least; and do not think my simple-hearted friends less accustomed to feel because they often express their feelings with difficulty. No, let me assure you, that as long as the tale of this night shall be told by the cottage hearth, so long will your name be spoken of with praise."

"Sir," he replied, "I have been soured by the world, or I should not have expressed a doubt, which, believe me, I am very far from feeling. I know, as you say, that my poor services will be handed down as part of this night's sad tale; and of yourself, sir," he slightly raised his hat, "I have seen enough to convince me, that you deserve my respect, even had I not seen it reflected from those whose hearts are difficult to win; and let me assure you, that I am more gratified than you would easily believe, for the good opinion you so kindly express, though I feel myself utterly unworthy of it. It were hard for me to doubt the existence of gratitude, when the smallest benefits, and even the kindly words of—

'Auld lang syne'

are treasured up in my mind. No; past benefits are like stars which we leave behind in our onward path, but which may light it still. But," added he, relaxing into his desponding tone, "how very few have we to remember—how scantily are those kindnesses shewn which keep the heart warm towards its fellow creatures."

"Pardon me," replied Mr. Ware, "carry back your thoughts perhaps to a mother's tender care, and her love which can find an excuse for every fault—the more thoughtful pride of a father, and the thousand little kindnesses and confidences by which sisters and brothers bind themselves to each other by links which the world finds it difficult to break.

"Remember our school days and school-fellows, friends at college, and why not friends in after life. Oh, the heart must be bereaved indeed that has nothing to excite its gratitude—and, excuse me, the heart is kept warm towards the world more by its power of blessing others, than of being blessed itself—and that is in the power of all, even if it be but the gift of a kindly word and a sympathizing look. I am surprised that one so skilled in giving assistance to others should speak as you do; but it seems, if I may venture to say so, as if the world had dealt hardly with you."

"And you," said the stranger, "speak as one who has been so fortunate as both to have given and received blessings."

"You speak truly, at least so far, that I have been much blessed through a life which I may call a long one—let me hope that you may be equally so."

"What I may be," he replied, moodily, "none can say—but what the past has been, I know too well. Yet why I intrude my confidence upon you, I can scarcely tell, except that your kindness encourages it. Yet, when I am far from here, I shall remember your courtesy with pleasure, and would plead that I may not be altogether forgotten."

"You need not ask me that," said Mr. Ware; "but you are not going to-day, and must come and dine with me."

"I must deny myself that pleasure," he returned; "for I have sent my horse to the little inn at Fowly, and ordered my dinner—and besides, you will have another guest."

"Then I must wish you good day for the present," said Mr. Ware, as they parted, he to see after the comforts of the sick bailiff, while the stranger crossed the fields to the Aston woods, and buried himself in its wild paths for the rest of the day.

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## CHAPTER II.

Life is before ye—from the fated road  
Ye cannot turn; then take ye up your load,  
Not yours to tread, or leave the unknown way,  
Ye must go o'er it, meet ye what ye may;  
Gird up your souls within ye to the deed,  
Angels and fellow spirits bid ye speed,  
What tho' the brightness dim, the pleasure fade,  
The glory wane—oh! not of these is made  
The awful life that to your trust is given.

F. BUTLER.

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Towards evening Mr. Ware repaired to the lodge. When he entered the small room he found his sister sitting near the window, while Mabel was still upon her knees by the bed-side.

"I cannot rouse her in the least," said Miss Ware, anxiously, as she met his eye, "this is a wretched place for her to stay in, and it will only do her harm."

Mr. Ware approached her, and repeating her name gently, waited for an answer, but receiving none, he laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, with attempted firmness—

"My child, your mother asks for you."

A heaving of the chest and a deep drawn sigh shewed that he was heard.

"Shall she ask in vain," he continued, "will you refuse to go to her, dear Mabel—will you not go and weep with her?"

Mabel raised her head, but her first effort caused her eyes to fall upon the bed, and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

The brother and sister, both deeply moved, looked at each other in silence.

Again Mabel raised her head, and seemingly relieved, stretched her hand towards Mr. Ware, who took it, and kindly pressed it in both his own.

"Bear with me a little while," she murmured, with quivering lips, "and I will go with you—yes, I am ready now," she said, slowly rising, then stopping to look round upon the desolate chamber, she exclaimed—

"But how can I leave her here?"

"Leave her to my care," said Miss Ware, "and she shall be properly removed to the Manor."

Mabel seized her hand, but then, as if afraid of trusting herself, she tore herself away, and hurried out. Once in the open air she accepted Mr. Ware's proffered arm, and allowed him to guide her where he pleased. She neither spoke nor looked around her, nor did he seek to excite her to any further effort, he was contented in the idea that he was taking her where she would not long remain inert; so he only drew the cloak, he had thrown round her, closer over her head, to shield her from the cold air, and led her quietly to the Manor.

It no longer wore the air of solemn silence, which was its wont; the sound of many confused voices woke the echoes in the court-yard, and men and women lounged freely about the usually strictly kept premises.

The hall door was opened as they approached, by Mrs. Hawkins, who had seen them from one of the windows—the good woman looked considerably hurried from superintending the different parts of the well-filled mansion, and in doing her utmost to preserve the carpets, hangings, and statues from the touch of the children, and the over curious.

Mabel paused as she entered the hall, and looked anxiously round her. This was the only show part of the house, but it amply repaid the visit of the stranger. Around the walls statues of great beauty and immense value were placed in niches—above was a gallery in which paintings of the choicest kind were arranged with much taste. This reached by two marble staircases at each end. The hall was of the height of the house itself, and was thoroughly lighted by windows, and a sky light, so that the pictures were seen to the greatest advantage. Beneath it opened on passages leading to different sitting-rooms, while the picture-gallery above led to the bedrooms. All these being fitted up in a style which included every luxury which the most lavish wealth could purchase, yet so completely in keeping that the whole appeared a thoroughly comfortable English home, after all.

For a few moments Mabel remained looking round her in bewildered silence. Mr. Ware watched her attentively, but her open countenance did not, as usual, tell him the train of thought which oppressed her. He took her hand, saying kindly—

"Mrs. Hawkins is waiting to take you to your mother."

"I am ready," said Mabel, drawing a long breath, as she turned and followed her to the room which had been given to Mrs. Lesly, and where already every comfort, which the good housekeeper could devise, surrounded her.

Satisfied now that the mother and daughter were together, Mr. Ware left the mansion with many sad reflections.

The next day was Sunday, and strangely came that time of rest after the two last days of confusion and terror. The morning was cold, clear, and frosty, and as glad a sun as ever cheers a wintry landscape, shone down upon the smouldering ruins of the village. As the time for morning service approached, a merry peal from the bells of the village church welcomed sunshine to the earth, and peace and safety to the hearts of men.

As Mr. Ware slowly ascended the steep path leading to the church, he was followed by many groups of old and young, who, at his bidding, hastened to testify their thankfulness for the sparing of their lives. One young life had alone been cut down, and none passed Mrs. Lesly's cottage, without thinking sadly of Amy. When the whole of the little congregation had assembled, crowding the church, for all were there, the stranger entered with a sad and serious countenance. Avoiding the seat belonging to the Manor, which the clerk readily opened for him, he entered the next pew, and kneeling gently, seemed anxious to avoid the many eyes which were turned admiringly upon him, who, for their sakes, had braved every danger with reckless confidence. The sermon was rendered impressive by its touching simplicity, and found an echo in every heart subdued by the late calamity. None listened more attentively than did their stranger benefactor; and when the service was concluded, he seemed still impressed with what he had heard, as, avoiding all companionship he walked again to the woods, which, by their peculiar beauty, always attracted the attention of the tourist. But when the bell again called to service, he returned, and entered the church, late, as before; possibly to avoid the many groups which had been loitering round it; and, when they again left the church, he lingered till he could join Mr. Ware in the porch, walking quietly out with him through his private gate; thus, avoiding those who were anxious to offer him their thanks.

"You understand, sir," he said, "how to touch the feelings."

"It is of little consequence, I fear, to excite the feelings," replied Mr. Ware; "for so many are contented to go no further."

"I believe you; yet our feelings are often the gateways to our reason."

"Yes, indeed; and therefore the power of appealing to them is not to be slighted. I was myself deeply impressed, to-day, when I saw the many anxious faces looking up to me as I spoke. Oh, I do believe this might be the beginning of better things in my parish, if—"

"If what," enquired the stranger; "are you, too, going to throw all the blame on the poor

landlord."

"Willingly, most willingly would I throw not the blame, but all the praise of their well-being upon him, if he would but return and give us the blessing of feeling him to be amongst us."

"Yet you cannot help being angry with him."

"Perhaps not, but mine is more the pettishness of jealous affection, and I cannot bear to see him keeping away from those whose hearts he might make all his own—and wasting health, and time, and happiness, in the wayward course he has chosen.

"But, sir," added Mr. Ware, checking himself. "You will come to my house, to-day."

"I thank you, time presses with me; and here you see my horse is waiting. A fine fellow, is he not; how gallantly he bore that long ride the other night, and he looks none the worse for it now. Here, my good fellow," he said, dismissing the man who led him, and taking the rein upon his arm. "Will you not walk a little further with me," he continued to Mr. Ware.

"Certainly, though I confess myself thoroughly disappointed that you will not stay with me."

"Another time, dear sir, I will not fail to avail myself of the pleasure of your acquaintance; but I really have engagements I do not like to break. Do you think there is any hope of the poor bailiff?"

"I trust so."

"I know you will do every thing you can for him, mentally and bodily. If he would become a changed man, the comfort of your people might be better secured, than by the appointment of a fresh bailiff."

"Very possibly," replied Mr. Ware.

The deep shadows of the winter's evening were now rapidly closing round them, and the light streaks on the horizon growing fainter and fainter—yet, still they lingered as if their short acquaintance rendered them reluctant to part so soon.

"The night warns me that I must go," said the stranger, at length, as he mounted his horse, casting as he did so, a glance at the surrounding country; "though I would willingly stay—but the shadows always come between me and happiness."

"Not so," said Mr. Ware, earnestly.

"Is it not so," said the stranger, slightly bending towards him, and as he did so, raising his hat, together with the mass of red hair which disguised his countenance, now beaming upon him in its characteristic and noble beauty—to which the deep black of his hair added all that was wanting. Before, however, Mr. Ware had time to utter a word, a light stroke of the whip sent the horse forward, and as he dashed onwards, he cried; "Say nothing till we meet again." In a few seconds he had turned the corner, and as Mr. Ware stood entirely bewildered with the revelation which had burst so suddenly upon him—he heard nothing but the echo of his horse's hoofs—as its utmost speed carried him further away—till the last sound died upon the night air.

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## CHAPTER III.

Oh, there are griefs for nature too intense,  
Whose first rude shock but stupifies the soul;  
Nor hath the fragile, and o'er labour'd sense,  
Strength e'en to *feel* at once their dread controul.

But when 'tis past, that still and speechless hour  
Of the sealed bosom, and the tearless eye,  
Then the roused mind awakes with tenfold power,  
To grasp the feelings of its agony.

HEMANS.

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The heavy sound of the funeral bell may, in crowded cities, lose half its influence by falling upon ears which use has attuned to its sound; but in a small and remote village death comes at long intervals, and reads a more solemn lesson, lest he may be altogether forgotten. How strange and oppressive is the sound of the minute bell—the pause—the silence—and then the low booming sound which strikes to the heart of the most careless, as if it would urge us while the king of terrors is before us, and weighing oppressively on our hearts—to wake from the lethargy of sin, and the fascinating dreams of worldly pleasure and ambition. The air feels heavy, though on the brightest summer day, and, though we may not waken to the things which death calls to our remembrance, we cannot sleep as firmly as before.

Such, perhaps, might have been the thoughts of the worthy Rector, as he remembered many unruly members of his church, and wished that the awful sound might waken them, to look with him beyond the dark tomb and funeral pall, when that solemn tolling spoke to them of the fair young child, who had departed from amongst them. As the simple procession neared the church, those employed in clearing away the ruins, leant upon their spades, and for awhile forgot their labour. Amy had been Mabel's favorite messenger of mercy to the sick and afflicted, and every little gift had come with more grace from the hands of the beautiful child; to many a fevered couch had she carried the ripe fruit, which she had begged from the old gardener; and many watched now with tearful eye as she passed to her long home. Mabel followed her with feelings of anguish, she in vain endeavoured to tranquillize, for her natural passions were as strong as the controul she so steadily placed over them. Captain Clair had obtained permission to attend, and those who did not fully understand the poor child's history wondered at the emotion he betrayed. It was a cheerless, dark day, when they laid her to rest in her narrow bed, amongst the graves, where, led by a gentle sister's hand, she had from infancy learned to think of

"A heaven of joy and love,"

and to know

"That holy children when they die,  
Go to that land above."

The remembrance of those by-gone scenes—of the sunny days of Amy's childhood, and the earnest face with which she would listen when she talked, came fresh to Mabel's mind; but, when she remembered that they had not been passed so thoughtlessly as they might have been, she tried to chase away selfish thoughts, and to turn with calm submission from the past, which she had loved so well—to a hard and relentless future. Yet, when the last rites had been performed, when she had gone from the grave and again entered Aston Manor, a loneliness fell upon her heart with cold oppressiveness. It was, perhaps, some relief to her that she was surrounded by no familiar objects which could have recalled memory after memory of past days. The marble staircase, and the beautiful pictures which hung round the gallery, could form no memorial of their neat but old-fashioned cottage, where her father's retirement, and Amy's whole life, had been spent. The soft carpets and silk hangings could only recall, by contrast, those which neatness and economy alone had rendered respectable. With one glance at her black dress, which her mother was to see for the first time, she opened the door of the room which Mrs. Hawkins had chosen for them, and stole noiselessly in Mrs. Lesly slept, and her faithful maid sat by her, weeping silently. It was a relief to poor Mabel not to be obliged to speak, and she withdrew to a window-seat, where she might think without interruption. Her mother slept in a bed of crimson silk, which fell in graceful folds to the ground. The whole furniture of the room was costly; pictures, of sacred subjects, by the first masters, hung round the walls, and every comfort which luxury could suggest, or wealth purchase, betokened the riches and taste of the possessor of the mansion. She turned her eyes to the window, where a view presented itself fully in keeping with the interior of the building. The wide spreading oaks had been so arranged as to open on a vista, which admitted the copse covered hills, beyond; while, immediately below the windows, lay the gardens, which, like the house, gained what they lost in size, in rich and careful cultivation, and where now, evergreens, of all varieties, from all countries, gave a still life to the scene. The wind had again risen, and dark clouds chased each other over the lowering sky, such, as in our melancholy or fanciful moods, seem the hieroglyphics by which we may read our destiny. By how many fanciful links are we united to the invisible world. But it was beyond the cloudy screen, that hung so darkly over the earth, that Mabel's clear eye endeavoured to penetrate. With her hands clasped before her, she remained gazing upon the pure sky, which at intervals might be discovered as one cloud rolled by, though immediately followed by another, as if the image it brought to her mind cheered and upheld her. With childlike trust, she endeavoured to resign that which had endeared a life, which one sorrow had done much to darken; but the duty was a hard one. It was not easy to lose the occupation, the thought of the present, and the preparations and visions of the future; at once, to be forced, in stillness to think, when, before, active exertion had found an object, and every motive an end.

But, as she still gazed upon the scene around her, a cloud stole over her brow, and she looked uneasily at the dark woods, which skirted the landscape. She took a long review of the past, which, as it were, forced itself, in this terrible hour, upon her mind; the struggle which she recalled, had nearly cost her her life, and would have rendered life valueless, had it not been for the victory of principle over wayward and exorbitant passion, which, turning her thoughts inward, upon a sinful heart, and forward, to a future, still richly blessed, taught her that, even deprived of the blessing she had so fondly prized, she had yet sufficient to call forth her warmest gratitude. When first she had brought herself unflinchingly to sacrifice her love to her religion, she might have deemed that sacrifice of her heart's best affections one which might atone for much evil, and that, the victim of a broken heart, she would find a martyr's grave. But there was within her a better though a humbler seed—the germ of a higher and holier principle. It had slept in prosperity, and the bitter tears of sorrow were needed to call it into life. Under its influence, she learnt a truer idea of herself, and her own duties. She found that life, though spent in weariness and pain, is a boon of boundless blessing, since it is a working day, on whose wages our whole happiness depends. Six years had passed since Mabel and her lover had parted. She seemed, indeed, to those around her to be the same being—but in herself how changed in those few years. All that before was impulse or wayward goodness, now rose from the one pure motive—the hope of blessing instead of being blessed. She had, therefore, learnt to govern her temper—



to give up her own selfish inclinations—and to counteract any morbid remembrance of the past. The habit of self control, thus earnestly acquired, she now found of avail in the hour of need, in a way scarcely to be comprehended by the habitual victims of weakness, or the slaves of the feelings of the hour. She rose and left the window, and taking a seat by her mother's side, partially screened herself from her notice, lest the first sight of her mourning dress might too evidently recall the day's sad duties. Yet she could not refrain from watching her as she slept, with that anxious solicitude which Mr. Ware had foreseen would not long be absent from her mind; for how soon she too would be removed, he feared to think. But to Mabel's ever hopeful mind had come a doubt of her danger, which gave a zeal to every effort to forward her recovery. Mrs. Lesly's removal to Aston Manor—the seat of her husband's near kinsman—served to soothe one of the few selfish feelings she possessed. There was something peculiarly agreeable to a proud and refined mind like her own, in the luxury with which she was surrounded, and, though she might have had some reluctance in taking advantage of it, could her health have allowed her removal, she quickly gave up the point, with her constitutional indolence, and readily acquiesced in an arrangement, which, in its general effect, soothed and gratified her. The poor and neglected widow would spend her last days in the mansion, where she felt honor to be her due, though she could scarcely tell why. Yet she might be forgiven the few failings to which she was subject, and which always did more injury to herself than others, to whom her kindness was ever most lavish. Since her confidence with Mabel, as to the lost papers, her mind had seemed at ease, and her daughter had skilfully prevented her recurring to the subject, or again suffering that uneasiness which had preyed so seriously on her mind before. Perhaps, with the vague remembrance that Mabel had suggested something, though in reality but the quick prompting of an affectionate heart, she had flattered herself that all was well—and Mabel rejoiced that it was so. To say that the latter was indifferent when she allowed herself to think, would have been untrue; but now, with Amy, had gone, all restless doubts of the future. A steady mind, a firm and trusting heart, and an humble, but courageous, self-reliance, were sufficient, she felt, for her own provision, though she would have trembled to have entrusted one so dear, and so helpless, to such support as the brave man, sometimes, when called on, to protect those he loves, has been seen to lose nerve through dangers which, had he met them alone, would scarcely have excited a thought of fear.

At length, Mrs. Lesly slowly opened her eyes, and gazed round her for a few moments, as if to bring back the reality, and to separate it from her dreaming fancy. Mabel shrunk slightly back; but her mother, as if divining her motive, herself drew aside the curtain, and taking her hand, said, gently—

"My sweet child, why should I fear to look upon these sad signs of your grief? I have little cause to regret that she has gone a few days before me. No, dear, I, who have seen so much of this cold world, could scarcely wish to leave my darling to its stinted kindness—so young—so helpless—and so unfriended."

"Ah," thought Mabel, as tears rushed to her eyes, "to have begged for her her daily bread, would have been joy to losing her."

"I see," continued Mrs. Lesly, "that you can, with difficulty, perceive why I speak so now; but, my Mabel, will remember, with gratitude, should she ever suffer the unkindness of the world, that her sister shares it not, and her noble heart will rejoice that she alone will have to bear the trials, from which a dying mother cannot protect her."

"Ah, Mamma, that word alone is dreadful; you must not—cannot leave me."

"My child knows that there is a *must*, which cannot be resisted—and I have mistaken my Mabel if she does not bow before this, with as much courage and submission, as before every other trial. Remember your dear father's words in his last illness—'Mabel, life is but a short campaign after all, and you must fight to the end; who would be so cowardly as to lay down his sword for a wound?'"

"I will remember, dearest mamma," said Mabel, more firmly, for the words of her father always had influence with her; "and, oh, forgive my selfishness."

Tears were in her mother's eyes, though her voice had been firm; and Mabel, fearing to continue the conversation, returned to the window, and looked out again upon the night, which was fast closing around; but scarcely did she now heed the flitting clouds, and the coming darkness, or the wind as it rocked the old trees, or their branches, which, by their fantastic motion, appeared beckoning her attention; they seemed, an hour ago, to echo back the light laugh, whose gay music she would hear no more; but now the hour of fancy was over, and oppressed by the real presence of grief, she bowed her head, and chastened her heart to silence.

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## CHAPTER IV.

There is one  
Must be mine inmate, for I may not choose,  
But love him.

On the Saturday evening of the week which had been so eventful at Aston, the Villars family were assembled in their showily furnished drawing-room, in Sydney Place, Bath, each engaged in different occupations; but all eagerly expecting the promised arrival of their rich cousin, Colonel Hargrave. The drawing-room had been studiously arranged, and had not failed to become what it was intended to be—tempting morning and evening lounge, where every single, and eligible man, obtained an easy chair, an amusing chat, and a welcome, which flattered his vanity.

On the present occasion, the ladies of the family were all as finely and as tastefully dressed in the newest mode, as an evening at home could allow—and certainly, taken together, they might have been regarded as a singularly fine family.

Mrs. Villars we have already had occasion to describe; yet, *en passant*, it is necessary to say that herself at Aston, (swayed by the conflicting feelings of conscience, and her sister's straightforward reasoning, exercised with a candour, known to their girlhood before either had chalked out her path in life,) was a very different personage, indeed, to Mrs. Villars in Bath. The stately importance, or smiling dignity, with which she received her levy of morning callers, or evening guests, showed no wavering conscience, or doubtful heart. A certain degree of intrigue many might have detected; but in the mother of so large and fair a family that was easily forgiven; and, while the gaiety of her conversation rendered her ever a welcome and popular guest, the size of her rooms, and brilliancy of her parties rendered her a valuable hostess. She was now moving about the room to adjust something or other, or taking a peep at the dining-table, to secure herself against anything which might give a bad impression to the expected guest.

Next, if not first, in dignity, stood her daughter Caroline. She was certainly beautiful, though rather fine than engaging, and her expression was haughty and severe—yet beautiful she certainly was, if the most perfect outline of feature is beauty. In figure she was above the middle height; but this was modified by a well rounded person, and a certain academical grace of movement. Her person did not belie her character; she did not rate herself below her real value, and might, indeed, often have erred on the wrong side. In her manners, she was overbearing, but seldom unlady-like. She was talented, yet wanted solidity—haughty and ill-tempered, yet seldom mean, unless greatly tempted. In her own family she rivalled her mother's influence—being a sort of person over whom it was very difficult to have authority. Her age was something beyond thirty, and the remembrance that, with all her beauty, she was still unmarried, gave her mind a sourness which greatly embittered the comfort of the circle of which she formed so prominent a part. On the present occasion, however, she was in one of her best moods, for, slow to take warning from the past, she looked on future conquest as certain. The expected arrival of Colonel Hargrave, about whom, for the last few months, she had been incessantly rallied by her mother and sisters, gave a brilliancy to her color, and a radiancy to her large black eyes—and as she leant over her harp, rambling over a few airs, which might form a romantic greeting to him, Mrs. Villars looked upon her with satisfied triumph. To tell the truth, she was very much afraid of her on account of the haughty and imperious temper, which, in childhood, she had forgotten to guide, and looked upon no scheme for the benefit of her family, with more interest than on the one which might secure Caroline a settlement, which would satisfy her temper, bring honor on herself, and, not least, remove her from all rivalry with her younger sisters. She had, therefore, on the present occasion, been spared nothing which could coax her wayward humour into rendering itself as fascinating as possible—for well did Mrs. Villars know that by a little ill-timed opposition, her anger might be roused, and thus all hopes of her settling be lost. Her expensive taste had, therefore, been for the last few weeks fully gratified, though Mrs. Villars trembled at every request which she feared to refuse. Selina, her second sister, was lounging about the room, sometimes taking up an old album, or a piece of knitting, and wondering where the Colonel could be. She was a very fair-skinned, fair-haired girl, with very light blue eyes—bearing an expression of indolent, good nature. Her prevailing taste was dancing, of which she was *passionately fond*. Less talented than her elder sister, she yet understood better how to render herself acceptable in society. The pretty lisp with which she often declined attempting a difficult song, was by many deemed more pleasing than her sister's perfect execution of it; and the many pretty nothings about nothing, with which she entertained her partner in the dance, or the smile which meant anything he liked to interpret from it, was often preferred to Caroline's more sensible conversation. She was not, however, so silly as she sometimes chose to appear; a quiet sense of self-preservation usually befriended her, and rendered her sufficiently alive to her own interest. But though very generally liked, she was not often seriously admired.

Our friend Lucy was seated on a stool near the fire, seemingly anxious to catch the fitful light as it fell upon a picture of Finella, (her intended character for the fancy ball,) which she held in her hand. It might have been that she remembered something of the time when Captain Clair had so earnestly dissuaded her from going to that very ball, for the color came and went upon her cheeks as if her thoughts were far from the present scene, and as if they so much occupied her as to prevent her feeling the tedium of expectation.

Maria, the youngest of the sisters, was standing by her, trying, at times, to rally her by remarks which dyed her cheek still deeper, though she remained determinately inattentive to them.

Over Maria her mother had spent many a desponding hour; to her, beauty was everything, and the beauty so lavishly given to her other daughters, was in Maria singularly wanting. Maria, however, possessed more energy than the others, and was not disposed to weep over a

deficiency, which she very justly considered to be no fault of hers. Her mouth indeed was very misshapen, and her nose anything but Grecian—but the irregularity of these features was very much redeemed by a pair of handsome eyes, which, though they sometimes sparkled with satire, as often sparkled with fun, in which she peculiarly delighted, though, unfortunately, it occasionally degenerated into vulgarity. She had sufficient common sense to know that if she remained inactive, comparisons, which in most cases are odious, would be doubly so between herself and her sisters, and she seldom allowed her tongue to be sufficiently silent to lead any one to take the trouble to scan her countenance; and, perhaps, the knowledge of her own deficiency did much to compensate for its existence.

One of the first exclamations a stranger would feel inclined to make, on an introduction to this family circle, would be—Why are all these girls unmarried? but no satisfactory answer could be given. Maria suggested, when the subject was discussed in private, that luck was against them. They were sought for, invited out, admired, flirted with by a host of young men, who professed they would have died to serve them, but somehow forgot to make those bona fide proposals, which would probably have been of more service to them than their deaths.

In leaving the description of Mr. Villars to the last, we are only following a fashion which was too prevalent in his household. There was little that was striking in his first appearance; he was only very thoughtful, very gentle, and very gentlemanly. He was the younger son of a wealthy merchant, and had been placed, much against his inclinations, in a firm of some consequence in London. His natural tastes led him to prefer rather classical studies, than the active part in the world of business for which his father designed him. Respect for parental authority, however, prevented his choosing his own profession, in opposition to it; and, being a man of high principle, he resolved that the dislike he entertained for his employment, should not prevent his vigorously exerting himself in the state of life in which he found himself. His prudence was rewarded, and during the thirty years which he had unrepinningly given to his business, he was fortunate enough to realize a fortune which enabled him to retire from it, and having amply provided for his family, by insurances effected on his own life, he was enabled, during his lifetime, to gratify both himself and them in every reasonable way. Having ceased to take any active share in the business, he removed to Bath, where he hoped to find gaiety sufficient to satisfy their wishes, while he indulged his dearly prized leisure in literary pursuits. This plan, however, failed to answer his expectations; his former occupations had given him little time to inspect personally the rising characters of his children, who had been left entirely to their mother's guidance, and he now found, when too late, that they were little calculated to form that domestic circle towards which, through so many long years, he had looked, as the haven of his rest. His tastes were not theirs, and the self denying love which can atone for such deficiencies, had, in their education, been forgotten. They were fond of him in their own way, but this did not prevent their finding the time spent in his study, in hunting for a lost passage, in a favorite author, or listening to some of his own elegant compositions, very dull indeed—though many efforts did he make to overcome this difficulty, and to find one, at least, amongst his four daughters, who might make a pleasant companion; but he had not the heart to command the attentions which he well knew love alone could supply, and with a sigh, he retired, not only companionless, but with a lower idea of his own merits than they deserved. The greater part of his time was now spent alone, in a way which little suited his gentle and domestic disposition; and, contented with holding the reins of domestic government, in serious matters, he let smaller arrangements take their course, without troubling or interesting himself in them. Such was the family group assembled to welcome Colonel Hargrave. The hour appointed, had, however, long passed; Mr. Villars had taken out his watch for the twentieth time, and now stood with it in his hand. Mrs. Villars wearied of her repeated messages to the kitchen to put off the dinner, and Caroline looked lowering for a storm. But nothing availed; quarter followed quarter, counted by impatient minutes. Yet, still, Mrs. Villars referred to the Colonel's note, which she carefully carried in her bag, and again and again read his promise to be with them at the time mentioned, in order that he might accompany them to the ball on the Monday. She had boasted of this, in no unsparing language, and, should he fail her now, her mortification would be complete. Still, concealing her own fears, she glanced, every now and then, entreatingly, at her daughter.

At length, Mr. Villars declared he would wait no longer. This resolution being at length carried, they adjourned, in no very agreeable mood, to the dining-room, to partake of a fine dinner, completely spoilt. Mr. Villars, feeling annoyed at the disrespect which a neglected appointment often implies, was not in the best possible humour, and his wife, eager to support the popularity of her unknown favorite, was obliged to exercise no small rhetoric to make all smooth. But when she looked at Caroline, and saw the cloud of ill-humour gathering fast, and, as quickly shading her beauty, she as fervently wished he would stay away for that night, at least, as she had before been eager for his arrival. This last wish was fully gratified, for the evening wore away, and yet no Hargrave made his appearance.

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## CHAPTER V.

At me you smiled, but unbeguiled,  
I saw the snare and I retired.

The Monday appointed for the fancy ball arrived, and still nothing had been heard of Hargrave. Mrs. Villars fretted, and Caroline assumed a haughty and sulky indifference. During the day, every knock and ring brought disappointment, till the lateness of the hour warned them to prepare for the ball. It was then that Caroline, for the first time, announced her intention of remaining at home. In vain did Mrs. Villars remonstrate that her fancy Sultana's dress had cost more than twice as much as her sisters', and it was of as little use to flatter her vanity by representing that she would be the most elegantly dressed in the whole ball-room; Caroline's temper was not to be conquered in a single night. Tired of persuasion, her mother stormed, and changing entreaties for threats, commanded her to go; but Caroline was obstinate, and nothing but bodily force could have moved her from the arm-chair, in which she had settled herself for the evening, with a candle close to her elbow, and a new novel in her lap. She would not go, she declared, with a haughtiness which would have suited a more unworthy proposal. Nor would she move from her chair, even to give the assistance of her advice at her sisters' toilet, or, in any other way betray the slightest interest in an amusement for which they had all been so long and so busily preparing.

Extremely chagrined, Mrs. Villars was compelled to submit, and, as she gave a last glance at the beautiful velvet dress which taste and money had alike been expended to prepare, the bitterness of her disappointment was not a little increased by remembering that this fruitless purchase had been made with part of the loan so hardly wrung from her sister; and it was with an uneasy sensation of annoyance, that she led her fair daughters that night into the crowded ball-room.

Lucy, with a heart upon the rebound, and flushed with the determination of piquing Clair, if possible, had never looked more lovely than she did that night. A white dress of the greatest simplicity distinguished her character, as Finella, while her long light curls fell in careless tresses over her neck and shoulders, forming a veil, which enhanced the beauty they seemed bent upon concealing. How wildly beat the heart in that illregulated bosom? Her simply going to the ball would, she imagined, shew herself free from any deference to Arthur Clair's opinion, and if any thoughts of Amy Lesly came unbidden amongst the revelry, she banished the remembrance by a lighter laugh or a bolder sally. She could not fail to attract attention, and many strangers were anxious to be introduced to the fairy Villars, as she was that night called; but one only attracted, and soon absorbed her attention, he was a young man of a prepossessing appearance, with large melting eyes and a low persuasive voice. Evidently attracted by her appearance, he had obtained an introduction, under the name of Beauclerc. He waltzed to perfection, and the implied compliments he every now and then offered, in a tone and voice of great sweetness, Lucy took for deeper homage than he perhaps intended, and the ready blush deepened on her cheek, and her eye sparkled when she suffered herself to be led to a seat apart from the dancers, where his witty remarks afforded her ample amusement. So readily, indeed, flowed his language, that the absent Clair sunk into nothing, a mere every-day flirt, compared with this fascinating new acquaintance. Besides, he possessed the power of drawing her out, and made her feel quite clever, by leading her to display herself in a new light. He listened to her remarks with the most flattering attention, and resigned her to the gentleman who next claimed her hand for the dance, with apparent reluctance. She was then surprised to find that she had as little to say as formerly, and that her new partner's observations on the fashionable news of the day had become quite uninteresting. She was not, therefore, sorry to find Mr. Beauclerc again by her side, when the dance was over, and she had taken a seat by her mamma.

"Can you tell me?" she said, turning to him, with a smile, "why, just now, I had plenty to say, but immediately I began to dance with that gentleman, I felt so dull I could not say any thing at all. I have been labouring at conversation, I assure you, with as much industry and dulness as the noted donkey at Carrisbrooke Castle employs in his task, but with far less success, for he succeeds in fetching up some water—I am afraid I cannot say the same, of a single idea. Would you believe that I twice observed on the band, once on the room, and three times on the lights. Can you tell me why, since you seem to have the genius of explaining every thing?"

A well pleased smile passed over his lips as he replied, only, by taking out a small hunting watch which he quietly opened, and then handing it to her, he presented her at the same time with the key of his *escritoir*.

"Will you," said he "oblige me by winding this watch."

"Oblige you," replied Lucy, laughing, "by breaking the spring, I suppose—that key belongs to your desk."

"You give me the very answer I desired. You cannot wind my watch, because I have not given you the right key. This illustrates what I am going to say."

"There are some minds suited to other minds, as this watch is to its key. This beautiful piece of mechanism," said he, playing with the watch in his hand, "would be to me, or to any one else, perfectly useless without the key, which, however simple in its construction, is yet so necessary to the watch, that it alone can render it of any service. It is so with the human mind, we may live for years without being fortunate enough to meet with one answering mind which can unlock the treasures of our heart, and the secret springs of feeling, and of thought, and bring them into exercise. It is the sympathy of those around us which we need, the power which others possess of understanding us; to place ourselves in a true light—do you understand me?"

"Partly," replied Lucy, hesitating, and looking down.

"Partly, but not entirely," returned Mr. Beauclerc, repeating her words, with an emphasis, which argued a slight degree of superiority, to which Lucy readily bowed. "Yet I would say you were made to enjoy these things as well as understand them. Nay, you must not think me rude if I say I read as much when first introduced to you; and that I felt I should be understood if I ventured to speak in a way which the world too often ridicules, because it does not comprehend it. It is only the simple language of truth; yet, because it is not exactly the same as the hacknied language of the world, it is regarded as nonsense."

Lucy did not quite understand all he said, but she felt that she was receiving an admiration more flattering, because paid to her understanding; and she only broke up the conversation after repeated invitations to the dance, and her pulse fluttered quickly as she heard, or fancied she heard, a sigh from the accomplished Beauclerc, as she gracefully resigned herself to a young officer, upon whose arm she was soon whirled past him in the giddy round.

Mrs. Villars smiled with secret pride, when some of her friends rallied her on her daughter's conquest, and she took an early opportunity of asking a friend who he might be.

"Have you not heard?" was the reply, "that he has brought his own carriage, and two hunters, to the Castle, and Ball—and, besides, his person speaks for itself, it is so *distingué*."

Mrs. Villars sought for Lucy, to impart these particulars, but was not sorry to find her waltzing with Mr. Beauclerc.

"What a handsome couple they would make," thought she; "and, oh, if Caroline and Hargrave were but here, I should be quite happy." But she little dreamt of the pleasure yet in store for that evening.

Mr. Villars soon beginning to feel impatient, she was compelled to draw her party together. Beauclerc accompanied them to the door; and as he handed Lucy into the carriage, she fancied his hand trembled. With this pleasing impression, she leant back in the fly which conveyed them home, and gave herself up to pleasant reverie, and castle building. She ran over every word which had passed in their long conversations, and thought they were an easy beginning to a more pleasing acquaintance than they often met with—she began then to feel quite surprised that she ever had given a tear to Captain Clair.

"Willingly," she said to herself; "will I resign him to Mabel, if she will have him; yet there was something in him I liked, though I cannot well remember what it was now. Why, he never talked in six weeks, half the sense which Mr. Beauclerc has thrown into one conversation. I feel quite grateful to him for deserting me, since, otherwise, I never should have met this very superior man, who, as he himself observed, though not in plain words exactly, possesses the key to my mind—and does not that seem like affection?"

These pleasing considerations were interrupted by their stopping at their own door, paying the driver, and running gaily up stairs.

"Hark," said Mrs. Villars, "there are voices in the drawing-room, I am certain. There are, I do believe."

"Why mamma," said Maria, who, with more courage, had applied her eye to the key-hole; it is only Caroline talking to somebody. When, upon this information, they opened the door, Caroline was discovered *tête-à-tête*, with a strange gentleman, with as much ease and nonchalance as if at the regular calling hour.

There was a slight tone of triumph in her voice as she said:—

"Colonel Hargrave, papa?"

"Oh, Colonel," said Mrs. Villars, taking the words out of her husband's mouth; "I can scarcely forgive you for obliging us to go to the ball without you."

"He has excused himself most ably," said Caroline; "the death of a friend detained him."

"I assure you," said he, with the greatest courtesy, "that nothing but so serious a reason would have prevented my keeping my appointment; and I trust, my dear sir, that you will excuse my keeping your dinner waiting on Saturday; but, as I said, just now, some very sad circumstances detained me on my road."

"Pray, say not another word," said Mrs. Villars; "we are very sorry for you, I am sure."

"I suppose," said Maria, "you did not arrive in time to join us?"

"Do you think," said Caroline, "that he could go to a fancy ball after attending the death-bed of a friend?"

"No, truly," said he, "I was in no humor for such gaiety, and was more pleased by the quiet welcome I have already received."

"Caroline has only expressed the feelings we should all entertain," said Mrs. Villars, smiling benignly, "and, indeed, I am most happy to see my truant nephew, at last."

Hargrave slightly started at the word nephew, not being able to divine how his distant connection

with the family could be twisted into so close a relationship.

"I trust," continued Mrs. Villars, "that Caroline has taken every care of you, and that you have had some refreshment."

"Indeed she has been most kind," replied he politely. "She would not allow me to persuade her to retire to rest, when I had once announced my intention of remaining up to introduce myself. I will, however, no longer tax your patience; but will go to my own room, if you will allow me."

They accordingly separated, the Colonel lingering to say a few words to his host, and the ladies retiring to a kind of mutual dressing-room.

"Well, my love," said Mrs. Villars to her eldest daughter, "I will never blame you again, for I see you know how to manage without my interference. Nothing could have turned out better."

She felt, indeed, half inclined to idolise her, for the very ill-temper, which, in the early part of the evening, she had more justly blamed. Caroline, in her turn, looked upon them all with an air of superiority, as if the accident had been the result of her prudence.

"Indeed," she said, "he is a most sensible and entertaining man, and, I dare say, if the truth were known, my evening was the most pleasant after all."

"Not quite," replied Lucy, "for I also met with a most sensible and entertaining man."

"Yes," echoed Maria, "such a handsome man too—Hargrave is nothing to him. Every one was wondering who he was, and remarking on his attentions to Lucy."

"What, is Lucy taken in again?" said Caroline, with jealous bitterness. "I thought once in a season was sufficient."

Lucy coloured deeply and angrily, for it was not the first wound she had received.

"Well," said she to herself, "I will be closer this time—I will have no one to abuse my confidence by taunting speeches."

"Come, come," interposed Mrs. Villars, "do not let us quarrel with fortune; for my part, I feel inclined to be on good terms with all the world. Nothing could have been more propitious than your meeting in such a romantic manner. What were you doing when he came in?—at your harp, I hope. Well, how do you like him?"

"Why, Mamma, I think you believe in love at first sight. I am not so easily won."

"Nor the Colonel either, I dare say," said Maria.

"I will thank you, Miss Maria, to remember what you say, and to whom you say it."

"That I very seldom forget," retorted Maria, as she laid down her Swiss hat and ribbons, with a sigh, to think that she might not display them again.

"Come, come," again urged Mrs. Villars, "surely, Caroline, you can give us your opinion of him. You are so quick at reading character."

"That may be," replied Caroline, "but I scarcely think the right advantage to take of discrimination is to retail a private conversation, for the sake of subjecting a friend to everybody's quizzing observations."

Here she glanced angrily at Maria.

"Well," returned the latter, perfectly undisturbed, "is it come to friend and private, already, that, at least, sounds like something, and if you will conquer the good nabob in your own way, I suppose we must excuse being kept in the dark, as the cat politely observed to the mouse, when he was introduced to him in the cupboard."

"I think he is very handsome," said Selina.

"Yes," said Maria, "well enough since he possesses good eyes, good teeth, good forehead, nose and eyes—all tolerably well put together. Yes, I suppose he might be called handsome. I will ask Miss Foster, she is such a judge of masculine beauty."

"I beg you will do no such thing," said Caroline; "he must be considered as one of our own family, and I do not see what right Miss Foster has to pass her observations on us."

"I am afraid you are not quite so rigid with regard to Miss Lovelace," retorted Maria.

Mrs. Villars saw that much bitter remark was rising, and knowing that nothing could be obtained from Caroline, dismissed the conclave, which had assembled at so late an hour, only in consequence of the importance of affairs under deliberation; and she retired to rest satisfied with the course events had taken, and fully impressed with respect for Caroline's judgment. She, meanwhile, in the retirement of her own room, condescended to give Selina an account of the evening's conversation, by which means Mrs. Villars heard the whole the next day from Selina, whose more gentle temper rendered her the general recipient of her mother's schemes.

## CHAPTER VI.

He walked he knew not whither;  
Doubt was on his daily path; and duties shewed not  
certain.

TUPPER.

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Colonel Hargrave was a little past the age when hearts are easily won—and the ready courtesy with which he had performed his part of the evening *tête-à-tête*, might have shown a less prejudiced judge, that he was too accustomed to beauty, grace, and all the endless charms so bewitching to a younger man, to make him very easily fall into the snare which had been laid for him.

However, he had but very lately landed in England, after some years spent in the East; and though like most English travellers, he had been, at first, delighted with the marvels and records of ancient days, which that quarter of the globe so lavishly affords, as well as with the customs and habits of a people with whom he had delighted to mingle, he was not sorry to find himself once again in merry, busy England—one of a people whose interests are more of the present than of the past, where the rapid march of improvement and discovery, form a striking contrast to the splendid dreams of past Eastern glory. Then the comfort of social society—home with all its thousand associations of comfort and tranquillity were not indifferent to him, and he was not sorry to find a gayer welcome than the lonely halls of his own beautiful Aston might have offered him. His sleeping apartment had been arranged with a care that made it seem luxurious after the cabin fare to which he had lately been accustomed, and he paid more attention to the trifles which surrounded him than he had ever before done, for of such trifles he, for the first time, perceived the importance, since all combined gave a feeling of homely comfort which he felt he had scarcely missed till now, when once more in the enjoyment of it. Opening from this room was another, arranged with the most studious attention to ease and appearance. A fire blazed a warm welcome, after his day's journey, and everything conspired to make his little sitting-room one suited to a gentleman's fancy—and by affording him a place of retreat, he perceived that he would be allowed to enjoy the company of his cousins only when he was inclined. In all this there was such an evident desire to please, that he could not help feeling a little flattered, though, perhaps, as representative of the family credit and opulence, he might, at the same time, have felt it to be his due, and a necessary appendage to the invitation.

Tempted by the blazing fire, he threw himself upon the horse-hair sofa, which was near it, and fixed his eyes upon its flickering and varying light, but as he did so, his countenance soon lost the air of courteous pleasantry, which had a short while before possessed it, and he appeared lost in deep and even bitter thought.

The grave accusations of old Giles, and the lighter description of Clair, were both true; and yet a few words more of his mental history is needed fully to unravel his character.

During the life of his mother, he had been the pride of her existence, and keenly sensible of the quicksands which await the young man on his entrance into life—she had watched his opening manhood with the most tender solicitude. Her death, however, left him entirely to the care of his father—and he, thinking the hot-house system of preservation no longer befitting a youth of talent and ability, sent him abroad, first with a tutor, and afterwards alone, in order that he might acquire a knowledge of the world, and the ease, conversation, and polish, which foreign travel is calculated to give. In this he was fully successful. A short residence in the gayest city in Europe, so called forth young Hargrave's natural refinement of taste, that few could find fault with the manners of the finished gentleman whom Paris sent back from its school. But in Paris he had been thrown with those of professed Infidel principles—and amongst them he found men of superior talent and great intellect, who, while they extorted his own secret admiration, rendered him a homage to his youthful talent of the most flattering kind. By them he was rashly led to argue on the tenets of natural and revealed religion, and to discuss points, which are rather matter for faith than comprehension—and he entered on these questions with a spirit of which older men have not been innocent, rather seeking to display his own powers in the argument, than to do honor to the truth. The contest was eagerly courted by those who only kept their hearts at ease by engaging in the excitement of perpetual warfare. They were subtle reasoners, and Hargrave found himself coping with them, only with the greatest difficulty.

But, who can unlock the secret mysteries of the human mind, or give a clue to its strange inconsistencies? Even while he argued, the dreadful doubt passed into his own mind, and, wondering and amazed, he found himself an unbeliever in the faith he had so warmly defended! Too often have those who have become the most devoted christians at an after period of their life, had to mourn such infidelity, though, for a time only; and had Hargrave resorted to the simple means used by his old tenant, whom his thoughtless words had led astray, he, like old Giles, might have been restored to comfort—but he only rushed deeper and deeper into argument, and the more confirmed in error—he, at length, ended by declaring himself vanquished, and thanking his new friends for having opened his eyes to his own superstition. Thus eagerly received by a brilliant *coterie*, adorned by wit, genius, and learning, he learnt to boast of the sentiments he at first deplored, and to wonder that he should have been weak enough to recognise any other.

Where then was the reward for a mother's untiring self-devoted love to her son, through the years of infancy and youth? Despair not, fond mothers—"cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days"—after *many* days, remember, and be patient.

One result, was, however, evident in this wild fit of recklessness—under the pretence of keeping his intellect pure and unclouded, he preserved the same rigid principles she had recommended, and in this he was firm, spite of the ribaldry of his companions. "No one," he said, proudly, "should be able to affirm that he had abandoned his religion because too weak to obey its laws." His friends, therefore, left off their jests and boasted that no professor of revealed religion could be a better moralist, or a more virtuous man. But such virtue must ever be but an unsteady light, which is founded on no firmer basis than self-opinion, and Hargrave might have started when in foreign lands, he had lavished the most profuse charity on those around him, had he remembered how blind he was to the wants and sufferings of those who at home called him master.

Too late his father's death summoned him to Aston, to take possession of the immense wealth which he thus inherited. After but a brief stay, events induced him to leave his native country, and entering the Indian army, he sought employment for his restless energies on the banks of the Indus. There his military career had not been without honor, and why he had returned to England, scarcely himself could tell.

There he sat, an older, if not a wiser and better man. Dark thoughts, like heavy clouds, seemed to pass over his mind, as with his hand supporting his head, he gazed fixedly, but vacantly on the fire. Perhaps he was thinking of his early days, and of the mother who had taught him to hallow them. Perhaps he was remembering how unable he had been to build the fabric even of human and short lived earthly happiness, on so weak and failing a foundation as his own unassisted virtue. For, to his heart, common joys had been tainted. The sabbath chaunt had brought no melody to his ear, reminding him of the rest which its Maker had hallowed. "The gentle flowers that stooping o'er the wilderness—speak of joy, and faith, and love," had seemed to him only a difficult clause in the argument of an adversary. Such might have been the dark remembrances of the hour, for he swayed himself to and fro, as if in an agony of spirit, nor did he retire to rest till the grey dawn warned him of the necessity of seeking repose.

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## CHAPTER VII.

Wisdom revenges, said  
The world; is quick and deadly of resentment;  
Thrusts at the very shadow of affront,  
And hastes by death to wipe its honor clean.

POLLOCK.

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The next morning Lucy was down stairs by eight o'clock, appearing scarcely to feel any fatigue from the gaieties of the last evening. The servants, taking advantage of their mistress's slumbers, had not been very careful to rouse themselves early; and as Lucy wandered about the house, she found nothing but rooms half closed, and maids with sweeping brushes, dusters, and open windows, forming no tempting welcome on a cold morning. Yet, chill as was prospect both within and without, she felt nothing cheerless that morning, and, putting on her bonnet and cloak, she went out, saying she would be back by breakfast time. She found the atmosphere thick and humid, and cold drops quickly gathered on her veil. The streets, under the influence of a slight thaw, were wet with black mud; but she quickly threaded her way through them, till reaching Milsom Street, she took her way towards the higher parts of the town. Few people were stirring, shops were only just open, and the occupiers engaged in filling their empty windows with a display for the day. The light-hearted girl scarcely giving a thought to any thing around her, soon reached the Circus, a fine but gloomy part of the town. Time and the weather have cast a black shade over its formerly clean white stone, which gives it an appearance of sadness, which is shared by the sombre hue of the evergreens, which ornament its garden. To one of its houses Lucy hurried, and after a short pause, was ushered into it by an old man, apparently butler in the establishment. The room into which she was shown, was upon the ground floor, and shared in no very slight degree, the appearance of the outside of the buildings. Its furniture was dark green, and the curtains, with their many heavy folds had been suffered to trespass too much upon the windows. There was an oak wainscoting round the room, and here and there some old portrait frowned down from the walls. The room was rather long than wide, and lighted by windows only on the one side, looking on the street; this often made it appear dark, but, in contrast to every thing about the place, a bright fire blazed upon the hearth, and a small table, with a snowy cloth, supported the hissing urn, and a frugal but snug breakfast. Seated beside it was rather a young looking lady. There was a certain air of unmistakeable dignity over her whole appearance; her features, though irregular, were intellectual and commanding, and the sparkling eye wandered with restless energy. Her hair was black as an Indian's, and she might have been called beautiful, but for the melancholy, which, as a veil, seemed thrown round her, stilling every quicker impulse into chill composure. She held the *Times* in her hand, folded at the leading article, but she laid it



down and rose, on Lucy's entrance, with a look of surprise and pleasure.

"Why love," said she, "I thought you would be sleeping for an hour or two yet, after the fatigues of last night. I am sure no common event would bring you out this foggy morning, but sit down and I will give you some breakfast, for I am sure you have had none; let me take off your shawl, and then you shall have some of your favorite chocolate, and tell me your news as you drink it."

"I could not sleep," said Lucy, "and as no one was up I thought I would come and see why you were not at the ball as you promised last night."

"My poor uncle was so bad with his gout, that I had not the resolution to leave him, and you know how little will tempt me to stay away from such things," said Miss Foster, with a sigh.

"Ah," said Lucy, smiling, "clever people like you do not need such frivolities; but what would my poor vacant brain do without them."

"Why is it vacant? But you have not, like me, given up the phantom happiness, or you would prefer seeking something more substantial."

Lucy glanced at the leading article, and gave a slight shrug.

"You may come to that at last," replied her friend, with a moonlight smile, which passed almost immediately away, "really you do not know what a pleasure the morning papers give me—they make me remember that I am a denizen of the world, and besides, a daughter of England, and then I forget how lonely I am as an individual."

"But why lonely," returned Lucy, "the slightest effort on your part would surround you with friends, and you might have a host of acquaintances instead of my poor self, whom alone you admit, and I enjoy that privilege, merely from accident."

"You do not quite know me yet," said Miss Foster, "such society is no longer tolerable. And I might never have known even you, had not your horse thrown you at our very door, and forced me to open it. There was, indeed, something so pleasing in being able to nurse you for a few days, that I became insensibly attached to you. But such accidents seldom occur, and I care not to go through the common ordeal of acquiring acquaintances."

"Well," said Lucy, "when I am inclined to turn anchorite, Millie, you must let me in, and I will come and live with you; but I am rather of opinion that the world is a mirror which reflects back our smiles and our frowns."

"Is that sentiment your own?" enquired her companion, quickly.

"No—second hand from a delightful partner that I met last night. Such a very nice man—quite beyond my poor powers of description; everything he said was so clever, and so new, it seemed as if he had read more of the human heart than any one I ever met. He talked to me nearly all the evening."

"Imprudent girl!" exclaimed Miss Foster.

"Oh, if you take everything I say so seriously," said Lucy, poutingly, "I will not tell you anything."

"What kind of looking man was he?" said Miss Foster, without heeding her remark.

"He must be thirty, at least," said Lucy—"with light brown hair, deep blue eyes, rather tall, and very nice looking—not quite so handsome as Captain Clair; but then his talking was the fascinating part."

"And what did he talk about?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," said Lucy, coloring.

"And did you hear his name?" enquired Miss Foster, almost restraining her breath.

"Beauclerc," said Lucy; "is it not a pretty name?"

"You must have nothing more to say to him, if he talks such in a way that you blush already. Will you promise me?" said she, most violently.

"You must give me some reason."

"Imprudent girl, you must take my warning."

"If he were making love, I might consider," said Lucy; "but, as a common acquaintance, and a delightful dancer, you must give me some reason for cutting him."

"You are rash," repeated Miss Foster; "do not have anything to say to him, or you will repent it."

"I am not to be led blind-folded," said Lucy; "and you must prove me in danger before I can think such advice needed. Pray let us talk of something else—my poor *beaux* always tease you."

There was a very palpable tinge of vanity in this last remark, which caused Miss Foster to bite her lips, as if suppressing violent emotion, and to remain silent, though the uneasy flash of her dark eye betrayed something of the violence of her temper.

At this inopportune moment, a knock at the hall door announced another early visitor.

The door of their sitting-room was, after an interval of some minutes, cautiously opened by the venerable butler, who, with some embarrassment, presented a card to his mistress on a silver salver.

Lucy almost trembled as she saw that the storm which had been gathering on her friend's countenance was now ready to burst forth.

Her cheeks, which had a moment before been brightly flushed, turned to a livid white, as she brushed the card from the salver without touching it, and then stamped upon it with impotent violence.

Lucy's eyes fell upon the name—it was that of "Beauclerc"—and, unperceived, she took it up, and concealed it in the folds of her dress from further indignity.

"I am not at home," said Miss Foster, in a decisive tone to the aged butler, who regarded the scene with more concern than surprise, and left the room slowly and sadly. The front door was presently heard to close. As if ashamed of the passion into which she had been betrayed, Miss Foster seated herself, at once, and tried to resume her usual coldness of demeanor.

"See," said she, "the way in which I dare to treat him, and judge for yourself if he is worthy to be received as an admirer of yours."

"I think," said Lucy, recovering her animation, "you have shewn yourself very little my friend to treat a man with indignity, when I had expressed a contrary opinion of him."

Miss Foster regarded her rising spleen with an indifferent coldness, which made her still more angry.

"I say," she reiterated, "that it is a most unkind and ungrateful way of returning my confidence."

"Wilful child!" exclaimed Miss Foster, "will you never be guided for your own advantage?"

"I am no child!" exclaimed Lucy; "and if I do choose a guide, it shall be one who can rule her own temper."

"You should allow for the emotion you cannot understand," said Miss Foster, gravely; "but leave me now, Lucy, and do not be angry—we are both excited—and may say things we do not mean."

"Leave you," exclaimed her offended friend, starting up, and putting on her shawl with trembling hands—"I will not stay another moment where I am not wanted."

Miss Foster's head had sunk upon her hand, perhaps she was too deeply absorbed in her own feelings to notice Lucy's anger, till suddenly raising her eyes, in which thick tears were gathering—she watched her movements with a curious interest—but Lucy was already at the door—and gasping a "good morning," she hurried away, leaving her friend to the unpleasant thoughts she was indulging.

It was not anger alone which led Lucy to leave the house so hastily, for she was curious to see her pleasing companion of the night before, if but for a moment. She was not disappointed, for, as she opened the door, she perceived him standing on the other side of the way.

Could he have seen her enter the house? and, might not his having done so, been the reason of his early call on Miss Foster. Vanity is a ready prompter; and she had not proceeded many steps before she believed the delusive argument, and attributed her friend's warnings to jealousy. She had scarcely arrived at this conclusion, before she perceived Mr. Beauclerc crossing to her side of the way, and she gave a bow and a smile, which proved a ready inducement for him to join her. He looked so dejected, that she had not the heart to check his intention of lounging by her side, and he was far too courtly and ready in his manners to give such a meeting the least appearance of awkwardness.

"You are acquainted with the lady of that house then?" he enquired, after a slight pause in the conversation.

"Yes," said Lucy, smiling and looking at him, "and I suspect you know her also."

"Do you know her well?" he said, slightly colouring.

"Oh, very intimately—she is a great friend of mine."

"You know all her secrets then?"

"Well, I dare say I do," she replied, smiling importantly; for, to confess that she had a friend, and did not know all her secrets, seemed a derogation from her own dignity; "but, I fear I shall not know many more, for we have parted in anger."

"Indeed! can that be true—you in anger."

"Yes, yes," said Lucy, looking archly at him; "and what do you think it could be about?"

"I have, indeed, no means of guessing," he replied, with an interest which Lucy attributed rather to herself than her subject.

"About yourself, it was then?" said she, looking slightly aside.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed, delightedly; "have you then been speaking of me?—and what did she say of me?"

"Nothing you would, perhaps, like to hear," she said, with the same archness as before.

"And what part did you take?" said he, eagerly.

"Oh," she replied, laughing carelessly, "I never do things by halves—so I defended you through thick and thin."

"Excellent girl," cried he, enthusiastically, taking her hand, and pressing it warmly, "how can I ever thank you enough for this kindness?"

"*Prenez garde*," said she, "gossippers are abroad, and there, I declare, is Miss Lovelace's youngest sister going for her music lesson—all Bath will say we are flirting."

"You know how to contradict such scandal by a word," said he; "but that word, for my sake, you will not speak."

Lucy did not quite understand this last speech; but she did not like to say so, and, therefore, murmured a rapid "Yes."

A slight pause followed; and then he resumed the conversation with such a sudden flow of spirits, that Lucy very soon forgot everything in the pleasure of listening to him, and even suffered him to lengthen the walk by taking a longer route. At the entrance to Sydney Place, he took leave of her, and she returned home, thinking over everything he had said. They had only talked on general topics after all; but then he spoke with a deference to her opinion which was very pleasing. She was in very good humour with herself, and resolved that, after leaving Miss Foster to cool for a week or so, she would call and make up the quarrel in the most generous manner she could. Satisfying her conscience with this, she entered the house, and hastily taking off her bonnet, seated herself, with the rest, at the breakfast-table, in good spirits and with a fresh color, contenting herself with a very laconic description of her morning walk.

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## CHAPTER VII.

The foe, the foe is on thy track,  
Patient, certain, and avenging;  
Day by day, solemnly, and silently, followeth the  
fearful past,  
His step is lame, but sure.

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It was nearly eleven o'clock before the family assembled to breakfast, and Mr. Villars had already retired to his study, leaving the morning-room to its listless occupants. Maria, being the most active of the family, generally presided at breakfast and tea, and kept alive the yawning faculties of the party. On this occasion, she was busily, and relentlessly rallying Caroline on the last night's *tête-à-tête*, when Hargrave himself entered. He seemed entirely to have lost the gaiety of the evening before, and to have assumed the gravity of a judge. To Mrs. Villars' enquiries of whether he had slept well, he answered courteously, but gravely; and Caroline afterwards observed to Selina, that the dear creature was quite different when alone with her, and Selina, in return, lispingly suggested, that he might be shy before strangers. He did not, however, justify this remark by any of the little awkwardnesses which so often accompany that feeling. On the contrary, he seemed rather to seek the indulgence of one who is secure of favor, however small the pains he may take to acquire it. Nor was he mistaken. They were prepared to admire him, and his variable humours only gave him an additional charm in their eyes.

"What time do you receive your letters?" he enquired of Caroline.

"About this time," she replied; "are you expecting any? for, if so, you will not have very long to wait?"

"Indeed," he replied, not noticing her question.

At this moment the peculiar double knock of the post-man began to be heard uncertainly, then louder and louder, as, coming round the street, he stopped at their door.

"Here he is," exclaimed Lucy; "I wonder if there is a letter from Mabel."

Two were brought; one for Mrs. Villars, and the other for her guest. They were both written by Mr. Ware; the one addressed to Mrs. Villars, contained a brief, but touching account of the fire, the illness of her sister, and her removal to Aston Manor; concluding with poor Amy's death.

Mrs. Villars slowly read the letter aloud, but when she reached the last few lines, which spoke of her niece's death, a loud shriek burst from Lucy, as she rose and flew to her own room. Hargrave followed her to the door with a deeper interest than he had before displayed, but she had quickly vanished, and he returned to his seat.

"She has been staying with them," said Mrs. Villars, in explanation; "and the dear girl has so much feeling—but, colonel, only think of my sister being at Aston Manor; but, perhaps, I ought not to have told you, as I suppose the servants make free with the place in your absence."

"Your sister is quite welcome to any hospitality my house can afford her; and, perhaps, you will be kind enough to assure her on that point, if she has any doubt. I will, myself, write to my housekeeper, and request her to see to Mrs. Lesly's comfort."

"You seem to take the news of your lost houses with admirable coolness," said Caroline.

"You mistake me, Miss Villars," he replied; a momentary fire lighting up his eye, which made her shrink; "I am not indifferent to the death of our poor cousin—the rest can be repaired—but I take it with apparent coolness, because this is not the first time that these distressing events have been communicated to me."

"How?" exclaimed every one; "and why did you not tell us?"

"Bad news travels quickly," returned Hargrave, evasively; "and it is hardly likely that I should long be kept in ignorance of such a serious accident."

So saying, he opened his own letter, and read it with deep attention, and emotion; a little to the surprise of the ladies, who had already entered upon a discussion on the prettiest mourning dresses which the fashion afforded. His better feelings alarmed, he scarcely knew why, by the frivolity with which the news had been received, he retired to his own room, and taking up his writing materials, he wrote much as follows:—

MY DEAR SIR,

"I regret that I cannot at once obey your summons to Aston; partly, because I think it would be a more delicate kindness to Mrs. Lesly and her daughter, to leave them in possession of my house, under their present affliction, rather than intrude myself upon their attention, just now; at the same time, if I came to you, they might think they were putting me to inconvenience. But we shall soon meet, my dear sir, I trust; when, from your accustomed kindness, I may obtain forgiveness for the past; now, I do not feel worthy even to reply to the praise you so lavishly bestow upon me.

"In the meanwhile, my poor tenants, of whom you speak so warmly, shall not be forgotten. I will write by this post, to a young friend of mine, an architect; who, if able, shall go down to Aston immediately, with powers to construct a sufficient number of commodious tiled cottages—at the same time, I shall instruct him, that any wish, or suggestion you may be kind enough to make, about any part of the village, shall be strictly attended to.

"With my best compliments to Miss Ware, and the hope of meeting ere long, I am,

"My dear sir,  
"Your attached pupil,  
"HARRY HARGRAVE."

This letter was written with great rapidity, and having sealed and directed it, he lounged back to the morning room. The recent events, of course, formed the topic of conversation; but to all, but Lucy, Amy had scarcely been known, more than by name; and she had retired to her room in an agony of remorse, for her feelings, though seldom deep, were impetuous, and easily moved by circumstances. She remembered Clair's entreaty, that she would not go to the ball, with tenfold bitterness, as she now reflected that, at the moment when she had been rejoicing in unbounded spirits, Mabel had been keeping the sad death-watch by the corpse of her sister. Again, and again she reproached herself as her murderess, flung aside the tinselled dress which had rendered her the ornament of the ball-room, and turned almost indignantly upon Maria, when she attempted to comfort her.

Her sisters, little understanding the nature of her feelings, and wearied with her self-reproaches, soon agreed that it would be better to leave her alone till she should recover herself; but Lucy, who appeared to have little pleasure in their comfort, no sooner found herself alone, than she felt unkindly neglected, and compared them bitterly with Mabel, whose untiring patience had so often borne with her weakness.

In the afternoon, when exhausted by grief, and wholly subdued, she sat crouching over the fire in their little dressing-room, Maria entered with bustling pleasure.

"Oh, Lucy," said she, "do dry your tears, and look bewitching—for who do you think is down stairs—no other than your charming partner of last night, Mr. Beauclerc, who is making himself so agreeable, listening to mamma's touching account of your grief—so that you need not mind his seeing that you have been crying."

"Thank you," said Lucy, without raising her head; "but I cannot come down to-day."

"Oh, nonsense, Lucy—think how disappointed he will be—he may never come again."

"I cannot help it," said Lucy; "excuse me in any way you like—I cannot and will not come—and you will only tease me by asking me."

"Well, I am sure I would never stay up-stairs when a beau of mine was down."

"You do not know what you would do, if you had been as wicked as I have been."

"Come, come," said Maria, "we all are wicked, I dare say; but I would never fret myself to death about it; but I suppose I must go," she said, seeing Lucy resume her crouching attitude; and leaving the room, she went to tell her mother, who, though much disappointed, was forced to make Lucy's grief as becoming and touching as possible, in the eyes of the stranger, though she afterwards expressed herself more candidly, saying—"She had no patience with such fits of the heroics, and trusted her sisters would laugh her out of them."

Hargrave listened with great interest to the account of Lucy's share in the accident by which Amy had first suffered, which he gleaned from Caroline; and when, late in the evening, she appeared in the drawing-room, her eyes swollen with weeping, and her cheeks pale and discolored, he met her with a kind look, which her most sparkling moments, perhaps, would not have excited. He gave her the most comfortable seat by the fire, for which she tried to thank him, but her voice failed her, and seating herself, in silence, she rested her tired and aching head upon her hand.

"You have been staying with Mrs. Lesly, I find," he said, knowing that it would be of little purpose to try to turn her thoughts from the subject that pained her.

"Yes," was the faint reply, followed by a deep sigh.

"Really, Lucy," said Caroline, a little sharply, "you should not give way so, it will not mend matters now."

Lucy had not temper for the "soft answer," and was too spiritless to retort an angry one.

"I think," said Hargrave, "you must have met a fellow-voyager of mine, a Captain Clair—he said he was going to stay with his uncle at Aston."

"Yes," said Lucy, despairingly, "I did meet him; and he said he knew you."

"How did you like him?" he pursued, anxious to make her speak.

"Oh, pretty well," she said, carelessly; but a burning blush kindled brighter and deeper on her pale cheek, as his penetrating eye watched for her reply.

She moved impatiently beneath his glance; but she felt that it was not withdrawn, and painfully conscious of her increasing color, she rose abruptly, and turning on him, for a moment, like the wearied stag at bay, she looked angrily at him, and then hastened from the room.

Still, however, as she once more retreated to her chamber, and shut the door violently behind her, that glance seemed to follow her, not simply inquisitive, but compassionately answering her own angry expression, as if deprecating its violence.

"He must know something about me," she thought. "Could Clair have spoken of her to him, and in the same terms, which she had overheard him use to his uncle, accompanied, perhaps, by ridicule. Yes," thought she, actually throwing herself upon the floor in the vehemence of her passion, "he sees me with Clair's eyes—if he pities, he despises me, as the girl who was only used as the cloak to more honorable attentions to Mabel. I cannot endure this—anything but to be both neglected and despised. There is one, at least," she added, to herself, proudly, "who appreciates me—but this time I will keep my own counsel." She rose, and looked at the glass—but it now only told her that the boasted beauty of the night before had faded before her tears. "I will weep no more," she said, angrily, brushing the heavy drops from her cheeks, "I will weep no more—but, I fear my heart will become hard indeed."

A passionate burst of tears again interrupted her resolutions, and she turned from the disappointing mirror, which had, only a few hours before, reflected a form of airy liveliness, which had even astonished herself.

Of one thing, however, she was resolved; to avoid, as much as possible, the offensive pity with which she imagined Hargrave regarded her; and this resolution was so well kept that she always, after that night, avoided him with studious shyness.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

What sadder sight can angels view,  
Than self deceiving tears,  
Pour'd idly over some dark page,  
Of earlier life, though pride or rage,  
The record of to-day engage,  
A woe for future years.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

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Colonel Hargrave rapidly domesticated himself in Sydney Place, and very soon placed himself on terms of intimacy with the Villars family. Still nothing occurred which seemed to bring Caroline nearer her object, and though for some weeks her temper remained unruffled in his presence, nothing betrayed any thing like admiration on his part; nothing could warm into affection the every-day friendship which had been established between them, or induce him to take advantage of his popularity, by choosing a mistress for Aston Manor.

Mrs. Villars was too ready to interpose her powers of contrivance, and took every opportunity of throwing them together; in public, she often succeeded, but in their private circle he was more than a match for all her address, for when the manners of the perfect gentleman failed to secure him from any well-laid scheme to entrap his admiration, he was ready to assume those of the bear.

One great difficulty consisted in dragging him to the balls and evening parties, which began to succeed each other in rapid succession; and sometimes when they had wholly reckoned on his company, he would be found in his morning coat, busily employed in writing letters, which no coaxing could induce him to leave. At these times Caroline would often plead a head-ache, and remain at home, but to very little purpose, as he seemed to believe the excuse, and, probably supposing quiet the best restorative, he would gather up his books, and retire to his own room.

A woman's heart, when regulated by no higher principle than that of its own native impulses, is often piqued into love by the very means which should have restrained it, and Caroline's had been left to the government of vanity and coquetry, habits which insensibly corrode the innate modesty of the female mind. Hargrave's failings, therefore, excited more affection than his virtues—for the necessity of watching his humours, and of courting rather than receiving his attentions, insensibly interested her, and though her feeling was composed of component parts of vanity, self-love, avarice, and, ambition, it could scarcely be affirmed that it did not contain a few grains of genuine affection. She had indeed merely expected some broken down nabob, who would have formed an easy conquest, and she was therefore agreeably surprised by Hargrave's manner and appearance, for his manly bearing and easy air, compensated for any injury an Indian sun might have given his complexion, and called forth the praise of all Caroline's fair friends. Thus, stimulated by opposition, she left no art untried to win him, and watched his movements with secret and constant jealousy; while her mother, with the foolish fondness, which had grown almost to fear of her beautiful daughter, encouraged her to hope, by repeating and magnifying, sometimes even inventing, speeches, which seemed to betray more than Hargrave openly professed.

Meanwhile, he evaded these manoeuvres, and placed himself on terms of equal civility with all the sisters, by whom he found even his weakest foibles caressed. Lucy, alone, resisted his fascinations, and long after every shadow of her grief had disappeared, continued to avoid him, and never mentioned, before him, the name of her new admirer, whom she now frequently met, either at the public balls, or the morning concerts in the Pump room, the fashionable resort of the sick, who drank its waters, the musical, or the idle.

Mr. Beauclerc considered himself a judge of music, and might frequently be seen listening to the performance with a scientific air. He seldom failed to join the Villars party, and engage Lucy in conversation, to her unfeigned satisfaction. She could not fail to perceive that there was one subject which dwelt in his thoughts, though seldom more than dimly hinted at, which gave an air of sadness to his mind.

What this might be, Lucy knew not, though vanity echoed a ready answer, and, whenever he spoke of his own loneliness or unhappiness, she evaded the subject with a coquetry sufficiently skilful to check his confidence, and, though it sometimes sent him away in an ill humour, he invariably returned, in a short while, and she flattered herself that each little exertion of her power only riveted his chains more surely.

Several weeks had thus passed when, one morning, Mrs. Villars received a letter from Mr. Ware, begging her immediate presence at Aston, as the symptoms of her sister's illness had assumed a more dangerous character, and he feared that the utmost haste would be required to enable her to reach Aston in time to see her alive. Estranged as Mrs. Villars had been from her sister, she yet loved her, as warmly as her selfish nature would allow—and she hastened to her husband's study, to make preparations for her immediate journey; she would not, however, hear of his offer to accompany her, lest Colonel Hargrave might take the alarm, and leave them—she, therefore, only begged him to keep less to his study, at least, in the evenings. Mr. Villars replied, that his own sense of delicacy might be relied on; which made her fear that he would give them too much of his company; but she had little time to argue, for, before her hasty preparations were completed, the post-chaise, which had been ordered, was at the door.

As she was stepping in, Colonel Hargrave offered to accompany her for a few stages, saying that he had a friend in the direction she was going, whom he was anxious to visit.

"I am going to a sad scene," said Mrs. Villars, when they had travelled for a few miles, "and, besides the loss of my sister, my feelings will be agonised, I know, for she leaves a daughter to mourn her loss, homeless and unprotected."

"Yes," said Hargrave; "but your presence will be some comfort to her."

"I quite dread the meeting," continued Mrs. Villars. "Did you read Mr. Ware's letter? I fear there is no hope."

"None, indeed, I fear," replied Hargrave, looking out to urge the post-boy to greater speed. "What is to become of Miss Lesly?" he presently asked, "she has, I suppose, something to depend upon."

Mrs. Villars slightly coloured, and couched hastily, when she perceived her change of countenance observed.

"I do not think they were very good managers, to tell you the truth," she said; "and they had not much to save from."

"What will become of her then?" he repeated, with sudden animation.

"I can scarcely tell what may happen eventually," replied Mrs. Villars; "but should my poor sister die, I mean to bring my niece back with me, for the present, at least. She is a good-looking girl, and I may be able to get her settled."

"Settled!" repeated Hargrave, mechanically, and relapsed into silence.

Soon afterwards, a turn in the road brought in sight some tall, old-fashioned gates, opening on an avenue of dark trees, through which nothing could be discerned, but the gable ends of a more distant mansion. Here Hargrave alighted, and bidding her good-bye, in a tone of sadness, which seemed the highest compliment to her present affliction, entered the old gateway, and stood there, till Mrs. Villars was beyond his sight.

Musingly she continued her journey, and gladly would she have had his further companionship, to screen her from the thoughts which were now rapidly gaining entrance into her mind.

It was one of those dark days, when the shadows seem to fall long before the unseen sun has set; and, as the horses speeded along, she gathered the folds of her cloak closer around her, and endeavoured to suppress the shudder, which something beyond the cold biting air of a dull easterly wind made to pass over her frame. Night had already closed, dark, dismal, and cold, before she reached Aston. As they entered the village, she leaned from the window, and expressed her desire to stop at the inn, she remembered; but a further glance at the ruined village, faintly shewn by the light of the carriage-lamps, as she rattled through it, told her of nothing but scattered timbers and blackened walls, and thus obliged her to change her order, and drive, at once, to Aston Manor.

As the chaise rolled lightly up the smooth gravelled avenue to the Manor, Mrs. Villars endeavoured to calm her trembling agitation, with the hope that all would yet be well; but the low, hurried whispers, in the dimly lighted hall, that greeted her arrival, unnerved her, and, dispensing with the assistance, she usually so rigorously exacted from her inferiors, she hurried from the chaise, and entered the hall, exclaiming—

"Can it be possible? am I too late?"

"Yes, indeed, ma'am," replied the housekeeper, now advancing; "it is too true. We closed her eyes but late last night."

Mrs. Villars hid her face in the sables which enveloped her, and sobbed convulsively; then, flinging down her purse, she begged her to dismiss the chaise, saying, she was Mrs. Lesly's sister, and must see her immediately.

"Let me beg you, ma'am," said Mrs. Hawkins, respectfully, "to compose yourself—it will be too much for you to-night."

"No, no, no," cried Mrs. Villars, as warm, repentant tears streamed rapidly down her face; "let me see her now—my poor, poor sister."

Mrs. Hawkins sadly led the way up the marble staircase, and across the gallery, to a door which she noiselessly opened, as if she feared to disturb the slumbers of the dead. The room was fully lighted by wax tapers—but the bed was partially concealed by the many folds of its crimson curtains.

An old woman was sitting by the fire, who rose on Mrs. Villars's entrance—and, at the same moment, glanced to the window, where Mabel was seated, gazing out upon the star-light stillness of the night, as if communing with her own spirit. She rose on perceiving them, and gliding from the recess, advanced rapidly and noiselessly to meet her aunt; placing both her hands on hers, she attempted to speak, but the words died between her half parted lips, and a quiet burst of tears succeeded the effort.

Mrs. Villars caught her in her arms, sobbing violently, with the excess of her emotion. She had seldom been with the dying, and did not remember having ever been in actual contact with death itself, and it was with an internal shrinking, that, at length, releasing the poor girl from her arms, she advanced to gaze on the face of her sister. How calm and placid seemed the sleep of the dead, in that still chamber—but, though sweetly tranquil was the countenance once so dear, it bore the unmistakable, terrible touch of death; and Mrs. Villars wrung her hands, and turned away; an icy coldness seemed taking possession of her senses, and terror prevented her stooping to touch the cold lips which never more would reproach her with their confiding words.

Mrs. Hawkins soon kindly put an end to this trying scene, by leading her from the room; there was enough in the bereavement itself to touch her sympathy, without her being aware of the pangs of awakening conscience, which added bitterness to a grief seemingly so natural.

How miserable those days of mourning seemed to the heartless woman—as hour slowly dragged after hour in that silent house. There were no exciting trifles to wear away the time—nothing but the endless black crape with which she tried to feel interested, though her senses sickened at the mournful tales it told. There, no company came to banish thought—thought of solemn things that she was little prepared to contemplate—she was alone with Mabel, and the dead.

Again, and again, she condemned herself for the deceptions she had practised, and endeavoured to appease her self-accusations with ideas of the most lavish generosity to Mabel—but justice—alas, that she felt she had placed it almost beyond her power to render her. She now owed her six hundred pounds, and well she knew, that, however frivolously she had spent, however small a part of her extravagances it had proved—this sum was almost the entire support her sister had saved for her orphan daughter; which, though little calculated to afford her maintenance as a gentle-woman, might, in talented hands, be the commencement of a respectable independence; or, at all events, save her, if dependent, from many minor, but bitter personal necessities which wound the delicate mind so sorely. Well she knew this—but she knew, also, that she never would have the courage, either to limit her own personal expenses, or to ask her husband for the money. Mabel must be repaid by the most lavish kindness, and by all the comforts of a home. She could not know of the debt, therefore would not feel her loss, and if, by a timely display of her beauty, and her painful bereavements, she could marry her well—she might then deem the debt repaid. All this she endeavoured to persuade herself; but, as she wandered from room to room in the twilight, which their closed windows afforded, something uneasy oppressed her, which forced her to repeat, again and again, the same line of consolation. It was then, with a sense of relief, that she saw the day for her sister's funeral draw near, and she watched the dark procession from the house, winding its way to the little church, with grief, indeed, but with grief lightened of its heaviest sense of oppression. With the greatest attention she watched over Mabel, whose strength had entirely given way, when the last sad scene, the last parting was over—and, for hours, seemed to have forgotten all that was selfish in her nature to minister to her comfort.

On the following morning, perceiving that she was sufficiently calm to listen to her, she begged her to enter on an explanation of her affairs; expressing herself anxious to know if she had thought of any plans for the future.

"No, dear aunt," was Mabel's reply; "but I must soon think of them."

"What money have you left?" enquired Mrs. Villars.

"In the funds only one hundred pounds, I believe," replied Mabel, "for the physicians I procured from London were so expensive in their fees—but the rest you know—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mrs. Villars, too troubled, and too uncertain as to her future conduct to commit herself, by answering what she apprehended to be an allusion to her debt, "but I was going to ask, did you save anything from the fire?"

"Yes, some plate, a little more than a hundred pounds worth, I think—Captain Clair kindly secured it."

"Ah," said Mrs. Villars, self-awaking, "I remember it is just the same pattern as mine; if you like I will have it properly valued, and pay you for it—people may think if they like, that your poor mother left it to me."

"Thank you," returned Mabel, who had perceived her aunt's hesitation with regard to the money, and therefore was little willing to increase the debt; "but I do not think I shall dispose of it yet, if at all."

"But then I cannot make people believe it was left me?"

"There will be no necessity; for what I am not ashamed of doing I can bear to have known; and it is only for my sake that you can have any scruple."

"Oh, dear, no, of course not," returned her aunt, not the better pleased to find Mabel so unlike her mother in worldly matters. "Well, then, if you do not like the plate turned into money, the hundred pounds will keep you in dress for two years, and by that time I trust you will be, better provided for, by a respectable marriage."

Mrs. Villars had been too accustomed to speak of marriage, in this kind of jobbing style, to her daughters, to be fully alive to the blush of exquisite pain, which, for an instant, brightened the pale cheek of her companion. Something, however, in that blush, recalled a resemblance she only rarely shewed to her mother, and Mrs. Villars felt again all the pangs of concealed shame. Hastening then to relieve herself, she entered more eagerly on the real subject of her conversation, and at once pressed her, with affectionate warmth, to accept the protection of her home, to find in her a second mother, to be one with her daughters, sharer in all their privileges, and pleasures, and sisterly love.

Mabel started, and, as she listened to the generous proposal her aunt so warmly advocated, she could not help reproaching herself, for ever having regarded her as worldly minded. In vain she gently urged the inconvenience this arrangement might possibly bring; Mrs. Villars would hear nothing of it, and when Mabel still hesitated, she folded her in her arms and asked her piteously and entreatingly, while tears choked her utterance, if she would deny her the privilege of atoning to her lost sister for all the neglect, for which she now so bitterly reproached herself.



Mabel could say nothing, nor did she wish to urge anything more, for sweetly did those words sound to her ears, "home and sisters," kind sisters who would wile away her sorrow, and re-awaken her interest in life—home where her tried spirit might find refreshment and repose. She suffered her head to sink upon the bosom to which she was so warmly prest, and murmured forth an answer of affection and gratitude.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Ware was announced, and to him her new plans were immediately confided by Mabel. He had believed Mrs. Villars a worldly-minded woman, and was, therefore, much pleased when he perceived, by the tone of both, that the arrangement had been so cordially proposed.

"One alteration I must," said he, "beg in my favour: Mabel is so justly dear to us all, that to part with her before even attempting to console her grief, is more than I could well bear. You must indeed, madam, spare her to us at the rectory for a little while."

"Willingly, my dear sir," replied Mrs. Villars, with that tone of manner which often rendered her popular, "and we can manage it in this way—I have a friend at Cheltenham, who has been long pressing me to visit her, I will go and see her now, it will do me good after this sad trial—and, provided Mabel promises to obey my summons, I will leave her to join me on the road. She is now my ward, by her own consent," she added, smiling kindly at her.

This proposal was eagerly accepted by Mr. Ware, who dreaded losing Mabel, and clung to any pretext for keeping her.

"I must go and tell my sister that this dear child will soon be with us," said he, rising to take his leave, "and you, madam, suffer me to offer an old man's blessing for your kindness to this poor orphan," he said, laying his hand on Mabel's head, "I would have gladly taken her to my heart and home, to be the blessing there she has long been, but this selfish wish would deprive her of the healthy companionship of those who will be her sisters, and kindly cheer her young life, which has been bowed with many sorrows. I need not ask you to deal kindly with her for you have done that already. I only say, may an old man's blessing be upon you and yours, as you have dealt kindly by this poor lamb."

Mrs. Villars turned aside her head to conceal her rising emotion, and Mabel's face was bathed in tears, as Mr. Ware, with glistening eyes and trembling steps, hurried from the room to repress the feelings which had become too strong for utterance.

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## CHAPTER IX.

All have their tasks and trials; thine are hard,  
But short the time, and glorious the reward,  
Thy patient spirit to thy duties give,  
Regard the dead, but to the living live.

CRABBE.

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It was with pleasure—melancholy, indeed, but still most sincere—that Mabel was welcomed at the rectory. Mr. Ware and his sister emulated each other, in endeavours to cheer her, before her introduction to a gayer scene, which they knew awaited her in Bath. Their party had been increased by the arrival of Mr. Clifford, the young architect, mentioned by Colonel Hargrave, who had easily been induced to accept a room in the pleasant rectory; so that, together with Rogers, the bailiff, whose sick room required every attention, Mr. Ware was busy enough. Mr. Clifford brought with him different plans for the improvement of the estate, and the re-building of the village, on a different scale; and the greater part of the evening was generally occupied in talking these over, or drawing fresh ones. In this occupation Mr. Ware would gladly have interested Mabel; but she was scarcely equal to the exertion, and he well knew he could expect nothing, reasonably, beyond the un murmuring resignation, which characterised her grief, and the transient, tearful interest she sometimes displayed in what they were doing. The comfort and happiness of her favorite village never could be unheeded by her; but it required some relaxation of her over taxed nervous system before she could again become the self-forgetful, cheerful companion she had been. This indulgence was freely granted her—and her affectionate heart soon warmed to the watchful love which surrounded her, as the drooping flowers turn to the warm beams of the returning sun.

"How often have I had reason to be grateful to you, dear sir?" she said, one morning, as she passed her hand through Mr. Ware's arm, to accompany him in his walk round the garden. It was one of those days, which, in England, so often surprise us in the midst of winter, with their balmy air and spring-like feeling. "And now more than ever," she continued, "for supporting me at this sad season. You can little know how very, very grateful I am for this thoughtful kindness."

"My dear child," returned Mr. Ware, soothingly, "it must be very easy to accept the kindness which you have never forgotten to afford to others."

"Always kind," said Mabel, with a sigh, "how shall I bear to part from you?"

"Or I from you, dear Mabel; often have you secured me from the regrets, which, in a life of such seclusion as we have past here, might have invaded my quiet. You have afforded me that society which I could not otherwise have secured, and willingly would I have kept you still; but I feel that Aston would, at least for the present, be full of too many regrets for you to make me urge it. Besides, our natural relations have a claim upon us, and, with yours, you will probably find a safe and happy home. My Mabel will not forget that these have a claim upon her, and that she may be called to new duties amongst them."

"And new trials," said Mabel, sadly, "I shall meet *him*."

"Yes, for a while—only a little while; I need not say anything on that subject, your heart will best dictate your conduct—only be firm, and remember always, if annoyances prevail elsewhere, here is your home."

"Not so—I trust he will soon be here—he ought to be here—and, oh, how gladly would I see that. Do you not think his strange appearance on that awful night—the delicacy he has since shewn—Mr. Clifford's coming—do you not think all this looks well?"

Mr. Ware looked earnestly and painfully at her; she seemed immediately to understand that look, for turning from him, she wrung her hands together bitterly.

"Oh, why," she exclaimed, "can I never indulge my best hopes, without the appearance of selfishness—must they always be so inseparable; but you, at least, understand me," she added, turning her beautiful face full upon him with a look of supplication.

"Yes, indeed, I do," he replied, "only I began to fear—I do understand you, my noble-hearted girl—trust me, I do."

But Mabel only turned aside her head to weep, and though he tried to renew the subject, she skilfully evaded it, and when that pained him, she turned and soothed him with the eager caress of childlike affection.

At this moment, Clair was seen walking pensively up and down the walk, at some little distance, and, as Mr. Ware was called away, Mabel suffered him to go in alone, and advanced timidly towards his nephew; she gained upon him before he was fully aware of her presence, and joining him, she walked by his side, for a few minutes, in silence. He was moodily musing, and she seemed, for a time, watchful how best to interrupt him. She had never yet alluded to his letter, and spite of the afflicting scenes which had so lately engaged her attention, he felt slightly annoyed as well as disappointed—so little, however, did he acknowledge such a feeling, even to himself, that he was a little startled when she said, softly and timidly—

"You are offended with me."

"Offended, Miss Lesly?"

"Yes, and justly so—but if you could but know how many times I have tried to speak to you without having the courage to do so, you would forgive me."

Clair's eye kindled with sudden pleasure, but she saw the look, and hastened to temper it.

"You told me that you knew something of my early history."

"Yes, Miss Lesly," he said, puzzled at her manner, and one moment appearing ready to sink back into his dejection, the next, to seize her hand—and give way to something more than joy.

"You must know, then," she continued, fixing her eyes on the ground; "that the heart which has been once given away, is no longer capable of appreciating you."

"Unless," said Clair, eagerly.

"Ah, but with me, there is no unless," said Mabel; "do not ask me to unveil the painful recesses of a mind inured, but not insensible to sorrow; and do not, oh, do not, like me, prepare for yourself that loneliness of heart which I must carry with me always. I dare not trifle with a feeling whose intensity I know too well; but, yet, I hope, so earnestly do I hope, that you have mistaken yourself, and, that pity for my sorrows, and the unhappy share you had in them, have led you to think of me as you have done, and that these feelings may be easily overcome. I feel privileged to speak to you," she said, raising her eyes timidly, "because we are both unhappy."

"Ah, Miss Lesly, you little know me; I would give all my affection, even, for the pleasure of your society—even if you would but tolerate me for a while—my devotion might—."

"Oh, no," said Mabel, earnestly, and unhesitatingly; "do not speak like that again. I would not enter on such holy duties with such feelings only; and, even if I did, cruelly should I be taking advantage of your confidence. I came only to ask you to think of me no more—to forgive me, if possible, and—."

"And," returned Clair; "can you forgive me for my former trifling."

"Not quite, for had you not trifled, I might have spared you some pain now. But you do forgive me," she said, extending her hand, and their eyes met for the first time.

"I do, I do; if I have anything to forgive," said Clair, turning his pale face aside, as he pressed her hand.

Mabel bowed gently over it, then withdrawing it from his grasp, glided from him, and re-entered the house.

There was one other duty to be performed before she left Aston, which tried her courage as much as any other; this was taking leave of her mother's two old and faithful servants—but she knew that such a parting, though so trying was one expected of her, and she would not deny them the pleasure of seeing her, perhaps, for the last time. When, however, the hour which she had appointed for their coming arrived, her heart sank within her, and her spirits entirely failed, when she met their familiar faces almost as sad as her own.

"It is like losing the very light of my eyes to see you go away, Miss Mabel," said old John.

"You have served us long and well—and that thought will be very cheering when I am gone," said Mabel, "but I want to know what you mean to do—I want to think you are comfortable when I am away. Will you go to service again?"

"I do not think I could serve another master or mistress," said old John, decidedly. "If so be you wanted a servant—"

"Then," said Mabel, "you would be mine, of course; but that cannot be; and I have been thinking, that if you had a garden of your own—a nursery garden, I mean, you would be independent."

"I was thinking of that myself, ma'am," said old John, with a pleased expression at finding his wants divined—"and if—but I don't like to say it—there, I can't," he said, walking to the window.

"John was going to say, ma'am," interrupted Betsy, seeing that Mabel looked puzzled, "that if it would not hurt your feelings, he should like to keep on the old garden still—if he could have a cottage built where our house stood—if, that is, you do not object."

Mabel checked her rising emotion, and said, cheerfully.

"How could I object to your keeping the dear old garden—how glad should I be to think that it was an old friend, not a stranger, who lived there."

"Would you now, ma'am," said John, his face brightening; "I could keep the old walks and the hot beds as they used to be—and 'twouldn't be quite such a breaking up of old times—for I have lived there so long, it seems like a home to me."

"I should be very glad," said Mabel, "to think you were happy there, and that something of what I loved so well remained still. I will speak to Mr. Clifford, perhaps he may do what we ask—for he seems willing to please everybody."

"Thank ye, ma'am," said John, rubbing his head with an air of consideration, as if he had something more to say.

"And you, Betsy, what will you do?"

"Why, that's the very thing," said John, as Betsy hesitated, in her turn; "praps you don't know, ma'am, that Jonathan Williams has courted her for many years—but she didn't like to leave poor missis. Now, I was thinking, if you approve, that, as I am getting old, I shall want some one to help me, and as he's a clever man at a garden, I might as well take him into employ or partnership, and so we might live altogether—for," he added, with great emphasis; "I don't like to be put out by strangers—and Betsy knows my ways."

"That will be perfect," cried Mabel, with something of the gladness of her old tone of voice, rising as she spoke; "and you must write to me often, and tell me how this plan goes on;" she said, more hurriedly. "In the mean while, to secure its success, I shall place twenty pounds, a piece, for you, in Mr. Ware's hands; which you can draw upon, as you want money, for furnishing your new house—and I hope you have laid up something for yourselves, and so will be able to start with advantage. You must let me get you your wedding gown, Betsy."

So difficult is it for the uneducated to separate wealth from gentle manners, and ladylike qualities, that the two faithful domestics accepted her parting gift with gratitude and pleasure; but without the reluctance which they would have felt, had they guessed the real nature of her circumstances. They could not fancy that the mistress, whose noble qualities had ever received their genuine respect, was really almost moneyless, and dependent for the blessing of a home. Mabel was not sorry to keep up the illusion, and tore herself from them before they had time to enquire anything of her future plans.

When she placed the money in Mr. Ware's hands, he remonstrated with her on giving away a sum so large in proportion to with what she actually possessed; but she replied cheerfully—

"So much of our comfort is in the hands of our servants, that if they have served us well, we can scarcely reward them enough. The thought that I have shewn them something of my gratitude for the past, will be better to me than the money itself. The selfish reason that I have no one to care for but myself, should at least have its advantages."

Mr. Clifford was easily persuaded to grant Mabel's request, that, upon the site of her once happy home—one might be built for the old servants; and he readily took the opportunity of interesting

her by making her choose and alter the plans for the new cottage, which they agreed should be in the same style as the other, though, of course, a real cottage.

Mabel might soon, perhaps, have recovered the harmony of her spirits, amongst those dear friends who were so studiously attentive in every imaginable kindness, but she was not suffered to enjoy their society very long—for her aunt was impatient to return to Bath, and wrote to tell her at what stage upon the road they were to meet.

She dared not delay—neither did she much wish to do so, when she perceived Clair's unhappiness rather increased by time; and she, therefore, felt it right to depart as soon as possible. But, in leaving Aston, she began more and more to realise the true nature of her recent loss; and when Mr. Ware drove her to the little town where she was to meet the coach, he tried in vain to rouse her from the despondency into which she had fallen.

"My child," he said, as he took leave of his weeping charge; "you will remember, though not yet, that your past life calls upon you for future exertion."

Mabel endeavoured to smile her thanks, and her promises, but the light appeared in her eyes only to vanish again, put out by tears—yet, as the coach rolled off, she leant forward, and kissed her hand with an air of cheerfulness. Mr. Ware turned musingly away. As he drove home by himself, the road seemed unusually long, and the large flakes of snow, as they lazily fell through the freezing air, seemed even more cold and comfortless than they usually do: he could not conceal from himself that a gap had been made in his little circle, which he had no opportunity of supplying; and that, with the loss of the Lesly family, he must part with much that had tended to render his life happy.

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## CHAPTER XI.

I grew up selfish, full of hopes and cares,  
For my own welfare, unconcerned for theirs—

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With many different feelings, Mrs. Villars' return, with her niece, was expected in Bath, by her family—jealousy is, indeed, "strong as death," and uncertain and wayward in its effects—Caroline had, with unfeminine obstinacy, determined on becoming mistress of Aston Manor and its owner; and every object that came in her way, was regarded with dislike. She had heard from Lucy, of Mabel's beauty and winning manners; and such beauty, in distress, she fancied more dangerous still. What her mother could be thinking of to bring her to Bath she could not imagine! but it was in vain for her to write an angry appeal: the answer was decisive. "Mabel must come," the letter said, "and," added Mrs. Villars, "my Cary must make preparation for her proper accommodation; but should you object to our giving up the spare room to her, which certainly would be a sacrifice, you must fit her up a room somewhere, as well as you can—she must not be particular; still, as she is dependent on us, I should not like to stint my favors exactly, though, perhaps, she ought to take rather a more humble footing than my own dear girls." Caroline well understood this letter, and acted accordingly. She knew that her mother's generous fit was passing, and that she was preparing to be more worldly wise.

On the evening of Mrs. Villars' expected return, Hargrave was sitting in his study, lost in something very like a reverie, when he was roused by a low tap at his door. Hastily taking up his pen, to assume the appearance of occupation, he gave the customary answer of "Come in," and Caroline entered.

"Henry," said she, with a persuasive smile, "you must come and join our party in the drawing-room. We have a beautiful fire, and everything comfortable—so do come."

"Why to-night particularly?"

"Because we are all waiting to see mamma, and our wonderful cousin, and we want you to amuse the time away."

"Very well," said Hargrave, rising, and slowly closing his desk—putting aside a private paper or two from the table, which was covered with maps, architectural plans, ground measurements, and books.

"Really," pursued Caroline, glancing round the room, "you study too much. How very pale you look—lock up this dry room, and give me the key, you shall have it again in a day or two."

"Dry," repeated Hargrave, with a smile, taking up one paper after another, as if with peculiar affection, "dry—ah, that reminds me I have a question to ask your papa on this subject."

"Now, you tease, you shall not go to that tiresome study to-night; we want you, and you must come with me."

So saying, she passed her hand playfully through his arm, and compelled him to accompany her to the drawing-room.

The girls were all seated round a cheerful fire; but, there were two chairs left vacant, side by side. Hargrave, however, evaded this manœuvre by flinging himself, with all the coolness of accustomed indulgence, at full length upon the sofa, with his head supported by his two hands, and his eyes shut, as if in full preparation for a nap.

"Provoking creature," cried Caroline, "I did not bring you here to go to sleep."

"Pray do not let me disturb you," he replied, yawning; "I am listening."

"Now, Harry, you know that it is only because we all spoil you that you give yourself such airs; but do not think going to sleep a good way to preserve your popularity."

"I am not conscious of any diminution in it," returned the imperturbable Hargrave; "but here I am at your service," he added, slowly rising to a sitting posture.

One great source of amusement consisted in watching his caprices, and reporting his humour, as it varied.

"Are they not late?" he enquired, at length, when a carriage rolled down the street, causing a momentary expectation, but stopped not till its murmuring sound died in the distance, or was hushed by the wind, as it rushed round the corners of the streets.

"It is a long cross road, I think," said Caroline, "but I hope they will be here soon, for I am tired of waiting."

"How freezingly cold," said Hargrave.

"Yes, indeed;" said Maria, "the water is frozen in the rooms up-stairs, and there are long, horrid icicles hanging down the windows, and it is snowing out of doors. I really cannot bear to cross the passages, and I cannot think how people can be out to-night, when they may stay at home."

"I think," said Selina, "it is a great pity for any one to die in the winter—just in the midst of the gay season. Only think, but for this crape, we might be at Mrs. Trelawny's party this evening. It makes one's heart ache to hear the carriages go by—ah, there is another, I declare. Black is so unbecoming, too," said she, glancing at the tiny foot which peeped out from the black folds of her dress.

"Now I am sure," said Maria, "you are only asking for a compliment, when you know nothing suits a fair complexion so well as black. Now I, with my tawny skin, might complain, had I not long ago given up the attempt to look fascinating, and depended more on my tongue than my face; but still I do wish that this piece of perfection had retained possession of her Cotswold air, and left us to ourselves. Mamma is a clever woman—as if she had not girls enough to drag after her, and provide husbands for."

An angry cry of "shame" ran round the circle; but Maria, catching a half smile from Hargrave, laughed merrily in reply.

"Only think," she went on, "we must put on long faces for a fortnight, at least, in sympathy for the death of an old lady, we did not care a straw about; but, at least, I am no hypocrite, and that she will find—I shall not pretend to admire perfections who look down on every one else."

"That I am sure she does not," said Lucy. "Ah, that's the thing, she is better than ordinary perfections even—but here's papa."

Mr. Villars here entered the room.

"Oh, papa," cried Caroline, pettishly, "I wish you would not leave the door open."

Mr. Villars quietly shut it—but the request jarred upon his feelings—there was something, too, in the arrangement of the chairs, which did not offer any considerable inducement to him to remain. He was sure to put a check upon conversation, usually of the most frivolous kind, and, therefore, his presence was not often desired by his daughters, though his mild, indulgent eye seemed often almost to entreat the affection which was so coldly and grudgingly bestowed, while too sensitive to command the attention which was his due.

Solitude had become irksome to him, and he had now come to seek for some one to share in a new idea, which had for some hours occupied his pen.

He paused, for a moment, before the little circle—but no one rose to offer him a seat.

Hargrave's eyes were fixed upon the fire, seemingly forgetful of all around him. Caroline was regarding him. She was never susceptible to any interest in her father's proceedings, so that he did not attempt to gain her attention; but, addressing Selina, who seemed the least amused of the party—he said, smiling kindly, but timidly—

"I want a little advice—I have been trying all day to write a letter to the *Times*, giving my views on the present system of education at the Universities, showing how much time is wasted on the dead languages, which might be given to philosophy and science."

"Oh, really, papa," said Selina, with a half yawn to the subject, "I am so ignorant—I am sure I cannot help you."

"Oh, yes," he replied, gently; "you think less of yourself than you need—I shall be glad of your

opinion. Come—"

"Oh, no, papa, I would much rather not."

"My little Lucy will come then."

"I would," she replied, "very gladly, only I am so anxious to see mamma."

"Come, Maria, then, I really cannot get on without a little admiration—and I do not expect them for an hour or two."

"I would if I understood anything about it," said Maria, "I dare say the letter will do beautifully."

"I will come, sir, if I may," cried Hargrave, starting up, on seeing Mr. Villars leaving the room with a dejected air.

But the hall bell stopped both of them. Lucy sprang to the door, but suddenly stopped, and turned pale, and shrunk instinctively, remembering the impossibility of her being a welcome object to Mabel.

Mrs. Villars was now heard coming up-stairs, giving orders to the servants, as she did so. Her voice became more distinct, as she approached the room, and entered, followed by the dark, black figure of her orphan niece. She presented her to her daughters in turn, who each gave her a hand rather in curiosity than kindness. Lucy, unable to remain longer inactive, advanced with the impulse of throwing her arms round her neck, but feeling checked by the presence of her sisters, she only kissed her with a shy timidity, which very little expressed the real warmth of her welcome.

"Welcome, my poor child," said the kind and fatherly voice of Mr. Villars, to the silent girl, "you will find here, I hope, kind companions, and a comfortable home."

Mabel gently raised the heavy veil, which had completely shrouded her face, and seemed almost to bow down her head, and, as she did so, displayed a countenance, which the beautiful and haughty Caroline regarded with triumph and satisfaction. Tears stained her colorless cheeks, and grief and watching were deeply marked in her sunken eyes. There was no affectation of suffering there; but, as she looked up in reply to Mr. Villars, a light ray passed over her countenance, and at once spoke the loveliness which no sorrow could darken. She tried to speak, but her parted lips refused to utter expressions of feeling, which her eloquent eyes had already conveyed.

"You will now," said her aunt, pompously, "have an opportunity of thanking Colonel Hargrave for the hospitality he has afforded you."

But Colonel Hargrave was gone. No one had seen him leave the room; but when his absence was perceived, Caroline felt a sensation of pleasure she could not account for, and, in great, good humour, turned to assist Mabel in relieving herself of the heavy cloak which encumbered her; she then perceived that she was trembling with cold and agitation—and when she begged leave to retire for the night, every one saw that there was necessity for repose to soothe her spirits.

Maria, whose good nature was, at times, greater than she would acknowledge, almost forced her to swallow the wine she had declined.

Mrs. Villars, taking a light, requested Mabel to follow her, with stately kindness.

The drawing-room they left was on the second floor, and yet she led her up two flights of stairs, and then across a narrow passage, before she stopped at the door of the room destined for her.

"My house is so very crowded," Mrs. Villars said, apologetically, "that I am obliged to put you up here; but it will be a little home to you, and you must make yourself snug and comfortable. Oh, those naughty girls have forgotten to put you a chest of drawers; but you must contrive for a day or two, and I will see to it."

Possibly she forgot; for she did not see to it.

"It will do quite well for me, aunt, thank you," answered the low, sweet-toned voice, which so often touched her better self; but when we are deliberately acting with unkindness, it is not pleasant to have that better self awakened, after the pains we have taken to lull it to sleep.

Mrs. Villars hastily bade her good night, telling her to go to sleep, and be well on the morrow, and returned to the drawing-room. There she found her daughters busy in criticising the face and form of the new comer.

Caroline, vexed that Hargrave did not return, and seized with a sudden desire to follow him, quietly left the room, and glided down stairs.

With stealthy steps, she again sought the room, where she thought the truant had taken refuge. The light that streamed from it into the passage, shewed her that the door was open, and as she reached it, she paused, for a moment, to take a view of its occupant before invading his retirement.

A large fire blazed up the chimney, and cast a flickering light round the apartment, at times, bringing every object to view, and then leaving it in fanciful shadow. Piles of books, as before, lay upon the table, on which stood an unlighted lamp. Heedless of the many sources of employment which were scattered around him, Hargrave was sitting, leaning over the table. Caroline thought

he slept, and meditated some fanciful mode of waking him; but the moment her dress moved, he raised his head, and the firelight which, while it left her own corner in darkness, fell full upon him, shewed upon his countenance, the unmistakable traces of grief and weakness. Her naturally quick perception at once told her, that no time could be less favorable for intrusion upon one so haughty, and, to all appearance, so impenetrable, and drawing herself back into the shade, she lingered, but a moment, to assure herself that he was again lost in his solitary musing, and then noiselessly gained her own room, and sat down to think over what she had witnessed.

Did he always indulge in such thoughts? and if so, over what past event was he grieving? what loss which could not be repaired?

The flattering answer, returned by her mirror, gave her hope that such grief, if more than transitory, would still be of no long duration.

What the heart wishes, it finds a thousand witnesses to substantiate.

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## CHAPTER XII.

Oft in life's stillest shade reclining,  
In desolation, unrepining,  
Without a hope on earth to find,  
A mirror in an answering mind.  
Meek souls there are who little dream,  
Their daily task an Angel's theme;  
Or that the rod they take so calm,  
Shall prove in Heaven a martyr's palm.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

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The night was piercingly cold.

Mabel sat down upon her travelling trunk, which had preceded her to her room, and which, carelessly, had been left corded. There was no bell by which she could summon assistance, and therefore, with trembling fingers, she undid the tightly-knotted cord, and with some difficulty, for the box was heavy, she managed to open it; but, having done so, it seemed as if she almost forgot the purpose for which she wished it—for clasping her hands together she wept long and convulsively. How many bitter thoughts crowded upon her in that hour of weakness. Her mind seemed to lose all its strength, as she hurried from the past to the future. Where was the elastic promise of bold reliance on that future, made by her mother's side? Where was that mother? Sleeping in the cold grave, and as Mabel wept on, there might have come the thought that in that grave there was peace and refuge, though the night winds even now howled above it. How had she flattered herself that she had gained the control of her own fervent imagination, and yet how it trembled at the thought of the morrow.

Hargrave, her infidel lover, so warmly loved and yet so steadily rejected, how should she meet him on that morrow—did he still love her, and if so, would he press his suit, and force her to fly from temptation, or would he prove the truth of his threat, that with him there was no medium between truthful love and contemptuous forgetfulness. If so, how could she bear it, how would they meet day after day, keeping up the formal semblance of politeness, and if it were true, that he was making his suit to Caroline, how could she find strength for the daily trials which would necessarily be hers.

The quick, fiery blood of jealousy kindled in her cheek, as this last thought arose, and she mechanically raised her hand and loosened the twisted tresses of her hair, as if her heated brain needed relief.

If there be, as some affirm, a good and evil angel to guard our way, and track our steps through life, it was the evil angel that had power then.

She felt it—she rose, and almost instantly sunk upon her knees. Her clasped hands were now raised above her head—now clasped convulsively over her face—as hour followed hour through that dark and cheerless night, till her head gradually sank upon the bed by which she kneeled, and she remained for a long time in perfect stillness. Her long, disordered hair hiding every feature from sight.

The Abbey clock announced the approach of the chill winter morning, before Mabel again raised her head, but then her countenance was firm, and there was a soft radiance about her eyes that told that those dark and weary hours had not been spent in vain.

Wearied with the long conflict, she laid herself down to rest, and was soon asleep.

Strong minds, when they are sick, require strong remedies; had any one watched her calm repose, and quiet breathing, they might have told, that with her the crisis was past.

As she slept—flitting dreams crossed her fancy—once she thought she stood upon a high hill, where a noble castle of fairy and transparent beauty, was built immediately above a rocky precipice. Suddenly, as she lost her footing, and fell, she tried to prepare for death, when invisible hands supported her, and softly placed her on the bank above.

Then her dream became more distinct—she was again at Aston, and the setting sun was going down behind the hills—while its golden rays gave beauty to earth and sky. She was seated on her father's tomb, in the well-known church-yard, and close beside her was the delicate form of the little Amy, which her arm encircled with the covetous clasp of affection. They both gazed upon the setting sun, and the child listened, as she spoke of the ages it had shone in beauty, and the ages it might still shine; of the time it marked, and the eternity it presaged, till her eyes grew brighter, and her color deepened. Then it seemed as if a strain of holy music softly stole upon the evening air, and Amy raised her hand to attract her attention to it—her face grew of more than earthly loveliness, and, as the music died away, Mabel woke and found herself alone. The moonlight streamed into her little room, rendering every object distinctly visible. It is beautiful to see the mingling light of the waning moon and rising sun changing the scenes of the early morning with the rapidity of a diorama; Mabel watched the light for some time with unthinking pleasure, till gradually upon her waking senses arose the remembrance of the night, but with the early morning came the strength for which she had so earnestly pleaded through those hours of darkness.

She had bent before the repeated strokes of Providence with something of the feeling that her earthly duties were finished. But now came purer and holier thoughts. "What right," she asked herself, "had she to say that she had suffered enough?" Had she not already some call to exertion, some friends whom she might perhaps love and serve, and more, the fresh suffering that seemed in preparation, told her that it was right to suffer. "Thy will be done," she repeated, in trembling accents, as she knelt in meek and quiet devotion, and the words came from a heart not untried by many sorrows.

Mabel's mind was anything but morbid, for the dangerous tendency so strongly developed in her mother, had been checked and controlled by that very mother herself, who gladly saw in her more active child, the same delicate perception of the beautiful, the good and the painful, sobered by her care for others, and her love of exertion.

It was then with a feeling of gratitude that she looked round the little room, which, to many would have excited the most painful feelings of neglect and desolation. The small bed had been evidently used, formerly, in the nursery, and was diminutive in size; yet, as Kirk White, humorously observes of his study fireplace:—

"So big, it covered o'er,  
Full half the spacious room, and more."

One side, from the ceiling, shelved down to the floor, leaving dark corners, where the light from the small window never penetrated, giving an uncomfortable suspicion of dust and cobwebs. The wide window ledge, which served for the purpose of dressing table, with one shabby chair, completed the fittings of the room—for, as Mrs. Villars had observed in her casual glance—a chest of drawers had been omitted.

It was impossible that any one so careful of the comforts of others—so used to luxury as she had lately been, at Aston, should not read, at a glance, the nature of the apartment which one of her mother's servants would, perhaps, have hesitated to occupy—yet she busied herself in arranging it to advantage. She could scarcely satisfy herself when she had finished, for the room was not quite clean, and nothing she could do could remedy that deficiency—so she turned to the window, and looked out upon the back view it displayed of chimney-pots—dark back windows, as cheerless as her own, and walls blackened by falling smoke. Still, above the low dark, damp, courts, there was a glimpse of the pure blue sky; and as Mabel's eye rested upon it, even the passing shade of discontent vanished from her mind, as she remembered by whom her comforts and trials were meted; and then she turned her eyes again upon the room, and all that was uncomfortable before, seemed to have a light about it that made it look different now. It was all better than she might have had—more than she had any right to claim. Was she not under her aunt's protection, when she might have been left with strangers; left for the first time, in that kind of independence, most trying to a delicate woman? "Was not every thing," she again repeated, "better than she deserved? What could have made her think the room dark, and uncomfortable? What could have changed it so? Nothing but the reflected light of a humble and thankful heart. After remaining some little time longer in consideration, she went down stairs. She soon found the room where she remembered having been introduced the evening before; but, on opening the door, she perceived that it was still darkened, the window-curtains drawn, and the chairs arranged as they had been left on the preceding night. Looking again at her watch to persuade herself that it was really nine o'clock, she found her way to the drawing-room, which was in such dusty confusion, that she was going to return to her own room again, when a side door opened, and Mr. Villars appeared.

"Come in, come in," he said, stopping her; "you will not find a good fire any where else, for at least half an hour. My family are not fond of early rising, as you see; so I generally take my breakfast alone."

"Then, perhaps, I shall intrude upon you, sir;" said she, seeing the preparations for his simple



meal already made.

"Not if you will have some breakfast with me; you look tired already, and will be better for it. Only say so, and I will ring for a cup and saucer."

He laid his hand on the bell as he spoke, but hesitatingly, as if accustomed to have his attempts at sociability negated; but, when Mabel readily assented, he cheerfully busied himself in preparing for her. While he was doing so, she had an opportunity of scanning the apartment, which her host designated his den. It was lined on two sides, from the floor to the ceiling, with bookshelves, containing books of all languages, arranged according to their different subjects. Part of another side contained a selection from the best light literature of the day—and, beneath, were drawers, that seemed to have a habit of being always open, in which was a large store of written papers. The fourth side of the room was ornamented by a collection of stuffed birds, reptiles, and insects; curious specimens of botany, conchology, and mineralogy—shewing the various studies in which Mr. Villars had, from time to time, taken an interest.

Upon a table, near the window, were placed some open books, marked at different passages—together with scraps of paper, old envelopes, and backs of notes, all neatly written upon.

But the breakfast table was prepared with great neatness, and nothing but an unopened paper of the day before gave any temptation to reading.

Mr. Villars, having made the tea, and toasted his muffin, drew a chair to the table, and begged her to partake of both.

There is a kind of freemasonry by which some have the power of unlocking the hearts of others, and making them unreserved; perhaps it is the power of being genuinely natural oneself, which sets others so much at ease.

Mabel soon found herself conversing quietly, and without the least effort; and Mr. Villars, without anything of his nervous hesitation, had offered to assist her reading, by his advice, and instruction, as often as she pleased to spend an hour or two with him.

"May I then, feel free to come and go when I like;" enquired Mabel, rising when they had finished breakfast.

"Yes, at any time; at least, excepting when I have any particular desire to be alone."

"And then you must lock the door," she said, smiling; "because you might not like to turn me out—so that shall be a sign that you wish to be alone."

"A very effectual sign indeed," said Mr. Villars, returning her smile, though he suspected that he should not be often obliged to resort to this defence, as it did not seem likely that she would be more attached to his study than his daughters were.

Mabel felt reluctant to leave the quiet repose of his society, but unwilling longer to absent herself, she went to the breakfast room, where, by this time, the whole party, excepting Hargrave, had assembled. She stopped to give her aunt a kiss, with a warmth, which might have told an intelligent observer, that the gratitude she felt for her protection had closed her eyes to distrust.

Caroline, who had been left mistress of the house in her mother's absence, had intended the situation and furniture of her bed-room, at once, to announce the fact, that if admitted to their circle, it must be in the rank of a dependent. But this attempt to humiliate her, had seemingly failed. Mabel appeared pale, subdued, and sorrow-stricken, but evidently possessing a mind superior to trifles; and though, when she took her seat apart from the table, her lip slightly trembled, and her color came and went, not a sigh escaped from the sad heart within.

Caroline, as she rose from breakfast, said that Hargrave had promised to practise some duets with her, and she must go and find him—Maria and Selina followed her—and Mrs. Villars went to her house-keeping, leaving Lucy behind.

There was a momentary and awkward silence—and then Lucy walked up to her, and sunk down upon the floor at her feet, crying—

"How can you ever look upon me again? Think of my laughing and amusing myself, when—"

A shudder finished the sentence.

And Mabel stooped to raise her head, whispering—

"It is too easy to forgive you—you were more unkind to yourself than to me."

"How?" said Lucy.

"Because such things make the heart grow hard."

Lucy was silent, for a moment, and then exclaimed—

"How I wish I were married, and had a home to offer you of my own. Then you should not have such an old, poky bed-room as Caroline has looked out for you—I had such a quarrel with her about it. She is jealous, because I said you were beautiful, I know she is."

"Ah, Lucy," said Mabel, "how unkind to try and expose the weaknesses of a sister—remember the fable of the bundle of sticks. For myself, knowing that I do not deserve her unkindness, I shall not feel it. I own it is a trial—but as I am dependent on your mamma's kindness, by my own choice, and by my wish to please her, and not of necessity, and I can and will assert my independence when I please—it is quite a different thing."

"Are you going to be married then?"

"No, no," said Mabel, smiling; "I will tell you what I mean another day—perhaps I do not quite know how myself—I only know I will if I see it best—but do not let us talk of that now."

So saying, she took up a skein of silk which Caroline had been attempting to wind.

"Never mind that," said Lucy, "that is Caroline's, and she will never thank you for the trouble you take."

"Lucy!" said Mabel.

"Ah, I know you are the best of human beings; but I do not know what you would have been, had you been brought up in such a school as I have."

"Scarcely four months have passed," returned Mabel, "since you spoke that thought before. You have not used events rightly, if you can say it sincerely now. Oh, why have you been so sorely tried," said she, placing her hand fondly on her head—"Why have you been wounded so severely, if not to purify you from the errors of the past? Might not those sad events be made fit answers to the excuse you then made for yourself?"

Lucy was going to reply, when a double knock at the hall door made her start and blush, and then she jumped up, her face all radiance, and hastily kissing Mabel's cheek, ran off to the drawing-room.

Once more alone, Mabel tried to occupy herself with the silk she held in her hand, but her heart was full, and tears silently stole down her cheeks, and fell upon her busy fingers.

Just then, Caroline returned, something had gone wrong in the singing lesson, and her face wore its natural frown, and her cheek its angry flush—she glanced impatiently at Mabel, and then stopping to warm herself by the fire, looked angrily from it to her.

"What! are you crying again?" she said, peevishly, for her temper had become almost insane from indulgence.

Mabel made no reply.

"I hope," continued her cousin, "you are not going to be always miserable; for poor mamma's sake, you should command your feelings."

Mabel raised her eyes and looked firmly at her, as she said, slowly—

"I was alone."

"And is that what you call resignation?" said Caroline, in a tone of reproof. "I hope you will not give way to your poor mother's disposition."

"We mistake each other," said Mabel, rising, while her pale cheek kindled, her head was proudly and firmly erect, and her eyes almost flashed fire.

Caroline quailed; an uneasy sensation of something like fear stole upon her.

"Perhaps," said she, her voice trembling with suppressed passion, "we mistake our respective positions."

"We do," said Mabel.

Caroline would have been glad to relieve herself by some bitter speech, but she felt powerless, and, endeavouring to hide her own discomfiture, she swept indignantly from the room, saying that she had never believed in perfect tempers, and she would have nothing to do with people who tried to appear better than they were.

Mabel continued standing, her bosom heaving with emotion.

"I could have borne any thing but that—any reflection on myself," she exclaimed, half aloud, "but to speak so of my poor mother, I cannot bear. Ha—" she added, slightly startling on perceiving Hargrave, who had entered by another door, and who was standing by her.

Their eyes met for an instant and then hers sought the ground.

"Miss Lesly," said he, coldly and peculiarly, "we have never met before."

She looked up to read his meaning. His countenance was impenetrable, except that he seemed impatient for reply. There had been a time when her lightest word could move him, and when, to her, his smile was happiness, and his frown brought misery. Yet neither testified now the least emotion. After a pause she replied.

"You need not fear me, but I cannot, if I would, utter a falsehood. What does it signify that we have met."

"The past is forgotten, then?" he enquired.

"It shall be as if it had never been," replied Mabel; "but as you were candid then, be candid now."

"Why?"

"Because you cannot be happy without perfect confidence."

A fleeting smile passed over his lips, but she saw it not.

"You need not fear—no one shall take me under false pretences—I am fallen indeed in your estimation, since you believe that possible."

"No," replied Mabel, "I reverence and admire the beauty of the structure, but I do distrust the foundation on which it is built."

"Ah, some people do not think so deeply," he returned, gaily.

"I fear not," said she, sadly.

"Well, you have had trials sufficient," he added, "without adding mine to them—do not fear for me, I hope some day to hear you congratulate me on my happiness."

Without waiting for a reply he took up a book, which he had made the nominal reason for his visit to the morning room, and disappeared.

She hurried quickly to her own little chamber, to think over this strange conversation, which she believed conclusive of his attachment to Caroline. But was she worthy of him, would she influence him rightly—she tried to believe that the character drawn by her own quick judgment was only wrought by jealousy. Not a little did she feel pained at their quarrel, for she thought how easily might she prejudice her in his opinion.

"I can bear to lose his love," she thought, "but not his esteem—and yet I must, if necessary, do both, perhaps, if she speaks ill of me, and he will surely believe her."

Those who have experienced many trials will remember, that sometimes, by their quick succession, the mind becomes braced to endurance. It was so with Mabel; besides, she had certain fixed principles, and though she often erred from them, her mind almost invariably recovered its strength; and she now endeavoured to school it to the endurance of those small trials, which in her happy home at Aston, she had almost entirely escaped.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

The hope of fame may in his heart have place,  
But he has dread and horror of disgrace,  
Nor has he that confiding easy way,  
That might his learning and himself display;  
But to his work, he from the world retreats,  
And frets and glories o'er the favorite sheets.

CRABBE.

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When Caroline quitted Mabel she hurried to her mother, with all the petulance of a wayward child, and, with her, vented on Mabel the spleen which she had not had the courage fully to express. Great was her surprise when she found, that, instead of joining in her opinion, Mrs. Villars only endeavoured to extenuate and defend Mabel's conduct, though with that weakness which Caroline always had the hope of overcoming; but, for once she was mistaken, and, more than ever chagrined, the bitterness with which she regarded her cousin, only increased. This Mabel had soon an opportunity of learning, and her situation in the house became more and more uncomfortable, influenced as it was, by those secret prejudices and envious feelings, which there is no possibility of openly opposing.

Lucy, too, though still an object of solicitude to her, seemed shy of her company, and, indeed, held herself much aloof from every one but Beauclerc, whose attentions were now very generally remarked.

Still there was one room in the house where her presence was welcomed as a real blessing, and this consciousness atoned to her for much that was elsewhere almost unbearable.

At first, with the shyness which often attends the student, Mr. Villars frequently locked his door, but gradually the habit ceased altogether.

One afternoon, he was sitting alone, his manner was restless, and his eye absent in its expression.

The atmosphere without was unusually humid; small rain, which, in the distance, looked almost like fog, hid the prospect, and made the room dark, giving nothing of the inspiring feeling produced by a hearty shower. Within, the room seemed heavy and sombre. But within Mr. Villars' own thoughts there was something darker still, something cold and numbing—something that said the world was a dark and gloomy world—something that said he lived alone and uncared-for in it. He rose and walked up and down the room—that dark feeling haunted him still. He turned to the window—on its ledge lay his pen-knife—he looked at it uneasily—then walked away—then returned—and again regarded it as if it had the power to injure him. He returned to the table, on it lay a bundle of closely written papers—he turned from them, and again found himself at the window.

That knife again.

His thoughts grew darker—that something again stole over him, till the sweat stood in drops upon his brow, and his eyes glared feverishly.

Hark! He listens. The sound of a light footfall is in the passage—a quick hand is on the lock, the door is opened, and Mabel is by his side, looking uneasily and affectionately at him, with that expression of light and beauty so peculiar to her.

"You are ill—I am sure you are," she said; "let me call my aunt."

"No, no," he replied, hurriedly, "I am better—if you will stay with me. You must not go—you will not let them drive you from me."

Mabel looked puzzled—but eagerly promised anything he desired.

"Ah," said she, rallying her spirits, "I see it now. You have those papers out again. Why are you always unhappy when you take them out?"

"Because they remind me of disappointment," he replied, bitterly.

"I have a great curiosity about them," said Mabel, "and have some fancy that it is the manuscript of a book you have written."

"You do not deny it—then do read it to me."

"It would not give you any amusement."

"Now, uncle, how can you tell that? I am sure it will not make you so miserable, if you do."

"Well, my little sage—but I must first tell you the circumstances under which I wrote it, and the reasons I have for being disappointed."

"Stay one moment then," said she, drawing his arm-chair to the fire, which she stirred, till it sent a good flame up the chimney, then seating herself opposite, she begged him to go on. Beginning to feel happier, he scarce knew why he sat down, and, after a moment's hesitation, he said—

"I was always very fond of writing, when a young man—I dare say, thought myself something of a genius—but though I wished to devote myself entirely to study, this was so much opposed by my more prudent father, that I gave up my own inclinations, and entered into a lucrative mercantile establishment in London. Not long after this, I married, and then it appeared to me, to be my duty to devote myself entirely to business, in order that I might acquire wealth for my wife, and increasing family—but I gave myself too rigidly to the task—I gave myself no ease—always fearing that I longed for it, only from the desire for selfish indulgence. The consequence has been that my family has been educated in a manner of which I strongly disapprove—and, alas! I feel the evil is so great as to require something stronger even than a father's displeasure to remedy it."

Mr. Villars sighed, and then continued—

"In the short intervals of business, I noted down, from time to time, scenes which were drawn either from real life, or my own fancy—together with numerous remarks on the manners of my own times, which I thought might be amusing—pining always to indulge what I falsely believed to be a talent.

"How often desired blessings bring a curse. A few years since my speculations were successful beyond my expectations, and I found myself enabled to retire from business with a good conscience. This place was the scene of my happy boyhood, and of my school days, and here I resolved to settle, since it offered pleasures suited to us all.

"With the eagerness of a schoolboy I fitted up this study; it was the very perfection of my taste, it contains every book I take any pleasure in, and yet," he said, looking gloomily round him, "it has been to me the scene of greater misery than even you, seemingly deprived of almost every blessing, can calculate upon.

"Secure as I believed of the interest of my family, for year after year of, to me, heavy toil had, I believe, purchased it beyond a doubt. I thought I would prepare them a treat, and so set about collecting my scattered writings, and forming them into a whole, promising them a reading every Saturday of what I had done in the week.

"I never shall forget the first Saturday evening. You have, I dare say, often heard that an author's

vanity is capable of blinding him to the opinions of others. I cannot understand the feeling myself, and I was not slow in perceiving that my book soon failed to interest—but I tire you."

"You pain, but interest me," replied Mabel.

"Well, it is hard to believe that one's composition is too bad to interest those whose affection ought to make them indulgent to the dullest of our pursuits; but so it was; they eagerly courted any other Saturday engagement, and when they did come, they yawned or whispered over their work, and seemed so completely wearied with my reading that one day I threw down the book, and refused to continue. I forget what followed, but I know I was never asked to resume my readings. From that time I have been more and more alone, and I am sorry to confess that, after years of well rewarded toil, I find life losing interest with me."

Mabel started at the last words; there was an ominous meaning in them, that terrified her—while she watched him now pacing the room again, with a disturbed air, muttering exclamations of despair. She hastened to interrupt him.

"How very much I should like to hear your manuscript. Would you have patience to read it to me?"

Mr. Villars turned and looked full upon her; but she repeated her request eagerly. She saw the coming of that mental cloud, which has obscured many a noble intellect, and her eyes sparkled as she saw him yielding to her request, and that the dawn of hope was again upon the face of the disappointed student.

"Evening is the time for a work of fiction," she observed, "but let us have the first chapter now. If it will not tire you to read."

"If you really wish it," he said, handling the papers with trembling fingers.

"Oh, yes, I do wish it, but let me first get my work, for that is to us what chipping is to the Americans, it only assists our attention. While you find the first part I will go and fetch it."

Her errand took her longer than she had anticipated, for in the morning room she found her aunt, with Hargrave, Caroline, and Selina discussing a print with some eagerness.

"I would give anything to have such a head-dress," exclaimed Caroline.

"Well, my dear," said her mother, "I should be glad for you to have it too, but I fear you must give it up. I am sure, Henry, you ought to be complimented, for Caroline has been trying this hour to please you."

"Well, it is a pity," said Hargrave; "she would look well in it, but I am sorry I spoke of it, if it has given her so much trouble."

Mabel stopped at the table, and taking up the print, exclaimed—

"I remember seeing something like this at Gibraltar. Perhaps I could make it—may I try," she said, glancing at the crape which Caroline had been cutting and wasting.

"If you think you can do it," returned Caroline, "do take it and try—but I want to wear it to-night, at the ball."

"Then give me everything," said she, her manner excited from the scene in the library; and gathering up the crape, ribbon, and wire into her apron, she took the print and hurried to the library. When she entered, Mr. Villars was seated by the fire, with some papers on his knees, but the look of gloom had again settled on his usually patient face. "Oh, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, anxiously, "but look how much work I had to bring—now I am quite ready."

Mr. Villars said nothing, but appeased by the affectionate warmth of her manner began reading.

She listened attentively, and gladly found herself interested, without an effort, as she heard with surprise sentences, in a style of boldness, and purity of devotion, which she had scarcely expected.

Mutually pleased, the hours slipped away, Mr. Villars charmed by the attention of his listener, while she busily continued her work.

The small greasy rain dimmed the window, and darkened the room, till the shades of evening closed upon them, but its influence had ceased. A cheerful smile shewed the pleasure of the author, and the renewed hope with which he began to feel inspired.

"I scarcely know if I like the name—'The Merchant's Recollections;' it is scarcely striking enough," said Mabel, when he stopped to rest.

"I do not think I could call it anything else, after knowing it so long by that name."

"Well then, I suppose you must keep its name, but do make an effort to have it published, or do so yourself. I am certain it would be popular. Pray let me have what is in your hand, and I will give you the novelty of listening to your own composition; but first, let me light your little candle."

With thrilling voice, and the purest accent, she read, and Mr. Villars felt that he had never

appreciated his own composition before. As he listened, old recollections revived—an elasticity seemed given to his thoughts. So carefully had the influence been obtained, which was now so so cleverly exercised, that the sensitive author, with his keen perception and acute sense of the finest tone of feeling, was impressed with respect for his younger companion, who united sympathy in these to a healthy strength of mind.

Now as he looked, and listened to her, who had so timely rendered succour to intellect sinking, from discouragement, into despair, he gladly welcomed the new current of ideas which were crowding upon his attention. The thought of giving to the world the work which had so long occupied him, the chance of popularity, even the bitterness of failure, would be far preferable to the state of apathy into which he had been gradually falling. There was something stirring and exciting in the idea; there was life and employment in it, and he embraced it with rapidity.

The dressing bell put an end to their reading, and Mabel then called upon him to admire her workmanship, displayed in the pretty ornament she had prepared, in imitation of that worn by the Spanish girl, in the print, whose face was not unlike Caroline's.

"Are you going to the ball, to-night?" she enquired.

"I seldom go to those places."

"But I think you would enjoy it to-night, for they are all going, and I am sure would be glad of your company."

"Well, I may perhaps; I might enjoy it."

"I think you will, and then you will enter better into this to-morrow, for you have a great deal to do, and I am bent on seeing it completed."

"My good girl," said Mr. Villars, taking her hand with considerable emotion; "you little know the obligations you have conferred upon me to-day. I would give you all I possess for the power of conferring happiness as skilfully as you can. Heaven bless you for it."

"Providence often chooses the weakest instruments," said Mabel, "to fulfil its missions; and I endeavour to keep myself ready for service, lest I may lose the chance of being employed;" then blushing at her own speech, she withdrew her hand, and hurried from the room.

When they met at dinner, she begged Caroline to allow her to dress her hair for the evening, to suit the head-dress she had been preparing. The offer was readily accepted, and they retired together to the dressing-room already mentioned. The comfort, and almost finical luxury with which it was furnished, occurred to Caroline, as no very agreeable contrast to that which she had prepared for the houseless orphan, so lately deprived of all the comforts of home—but her attention was soon occupied by her toilette, in which she took so great an interest. Perhaps she would have been glad if their maid could have performed the same services for her, with as much taste as Mabel; but as she could not, she forced herself to accept her kindness with the best grace she could command. The beautiful head-dress, contrasted well with her raven hair; and when Mabel held the mirror before her, she scarcely believed her eyes as she gazed upon her reflected self.

"Come, I do believe you are a good girl," exclaimed Maria; "one of the right sort, after all. I wish you would concoct something for me—singularity is what I affect—but, I fear me, nothing will do," she added, going off singing.

There's nobody coming to marry me,  
Nobody coming to woo;  
O dear what can the matter be,  
Oh dear what shall I do.

The gay party were soon assembled in the drawing-room. Hargrave looked pleased when he saw the head-dress, and made many observations on its beauty, which delighted Mrs. Villars, and made Caroline's cheek flush with pleasure.

"Who knows," whispered Mrs. Villars, playfully pinching Mabel's arm, "but that your pretty cap may hasten the denouement; look how pleased he is."

Mabel felt sick, but no one saw the sudden pallor of her cheek, for the carriages which were ordered to take them to the rooms were announced.

Caroline, drawing her ermine tippet closer round her shoulders, took Hargrave's un-offered arm, saving:—

"You must be my first partner to-night, remember," and then walked down stairs with him, talking playfully, and gaily. Mabel thought she had never seen her look more beautiful. When they had all gone, she sunk upon a chair, suffering from the revulsion of over exerted feelings. She laid her hand upon her heart to still its beating; that heart, which spite of all its chastenings, beat true to nature still. Had she only decked Caroline to win a heart which was dearer to her than life—dearest when she had rejected it, in the name of heaven.

Oh, if Caroline were but one likely to lead back his truant heart to the duties he had more than neglected. Yet she felt little hope when she remembered her lifeless and listless Sundays—her wandering eyes in church, and the witty remarks which told how her thoughts had there been

occupied.

But she also felt that she had done right, and with this consciousness, she could afford to abide by the consequences of her actions. Her delicacy, also, soon reminded her of the necessity of putting a strict guard over her imagination, lest even the pity and sorrow she felt for him, might shew themselves, and be misunderstood. Grieve over him she must, but she resolved that even he should not know it. It was a difficult part for one so candid to play, but her delicacy stood upon the defensive, and warned her to be firm.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

Lady Clara Vere de Vere,  
Some meeker pupil you must find,  
For were you queen of all that is,  
I could not stoop to such a mind.

TENNYSON.

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Mrs. Villars returned from the ball full of triumphant feelings. Never, since her first appearance at the rooms, had Caroline appeared to such advantage. Hargrave, who seldom did more than walk through a quadrille, had twice asked her to waltz. Mrs. Villars had received, with gracious smiles, many premature congratulations—and her husband, who had despaired of Caroline's marriage, looked on with satisfaction, and began to think everything was taking a brighter turn.

The next morning, Mrs. Villars overwhelmed Mabel with thanks for her ingenuity—and even, in the excess of her gratitude, confided to her a long and exaggerated account of the ball, mixed with many speculations on the probable causes which led Hargrave to delay his proposals. She ended by announcing her intention, (if she did not consider it hurtful to her feelings,) of giving a grand rout the following week.

Mabel begged her not to think of her, as she could easily, if she preferred doing so, spend the evening alone. Her aunt was, however, bent on displaying herself as her benefactress, though she thought it better to be contented, at first, with getting no opposition to her plan.

Invitations were soon issued. Colonel Hargrave was persuaded to give up a hunting party he had intended joining, and even to discuss the numerous arrangements, of which none but good entertainers can appreciate the difficulty. The music, the dances, the company, the decorations of the rooms, were all thoroughly talked over, and everything promised to make it the most popular party of the Bath season.

The girls were in high spirits, and congratulated themselves on Hargrave's continued good humour.

Selina declared he must have made up his mind, at last, and anticipated looking pretty on a Shetland pony, at Aston, while Maria declared that she had nearly "hooked" a Gloucestershire squire, and hoped Caroline would give her an opportunity of landing him.

On the morning of the party, Mabel was sitting in the library alone, finishing some ornaments for the wax tapers, which her aunt had requested her to make. Mr. Villars was gone to put a letter to a London publisher in the post—and finding herself alone, she had given herself up to thoughts of her mother and Amy—that dear sister, whose life she had hoped to see so much happier than her own—then came to her memory, which was well stored with every antidote to discontent, those beautiful lines of Milman—

"We thank thee for our lost, our beauteous child,  
The tears less bitter she has made us shed."

And these told her how Amy's artless love had beguiled her first disappointment of its bitterness, and called her to exert her energies in a life of activity.

As she continued this more cheerful train of thought, she heard a step in the passage, whose echo thrilled to her very heart. How often had she sprung at that signal in all the buoyancy of unchecked love; cold and dark had been the change—the elastic step was now firm and majestic, and she listened to it with attempted indifference, for they had learnt to meet as strangers.

Colonel Hargrave entered, and instead of leaving the room, as he now always did, when he found her alone, he walked up to the fire, and stood looking at her, for a moment, as her varying color made her face look something more than beautiful.

"I have a request to make," he said, at length.

"One that I can grant, I hope," said Mabel; for the silence broken, her courage was at once restored.

"I would ask you to do violence to your own feelings, and appear at the dance to-night?"

"Why need I appear in a circle, where, being unknown, I cannot be missed, when I feel naturally disinclined for gaiety?"

"Because your influence is needed there. Do not think I am frivolous enough to believe, that the admiration you may possibly excite, would give you any compensation for the pain of appearing in that mourning dress, amongst the light and gay; but there is one over whom you seemed once to have some influence, who must be there, and you will have an opportunity of seeing her in society."

"Do you mean Lucy?"

"Yes—I have watched her narrowly, for some time, and think she may be made something better under proper guidance. Where is she to find that but in you? She is now attracted by a man, whose attentions are, I fear, too general to mean anything."

"Are you certain Mr. Beauclerc means nothing?" said Mabel, incredulously; "it is so difficult to decide—and almost impossible to interfere."

"Except by advice. Could you not persuade her to remain passive, and not to pay him so much open admiration?"

"Impossible;" said Mabel, "it must be that he is more reserved in the display of his attentions than she is. Are you not severe?"

"Depend upon it," returned Hargrave, "the truth is often more charitable than falsehood, and I am not speaking now in the common spirit of criticism. Lucy is rendering herself an object of general observation, and even ridicule, to the gentlemen of her acquaintance, and though I may be able to prevent such remarks being made in my presence, my influence cannot extend further. She offends all her former ball-room admirers by having eyes for no one but Beauclerc—she will dance with no one else, and pays him an open tribute of admiration, which cannot but be flattering from a pretty girl."

"But I do not see why you suppose he is indifferent to her?"

"If my observation has not deceived me, he shares, in common with many men of talent—a belief in a feeling warmer than friendship, but colder and more spiritual than love. I once knew a man, in fact, who carried on such a flirtation, for I can give it no other name, with a very superior, enthusiastic girl, but when every one expected him to propose to her in form, she heard of his marriage with a woman of the most ordinary understanding, but who, I dare say, made him a very good wife. As I was attached to him, I ventured to remonstrate with him on his conduct. In excuse, he brought so many really flimsy and poetical apologies, and proofs of the pure minded nature of his attachment, that though they appeared to me in their right light, they yet convinced me that he had not intended wrong, but that his vanity had led him astray, into the belief that he could be the object of an admiration superior to love; altogether foolish, but he was sincere, I believe. When I last heard of the poor girl she was sinking in a decline. Now I suspect Beauclerc to be such another as I have described, and I want you to see if you can make Lucy aware of it." "But you must first judge for yourself, and no such opportunity is likely to occur again, as you might not like to go out."

"You set me a difficult task; the more difficult, because Lucy has seemed so estranged from me lately."

"Ah, that reminds me of something else, I had to say. Do you happen to have met Miss Foster, a beautiful girl, one of the most striking women in Bath?"

"No, but I have heard Lucy speak of her."

"Yes, so she used to do, most enthusiastically; and her beauty, if nothing more, deserved admiration. I remember meeting her in the park—she was sitting down, and, as I afterwards learnt, had sprained her ankle. She looked so near fainting, that I did not hesitate to dismount—for I was riding—and offer her my assistance. After a little persuasion she gave me her direction and suffered me to place her on my horse, which I carefully led to her house, in the Circus. The grace with which she accepted my services, and the reserve with which she withdrew from my attentions, when they were no longer required, excited some curiosity in me; but, though I was repeatedly congratulated for such a singular opportunity of meeting the mysterious beauty, I am afraid I must confess that I was never able to improve the acquaintance. Now, lately, she has withdrawn entirely from society, and, indeed, up-stairs there is a polite note from her, declining Mrs. Villars' invitation for to-night. I have heard it frequently remarked that she is never seen out of doors, though some of her professed admirers have been anxiously watching for her. Lucy seems entirely to have forgotten her, and colored violently when I asked for her, the other day."

"A long string of evidence," said Mabel, with a half smile, "now tell me how you connect Miss Foster, with Lucy and Mr. Beauclerc."

"Why, she was at an evening party the day before he arrived in Bath, and has not been seen since; but this would be nothing perhaps had not my groom—who, one morning, took my horses to air, through the Circus—seen him call at her house, early, and thought, that when he was denied, he turned away with disappointment. I immediately ordered him to air the horses every



morning in the Circus, though certainly not the best place for them, which I might have chosen. However, the result of his information is, that almost every day, before the fashionable world is stirring, Beauclerc calls on Miss Foster, and is as strictly denied. To me, this looks suspicious, and Beauclerc seems carrying on a double game."

"Perhaps she is only some relation, and he calls to leave the morning paper," said Mabel.

"Well, only judge for yourself, if he is sincere with Lucy; if you think he is, we will leave them to themselves, but if not, the poor girl should be warned before her affections are too deeply implicated."

"Yes, I will appear to-night," said Mabel.

What more she might have added was stopped by the entrance of Caroline, whose jealous surveillance had discovered the *tête-à-tête*. Casting a fiery glance of suspicion on both, which was received with admirable coolness, she turned to Hargrave, and rather peremptorily informed him, that the case of fruit and flowers which he had ordered from his gardens, at Aston, was arrived, and they waited his permission to open it.

"Oh, I will come," said he, looking rather amused, than either sorry or angry at her displeasure. "Miss Lesly, you will like to see some flowers from Aston."

Accepting the half implied invitation to accompany them, Mabel followed to the morning room, where an immense basket was surrounded by Mrs. Villars and her daughters, in anxious expectation, while china and glass dishes were waiting to receive the fruit.

The basket fully answered the demand upon it—and satisfied Hargrave as to the state of his green-houses and hot-house, by producing some excellent specimens of forced early fruit, which Mrs. Villars had been anticipating, not only as an additional charm to her supper-table, but as a public proof of his anxiety to please her.

Besides flowers for vases, Hargrave drew from the basket, bouquets, arranged with a gardener's nicety, which he presented to Mrs. Villars and her daughters. They were composed of the most beautiful hot-house flowers, and were all in exquisite taste—but by some chance, it happened that the one presented to Caroline, far excelled the others in beauty. The sisters exchanged glances, and Caroline's haughty eye beamed with triumph.

"Stay, what is this?" said the unconscious Hargrave, dipping his hand again into the basket, and drawing forth from the moss, with which it was carefully packed, a bouquet, much smaller in size, and singularly pretty, because composed entirely of white flowers of the rarest kind. "Is it not beautiful?" he exclaimed, holding it up to view; "it really does my gardener credit."

"Beautiful indeed!" exclaimed every one.

"What is that paper round it?" said Maria.

Hargrave turned to the small strip of rather untidy paper, which was fastened to it, and read—

"Miss Lesly will accept this, with my respects."

"From my gardener, Dibden, I declare," said he—a look of childlike pleasure taking possession of his features, as he regarded the flowers which smelt sweeter than all the rest—and then handing them to Mabel, he begged her to accept them.

Mabel held out her hand, and looked much gratified as she took them; but no sooner had she done so, than the color rushed to Caroline's cheek, and a scowl darkened her beautiful features, as she regarded her with ill-concealed malignity. Her own bouquet no longer appeared the finest, and flinging it on the table with such violence, that the head of a camelia was broken from it, she said, angrily—

"I will have no second bests."

"My dear," said her mother, trembling, "yours is, I am sure, the prettiest."

"Do you think I have no eyes," returned Caroline, "or that I am going to be eclipsed in my own house?"

Hargrave stood amazed, for hitherto her temper had been greatly concealed from him, and he was surprised to see features, lately beaming with smiles, now darkened and disfigured by rage, while he felt something very like disgust at the jealousy which so openly betokened a preference for himself. Mabel stood, with her eyes fixed on the flowers she held in her hand, too pained to look up; then suddenly remembering herself, she offered them to Caroline, saying—

"I am glad I have anything to offer you, that you really like—pray take it."

Caroline, however, was too provoked to be easily pacified by this display, as she believed it, of superior sweetness of temper, and roughly pushing aside Mabel's extended hand, the flowers fell to the ground.

Hargrave looked from one to the other in mute surprise; and Mrs. Villars, terrified at her daughter's ungovernable temper, and mistaking his look for vexation, hurriedly interposed.

"Oh, my dear, now do take what Mabel offers you—do, my dear, if you have a fancy for it—I am

sure Henry intended to give you the best—who could think you would prefer a few white flowers to that lovely collection of geraniums. Come, my dear, now do have it."

"I am sure," said Hargrave, indifferently, "I knew no difference in the bouquets—I have nothing to do with poor Dibden's unfortunate present."

"There now," said Mrs. Villars, "now do take them, if it is a fancy of yours."

"Don't be angry, love," said Selina; "only think what is to become of the party if you and Henry quarrel. No one will have spirits for anything. Don't, dear, be angry."

"For my part," said Maria, "I see nothing to be angry about."

"Nor I," said Hargrave, as he left the room.

"Now see," said Mrs. Villars, "how you have vexed him."

"Something more than that, I fear," said Maria.

"Well, I really have no patience," observed her mother; "with lovers' quarrels—there, smile and make it all right again. We all know what your feelings are; but do, there is a dear girl, cheer up, for all our sakes. Is she not a silly girl, Mabel."

The latter was too candid to venture on a reply, as she stood busied in restoring the bouquet to order.

Caroline received these offerings to her wrath, with haughty indifference; but, at length, she suffered herself to be appeased by their repeated entreaties, and Mrs. Villars whispered to her niece, that if she now offered the flowers, she thought the dear girl would receive them.

Mabel could scarcely allow herself to minister to so much selfishness, and it was with some appearance of reserve, that she placed the bouquet on the table, by her side, not choosing to subject it to a second rebuff.

But Caroline's good humour was now happily restored, for she had gained all she could by her violence. Not only obtaining possession of the desired object, but being entreated to accept it. She, therefore, rewarded the patience of her mother and sisters, by entering into the arrangements of the evening with renewed animation.

"Mabel," said Lucy, as passing her arm through hers, they walked up stairs together; "where did you get such an angelic temper?"

"Whatever good I do possess," said Mabel, gravely; "is not mine; but is borrowed from a treasure house, which is as free to you as to me."

"But, tell me," urged Lucy, stopping on the landing place; "do you not despise the weakness to which you minister."

"What right have I to do so," answered Mabel; "who knows how proud and self-willed I might have become, if I had not early suffered deprivation, sorrow, and humiliation, as I have done. And who can say, I shall be as strong to-morrow as I am to-day; when a thousand temptations surround us on every side; and we cannot tell under which we may fall, if we once lose sight of the true humility which alone brings strength and power. How, then, can I dare to despise the frailty of others. But, dearest, what is the matter, how can I have pained you."

"You have not pained me," replied Lucy, a momentary color banishing the pallor of her cheek; "but sometimes I feel as if there were something wanting in me, which I find in you—yet, if it has been purchased by suffering, I must not wish for it, for I have not courage for such an ordeal."

"But, only consider," replied Mabel; "how much more noble, how much more worthy—if any could be worthy—would be the offering, to heaven, of a young heart, in the midst of joy and prosperity—than the tearful tribute of the worn spirit, which can find no other refuge. It is only our own rebellion which makes sorrow needed."

"Beautiful words," said Lucy, mournfully, "and something within tells me that they are true;" she stopped for a moment, and looked down upon her own share of the beautiful flowers, which she held in her hand, and a tear hung upon the lash, which shrouded her bright blue eye; then turning again to her cousin, she said:—

"To-morrow, dearest, I will think: to-night, must be all mirth and gladness."

Mabel would have remonstrated, but she saw that the serious fit had passed away, by the beaming smile that lighted her face, and dimpled round her mouth; and she knew her temper too well, to hope to recall it. So the two girls separated. Lucy to think over the pleasures of the evening; while Mabel, meditated how she might serve her, by screening her from the consequences of her indiscretion. She could not, however, refrain from reverting to the disagreeable scene in which she had taken a part. She could not help feeling almost humiliated for Caroline, while she regarded Hargrave's situation with commiseration; for she fancied that, however he might have implicated the honor on which he so strictly prided himself, with regard to Caroline, he displayed very little love; and she sincerely pitied him, as she knew that, if he had once committed himself, he would probably be too proud to retract.

## CHAPTER XV.

He spake of virtue: not the gods  
More purely, when they wish to charm—  
Pallas and Juno sitting by.

TENNYSON.

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The united taste of the whole family had not been exerted without effect—and their guests might well be delighted with the preparations which had been made for them.

On entering the house, tea and coffee waited them in the dining-room on the right hand, and, after an opportunity of taking this refreshment, they next ascended the staircase, which was brilliantly lighted, and ornamented with evergreens. This led to the ante-room, from which several doors opened on apartments all dedicated to the service of the evening; something, indeed, to the detriment of the family comfort. There might be seen, evergreens of the richest varieties, which were intermingled with flowering and beautiful geraniums.

On the left, a door opened into the apartment chosen for the reception room, where was arranged everything that could minister to comfort. The softest couches, the most lounging easy chairs, worked ottomans, and foot-stools, which had occupied much of the sisters' time. This was intended for those chaperones, who, through the folding doors which led to the ball-room, preferred watching the dances, to joining in the whist parties; for wherever they were seated, the ever revolving waltz would be almost certain to bring to their view, those in whom they were most interested.

A more distant room, the one furthest removed from the sound of the music, was selected for a card-room.

But the ball-room had occupied most attention, and a brilliant effect it certainly presented, that evening. Colonel Hargrave had had so many expensive whims which no one hindered him from gratifying, and evidences of his expenditure or his taste might be seen in every part of the house that night. Round the room, seats were arranged for the dancers, which being here and there interrupted by evergreens, and hot-house plants, formed, as the sisters well knew agreeable opportunities for those *tête-à-têtes* which they were so clever in sustaining.

Mrs. Villars looked forward to this evening with elation, but yet with some share of anxiety also. Nothing, she felt, but the complete success of her schemes could justify to her husband, the expenditure in which she had lately been so lavish, and, though she was indifferent to his censure in trifles, she feared to excite his serious displeasure by any great offence.

She was thinking of this as she stood with him and Hargrave, in the lounging room, where they waited to receive their guests, watching to observe the effect caused by Caroline's entrance.

"The girls are late," said, Mr. Villars, nervously consulting his watch, "it will be awkward if any one comes."

"I think I hear them, sir," said Hargrave.

At the same time the door opened, and the four sisters entered; even Maria looked well in the studied *negligé* of her appearance, but Caroline looked brilliant as she entered, with her majestic steady step, and well-pleased countenance; while the pure white flowers for which she had so bitterly contended, rested in all their simplicity upon her haughty breast.

"You have not forgotten your promise, I hope," she said, playfully resting her fan upon Hargrave's arm, "of inviting a great many of your gentlemen friends."

"Oh, no, I have selected a few of my acquaintances, but with care; for when entrusted with the privilege of affording introductions to ladies, one cannot be too careful."

"Fudge," exclaimed Maria; "as if it signified who one waltzed with for an evening."

"What," exclaimed Hargrave, "does it not signify whose arm encircles your waist?"

"Oh, come, do not squabble, do you know we are to have the pleasure of Perfection's company, to-night; I should not be surprised to see her come down with a dress up to the throat, and down to the wrist, a walking sermon on the degeneracy of the age."

"Really, mamma," said Caroline, smiling at the latter remark, "you ought to have ascertained if she had a dress fit to appear in."

"Mabel is always dressed well," said Lucy, "though she seems to take so little pains about it."

"Oh, perfect, most perfect," said Maria, holding up her hands and raising her eyes in affected admiration, "Henry, do you not appear very small in her company?"

"Perfectly infantine," he returned, with a good-natured smile; "but hush, here she comes."

Maria took up the hush, and repeated it so loudly that it deadened every other sound, and caused a blush to mantle on Mabel's cheek, as she entered. She looked a little timid as she advanced into the little circle.

To tell the truth, her garret toilet had had only the assistance of the good-natured cook, who, alone, in the general bustle, had found time to think of her; yet there was not a single fault to be found with it, and Caroline bit her lip with vexation, when, instead of the ill-dressed bashfulness she had expected, she felt the influence of a something wholly indescribable, yet all fascinating, in her appearance, as she quietly stood by her uncle's side.

As if seized by sudden impulse, Hargrave stepped forward, and requested the favour of her hand for the first dance. Mabel replied that she did not intend dancing at all that evening, and, though, apparently dissatisfied, he was compelled to submit.

Mrs. Villars drew him a little aside, for Caroline's glowing eyes precluded a storm.

"You know," she said, laying her hand confidentially on his arm, "that Caroline has been hoping for the pleasure of opening the evening with you—you will not disappoint her?"

"Pray tell her I shall be very happy," he replied, a little peevishly.

"Caroline, my love," she said, immediately turning to her daughter, "Henry feared you were engaged, but as I do not think you are, I have ventured to promise him your hand for the first."

Hargrave could scarcely repress a smile at this adroit falsehood, and as he seconded her request, Caroline graciously consented.

Mabel felt slightly annoyed, she scarce knew why—perhaps because she had been too pleased a moment before—at seeing how quick the cloud passed from Hargrave's brow: it never occurred to her to doubt the truth of what Mrs. Villars said.

They were, however, no longer left to their own entertainment, for guests began to crowd in, till the rooms were filled to overflowing; young and old, pleased, to-night, with the entertainment they would criticise on the morrow, prepared to enjoy themselves.

Upon the principal sofa in the reception-room, two old ladies were seated, the Lady Scratchal and the dowager Mrs. Pierce, who, from some reason or other, claimed a double share of respect in the houses where they visited, partly, perhaps, because they both possessed unlimited power over the large fortunes they enjoyed, and appeared to have not altogether determined how to dispose of them. There is an instinctive power in wealth, which the world often feels without stopping to analyse, and this these two ladies exercised with ready tact over their acquaintance.

"No one gets up a party like Mrs. Villars," observed Mrs. Pierce to her friend.

"But I think there is a great deal more of display than there ought to be," returned Lady Scratchal, whose hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, formed a melancholy contrast to the sparkling diamonds which encircled her wrinkled brow, and the youthful hair which surmounted it.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Pierce, "I am afraid, she is silly enough to reckon on the rich colonel for her Caroline—but I am greatly mistaken if there is any love there."

"Men did not make love in that way, in my time, certainly," observed Lady Scratchal, the ominous shake of her head covering the shades of many departed admirers.

"Well, and you know," observed Mrs. Pierce, "that I have my doubts about that other gentleman—we need not mention names—for you know who I mean, I am sure."

"With Lucy?" enquired her friend.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Pierce; "I am sadly afraid—"

She did not finish her sentence, but followed it up with many dreadful shakes of the head, and other symbolical actions, which Lady Scratchal seemed perfectly to understand.

Their attention was, however, diverted, by seeing Hargrave hurrying to the door to receive, with a hearty shake of the hand, a young man, who was entering with rather an abstracted air, till roused by the heartiness of his welcome, to which he immediately responded. Hargrave then hurried him to his hostess, who started, when she heard his name given as Captain Clair, yet concealed every sensation of annoyance, for fear of offending her wealthy relation. Mabel met him with unfeigned pleasure, and eagerly enquired for news of Aston, and her kind friends at the rectory; but Lucy having given him a trembling, feverish hand, for an instant, turned away, impatiently, and fixed her eyes upon the door.

It was so tantalising to see one after another enter, well-dressed, good-looking, and welcome to all but her. Her head was giddy with watching, and her ear had become so acute from listening, that she could distinguish footsteps on the stairs, from the hum of many voices, and the merry music which made her poor head ache.

How gladly, too, in the presence of Arthur Clair, would she have appeared the admired and loved of the far more talented Beauclerc. Regardless of the eyes of the watchful dowagers, she thought and teased herself till her very beauty seemed to fade before the workings of her restless and ill-governed imagination. And Clair seemed to watch her with a pitiful expression—perhaps, he

believed her as broken-hearted for him, as he was for Mabel. Enraged at this idea, she would accept the first partner, who presented himself, and suffer him to lead her to the giddy round, where, with excited, restless spirits, she would seem the merriest of them all; but tired, in a few minutes, she would take the first opportunity of returning to the lounging-room, and there, sinking into a chair, she would indulge in a fit of thought, more soothing from its very painfulness, than the merriment in which she had so lately joined.

She was sitting thus, late in the evening, under the severe, but unheeded scrutiny, of Lady Scratchal and her friend, when the well-known and long watched-for step was heard, and Beauclerc, looking more handsome and more pensive than ever, entered. Entirely forgetful of everything but the long hours of dreary monotony, which had preceded his coming, she started up, and her face was, in an instant, radiant with smiles, as she walked quickly across the room to meet him, extending her pretty hand with a mingling of playfulness and pleasure in her manner.

"Where have you been, truant?" she cried, suffering him to retain the hand which she had so warmly extended; "did you not know how dull everything would be without you?"

"Had I really guessed as much, I might have delayed the business which detained me, though at some inconvenience," he said, kindly, but gravely, leading her to one of the recesses, where he took a seat beside her.

"Ah," he added, thoughtfully, "you little know of how great a value your kindness has been to me—now, while my spirits seem to sink within me. How should I ever have borne my heavy trial without such a sweet comforter, as you have proved yourself to be to me."

"Ah," said Lucy, her eyes falling beneath his anxious glance, "how proud I ought to be, to have been able to administer comfort to such a mind as yours."

"All the mental energy we possess," returned Beauclerc, in the same sad tone, "does not equal the magic of one kind word from a feeling woman."

"I am too glad to have the power of serving you," said Lucy, as her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"And is it really a pleasure to you to serve me," repeated Beauclerc, looking at her with liquid eyes—"then yes—I think—yes, I will be bold enough to ask you to serve me still further; but first you shall know my history—a painful story indeed—but it is fair that you should know it, before you bestow any further kindness upon me. But when could I find such an opportunity?"

Lucy thought, for a moment, and then replied—

"I often walk before breakfast—and if you happen to meet me any morning in the park, you can tell it me there undisturbed."

"Will you walk to-morrow?" he enquired.

"Very likely I may; but stay, I will go to-morrow, because they will not be down till eleven, I know, so there will be plenty of time for you to say anything you like."

"Ingenuous, kind-hearted girl," he exclaimed; "I know some who hide their coldness, for the feelings of others, behind a prudish reserve, which would not allow them to do such a vastly improper thing, as meet a gentleman in their morning walk—but you are not of the number of those worldly beings—I will be waiting for you at that corner, where there is, if I remember rightly, an old Jupiter's head."

"Very well," said Lucy; "but you must take the chance of my coming, as it is very late now. Is it not nearly three o'clock? I never spent so long an evening."

"You are tired, I see; but we will join this last waltz—for such it ought to be, I am sure."

So saying, he passed his arm lightly round her waist, and was soon amongst the dancers.

Mabel had been no inattentive observer of Mr. Beauclerc's entrance, and she perceived that Lucy seemed to excuse to herself the open admiration she paid him, by considering him as a kind of demi-god, while he appeared contented rather to suffer than to encourage that admiration which he too plainly perceived.

"Hargrave had, for some time, stood by her in silence, bent on the same observation.

"Well," he said, speaking at length—as if he would challenge her thoughts.

"I hope—but fear," she replied; "how lovely she looks to-night."

Hargrave gave vent to an impatient "hum."

"What influence can I possess against such an infatuation?" enquired Mabel.

"The influence of common sense," he replied; "I never witnessed such absurdity in my life."

Mabel sighed, for she knew how impossible it was to govern Lucy, when bent on having her own way.

She perceived, also, for the first time, that Hargrave was either out of spirits, or in one of his obstinate humours; and, when Caroline joined them, which she did almost immediately, he broke from them, and retreated to a group of gentlemen near the door-way, with whom he had spent

the greater part of the evening, much to his fair cousin's chagrin. Perhaps, an incautious remark of Mrs. Villars, on his intimacy with her daughter, which, possibly, he had overheard, might have led to this inconsistent conduct; for he had ably resisted all her little plans to bring them together.

Mrs. Villars was sensibly annoyed; and Caroline, who, in the course of the evening, had overheard many remarks in praise of Mabel's beauty, and had been repeatedly called upon to join in praising her—felt enraged with her, as, what she termed, the under-ground cause of her failure.

In vain Selina looked all that was fascinating, and smiled all that was good-natured—in vain Maria jested—the spirits of the hostess were infectious, and soon communicated their influence to her guests, who, one by one, took their leave, and hurried away, sooner, perhaps, than they might have done.

The family party were once more alone—and when the last guest had been civilly disposed of, stood regarding each other in bewildered silence, surrounded by failing wax-lights, and the ruins of gay bouquets; with the echoes of the now silent music still sounding, in fancy, in their ears.

Hargrave, without waiting to discuss the evening, during which he knew he had taken so unpopular a part, bade them, hastily, good night, and hurried down stairs, where he encountered Clair, who, as if spell-bound, had lingered till the last, and now busied himself in a forlorn search for his hat.

Hargrave offered to lend him one, and took him into his room. They found the fire burning so brightly, and all looking so snug, that they were tempted to remain talking over it, till the lost hat was forgotten.

Mabel, anxious to offer a word of counsel, proposed to accompany Lucy to her room, to assist her in untwisting her hair; but this Lucy declined coolly and evasively, and she too, departed, feeling a depression arising from the lateness of the hour, and an evening spent in heated and noisy rooms, with which she was hitherto unacquainted; and it was some time before she could shut out the moving panorama, which perpetually presented itself, and close her eyes in sleep.

In order to make arrangements for the display shewn that evening, the whole house had been overturned; but, in the amusement of the preparations, none had felt the many little inconveniences to which they had all laughingly subjected themselves; but now the scene was changed. Nothing appeared more wretched to the sisters than all being obliged to occupy the same sleeping apartment, and submit to all the little acts of self-denial, which good-nature would only have discovered to be amused with. Wearied, fatigued, and disappointed, few felt so chagrined as Mrs. Villars, when, after seeing to some necessary household duties, and waiting till her kitchen was cleared of half intoxicated waiters, she retired to her room, anxious to shut out the unpleasant thoughts of the evening in sleep. She was not therefore very agreeably surprised to find her eldest daughter waiting for her.

It was with difficulty that Caroline had suppressed her temper till that minute; and, though it was already morning, she felt it impossible to retire to rest without first venting it upon her indulgent parent, whom she regarded, (as most spoiled children do their parents), as the malignant cause of all her sufferings, real or imaginary. Mrs. Villars would willingly have escaped, feeling herself too distressed, and too tired to frame those excuses and cunning falsehoods which had been so often applied, to heal the wounds of an acrimonious temper; but it was in vain; for Caroline indignantly flinging herself down into a chair; exclaimed—

"I knew how it would be—it is all your doing—and I do think if you had felt like any other mother, you would have spared me such a mortification."

"I!" replied her mother, almost equally irritated by fatigue and disappointment, "I spare you mortification! how can I make the man love you! It is your own vile temper which is in fault."

"Whatever I may be," replied Caroline, bitterly, "I am what you have made me; but I can tell you, that if that girl is to be suffered to queen it over us all, I am not the one to stand it, I would rather go out as a governess."

"Mabel! what has she to do with it?" enquired Mrs. Villars, not sorry to have the blame thrown off her own shoulders.

"Did you not see Henry speaking to her, and to no one else; and did he not ask her to dance before me; and did not Lady Scratchal say that, if she were you, she would not suffer such an artful girl—who knew how to make such use of her good looks—to be with her daughters, if she had any."

"But, Cary dear, remember the poor child has no home, and I promised her mother she should find one here."

"Very well," said Caroline, tossing her head angrily, "I see how it is; she has already supplanted us with papa, and she is going to do the same with you."

"My love," said Mrs. Villars, quite overcome by this appeal to her parental affection, "you know better than that; you know how much I would sacrifice for you—any thing—everything."

"Then send her away," said Caroline, bursting into tears.

"I will see about it, I will think to-morrow," replied her mother.

"No; say you will, to-night," urged Caroline, kissing her, "just say you will."

"Go my love, now—there is your papa, on the stairs—and he will not like to find you here."

Caroline was, reluctantly, forced to hurry away, and her mother, once more alone, endeavoured, in vain, to reconcile her desire with her policy. Almost equally with her daughter, she wished to get rid of Mabel, for she was not blind to the fact, that her gentle dignity of manner, joined to her self-denying temper, contrasted ill with the characters of her daughters; yet, there was one obstacle which she had no power to remove; for, possibly, Mabel was aware of the loan granted by her mother, and might be regarding her stay in the house, as the condition upon which it would be cancelled; otherwise, how could she have so cheerfully evaded every attempt to humiliate her.

Finding it impossible to meet this view of the subject in any satisfactory manner, she thought that the most comfortable plan would be to postpone the consideration of it till Caroline should again renew the topic; trusting to her ingenuity for some plan for getting out of the difficulty, should Caroline's obstinacy force her to do any thing which would oblige Mabel to seek some other refuge. And, having come to this decision, she sunk into a dreamy sleep, from which she was only awakened by the noon-day sun.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

But oh, to know that our heart has been,  
Like the toy of an Indian queen,  
Torn, trampled, without thought or care,  
Where is despair like this despair.

L. E. L.

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The next morning was the beginning of one of those early and fleeting days of spring, which are so gladly welcomed at the close of a long winter. The rising sun smiled mildly and pleasantly, and all nature welcomed its beams by dewy freshness from herb and flower. Here and there, some few buds, the graceful blossom of the nut, and the silken tuft of the palm, gave promise of coming leaves and flowers, while the yellow crocus and the primrose, soon to become so plentifully luxurious in meadow and hedgerow—here and there looked forth from their dewy bed—rich treasures for those who sought them.

It was not, however, to welcome these early harbingers of spring, that Lucy Villars hurried past the streets, and entered the Victoria Park, which, though at a late hour of the day, the fashionable lounge of the inhabitants of the gay city, was now scarcely the resort of a single person.

As she went on with rapid step, her cheeks flushed, and her bright eyes beamed with expected triumph.

"Why," she hastily reasoned, as she entered the silent walks, "why should Beauclerc have sought such an interview, if not to make her acquainted, rather with the history of his present feelings, than with his past life; and what could those feelings be, if they referred not to her. Or, perhaps, some obstacle lay in his way, which one light word of hers might be able to remove."

But she had reached the appointed spot, and now stood there alone. A mass of rock-work, surmounted by the cumbrous head of some heathen God, was the place appointed. Was it like a lover, to be so unpunctual! rather should he come an hour too soon, than one minute too late—for the first time, she began to feel an uneasy conviction of the impropriety of her situation; but sophistry seldom, till too late, deserts those who trust in it. The grim head frowned down upon her; as she walked up and down before it, reasoning with herself, that there could be no possible harm in taking a morning walk, to dissipate the weariness of a ball. She had a quarter of an hour for reflection, but, as it was spent in such reasoning it was of little service to her. At the end of it, Beauclerc was seen advancing in the distance. He must perceive her, and now retreat would be foolish and unavailing, had she even desired it, which she did not; for the thought of being able to announce her proposed marriage to her mamma and sisters, not as a matter of speculation, but of certainty, made her heart beat vehemently; and she did not stop to analyse the feeling of infatuation or vanity, which, in its effect, seemed so akin to love.

"Have you waited for me, Miss Villars?" he enquired, when he reached her, with his usual earnest manner, but with less of ardour than she had expected—so she replied hastily and carelessly—

"Oh, no, only a few minutes; but I see I am a better riser than you are."

"Perhaps an earlier sleeper; I have scarcely closed my eyes since we parted; but you will take my arm and then—." He stopped and sighed.

"And then," replied Lucy, "and then."

"I will, if you still desire it," he replied, in a tone which checked her playfulness, "repeat some part of my own sad history, in order that you may give me that assistance which I am told you have the power to afford me. If, indeed, I am not mistaken in hoping that you feel some kindly sentiments towards me. Some part you know already."

Lucy raised her eyes archly, but said nothing. Her companion seemed satisfied, for he continued, still more gravely—

"Where, or how shall I begin?"

"Who are you—what are you—and why are you sad?" said Lucy.

"Who am I? Yes, that will do very well," said he, suddenly assuming the quick flow of language most natural to him.

"Like your father, mine was a wealthy merchant; I was his only son, and he earnestly prided himself on bestowing upon me all the learning and accomplishments which money could procure. The advantages of a first-rate education, joined, perhaps, to some natural ability, enabled me to shine at the University; and I left Oxford to pursue the study of the bar in Lincoln's Inn, trusting to be able to use my money skilfully in the pursuit of fame; but how fallacious are all the expectations of human life! My father made some enormous speculations, and, after years of successful ventures, failed this once and for ever. He did not many days survive his loss, and dying broken-hearted, left me heir to his poverty; but how unfit for it—accustomed, from infancy, to the gratification of every whim—lavish in my expenditure, and boundless in my ambition, with nothing but a profession, yet untried, and a feeble dependence on a sick uncle. What a fall for one accustomed to all the elegances of life. But this was not all; I had at this time become acquainted with the daughter of a banker, reported to possess enormous wealth."

"What can be coming," thought Lucy, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

"I had not hesitated to seek her," continued Beauclerc; "she returned my affection, and we fondly looked forward to our union. But, when my poor father died, I felt that we must meet on different terms, and that I had no right to claim a promise given under such different circumstances. I felt, indeed, the curse of poverty, too bitterly, to wish to make her a sharer in it; and so I went to her at once, and offered to resign all pretensions to her hand."

"You may imagine how a generous warm-hearted girl would receive such an offer. She saw at once, that nothing but my love for her induced me to make it; and declared that she was ready to share my poverty, and would become my wife, as soon as I was able to marry. She only stipulated that I should enter on my professional duties, with some chance of success, in which case she promised to obtain her father's consent."

Lucy began to listen with that constrained attention which a person possessed by nightmare, might give to some horrid vision, from which they would willingly break, though obliged to wait its conclusion in silence. Beauclerc, however, seemed too much occupied by his own thoughts to regard hers, and presently, continued:—

"I was then almost without money or resources; but, being of a confident disposition, I felt there were few things which love could not surmount. I knew, besides, that my wife must be the heiress to her father's wealth, for she was an only child—but, as I was unable to settle any thing of my own upon her, I was timid of approaching the subject; particularly, as, whenever I did so, her father seemed so pained, that I instantly dropped it again. I could not but feel gratitude for this delicacy towards my feelings, and this trust in my honour, where so dear a child was concerned, and I resolved to deserve it. I was far too proud to be dependent on him; and, therefore, privately borrowed money on bond—took chambers, furnished a small house, and obtained a few briefs through the interest of some of my father's friends; and probably, had I been careful, I might have done well.

"This industrious commencement induced my intended father-in-law to give his consent to our marriage; and, in a few months, I had the satisfaction of seeing my wife at the head of a small, but elegant establishment. Poor thing, she had been so accustomed to the luxuries of her old home, that she never doubted me when I told her that mine was arranged with the greatest economy.

"But the consciousness of deceiving her, and the perpetual dread of that wretched debt always hovering round me, insensibly soured my temper, and wore upon my spirits. But this only called forth the depth of her affection. She was never weary of pleasing me, and my very fretfulness rendered her more sweet and patient. It was beautiful to see," he continued with emotion, "how she schooled her naturally fiery and uncurbed temper, to bear my sour complaint, or peevish rebuke. Beautiful to see how little it humbled her when she was most patient; and what a sweet, and gentle, and loving wife, the spoilt child of wealth had become, at my bidding. But, let me spare myself the agony of remembrance. A greater trial was yet in store for her; for we had scarcely been married six months, when her father died. I had by that time become so deeply in debt, that, though I hated myself for it, I felt relieved by the news which fell so heavily on my wife.

"If the clouds we so much dread, are often big with blessing—how often is the sunshine only the fore-runner of the storm?"



"In a few days I had cause to know this; for I found, when affairs were inspected, that, instead of being, as I expected, possessed of thousands, I was again the heir of a ruined man. And, even worse, ruined myself; for it was only upon this tacit expectation that I had obtained credit, and creditors would soon press upon me. I knew, now, that all hope was gone. Ah, wretch that I had become, simply, perhaps, because, I had despised the common-place business of money matters.

"Almost mad with the intelligence I had just learned, I rushed home to insult my innocent wife, with the knowledge of her parent's disgrace. Heaven forgive me, I must have been mad, or I could not have done it.

"I well remember it was morning, and I found my way, I scarce knew how, to her dressing-room—she was weeping—but when I entered, she tried to dry her tears. I was, however, past control, and bitterly did I reproach her for the deception, I alleged she had practised upon me—taunting her with angry violence. At first, she seemed stunned, by what she learnt from my wretched complaints—but then, as if suddenly stung to the quick, she retorted on me, accusing me, with bitter calmness, of having loved her for her expected fortune. I hardly know what I replied—but bad enough it was, I know—I, passionate and abusive; she, cold and contemptuous—and then, with a bitter curse, I left the house.

"I hurried out of town; any where to forget myself—some where to the country; it did not signify where. The cool air refreshed me, and nature called me to better feelings, for, happily, passion is of short duration—it told me, as I lingered amongst its beauties, of our happy honeymoon—it told me how, from that time, I had declined in my kindness to the wife whom I believed I loved better than self, and how, through all the trying months which had followed, she had preserved an unvarying meekness of temper, till that one day, when, galled beyond endurance, she had ventured to oppose passion to passion. Such sweetness might well atone for this single act of opposition—and spent with rage, and half repentant, I resolved to return and forgive her, though in a dignified manner; and to offer her my continued love and protection, if she desired to accompany my flight abroad, which I felt certain she would be too willing to do.

"There was a stillness about my house when I returned, which I was not surprised to find, for it was a house of sorrow—yet I had not noticed it so much before—I was late, as I intended, hoping to find my wife frightened and penitent—yet she did not come to meet me—no one did but my man, who asked me, with the tone of one accustomed to a sharp answer, 'if I intended waiting dinner for his mistress?' I hastily replied in the affirmative—and concealing my alarm, I hurried to the room where I had left her. A note lay upon her dressing-table, and, in the haste with which I opened it, something fell jingling to the ground. The note itself contained a few lines, written in a decisive tone, expressive of farewell, and telling her determination of renouncing, at once, my protection and my name. I stooped to pick up what had fallen—it was her wedding ring—that ring which, in happier days, we had so delighted to look upon, because the pledge of a faith which, it seemed, she could so easily cast aside.

"Let me pass over that dreadful day of stupefaction, and bitter repentance, at the end of which I found myself in prison, for all care for liberty had passed from me when she went—and I had not even tried to fly. You see," he continued, perceiving that Lucy listened with breathless attention, "that I was, thus, prevented from instituting any enquiry; and, indeed, I felt glad to hide myself from her eyes, for how could I wish her to acknowledge me in a prison—I believe I was completely humbled, and when I say that, I say a good deal—and that I was truly so, must be seen by the candour with which I have unveiled my meanness. Tell me, do you not pity me?"

Lucy made no reply.

He continued, in a more agitated voice—

"Do not turn from me—you can, you will serve me, I know. Stay, I forgot to finish my story. Only two months since, my old uncle died, and bequeathed me his whole fortune. He did not know I was in prison, or he might have cancelled this will. It found me there, wretched and desponding, and relieved me from its chilling influence. Once more free, I discharged every debt of honesty or honor, and then sought for my wife. I found that she had again taken her maiden name, which enabled me to trace her to this city. The rest you know."

"I don't," screamed Lucy.

"Good Heavens," cried Beauclerc, seizing her hand, "the bosom friend of Millie Foster, and not know—"

A hysterical scream, and another, and another, burst from the poor girl—she sunk fainting in his arms.

What was to be done—Lucy could not be left—yet Beauclerc felt the increasing awkwardness of the scene. In his interest in his own narrative, he had not had time to mark her rising agitation till too late to check its effects.

As he was bending over her, endeavouring, with trembling hands, to untie the strings of her bonnet, a hasty step struck upon his ear, and turning quickly, he confronted Captain Clair.

"Beauclerc," said the latter, sternly, "what does this mean?"

And, as he said this, he turned full upon him, with anger flashing in his eyes.

Beauclerc turned pale, and then red, as he answered his angry glance, saying, hurriedly—

"There has been some fearful mistake here: indeed, indeed, it has been no fault of mine."

"No fault of yours," said Clair, even more sternly, "that you have drawn the eyes of all Bath upon your heartless flirtation, and subjected a young girl's name to the ribald jest of any who chose to comment upon it. As I am a soldier, you shall answer for it."

"Whatever you do," said Beauclerc, with a face of ashy paleness, "let us think of her first. Do not let this get abroad."

"Canting hypocrite," cried Clair, fiercely, "do you not know that you have made her a jest, in every place where men congregate, and you would ask me not to let this get abroad—stand back from her I tell you."

Beauclerc, however, did not heed the latter remark, for, having succeeded in loosening the strings, he threw back her bonnet, and suffered the morning air to play, undisturbed, among her fair tresses, and over her heated brow, and, as it did so, the color slowly returned to her blanched lips, and again breathing more freely she slowly raised her head; and then, perhaps, feeling able to stand, she drew herself from the support of Beauclerc's arm, and, as she did so, encountered Clair; she looked at him for an instant, with a terrified expression, and then hid her face in her shawl.

"Will you let me take you home, Miss Lucy," he said, in an abrupt, but kind voice, at the same time, handing her, her bonnet, which he held in his hand, and studiously turning his back on Beauclerc.

"Home!" said Lucy, almost wildly.

Clair made no reply, except by placing himself by her side.

"Yes, I will go anywhere," said Lucy, in the same vacant tone.

He drew her hand within his arm, and without a second glance at Beauclerc, who stood like one who had lost his senses, he hurried her forward at a brisk pace.

She did not speak, and, it is probable, almost forgot whose arm supported her; neither did Clair attempt to gain her attention, till they reached her father's door. He suffered her to enter alone, waiting a short interval before he himself gained admission, when he hurried to Hargrave's room. The latter was waiting for him with some anxiety, and turned towards him as he entered.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "nothing, after all, I trust?"

"Nothing!" said Clair, "nothing! when I found her in the Park, lying in his arms in a fainting fit—scoundrel."

"And you have brought her home?"

"Yes; she came very willingly when I asked her. What had passed I cannot divine, but if she does not know the truth already, the sooner she does, no doubt, the better. Have you seen Miss Lesly?"

"Yes; she promised to keep watch for her, and they are together by this time."

"So far so good, then," said Clair, endeavouring to compose himself into his naturally careless air, "now for Beauclerc—I declare," he added, brushing his hand angrily over his eyes, "it almost unmans me to see a woman in distress."

"And yet, my dear Arthur," said Hargrave, laying his hand kindly on his shoulder, "I fear you are not guiltless."

"Well, if I have given her pain, nobody else shall. Come Hargrave, will you go to him, I can trust no one so implicitly as I can you."

"If you are determined on meeting him, I will go, certainly, but only consider, first, how little right you have to take up her quarrel, and the unnecessary publicity you give to the affair."

"With regard to that, how, I cannot tell, but, depend upon it, before to-morrow night, the affair will be discussed in every *coterie* in the town."

"What do you require, then?" said Hargrave, taking up his hat.

"The most ample apology."

"And who shall I say you are—a friend of the family?"

"Never mind that—he knows me, I was his friend once, and he will not enquire into my right to question his motives."

"Very well then, wait for me in your rooms at the Lion, and I will join you directly."

"I have seen him—stay, where is he?"

"We are both at the Lion, so we will walk there together," said Clair, following him into the street.

A few minutes walk brought them to the hotel, and, parting at the public entrance, Clair proceeded to his room, while Hargrave sent in his card to Beauclerc.

He was immediately admitted.

Beauclerc was standing by the table, his face expressing much internal agitation, while his usual self-possessed air was entirely gone.

Hargrave, on the contrary, was perfectly cool, but very grave, as he bowed to him somewhat stiffly, and said, courteously—

"My friend, Captain Clair, was—"

"I know what you would say, Colonel Hargrave," interrupted Beauclerc, quickly, "he would ask me for an explanation of the strange circumstances under which he met me this morning—I will not ask what right he has to question my conduct—I am too angry with myself to seek to take shelter under any such subterfuge—I have done wrong, I now see, but how to atone for that I cannot tell."

"I fear there is no atonement to be made, except the poor satisfaction of an open explanation and apology."

"That I am most ready to make," replied Beauclerc, with unaffected sadness, "and I wish I had more to offer."

He then hurried over what he had repeated before to Lucy, while Hargrave listened with that acute attention which seldom failed to give him an insight into the characters of those about him, when he chose to exercise it.

"Miss Lucy Villars," said Beauclerc, in conclusion, "was the first acquaintance I made here, and, knowing her to be the intimate friend, nay, almost the only admitted friend of my wife, I looked upon her with peculiar interest—not for an instant doubting her knowledge of the connection existing between her friend and myself, from the readiness with which she fell into my confidence—and, indeed, from her replies to all my allusions to the subject. Believing that she knew me to be a married man, I never (pardon my alluding to this subject,) thought the attention she bestowed upon me any other than that, which love for her friend, and pity for my situation, called for."

"Are you sincere in that?" said Hargrave suddenly, changing his tone of courteous attention to deeper earnestness, as, with his dark eyes fixed upon him, he waited his answer.

"I am," returned Beauclerc, decidedly.

"And you were not aware of the danger in which you placed a young girl of ardent imagination?"

"I might, had I considered; but I did not consider."

"And I may suppose myself warranted in conveying to my friend this explanation, together with the fullest apology for the mischief you have unknowingly caused."

"Most certainly."

"Then, sir," said Hargrave, rising, "however deeply I may regret the mistake which has arisen between you and Miss Villars, I feel bound to offer my testimony to the sincerity of your purpose."

"Thank you, thank you," cried Beauclerc; "where I was wrong, was, perhaps, in believing the possibility of a friendship of so much warmth existing between a young girl of singular attraction, and myself, a married man."

"Why, yes," replied Hargrave, sternly; "I am not a married man myself, yet I have my own peculiar, and, perhaps, very strict notions of the duties of married life, which would scarcely admit of the freedom you have allowed yourself."

"You open my eyes," said Beauclerc, as if a sudden idea had occurred to him; but then, remembering he was speaking to a stranger, he colored, and was silent.

Hargrave, unwilling to intrude on his private confidence, by any further remark, immediately wished him good morning, extending his hand, as he did so. Beauclerc shook it warmly, thanking him for his patience and temper, and, with many repeated assurances of regret, suffered him to withdraw.

He immediately went to Clair, who was waiting for him, with some impatience, and, in a few words, repeated the subject of his interview.

"There," he said, in conclusion, "I have done my best, and so I think have you. It is as I suspected—Beauclerc had really no intention of doing harm—and Lucy would have suffered none, had she not jumped to the conclusion that, of course, he admired her. We cannot, with the best will in the world to serve her, atone for the consequences of her own folly—and this, I fear, she has displayed in the whole affair. What a pity it is that girls possessing so many natural attractions should not wait to be sought."

"A great pity, indeed," said Clair; "I know few girls who would be more attractive than Lucy

Villars, if she had but the one necessary appendage—sterling principle."

"Perhaps, it may be so," said Hargrave, "and if she had, besides, a greater, and a less reliance, on her own powers. But we have had excitement enough for one morning in settling her affairs. I am going into the country, will you walk with me?"

"Willingly," said Clare, taking his hat and stick.

And the two young men sallied forth together for a long country excursion.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

Oh, pass not, pass not, heedless by,  
Perhaps thou canst redeem  
The breaking heart from misery,  
Go, share thy lot with him.

---

When Lucy reached her own room, she found Mabel waiting there—but without taking any notice of her, she sunk down upon her bed, and remained gloomily silent.

Mabel offered no consolation, for there is a dignity in grief which calls for something like respect; she, therefore, busied herself in getting the chamber restored to something like order, that Lucy might not be disturbed; and as soon as she heard her aunt stirring, she went to her, though most reluctantly, to communicate as much as she knew of the morning's adventure. As she anticipated, she had to bear the brunt of her wrath, for Mrs. Villars, with the unreasonable temper of disappointment, was almost ready to blame *her* for the whole occurrence. Mabel, however, listened to her patiently, glad to shield the unhappy Lucy from the angry observations which she had herself to endure. She then returned to her cousin, and remained with her for the rest of the day—though there seemed very little to repay this patient attention to her feelings. Lucy turned with peevishness from her sisters, when they either offered their pity, or attempted to gratify their curiosity, and they soon left her to herself.

For the last few weeks, her spirits had been kept up to an unnatural pitch of excitement, and she had danced late, and walked early, without shewing the slightest fatigue; but now her nerves suffered from reaction; and sleepless nights, and fatiguing days, all seemed to oppress her then; and before that evening had closed in, her burning brow, which could scarcely find rest upon the pillow—her parched lips, and feverish pulse, frightened her companion, and she hastened to Mrs. Villars, begging her, that she might be allowed to send for a doctor.

"What!" exclaimed the latter, indignantly, when she heard this request, and speaking very loud; "what! send for Mr. Mildman, that he may carry the scandal all over Bath? No; I will do no such thing. She never took to these absurd whims, till she went to Aston, and I will not have them, and that you may tell her. Say, it is my wish that she should get up and shew herself."

"Shew herself where?" thought Mabel, as she slowly retreated; "in the Pump-room—the assembly rooms—or the crowded streets? and what chance of real comfort could they offer? callous they might indeed make her to the sufferings of life, but to its better feelings also." And she returned, with renewed diligence to the couch of her restless patient, resolved that no want of kindness at home, should make her seek it abroad; but she was soon convinced, also, that her aunt was so far right in believing that Lucy's sufferings were rather mental than bodily.

She seemed sullen and selfish in her grief; and, heedless of her cousin's presence, she would turn her face away, or, burying it in the clothes, seemed resolved to hug her disappointment, as closely as she had cherished her former infatuation. She answered, with peevish bitterness, any attempt to cheer her, and when her mother or sisters paid her a visit, she obstinately refused, either to speak or listen to them. This conduct they were little inclined to bear; and one after another, as she gave up the task, readily agreed, that, as Mabel did not mind it, it was better to leave the two alone; so that she spent her time almost entirely in the sick room, unless when she went down to the study to give some passing word to Mr. Villars, and to run away with some passage which he wished copied. As she was one day returning from him, a servant handed her a letter, which she stopped on the landing-place to read—it ran as follows:—

"Miss Lesly will, I trust, pardon the liberty I am now taking in addressing her—and will allow me, through her, to say some words in vindication of myself to Miss Lucy Villars—and to tell her, that, when I first sought an introduction to her, it was under the impression that she was the bosom friend of my wife, from whom circumstances had separated me—and with the hope that she might aid me in obtaining a quiet reconciliation. That we never spoke openly on the subject, I allow—but I frequently alluded to it—believing that she understood me. That she did not, I lament; and if in the course of our friendship, I have displayed so much of my admiration for her artless candour, and ingenuous beauty, as to place my sentiments in a doubtful light, I most sincerely repent having done so, and entreat her to forgive me. Again soliciting Miss

Lesly's pardon, and begging her to convey all the apology which a delicate mind can with delicacy accept, I remain, her obedient servant,

"ALFRED BEAUCLERC."

At this moment Hargrave ascended the stairs, and Mabel handed him the letter, saying—

"Pray read this, for you are a better judge of character than I am."

"You cannot, then," replied Hargrave, "detect the deception which prevents some people from reading themselves. Now I really do not think this man knew he was exactly flirting, for the knowledge that he was a married man made him admire the confidence and freedom which would have disgusted him had he been single."

"Why?"

"Because," replied Hargrave, smiling, "he would have suspected motives, which, being married, he knew could not exist."

"But this was still very, very wrong."

"I own it; marriage should be like the Devonshire lane of the poet's song; and he is most unhappy who looks over its high hedges to discover more beauties in the scenery beyond, which he has given up for ever. Still, I do not think Beauclerc meant any harm; at least, when I called, on the part of Captain Clair, to demand an explanation, he assured me so, in such a simple manner, that I felt it impossible to doubt him; and you must know how very imprudent Lucy has been; she was likely to bring such a thing upon herself, becoming attached to him, without enquiry as to who or what he was, and having no certainty with regard to his sentiments. So I think it would be much better to hush this foolish affair up as quietly and quickly as possible."

"Then what shall I do?" enquired Mabel, taking the letter.

"Try to make Lucy think no more than may be beneficial to her. Write to Beauclerc, absolve him, and treat his offence as trifling, and, promise that she will do as he desired—become a mediator between him and his wife."

"Thank you," said Mabel, scarcely suppressing a smile at the difficulty of her task; and she went on to Lucy's room; as she did so, she heard a step hastily retreat from the top of the stairs, and the rustling of a silk dress.

For the first time, Mabel found Lucy in a sound sleep, and, fearful of waking her, she took up a book, and seated herself by the fireplace, for fire there was none, though the day, for February, was particularly cold and cheerless.

She had been sitting thus for nearly an hour, when looking to see if Lucy still slept, she found that she was awake, and with her large light blue eyes filled with tears, was gazing at her with a gentle earnestness, which was a relief to see, after the angry flush, which had before so constantly marked her countenance.

"Will you ring the bell, if you please," said Lucy.

Mabel did as she was desired, and, when the servant entered, Lucy said—

"I wonder that Miss Lesly has been suffered to sit so long without a fire. Will you light one directly, Jemima?"

As Jemima did so, she watched the preparations with more interest than she had lately regarded any thing.

When they were again alone she said—

"Can you tell me how it was that Captain Clair happened to see me in the Park that morning?"

"Because he went out on purpose to meet you."

"And why?"

"Do you remember, that after the party, Colonel Hargrave went to bed earlier than we did?"

"Yes; I think I do."

"Well, when he went down stairs, he found Captain Clair, who had lost his hat, so he offered to lend him one, and took him into his room,—where they found the fire blazing so temptingly, that, late as it was, they sat down to talk, and in the course of conversation, Captain Clair remarked on your intimacy with Mr. Beauclerc, which he had noticed that evening, and, in return, Colonel Hargrave observed, he was supposed to be paying you attention, and that it was generally expected that he would soon come forward. But why need I tell you all this?"

"Because I wish to know—pray go on, what then?"

"Why, then, Captain Clair startled him by saying, that he knew him very well, and that he was married, though separated from his wife. Colonel Hargrave, feeling very much distressed, for he is very kindly interested in you, and had many doubts of Mr. Beauclerc, before—went on talking and planning with Captain Clair, how to break such disagreeable news to you—and, while they

were doing so, you came down stairs, and went out. Now, as this appeared to them very singular—after a night of such fatigue—they suspected something wrong, and, with the hope of being able to serve you, Captain Clair followed you at a distance, keeping you in sight, though he did not like to interfere till he saw you faint."

Lucy listened with attention, but made no remark, and when Mabel left off speaking, she again buried her face in the bed-clothes, and seemed to sleep.

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