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AUTHOR OF

"LIFE IN A GERMAN VILLAGE," "THE DUTCH COUSIN,"

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MRS. DORRIMAN.

CHAPTER I.

There perhaps never was a more bewildered woman than Mrs. Dorriman, a lady whose mind was apt to be in an attitude of bewilderment about most things in this complex world. The problems of life weighed very heavily upon her (not only those deeper questions perplexing to scientific minds, and ranging from the consumption of gas, and its unexpected proportions in domestic economy, to the vexed question of shooting-stars and the influences of natural forces), but she was in a measure content to remain unenlightened, recognising, with some wisdom, that there was so very much she could not understand; it was quite hopeless to make an effort in any direction.

The immediate cause of her present bewilderment was a letter from her brother. This letter, lying upon her lap, had been read several times, and she held it by one corner daintily, and ruffled her brow as she looked at it—much as one might face the differential calculus while as yet the previous paths of mathematical intricacy had not been trod. It was on the west coast of Scotland, and on a certain day in September, that Mrs. Dorriman was sitting under a large rowan tree—whose scarlet berries were beginning to blaze forth in autumnal beauty; from where she sat the sea far away below her was distinctly heard in its incessant and musical monotony.

Upon one side the fair hills of Skye took every changing hue under the influence of sunshine and storm. Every hollow marked at one time by the vivid sunlight, which cast such clear sharp and lovely blue shadows, and again retiring behind a veil of mists; looking so near and so exquisitely coloured before rain, and half concealed by threatening clouds before the bursting of a storm.

Behind Mrs. Dorriman the ground sloped upwards and was well wooded; a burn came rushing and fell down the hill-side in the shape of a waterfall over the cliff; her own house was small, but well-planned, and was so sheltered that the flowers of spring, always so welcome to any one with even a faint sense of natural beauty, flourished here to perfection. By the burn-side a walk wound its way, having been cut out of the rock, and it went down to the sea-shore and skirted the cliff till it ended in a patch of grass, where three stones made a secure and comfortable seat.

Mrs. Dorriman was one of the women whose lives have been pursued by perpetual failure. Her childhood had been a neglected one, her youth had been the same; she was hurried into a marriage with a man much older than herself, whom, if she did not dislike, she had no real love for, and towards whom, when adversity came, she had nothing to draw her, for adversity is the highest test of love, and if there is no deep affection the breath of non-success kills it at once.

She was sorry when he died; but she had a deep-seated feeling that in some way every thing was his own fault—and she blamed him so much, and was so sorry for herself, that she had no room for pity. Only when he died and had given one half reproachful, half imploring look, a dim sense of some want in herself and of her injustice came to her, and she had suddenly bent down and kissed him, and she was always glad of this; she had forgiven him at the last, and had let him know it.

For some years now she had lived at Inchbrae, understanding vaguely how she came to live there, and how her income arrived. Everything was confusion to her on this subject. She never knew how it was that all she had came from her brother. Her husband had been a wealthy man when she had married him; and though they had moved from one place to another, and always seemed to be going back, instead of going forward, still it seemed strange to her that she was dependent and not independent.

The remembrance of those early days had taught her in some measure to comprehend her brother's character, her brother who was her half-brother, a tie which can be made so close, or so far apart!

This remembrance gave her a conviction lying well hid up in her secret heart, that but for some great reason the ostensible kindness would not be there; and half-frightened, indeed more than half-frightened, at the temerity of her thoughts she rose suddenly from her seat, and was recalled to her present position by the letter which fluttered to the ground.

This letter requested her in terms, which amounted to a command, to give up her house and come and live with him—not to let the house, but to sell it; indeed, he informed her that, having no doubt as to her being glad to do as he wished, he had already taken steps to effect this.

Poor Mrs. Dorriman! She was so little certain of being happy under her brother's roof, that it was very terrible to her to put herself in a position from which she could not retreat at will. She was a

woman who had never in all her life had a confidante or a friend from whom she could take counsel, being one of those rare characters who literally cannot speak to any one of the things nearest her. In her childhood and her youth she had been isolated and had had no companions, and between her and her husband there had never been full confidence; thoughts so entirely kept to oneself are apt to become bitter and one-sided; nothing is perhaps more unwholesome than allowing no light from the outside world to brighten those darker thoughts which come at times to every one, and which a frank and open discussion with a friend will often chase away; but if this is perilous in ordinary cases it is far worse when a thought lies in the heart with so terrible a portent that it acts as a drop of deadly poison, and that only the knowledge of its power keeps it from being brought out and looked at in all its bearings.

The sea-breeze ruffled Mrs. Dorriman's hair. She was not much over thirty, and after her mourning was over, had worn no cap. She had much that was comely in her countenance and person, but her large and rather light grey eyes had a habit of looking down as though something might be read in them she wished to conceal, and her face had lost its bloom. She moved well, but with the slow step of one who has never known robust health, and to whom repose is more acceptable than activity.

Long she sat there thinking, one idea running through all her thoughts—What was the use of any reflection? Her brother, Mr. Sandford, twenty years her senior, had always been the master of her fate, and always would be. She was to all intents and purposes powerless, unless.... She clasped her hands together, and the colour rose for a moment in her pale cheeks. Slowly a resolution formed itself in her mind. With a step in which no hurry appeared, but with her mind strung up, she went up the path to her house. It seemed very fair to her now she was to leave it—as things become more desirable to us all as they recede from our grasp—and she stopped for a moment to look at it. The grey roughhewn stones were partly concealed by various creepers; roses and honeysuckle overhung the porch, and the garden with its well-kept lawn still showed a perfect feast of colour to the eye. Mrs. Dorriman sighed, and, going into the house, she wrote a note, and rang for her servant. She was still a little flushed, but she sent her note, and taking up her work she sat down and went on with it mechanically. No one seeing her could have imagined that she had for the first time in all her life begun to set in motion an act of rebellion.

She kept looking along the road which showed itself between the self-sown birches that clothed the valley. The answer to her note came in the shape of a dilapidated pony-chaise with a pony in it, whose multifarious occupations left it saddened and subdued in appearance, requiring much persuasion to make it go with any approach to speed. It crept down the hills and it crawled up them, and its winter coat was already thick enough to render it absolutely impervious to a whip, which had grown shorter and lost its lash in service against it. That pony might with much truth have said to any one trying to urge it on, "It amuses you and does not hurt me." Mrs. Dorriman on those rare occasions when she had occasion to go to the nearest town, nine miles off, had borrowed this little turn-out from the farmer who kept it for his invalid mother, and she knew the pony well; when she saw it coming she folded up her letter and went upstairs, putting on her things as though she was going to church, and standing at the door ready to get in when it drew up there. The rosy-cheeked boy who drove, was gifted by nature with no desire for conversation, and Mrs. Dorriman took a book to beguile the tediousness of the way, which she read, as we do at times, without taking in the sense of it, her mind full of the approaching change, and the plan she had suddenly made, and which was at variance with all the previous habits of her life.

That love of beautiful scenery which few people are really born without, made her from time to time raise her head and look around her. High overhead towered the hills on either side, with their huge rents and rifts clothed with mosses, and here and there a patch of grass upon which the hardy little mountain sheep clustered. Lower down, the natural birch-woods were a mass of gold, their colour enhanced by the swaying movement of their graceful boughs, which caught the sunlight and kept it dancing there. One chain of lochs after another swept down the strath with wooded promontories and islands, and the hills rose "peak above peak," carrying the thoughts upwards to that heaven they seemed to reach. There was movement in the air, but the wind, though coming up the strath from the sea, was soft and mild. From a few cottages, that looked miserable enough and yet were warm within, came that smell of peat which to those whose foot has trod the heather all their lives is full of pleasant associations—of fine days, when a bowl of milk and a hunch of oaten bread was enjoyed after the keen air; of wet days, when, wandering far on pony-back and overtaken by the rain, a peat-fire had brought warmth, and comfort, and that real hospitality, which somehow never fails amongst the poor. Mrs. Dorriman in her whole life had been indebted to the poor for all the love and real kindness she had ever known—many a kind woman pitying the motherless child, had cheered her, many a man remembering the sweet sad face of the mother who had lived her short life amongst them, a life short but full of sweetest remembrances to all whom it had touched, had shown their gratitude to the mother in kindness to the child. Nothing had been so painful to her as leaving her old home, not because of any kindness in the home where she had been taught many bitter lessons, but because of the warm close friends who filled her life, and who were to be found in almost every cottage on the hill-side.

Had she been going there, happiness would have predominated over pain, but Mr. Sandford (who made a merit of having no foolish preferences) had sold the old home long ago, and had built a house according to his own taste within two miles of a thriving manufacturing town, and poor Mrs. Dorriman had often enough heard of its smoke, of the trees killed by vapours from some sulphur-works, and of the blighted flowers; and, like all people who live alone and in their own

thoughts, exaggerated the miserable prospect before her. She was entirely dependent on her brother, and had no option, but, though she was too timid to make a stand against him, she had enough of the woman in her to think it no harm to circumvent him to a certain extent, especially as he need never know it unless ... and then she broke off thinking, and resolutely buried herself once more in her book, taking in as little of it as before.

She was roused by the sight of the row of small houses which was the beginning of the town, and by the voice of the boy, who broke the two hours' silence and inquired in a stolid voice, "Where wull I put ye doon?"

"At the draper's, Willie; and I will call at the inn when I am ready to go home."

She went into the draper's shop and took thought for a moment—even on such an occasion the habit of her mind was against buying any unnecessary thing—and she gazed a little helplessly at the array of cloth and homespun upon one side of the shop, and at the groceries and barrels of flour and herrings upon the other; the prevailing odour being tarred rope, herrings, and candles of the primitive sort made in the district—dips with much cotton and very little tallow.

The attentive shopman leaned over the counter (she dealt there)—he was half afraid she had come to make some complaint—and he inquired in those dulcet tones in which a distinct fear might have been read, what she required.

Mrs. Dorriman gazed at him a little helplessly and made no answer for a moment or so, and then, in a lower voice than was usual with her, she asked the way to the bank.

Good Mr. Forbes immediately reflected she might have had some bad news, and he moved a chair for her sympathetically, but she would not sit down. Throwing himself over the counter he went to the door and explained that the bank was higher up the street and on the right-hand side —indeed, as the town contained very little except the one very long straggling street, it would have been very difficult to have missed it.

Mrs. Dorriman bowed her thanks, looked out to see that the pony-carriage and boy were well out of sight, having a vague feeling that, if the boy knew she had gone to the bank, all her most private intentions might immediately become known to her brother. Murmuring something indistinct about coming back, she walked up the street, the paving of which was not carried out as a whole, but boasted only of flags before the bettermost houses, and the spaces between were of earth and often muddy.

The unwonted appearance of a lady walking along called every one to their door—the two butchers' shops, not rivals but friends, who killed one sheep on alternate days not to "interfere" with each other—the baker's shop with its complement of bare-footed children around it—the post-office with an imposing board and the most excellent sweeties in one window (which accounted for an occasional stickiness as regarded letters), were all passed, and not giving herself time to think, Mrs. Dorriman hurried on, entered the bank, and asked for Mr. Macfarlane.

Mr. Macfarlane, who had been occasionally at Inchbrae to see her on business, was a little startled by the advent of a woman who had never before been to the bank, and he naturally imagined that some bad news had brought her there.

"I hope," he began, as he came into the small room which was sacred to interviews and away from the hearing of the two young clerks, who wrote diligently at times and made up for their industry at others, by biting the tops of their pens and scanning the county newspaper, every line of which, in default of other literature, they knew by heart—"I hope——"

"It is no bad news," said Mrs. Dorriman, her nervousness betraying itself in her voice; "but there is no one here I can go to about anything—and I want to ask your advice about something."

Mr. Macfarlane knew the world, and he knew also a good deal more about Mrs. Dorriman's position than she did herself. But he was a man who made it a rule never to interfere in any one's business, having enough of his own on his hands. Any one looking at him and having a knowledge of countenances would have seen at once that caution predominated over all other impulses. His expression was an absolute blank just now, and Mrs. Dorriman, who had instinctively turned to him in appeal, shrank a little, and he saw it.

"I am not a man fond of interfering," he said, gravely; "but I hope I can see when I can do a kindness, and do it—always supposing that in doing it I do no one any wrong."

"I want your advice," Mrs. Dorriman said, nervously. In asking advice was she doing her brother any wrong?

"And upon what subject?" Mr. Macfarlane took out his watch, counted the seconds with his thumb and returned it to his pocket. Urged by this evidence of time being precious, poor Mrs. Dorriman, without any of those explanations which she had turned over in her mind as necessary to lead up to the subject, rushed into it at once. "My brother, Mr. Sandford, wishes me to live with him——"

"To live with him?" Mr. Macfarlane was a little surprised, but he knew also that this could not be all. "I suppose he is anxious to have more of a home than a bachelor has as a rule," he said, after a pause.

"He wishes me to give up Inchbrae."

"Give it up! You do not mean to sell it out and out?"

"Yes, he desires me to sell it," and Mrs. Dorriman's voice showed plainly what selling it meant to her, and what a pang it would give her.

Mr. Macfarlane was a little puzzled now. Though he knew a good deal of her history, he was not at all sure what the relations between brother and sister were, that is to say, he knew a great deal, but not *everything*, and he was afraid of making a false move from ignorance, and putting this poor lady into a worse position than she at present was in.

He looked at her expectantly, and then he said kindly, "Then you intend going to him—you intend leaving Inchbrae?"

"I must," she said, nervously.

"And my advice is not needed then, since you have made up your mind."

There was a visible struggle going on in her. "I am afraid I must go, since he wishes it, but—need I sell the place, Mr. Macfarlane?"

"The place is yours—I would not sell it if I were you."

"But he commands me," she said, bitterly, "and——"

"And you do not know what the consequences may be if you refuse to do so?"

"I—I know nothing," she said, helplessly.

Mr. Macfarlane was sorry for her, he understood quite well what was weighing on her—she was afraid of disobeying—she thought herself too much in Mr. Sandford's hands—too much in his power. Before he had time to speak she said, hurriedly, "Perhaps it had better not be discussed, perhaps I had better do it."

But here, the thought of having no home to come to if she was unhappy—the pang of parting with the little place she so loved, where her husband had died, and each shrub and tree of which she had seen planted, was too much for her—and her quivering lips and tearful eyes awoke real sympathy in Mr. Macfarlane's heart.

"What is in your mind, Mrs. Dorriman?" he said, kindly, and putting aside his official air he leaned forward and spoke to her, inviting her to speak her confidence.

Mrs. Dorriman turned red and pale, she was troubled, and her nervousness increased.

"I cannot bear parting with the place for ever," she exclaimed, but in a low voice, "if——" In vain poor Mr. Macfarlane waited, words would not come for some time, then in a hurried way she said, "Could I sell on the understanding that I might buy it back when I chose?"

"Yes, it might be done if the money was in your own hands. Was it bought in your name or in that of Mr. Sandford?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "then it is hopeless!" Her countenance fell, and Mr. Macfarlane was more sorry for her than ever.

He was himself a little puzzled and anxious. He did not know how far she could keep things to herself, and he had to think before he could offer any suggestion; it would never do to be involved in an angry discussion and correspondence with Mr. Sandford. Then a certain sense of shame came to him. He hated getting into any trouble; he hated interfering, but he was an upright man. What he knew justified him in guiding her, and he could not be so mean as to let her risk losing everything when a word might help her. He was cautious, but without entering into details he might advise her. He knew that giving up her house at Mr. Sandford's bidding was probably because Mr. Sandford had good reasons for wishing her to be under his own eye, and he had enough knowledge of circumstances to make him confident that she would lose nothing by being bolder, and asserting herself a little.

"Mrs. Dorriman," he said, impressively, "I do not think that you will find it answer, either to sell the place or to make private conditions about a sale unknown to your brother. My advice to you is simply this: refuse to sell, and let the place—so pretty and pleasant a place will easily let—and point out to your brother that *after your experience of investments* you think it better not to sell, but to keep the rent in your own hands, which will make you independent of his assistance during your stay with him; a lady wants clothes and ... a little money for herself."

Mrs. Dorriman coloured vividly. Now exactly he understood—the remembrance of long ago, when as a girl she had been forced to go to him for every little want, and often and often had gone without things rather than face the taunts and grudging words he showered upon her, came to her now. How well! oh! how well, Mr. Macfarlane understood!

Then that hidden thought came up as it often did when memory went back to those old days, and a flash almost of terror as though she had let her secret escape her shone in her eyes and startled Mr. Macfarlane, who was watching her keenly.

"You are sure that in this instance disobeying my brother will not ... will not do harm?" she said in a faltering voice.

"I am certain of it," he said firmly, "and it is best to act quite straightforwardly—I mean," he said, hurriedly correcting himself when he saw her wince, "you would find yourself in quite a false position if you had nominally agreed to do what your brother wished and yet reserved a power which virtually neutralised the sale."

She bowed her head, "You are right, Mr. Macfarlane, and yet...."

"It is natural you should shrink from doing anything to displease him," he said, trying to follow her thoughts and fancying he had done so.

"It is not quite that—it is not only that," she murmured in a low voice.

She had purposely left the letter at home; she wanted him to help her, and yet she did not wish to show him all, or to tell him the rough terms her brother had used. Like many another person she quite forgot that a half-confidence is worse than none.

Mr. Macfarlane was more puzzled now than ever. What was really at the bottom of all this; what did she fear?

The pale slight woman before him, who had never known peace till now, had evidently some complex mode of reasoning entirely beyond his powers of divination.

Poor woman! she saw her tranquil life slipping past her beyond recall, and the problem present to her now was, how she could let Mr. Macfarlane know, she was not quite at her brother's mercy, that she held something in reserve, without allowing him to guess what that something was?

The impossibility of doing this was by turns before her with its desirability, then she joined her secret thought to his outspoken words, and said in a firm voice, "I will refuse to sell." Mr. Macfarlane was immensely surprised, but, imagining that she was simply following the advice he had given her, he was also flattered. Asking advice generally meant making up your mind beforehand and going to hear the reason for and against having done so, when it was too late to alter anything.

"I am sure you are right," he said, warming towards her, "and anything I can do——"

"You can receive the rent and forward it to me," she said, "when the place is let. I must have time," she said, with a little tremble in her voice, "to arrange and put away my things." Mr. Macfarlane was amused by her simple belief in the production of a desirable tenant at a moment's notice.

He laughed a little. "It will take a little time, Mrs. Dorriman, to get just the person you want; some weeks at any rate. A step like this cannot be taken in a hurry—you yourself will require time."

"Yes, if I can get it," she rejoined, speaking her thought aloud.

"Come and have some luncheon with my wife," he said kindly; "she will make you welcome, I know."

Mrs. Dorriman accepted the proffered kindness, and followed him into the comfortable room where Mrs. Macfarlane was found with five children; who were introduced and dismissed in a breath.

Mrs. Macfarlane was one of those pleasant cheerful kindly women who see the sunny side of life most. She had been a petted daughter, was an idolized wife, and an adored mother. Her husband carried all his perplexities and all his troubles to her, and by so doing lightened them. She had a keen, shrewd way of looking at things, and was so wrapt up in her husband and children that she had no time for outside friendships. Her chief fault (as imperfection in some shape is but human) was her intolerance of imaginary woes, and want of reality in any and every shape.

She thought life was made so unnecessarily hard, not by real circumstances, but by the way those circumstances were dealt with.

She saw no hardship, where health and strength existed, in self-denial for those who were loved. She was completely out of sympathy with people who suffered acutely from what they falsely considered a loss of dignity. She had seven children, a very moderate income, and two servants. If those servants were busy or out, or hard at work, she opened her own front door and saw no harm in it; just as on Sunday she took the milk in when her servants were in church. To say that she had arrived at doing this without some trouble would be untrue, because all her neighbours thought her dreadfully wanting in that high standard of gentility that was their own.

But no woman is consistent without having a certain power and influence amongst her fellows. She had splendid health, and her powers of repartee were so well known that no one cared to lay themselves open to an answer—her absence of ill-health giving her a command of temper that always placed her in an advantageous position.

She was extremely sorry for Mrs. Dorriman: to be alone as she was, to have to face the world without any backbone (which was her way of putting it) was to her, like expecting a fish to swim deprived of its fins.

Nothing more gracious, more kindly, can be conceived than her manner to the poor lady who so

required it, and one slight effect of her influence was amusing enough. Instead of leaving the bank and going to fetch the pony-carriage, Mrs. Dorriman boldly sent for it to come and take her up there.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Dorriman drove home, well wrapped-up, and in a glow of feeling which would have been difficult to analyse. To one who is, as a rule, in an undecided state of mind, the very fact of having come to a decision is a comfortable feeling: besides this, there had been friendliness and kindness just at the moment the poor woman had been sorely needing both—and, though directly opposed to poetical ideas, it may here be surely confessed that excellent food—daintily set before her, and proffered with that true hospitality which nowhere is more real than in Scotland, and was conspicuous in Mrs. Macfarlane—had its share.

Then the support a cheerful, honest, and direct person (above all petty prejudices, and seeing facts disentangled from all complications) is capable of giving, had a most beneficial influence. Mrs. Dorriman's character had suffered in a long and weary contest against petty tyranny—just as a tender sapling may live and grow exposed to adverse and cruel winds, but it will be bent, and twisted, and gnarled, and finally grow stunted and fixed in one direction—an existing proof of the severity to which it was exposed when too young to stand against it.

A child, motherless, and with an invalid father, she had been unwelcome; the half-brother, who was so many years her senior, had asserted his authority harshly over and over again. She had been taught something, in odd ways, as representations from outsiders had been made, and she had learned some lessons not intended to be taught her. By nature anything but strong, she was timid and nervous, shrinking from every one, expecting roughness, repressed and taking refuge by her father's paralysed form as the one place where she could hear no reproaches. She dared make no friends, and she did not distinguish between those she might have made, and those she had better not make. No servant stayed long enough to befriend the child, and her earliest recollection was the departure of her nurse, who having, upon one occasion, got certain dainties for her, and being met by John Sandford, had been dismissed on the spot, as a thief. Mrs. Dorriman could yet remember how she had shivered in the cold nursery that night, and how helplessly she had tried to undress herself; and how, when all was quiet, a kind-hearted rough dairymaid had brought her a bowl of milk and a hunch of bread—and how wretched it had all been since then, when it was no one's business to look after her, and how she had been indebted to one or another servant (as they had tried) to do anything for her. Then a rough school, where no one seemed to care about her and where she was in perpetual disgrace for not knowing lessons she could not even read; the discovery of her appalling ignorance and the mortification of having as a child of nine to stand by little ones of five and learn as they did; the scanty provision sent for her clothes, whose very patches she vividly remembered—a harder nature would have soured for life. Mrs. Dorriman grew up with all the spirit crushed out of her, but she was not hardened. She had no holidays; she was left year after year there till she was seventeen. Then a gleam of joy broke into her life, for she was suddenly summoned home—by her father's wish—and she had arrived to find that he had made a rally, and that John Sandford was not there.

Her father could barely speak, even inarticulately. She yet could recall his wondering touch upon her shabby gown, and how, almost as in a fairy-tale, she had suddenly found herself in possession of much she had never dreamed of having.

His one happiness seemed to be to see her, and to have her near him. A few months passed like this—very few. She had arrived poorly clad, and suffering from the acute cold and bitter wind, in late autumn; when the snowdrops were still blooming, and the earliest trees were yet in bud, he died suddenly; giving her just before his death a little case in which she saw a lovelier fairer likeness of herself—her mother.

She had loved him with all the love that had never before had an outlet. The days that followed were like a painful dream. What she had, what her position was—of all this she knew absolutely nothing. The one thing she clung to was the old grey house, with the great beech and plane trees, and silver firs, up which the squirrels (imps of mischief though they are) ran so gracefully. The sea—the friend of all, giving society and music to the desolate, and rejoicing the hearts of those who are lighthearted enough to enjoy its sparkling moods—that sea was now her friend. To wander in the wood and look down upon it; to let its salt spray touch her face as it broke upon the rocks.—She loved it in every mood, and found there something of the comfort which the absence of any intimate religion deprived her of, the bald learning of a few verses, the chapters read in the morning in a dull tone by a shivering teacher in the fireless schoolroom; where, from motives of economy, the fire (generally kindled with damp sticks, and which hardly ever did anything but smoke) was never even allowed to have a match put to it till the girls were all assembled there.

This had been her religious instruction; and, as the church was very far from them, they seldom went, and, when they did go, the walk was too long for her, and most painful from the chilblains, which caused her much suffering; so that cold and pain were the chief impressions in connection with a sense of fatigue which left her half-awake in church, and employing all her energy in trying to conceal the fact of her drowsiness.

Then one day, while looking out on the sea, some few months after her father's death, her hat off, and a vague sense of wishing she had something to look forward to, pressing upon her, Mr. Dorriman had come, and her brother.

Instead of the usual sneering tone in which John Sandford addressed his sister, she was startled out of herself by hearing him speak with civility. The surprise gave her a brilliant glow, which touched her face with colour and lightened it up. Mr. Dorriman thought her lovely. Her gentle helplessness was another great attraction, an attraction which every day's acquaintance increased. Without fully understanding how it all came about she found herself Mrs. Dorriman, and content to be so and to get away from the roughness and unkindness which was all that she ever knew of the brotherly tie. At first she had not been unhappy. Mr. Dorriman was so fond of her and so carefully surrounded her with comforts and kindness that she was more than content, though she was not in the least in love with him. But soon shadows came. A man of some property, he was unfortunately surrounded by men of wealth. He argued that where those round him made gigantic fortunes he could do the same—putting upon one side the important fact that they had been trained to business and he had not. He plunged into every opening where he thought he saw a chance of success; losses only made him more certain of success in a new direction. He was upright, honourable, and kind-hearted to a fault. He knew really nothing of business, and imagined that in a few days he could master details other men had spent their whole lives in studying—and in this idea John Sandford confirmed him. After seven years of anxieties, and hopes, and fears, he found himself ruined in health from over-worry, broken in fortune, and not able to shield his wife from the consequences. That she had never loved him he knew and had long known. But he had learned from her something of her life and of the absence of happiness which had made her what she was. He also had many a score against John Sandford could he but live to pay them. There was much in the transactions between them he could not understand, and which, looking back upon now by the light of his failures, quite apart from his own speculations, he was certain, he had reason to know, had not been fair or right. But this conviction came to him too late; before he had done more than collect notes and tabulate letters he was struck down by fever, which his constitution could not stand, and Mrs. Dorriman found herself at twenty-five a widow, at the mercy of the world and her brother.

This little place of Inchbrae had been bought by her husband for her when he found how much the sea entered into her thoughts and how she loved it, and he went there to die, leaving her, he thought, a home, and a home she liked.

Mrs. Dorriman, however, after thinking that all was not lost, so she had it, only learned afterwards that she was there as a tenant at will; the place was hers, but all else had passed into her brother's hands in virtue of some claim he had on her husband's property, and she had not a penny!

The last blow completed that helpless feeling of indignation she had against her husband's incapacity for business. The test of a woman's love, as we have said, is adversity, and poor Mrs. Dorriman had never any love to begin with. She possessed her soul in patience before the world, but only before the world; in secret it was one long incessant protest against her fate. She felt in her heart of hearts, though even to herself she did not so plainly speak, that she had not received her share of the bargain. She had married to get out of her brother's power, and she had been a dutiful if not an affectionate wife, and now she was more in her brother's hands than ever! More because she was a proud woman, and her brother made her plainly understand that much that was painful as regarded her husband's transactions might be brought forward by him if he chose to do so.

It was just at that time, just when a helpless sense of loss every where filled her and made her very wretched, and that she was gathering everything together to go away, that Mrs. Dorriman came upon a whole box of papers, some letters all marked and arranged in order, receipts, and other things.

Poor Mr. Dorriman's great idea of business was keeping and docketing every line he ever received, and copies of much that he wrote.

His widow looked at these documents with something of the pang with which we see the relics of a hand no longer there. Indeed, since her husband's death, the faint affection she had had for him had undergone a change. She was indignant when she thought of his business incapacity, but she missed his kindness and she regretted him more each day, as each day taught her how much he had cared for her.

Should she burn these papers, or not? Timid as she was constitutionally—she looked round her, and at that moment she saw her brother coming up to the house. Afraid he might sneer at her sentimentality, or say something to vex her about her looking at them, she hastily pushed the box under the sofa, and sat down, not wishing to conceal anything, but merely from that one idea, that, if he saw her with the old letters before her, he might wound her in some way.

Her brother's visit taught her for the very first time that in that box might lie documents of importance to her husband and to her.

After sitting down for a moment or two, he rose and moved about restlessly, and then he said—

"I have to find some papers; where did your husband keep his papers?" Without expecting an answer, he said, "Oh, I know, in his writing-table drawers." And, without waiting for her to speak, he went into her husband's room, and she heard him lock the door.

Mrs. Dorriman rose, and, filling the skirt of her dress with some of the papers, she made silent and successive journeys to her own bedroom, where she concealed all, hastily throwing some skeins of worsted into the empty box, and once again sat down. She knew nothing—but there must be some reason for her brother's anxiety, and she had suffered so much at his hands that her whole instinct was alive in self-defence.

But a timid woman does not act in this way for the first time in her life without betraying something of the agitation into which it had thrown her.

When Mr. Sandford, with angry and baffled eyes, came back to her, he saw something in her face which roused his suspicions. To have put the suspicion into words would have perhaps roused hers, but from that moment the poor woman's dream of a peaceful life at Inchbrae with no one to dread, was a dream that had no foundation. He went away a day or two afterwards, and she lulled herself into a belief of contentment. So soon as Mr. Sandford's plans were made, though it took weeks and months to arrange them, he summoned her to his house. Certain in his own mind that she had concealed those papers, he determined to have such a hold over her as would give him the power of getting them into his own hands, if they were there.

In the meantime the fruits of her visits to the Macfarlanes appeared in the letter which she sent to Mr. Sandford next day.

> "DEAR BROTHER," she wrote,
>
> "I am quite willing to go and keep house for you for a time, but I will let my house and prefer not selling it; I like the place and do not wish to part with it.
>
> "When I have made my arrangements I and my maid will go to you. I will write again when I know the day and hour on which I can leave.
>
> "Your affectionate
>
> "SISTER SUSAN."

She felt happier when she had thus boldly asserted her freedom of choice.

Two days came and went, two lovely autumnal days, during which poor Mrs. Dorriman, instead of preparing to depart, wandered over the little place, every nook and corner of which was sweet to her at all times, and was doubly dear to her now she was going away. Late in the afternoon of the third day she was walking down the burn-side, stopping ever and again to look with renewed admiration at the scenery round her, and watching the purple bloom upon the distant hills as the evening shadows came down, a purple tinge which was reflected in the sea except where a blaze of gold in the sky shone with more broken lights below; the sun was low behind the hills, and heavy clouds speaking of rain to come were lowering in fine contrast with the vivid light lying between them and the hills. The sea-birds were agitated and astir; from the open sea upon her left came that hoarse strange murmur hurrying up like a relentless fate across the bosom of the sea. The light faded, grew less and less as the clouds descended, the wind increased in violence, and everything spoke of a coming storm.

Mrs. Dorriman saw the rain-clouds burst and stream down in the distance; she could not move, that curious foreshadowing of coming evil which we call presentiment made her cling to the spot. She heard herself called, she would not turn, she knew if she turned she would all the sooner hear what she did not want to hear. Then her faithful maid, the creature who cared more for her than any one, came up to her and touched her.

"The boy is waiting," she said, breathless with the speed she had used. "Here is a telegram, and oh, my dear, there's nine whole shillings to pay. It's no mistake—it's marked on it. I hope it may be worth all that good money."

Mrs. Dorriman clutched the telegram in her hand, and went swiftly up the path and to her own room.

Before she got in the rain had come to them, and it came down with a violence which the wind seemed to increase as it dashed it against the windows. As her foot was on the stair Mrs. Dorriman's kindly nature made her say,

"Be good to the boy, Jean; he cannot face the storm for a bit."

Jean, who was one of those dear old women whose delight is in ministering to some one's wants, and who was never happier than when having the opportunity of doing so, went into the kitchen happy, and was soon busy heating "a fine sup of broth for him," and other things as well—when she heard a cry.

Setting the broth before him, and carefully shutting all the doors, that he, an outsider, should hear nothing, Jean hurried upstairs. Mrs. Dorriman was sitting on the sofa, and looking white and miserable. The open telegram lay on the ground. She had flung it away as we fling away something that hurts us, and when Jean came in she laid hold of her arm, and pointed to it.

Jean lifted it up, and read as follows:—

"I have sold the place, and you are to be here at six o'clock next Saturday—without fail. The new proprietor will be there that day. No maid or other servant can come here."

Jean read and re-read—she did not take it all in at first. Then an indignation and a whole storm of righteous wrath rose within her.

She put her arms round poor Mrs. Dorriman, and they mingled their tears together.

A few words went back in answer to Mr. Sandford's telegram:—

"I will come, as I must come, on Saturday."

This message did not go for many hours. The boy was in no great hurry to leave the comfortable quarters he was in, and got back too late for the message to leave that night.

Mr. Sandford, aware that his sister would not have asserted herself in so unwonted a manner had she not gained spirit and strength from some source unknown to him, had passed a sleepless and agitated night, after receiving her letter.

In his dealings with Mr. Dorriman there were so many things that might appear against him. He was too cautious and too clever a man to put upon paper himself a word that might at any time rise up against him. But he knew Mr. Dorriman's ways; he knew that the one business-like habit he had was the tidy and careful way he had of docketing and filing all his papers. How often had the poor man not pointed to those carefully-folded and initialed slips, as a proof of how entirely nature had intended him for a thorough man of business?

Though Mr. Sandford, with a flow of language, and great powers of speech, could always confute him in an argument, how often he himself had felt uncomfortable when some paper he had entirely forgotten re-appeared in a moment, with its initial letter and note, showing to what it referred, written in a fine clear style outside.

One book, and only one of any importance, had he found in the writing-table drawers. This book was a carefully drawn up list of the papers Mr. Dorriman considered valuable or of any importance. It was written in that curiously neat and precise hand to be found generally in those who have nothing to do, and do that methodically.

All Mr. Dorriman's conception of business lay in this orderly manner of keeping papers; his losses and his gains were to him all vagueness. He hoped to get something by taking shares in one or another company, and he believed implicitly in whatever it was at the moment; was not only enthusiastic, but tired out his friends by the manner in which at inappropriate moments he introduced the hobby of the hour, which was to make his own fortune so completely that his good heart wanted all his friends to become rich in a like manner.

The immediate cause of his failure had been a carpet manufactory. Needless to say, he did not know one carpet from another, but it was sufficient for him that other people did. Wool was all round him on the hills, and the same primitive dyes of our forefathers still existed on every muir.

The Cluny Macpherson plaid is the first and most primitive of all tartans, having only the natural colours of the wool—the bloom and the root of the heather in its manufacture.

Mr. Dorriman was fired with the ambition of producing carpets on the same principle, where only black and white, purple and yellow, were to be combined.

His first expense was, of course, machinery; his second storehouses; his third was in experimenting how to extract the purple from the hills in a satisfactory manner, and at small expense. Then it occurred to him that growing the wool himself would be such a splendid idea! and quantities of sheep were bought—without much reference to their keep—and his first experience in connection with them was, that not having sufficient turnips of their own they not unnaturally laid siege to those of their neighbours, and so effectually, that heavy damages had to be met. Then he had not taken into consideration that there was no railway near him—and he had to procure carts to carry fuel to feed his engines.

Here he is spoken of in the singular number, but five people joined him in this enterprise. There were some carpets made upon the principle of primitive colours of no particular pattern; they were made of the best wool, and would probably wear for a long time, but their ugliness was their most salient feature; they cost an enormous sum of money to produce, and the result of a struggling existence for three years was to carpet his own house, much against his wife's inclinations, to provide certain carpets for the other members, to sell a few at a loss, and to collapse. Mr. Dorriman was not one of those men who, because they are extremely sanguine at one moment, are proportionately depressed at another. He bore disappointment with unflinching good humour, and was so immediately interested in a new scheme that the sense of failure never rested long upon him. In this instance, however, whether from failing health or from some cause not evident, he was seriously affected. Though he did not know it—he was the only one of the six investors who had any real property, and the consequence was that the whole loss fell upon his unfortunate shoulders.

To Inchbrae, his wife's little property, his thoughts turned. There he went and there he died; and it was only then, as before said, that a glimmer of reproach at her want of understanding touched his wife, and she had kissed him tenderly.

The record in his book that troubled Mr. Sandford's peace was not any written record, it was

what was left blank. After detailing various papers there came this:—

LETTERS FROM JOHN SANDFORD.

1. About the broken fences at Ardenthird.

2. " sale of larch-poles.

3. " advice on the subject of wool.

4. Papers and memorandums of his conversation about my wife's money.

5. Memorandums, written verbatim on same subject.

6. Certified copies, verbatim, on same subject.

7. Certified copies, verbatim, on same subject.

8. Transcribed conversation word for word.

9. Have not succeeded in seeing my father-in-law's will.

10. Copy of paper ... old Mr. Sandford.

What did all these last memorandums refer to? He had not seen the will. What paper had he a copy of, and why had he had that paper copied, and who had copied it for him? This book which John Sandford carried away with him gave him the most endless and intense anxiety. His own conscience spoke of a thousand things, a thousand transactions between them, that must not see the light. The very vagueness of it all was an additional trouble to him.

Through the day this annoyance pressed upon him, but through the night these shadows became real fears. He tormented himself in vain. Sixth and seventh all blank. Those unwritten words might be of terrible moment to him, for, as all men have their ambition in one or another corner, John Sandford had his—to be looked up to and to be respected. He was wealthy, but he remembered enough of the old days to know that mere wealth would bring but outward respect, and that character was the real power there, in that land where he craved for power. For power was what he really loved; he loved to feel that his will was law, and till his poor half-sister married he had made her feel this, as he tried to make every one else feel it. When he received her answer he was absolutely frantic; the least opposition to his will made him all the more resolute to enforce it, and he knew immediately that in some way unknown to him she had gathered strength. There was an assertion of herself in her answer both new and unexpected. All the more was he determined she should come under his roof. There was another reason, though he thought of it as a reason only when the desirability of her being under his own immediate supervision became so evident to him.

Mr. Sandford had married when in India, though, as his wife died within the year, and no one had ever seen her in Scotland, the fact was often entirely forgotten.

How his marriage would have turned out eventually is more than any one can say, but it had been the one softening influence in his life, and the one real grief had been his wife's loss. She had a twin sister who died before her, leaving two little girls, and the one request she had time to make was that he would always befriend these children for her sake; she made him promise this. Under the softening influences of the moment he had written to their relations telling them of his promise, and assuring them of his intention to keep his word if called upon to do so.

Having done this, and having received letters expressive of their gratitude, he forgot them as completely as though no such children existed.

Four years before the time when Mrs. Dorriman sat in tears at Inchbrae, in the arms of her faithful Jean, Mr. Sandford received a letter the purport of which was, that the little girls were now orphans, their circumstances not so good as might be, and in consequence of his promise (vide copy of letter inclosed) the old lady who had cared for them wrote to him for assistance and advice.

And he gave both, and assisted them at school, and now when these girls were respectively 18 and 16 he was once more asked in what way he intended to befriend them, and if they might still look to him for counsel and assistance?

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Sandford, having arranged through his banker about the small payments annually required for the two children, Grace and Margaret Rivers, had never given them much thought since. Their own money had made his payments of small account, though something had been necessary, and the payment of that something was as necessary to his sense of what his promise to his wife meant, as to the comfort and well-being of the children themselves. Having fulfilled what he conceived his duty his mind was at ease; he had kept his promise and it had not inconvenienced him. He was essentially a man who thought that all obligations could be wiped off by money, in some shape or other. When he went to church, which he did only because it was the

right thing to do, he gave largely, comprising the whole extent of the charity which was expected of him in that one gift. He gave always the same sum, and felt then that he had done his duty, but he could never understand why people talked sometimes of the "blessedness of giving" and of "a glow of satisfaction." He felt no glow, and, not being by nature a generous man, he thought giving a disagreeable thing; it would have been more disagreeable if he had had less to give; even as it was, he grudged it, and considered it as a very tiresome part of his position.

When he got the letter asking his future wishes about the girls he was very much annoyed. He was not well, having caught cold, and, as he was a man who never showed the slightest consideration for his servants, he had no old servants. There was no one in his house who took any interest in him; he was their paymaster and taskmaster, nothing more. His cold became feverish and he was really ill, so ill that he, for the first time, felt his loneliness. When he rang, his bell was promptly answered, and the trifle he wanted, more because he wanted an excuse to have some one near him, even for a moment, than from any real want, given to him; he lay in lonely state, and felt his loneliness terribly. The undefined dread about his half-sister, the shadowy fears of what those blanks in the list might mean, came and tormented him. There is an old and pathetic saying that deeds of kindness are the brightest lamps round a man's death-bed, but he had no such lamps; he had lived for himself; he could remember nothing, no words of gratitude, for he had earned none: worse than that, he had not always been just in his dealings. Then this letter came and here was a new complication.

He was worse than ever next day; all through the night his fears had been exaggerated and had kept him awake, and in the morning the doctor was sent for—for the first time he wanted one. When he came he was struck by the desolate and uncomfortable look of the rich man's surroundings; his servants were too much afraid of him to spend one unnecessary moment in his company; the contrast between services paid for, and services given from love and affection, were startling to a man who saw the poor in their hours of sickness, and who saw the tenderness of heart and the care amongst them, however roughly it might be shown. He knew little of the man before him, except that he had been a hard man to his brother-in-law and to the half-sister whom he had seen in former days, by the father's side, so often; but he was full of compassion for him and for his want of womanly care and kindness.

"You should have womankind, in some way, about you," he said. "You are not so ill; you will pull through this all right; but you may be ill again, and you need care and kindness. What a pity you have no family! Many a man would marry if he could look forward and see himself left to the mercy of servants and strangers when he is ill."

"I lost my wife," said John Sandford, abruptly.

"I'm sorry," said Doctor Bayne. "I forgot that; I now remember hearing of it. Well, it cannot be helped, but it makes a great difference having young ones about one; young people make one young again."

He stayed some time from pure kindness, and Mr. Sandford was anything but grateful to him; he wanted to think out by himself the thought his words had given him. However, he asked him to come next day; his visit was something to look forward to.

When he left Mr. Sandford lay quietly thinking.

"Young people make one young again."

Perhaps this was true; he was not old; he was strong and had never been ill. He was a hale strong man under sixty, and yet the doctor spoke as though now he must expect illness, then after illness came the end, yes, the end!

The evening shadows crept slowly over everything; all the hours since the doctor had left him John Sandford lay quiet, thinking, thinking of all that had come and gone, all that might come and go.

At length he slept, and in his sleep, caused by the soothing draught given to him, he dreamed strange things; some one, his sister, seemed pursuing him with something that always threatened to overwhelm him, and two girls kept warding it off. He saw their outstretched hands, and he had a sort of consciousness that with them there, she could not hurt him. The dream was so vivid that when he woke he looked round him expecting still to see the pursuing figure. He gave a deep sigh, the reality had been to terrible so him.

The morning light was struggling against the night shadows; it was still very early, so early that no one was astir, save a sleepy girl whose duty it was to light the kitchen-fire, and who was so startled by the sound of his bell that she let her sticks burn out without any coal while she went and stared at the bell-clapper as though there she could discover the reason for its early motion. As she looked it rang again, the master must be ill—what ought she to do? Rouse the cook and risk a furious scolding from her, or go and see what he wanted? While she was hesitating it rang a third time, and in her confusion she did both, she rushed into the cook's room and told her the bell was ringing like mad, and that Mr. Sandford was ill, and she fled upstairs in breathless haste, and knocked and went in, expecting to see her master on the floor in a fit, when she was quite prepared to throw her apron over her head and scream to the best of her ability.

"What do you mean by keeping me waiting and not answering my bell?" he asked in a tone of fury.

She was so surprised to find him able to speak at all that she held her tongue, and this was the best thing she could do.

"I want writing materials and a cup of tea," he said. "Where is Robert?"

"I believe he's in bed, sir, and Mrs. Chalmers, she is not up. I'll make some tea."

"And what the —— do I keep servants for, if they are all to lie in bed in the morning?"

The girl, frightened by his manner, left his door wide open, and he had the satisfaction of hearing her call out to the head of the establishment: "Oh, Mrs. Chalmers, maister Sandford he's just very ill, and he is just lying there and cursing and swearing like anything."

Mrs. Chalmers, fat, forty, but not fair, panted upstairs, raging at Robert for not being "at hand."

Mr. Sandford repeated his wishes, and he added, "It's high time you had a mistress to look after you all, and you'll have one too."

Down went Mrs. Chalmers, who was "that upset" she first sat down and had a cry, then she scolded the girl violently, making those general and vague accusations which are so much harder to bear than any that are definite; scolded Robert and the housemaid, who was used to it, and had too thick a skin to mind; and, the tea being made, she poured out the first cup for Mr. Sandford, which was less good than the second, which she took for herself; then she felt better and retired to her room, till the house was "right," and to reflect in silence upon the threat held over her of a mistress to keep all in order.

It will be seen that all these things together combined to bring about two results—the peremptory command to Mrs. Dorriman, and an invitation to Grace and Margaret Rivers to consider Renton House as their home, at any rate for the present.

If there was a wide difference between the way this invitation was given, there was a still wider difference in the way it was received. We have seen how poor Mrs. Dorriman felt it to be the loss of her independence and the uprooting of her quiet and peaceful life.

But the Rivers girls had that boundless spring of hope that is the delightful portion of youth and health combined; and in the invitation conveyed to them through the banker they only saw fresh kindness.

They had been all these years at a very second-rate English school; they had no visitors, nothing, not even holidays, to break the monotony of school life, and the prospect of going anywhere was exciting.

They had the misfortune there of being just a little above their companions in position, their father being a man of good family and their mother well connected; they had also a little independence of their own, a hundred and twenty pounds a year, and they were the wards of Mr. Sandford, whose wealth was immensely exaggerated, as fortune often is when at all undefined.

The two sisters who kept the school were kindly-intentioned, weak, and very ignorant women, whose educational deficiencies did not they thought signify, because they supervised only, and taught nothing themselves—the fact being that they were not capable of distinguishing real teaching from something of a very superficial kind.

The girls went there at six and eight years old; they were nice-looking girls, with no real beauty, but good-looking enough for partial friends to admire, and enemies to dispraise their personal appearance. The old ladies were fond of them, flattered and spoiled them, and their companions followed suit. Never did two girls go out into the wide world less fitted to take up a position in it properly. Grace had a rooted conviction that in some way she was a little better than every one else, and must always lead everywhere; and Margaret, herself very gentle, timid, and of a clinging nature, saw everything from Grace's standpoint, measured everything by Grace's standard, conceived her to be the most beautiful, cleverest, and most wonderful creature ever made, and thought it quite natural that she should expect always to be first everywhere. Everything she did she conceived to be almost inspired, she admired her, looked up to her, and had not a thought or feeling of her own, apart from her.

The girls left school, escorted as far as Edinburgh by a teacher going there. They were very much surprised no one met them there, but they went on to Glasgow, confident that here some one would come for them.

Never, as far as they could remember, had they left school since first going there, and even Grace, who was independent and capable, she thought, of going anywhere by herself, was depressed when they arrived in Glasgow.

It was a drizzling, dark autumnal day, the heavy pall of smoke that makes that prosperous place look so dismal and dingy to all outsiders, lay over everything. They could not see a hundred yards on either side of them, and when they got out of the carriage they were bewildered and dejected.

Every one seemed too busy to attend to them, and Grace thought it most extraordinary, and Margaret still more extraordinary, that no one paid her any attention. Surely they could all see who she was?

It was with difficulty that they got some information, and found that they had to go to a different station, and in haste, too, if they wished to catch the only train that went to Renton that night.

Tired and disappointed, they got a cab, and no more forlorn girls crossed the busy town than those two that day.

At the other station, by some mishap, but one clerk was left to attend to the demands of first, second, and third class passengers, and there was a crowd on either side. Grace nearly gave it up in despair, and had only just time to run for her train, leaving her dignity for the moment to take care of itself.

When they got to Renton they looked about—no one was there. Their spirits again sank considerably, and it was with ruffled temper, coming of wounded self-consequence, that Grace got into a cab with her sister, and crawled on up the hill to Renton House.

What she had expected, or what her dreams had been, is a matter of no moment, for they vanished there and then. A short tree-less drive up to a square house of no great size, with a good honest cabbage-garden beside and behind it,—a field, in which fluttered some household washing, and the town, smoky and full of factories below it, this was the palace of her dreams, the Renton House to which she had already invited (luckily in a very vague manner) her favourite schoolfellows.

Robert, who wore no particular clothes, answered the door, and showed them into a large primly-furnished room, and went off to announce their arrival to Mr. Sandford.

He came in and received them kindly enough, told them to wash their hands quickly as dinner was ready. But his pompous manner chilled them. Something in it seemed to say so plainly to them—"You have no real claim upon me, but I am giving you my countenance all the same."

In their room alone, the sisters looked at each other for a moment in silence; then their hearts sank, and forgetting time, and all but their disappointment, they cried in each others arms long and bitterly.

It was characteristic of Grace, that, in all her trouble and depression, she still thought of changing her dress. Dinner was ready, and they were twice sent for, but though Margaret was ready she would not go down by herself; and her sister, who wished to make an impression, was particular to the last item; the correct tying of a bow, and the placing of it exactly where it should produce the desired effect.

They went downstairs, and found the drawing-room empty; lower still to the dining-room, where Mr. Sandford had an unpromising scowl upon his brow.

"Less might have served you," he said, glancing at the girls, "when I was waiting."

"I am very sorry," began Margaret, but she was stopped by Grace—

"You might have put dinner off," she said, coolly, "as our train gets here so late—it was quite impossible to be ready sooner."

Mr. Sandford stared at her attentively for a moment; a grim smile crossed his face; but he looked from her to her sister, and his countenance softened. Margaret was very like his wife—not so good-looking he thought, but like—and he was glad, and he took a fancy to her from that time.

There was plenty of everything, though all was plain. Mr. Sandford said little; Grace was the chief speaker, and what she said did not please him. She found fault with the trains, the smoke, the bustle, the inconvenience at the railway-station. He heard her in silence for some time, and then, looking up, he said, sarcastically—

"If I had thought of it, I might have ordered a special train for you."

Grace was slow to see a joke against herself, but she had an uncomfortable feeling (very dimly felt) that such a thing might be possible—in him.

Dinner went on. Mr. Sandford, from beneath his shaggy brows, watched the girl before him. He was immensely amused by her airs and graces; and, as observation is frequently mistaken for admiration by wiser people than Grace Rivers, she rose from table quite satisfied with a success which she intended should lead to many important results.

She talked a good deal about this to Margaret that night when they went to their room, and about all the reforms she intended to make in the household. Margaret listened, with all the deference she was accustomed to pay to Grace's remarks, and no misgiving crossed the mind of either sister as to the complete power to be in Grace's hands.

"I shall have a great deal to do," she said, in a tone of much importance, as they finally composed themselves to rest.

As it was her last thought at night, so it was her first idea next morning.

The room they were in was a large square room, and off it was a room that corresponded with the drawing-room below, having equally with it the only bow window in the house, and commanding a country view over some green fields.

It was full of lumber—of old maps, school-books, &c.,—and, as is often the case where no womanly eye is there to interfere, various accumulations it was nobody's business to look after, had gathered there.

Broken china and broken chairs, some old prints, with their glasses broken also. Whatever happened was there concealed from Mr. Sandford's view.

"We will clear this out," said Grace, "put it to rights, and make this our sitting-room."

But she found her determination confronted at the very outset by Mr. Sandford's opposition.

"Is the drawing-room not big enough for you? What do you want a sitting room for? You should be glad enough to have a good warm room; let it be, I am not going to have the house upset by you or any one else."

"But we want a place where we can work and not mind making a litter," urged Grace, "and we can do it ourselves."

"Leave it alone," he said, gruffly, and he walked out of the room.

Grace made a gesture of despair.

"Here will be a more difficult task than I thought," she said, pathetically, to her sister. "Is it not hard that I should have so much trouble at the very beginning?"

"It is hard, darling," said Margaret, gently, "but you will get all you want soon; you know every one does what you like at last; you must just make him do it after a bit, when you know him better."

Grace's next effort was in the direction of the cook; she was determined to bring about a great improvement in her performances. Had she not attended a whole series of cookery classes, and learned how to ice cakes, and many other useful things? With great dignity she rang the drawing-room bell, and when Robert appeared she said, "Send the cook to me."

Robert grinned from ear to ear, and came back again in a very few minutes.

"Cook's busy and cannot come." He stood and looked at her.

Grace made no answer.

"I am to take any message," he said, longing to raise some little disturbance.

"If she does not choose to come for orders I shall give none," she said after a moment with a visible accession to her dignity, and Robert reluctantly departed.

The sisters began unpacking their things, and Grace's spirits rose when they had made their room more like the only home they had ever known.

That evening, when dinner was over, Grace began upon the subject of her duties to Mr. Sandford.

"I do not want to lead a useless life," she began, having well thought over her speech beforehand, but finding it terribly difficult to say it to him now, while his grey eyes, keen, hard, and cold, looked at her unflinchingly, "I want to be useful."

"Indeed?"

"Yes," she said, gaining more courage, "I intend taking a great deal of trouble and getting things right, and being really useful, I do not intend to eat the bread of idleness."

"Are you thinking of being a governess?"

A cold-water douche would hardly have been a greater shock to her.

"I meant I wanted to be useful here."

"Oh! You wanted to be useful. In what way?"

Poor Grace!

"I thought you would like me to order dinner, and—look after things."

"Have you had any experience? I thought you had always been at school. Did you order the dinners there?"

There was something almost insolent in his tone, and Grace through all the thick skin of her self-love, which generally prevented her seeing or feeling any intended slight, winced.

She rallied her courage, however, and said, "As we are with you and it is usual for a lady to be the mistress of the house, I thought...."

John Sandford threw himself back in his chair and laughed out loud. He was immensely tickled by this girl's assumption. His sense of humour—rarely touched—was reached by it; the situation seemed to him to have all the elements of the ridiculous in it, and his laugh was an unaccustomed and noisy laugh—under no control. An angry flush rose on Grace's face, Margaret saw it, and, as usual, threw herself into the breach—

"Grace only meant to do what she thought was her duty," she said bravely, "and it is unkind of you to treat her so—and, my dear Grace don't mind," and she rose and threw her arms round her.

"You are right, my girl," said Mr. Sandford, looking at her with increased respect. "It's a pity your

sister does not take a leaf out of your book. 'Those who don't walk on tiptoes need never come down on their heels,' a homely saying but a true one;" then turning to Grace, against whom he felt no softening influence, he said drily, "I am obliged to you for offering to make yourself the mistress of my house, and of not wishing to eat the bread of idleness, and all the rest of it. It all sounds very fine, but if I wanted a mistress—which I do not, being provided with one already—I should not choose an inexperienced girl under twenty, for the post. However, I have to tell you it is not necessary. My sister, Mrs. Dorriman, comes to-morrow, to be the mistress of this house; without her or some one like her, I could not have asked you here; and when she comes, it is my wish that you look up to her and obey her in all things."

Here was a thunder-clap. The girls looked at each other in dismay. His sister! she would then be a feminine edition of himself! All the poor children's dreams of having their time to themselves, and of being to all intents and purposes free, fell to the ground; the shock made Grace silent and Margaret's eyes filled with tears.

"I hope you quite understand," Mr. Sandford said roughly, pleased by the effect he had produced, "I have not reached my time of life to be worried and troubled by female rows and disturbances—and, if you cannot make up your mind to swallow your pride and knock under, you will have to find out some other way of eating bread, whether of idleness or the reverse."

With the scowl that clouded his face whenever he was angry he looked at Grace, resolutely keeping his face away from Margaret, whose glance had a strange influence over him, and, pushing back his chair, he rose and walked out of the room.

Grace rose also. She was pale and defiant, not in the mood to tolerate even Margaret's caresses, she went to their own room; and, chilly though it was, she threw open the window, feeling as though she was suffocating. For the first time in all her life she had been spoken to rudely and insolently, and made to feel her dependence. Fate was indeed cruel: why was she left to the mercy of the world and Mr. Sandford? She would not stay with him—to be bullied and hectored and ordered about by him and his sister. She would go—but where?

The spasm of pain, of rage, and of indignation, surged through her—for the first time in all her life her vanity and her self-love had been sorely wounded. She was suffering acutely, and just at that moment when she was railing against her fate and every one connected with it a letter from her old school-mistress was put into her hands. She read it and shrank as she did so, the fond words in which so much affectionate flattery was mixed, struck her almost as though written in mockery, she was not to allow her present life of splendour to make her idle: she had such great gifts, she was to use them; she was not to allow vanity about her personal appearance to disfigure her mind; though queen-like in appearance she was to walk humbly, &c. &c.

She sat down, staring at her surroundings. What splendour was there in the four-post bed with its moreen curtains and the hideous carpet which was the exact opposite of all she had been taught to like? She did not pursue the thought, and it never dawned upon her that her great gifts and her queen-like grace were equally untrue. She accepted everything, and no one can blame her for so doing, but no greater cruelty could have been done her than the false standard and over-estimation of herself given her, so completely enshrouding her, that one day the awakening would be terrible to her.

Her sister's innocent pleasure over the letter and the hearty way in which she endorsed the flattery, made her once more a comfort to her, and once again she turned towards her and spoke.

"What are we to do about this woman, this sister, this Mrs. Dorriman, Madge?"

Margaret laughed softly.

"You will get the better of them all in time," she said; "you make every one do as you like; every one admires you so much; you are so clever, darling, and so beautiful. I am quite sure you will marry a duke."

Grace smiled; she was beginning to forget the wound she had received, and her sister's consolations were very sweet to her. She went to bathe her face and said, laughingly,

"Unfortunately no dukes are in sight here; and Margaret," she said suddenly, with a little shudder, "I feel as if in this dreary place no one will ever come."

"That is nonsense, darling," Margaret said quietly; "the prince always comes just when great distress is there, just when the princess needs him."

A turn in the cabbage-garden, revealed a few coloured leaves and some late flowers mixed with the "useful" vegetables; these were better than nothing, and the girls gathered them and then went through the town, attracting, of course, a good deal of attention in that out-of-the-way place, where few gentry ever came.

Grace went home not altogether unhappy. One or two clerks and several of the shop people had followed her and her sister with admiring glances, and, in the absence of all else, this was acceptable.

She returned to the house in good-humour, and walked more daintily than ever, meeting Mr. Sandford at the front door. He had come home earlier than usual to receive his sister. He was satisfied to see she was not sulky; if she had been he had made up his mind to put it down, and

her too, at once.

Grace was, however, soon in her own room, getting ready for the encounter she dreaded. From the first Mrs. Dorriman should be taught the place she was to have; outwardly she might be mistress, order dinner, and keep the servants in their places, but, as regarded interference with her and Margaret, it was not to be, and she was thirsting to make this evident to her and settle it all at once.

As usual she was rehearsing the words and the manner in which she should speak when Mr. Sandford called her. He had his own notion of what was respectful to his sister, and before she had time to make a stand or say a word she had intended to say he was hurrying her downstairs with no very gentle grip upon her arm, having made up his mind that, as the proper thing to do was to go downstairs to the front door to receive Mrs. Dorriman, there she should go.

The carriage was not in sight even, but he had seen the train come in; and as Grace, standing beside him at the open hall-door, felt the cold wind blowing in upon her, she added this to the other wrongs, and almost hated him.

CHAPTER IV.

The last afternoon of her stay at Inchbrae had come. Mrs. Dorriman, under the impression she was working very hard, carried several things upstairs that ought to have remained down, and wandered about helplessly, a terrible sense of having an enormous deal to do and to arrange pressing upon her; mixed with that ever constant and depressing feeling which distinguished her, of not being up to the mark. Can anything be more dreadful than a consciousness that strength is *not* there whatever "the day" may be? and is it not as much a sin to crush and murder a spirit as to destroy a body? and her spirit had been crushed. She sat down upstairs in the favourite corner from where she could see the river rushing into the sea; she took her Bible from a hope of finding comfort—but her spirits were so fluttered that she read the words without taking in their sense.

The river suggested to her, as it does to all—the resistlessness of fate—she was inexpressibly affected by this new and terrible disappointment. After having known so little happiness she had got into so quiet a haven; and once more, after feeling safe and happy, she was dragged out into the rough waves of life to commence a battle again. It crossed her mind that there might be some appeal—some one might help her to avert this; she was a widow and no longer a girl; how was it that she was so much in her brother's hands? Could Mr. Macfarlane not unravel it. She had a secret dread giving up her husband's papers—perhaps something might be found in them that might harm his memory, and since his death she thought so much more tenderly of him, and remembered him with so much more affection than she had done during his life, in spite of her contempt for his abilities.

But still she blamed him for not having kept her safe out of this position of dependence which had been her great hope when she had married him. She forgave him now his want of success, but that—it was so hard and it was so unfair to her.

She was deep in these thoughts when she was roused by the crunching of the gravel under her window, and she went down to the room looking so bare and desolate, stripped of its flowers, its quaint bits of china, of everything that made it homelike—to receive Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane. Mrs. Macfarlane was a cheerful and a pleasant woman, but was much too warm-hearted to be overpoweringly and oppressively cheerful when it would have been hard for another to respond. She had the tact of a kind-hearted woman, which is a much more reliable thing than the tact acquired from the constant friction of society.

In a few moments they were all three having tea, the fire was making up for other deficiencies, and, though Jean made an apology about the best cups, no one had thought of anything as missing. Mrs. Dorriman had been very greatly troubled about the papers; she herself had never dared to go into them thoroughly as we know—she was afraid of seeing something in those records that might distress her, about her husband. But for this dread, she felt sometimes curious to know how these papers affected her brother, and she did not know what to do about them. She did not dare take them with her because she knew that if she did her brother would soon make himself master of them; she could not lock them up as the place was sold, and when she thought of that she always had a lump in her throat.

All the time she was drinking her tea she was wondering what to do, and longing to consult Mr. Macfarlane about it, kept back by her overpowering timidity.

He himself came to the rescue: he asked her if she wished to leave anything behind, and said he and his wife would be glad to take charge of anything for her.

He was quite astonished at her gratitude, which seemed so far beyond the slight service he offered her. She thanked him with tears in her eyes—there was some china and——

Mrs. Macfarlane's shrewd eyes saw that in some way this offer meant more than appeared, and she rose with Mrs. Dorriman to go and see how much room the things would take, and how best to take them over.

Mrs. Dorriman stood before the boxes holding the household treasures, her colour coming and going, and her evident hesitation and uncertainty quite pitiable to see. Her friend looked at her in amazement—she saw tears standing in her eyes, and she laid her hand softly upon hers, and said, "It is all very painful for you, you will feel better when it is over."

"It is all pain—it is not that——" and poor Mrs. Dorriman's tears overflowed. Then, as the sound of Mr. Macfarlane's carriage announcing her impending departure struck her ear, she stooped suddenly and drew out a box which she was unable to lift, and she said in an agitated whisper, "I do not know what they are, or what secrets they hold, I am afraid of looking—my brother wants those papers—Mrs. Macfarlane they were my husband's, they are mine. You will never give them up?"

"I will never give them up, save at your own expressed wish."

"It is safer for my brother not to know that you have them. He is not sure they exist, but he is very anxious—so anxious to find them that I know they are of consequence to him."

"But, dear Mrs. Dorriman, why not look through them? An evil guessed at, is worse than one confronted."

"You do not know—I am afraid. No! I cannot look at them—a day may come—Mrs. Macfarlane, if you knew all. In looking I may do my husband injury. I cannot do it—I have not courage."

"You may on the contrary find out much that puzzled people at the time of his death. No one understands how he managed to lose all his money;" and then being a discreet woman she stopped short—she must not say a word to set Mrs. Dorriman against her brother.

"Do you think it might do good?" the poor woman said, with a flash in her eyes—a ray of hope—that gleamed there for a moment and faded again. "No!" she repeated, "I cannot do it now. I cannot risk it."

Mrs. Macfarlane felt she had no right to urge her to pursue any course of action, when she was ignorant of the real history of her past, and could not foresee the consequences; but she went to summon her husband.

Mr. Macfarlane was not quite so willing as his wife to throw himself into the situation. Her warm heart often led her to take responsibilities his caution would rather have done without.

As usual, his reluctance did away with any doubts still lingering in Mrs. Dorriman's mind; the moment a thing is difficult or unattainable it becomes desirable.

He accepted the trust, however, and then suddenly said, "Are your marriage settlements in your brother's hands?"

"My marriage settlements? I never had any that I know of," she answered, helplessly.

"Never had any marriage settlements?" He could hardly believe her.

"No, at least I never knew of any. I suppose I should know all about anything affecting me in that way."

"I suppose so." He mused for a moment. The same thought that had occurred to his wife came to him in a still stronger shape. He must say nothing that would raise her suspicions about her brother, or that in any way would make her going to his house more painful than it evidently was.

"I strongly advise you, Mrs. Dorriman, to read through those papers. They may throw a great deal of light upon your position. You may be in a better, a far better position, than you think."

"I cannot," she said, in a low voice. "I am afraid. I may some day bring myself to do so, but I cannot do it now. Will you keep them for me? Oh, do! and never let *any* one, never let my brother know you have them. Some day if I am in great difficulty, and cannot see my way, I will ask you to read them."

She stopped for a moment, and then, turning towards them with a passion they had hardly credited her with, she said, with tears rolling over her face, "You do not know, how can you! But I was so hard. I could not forgive my husband for his want of success. He loved me dearly, and I—I had no love to give him. Then when he died I forgave him, and he knew it; but I never thought of this, that I was to be dependent again and lose my home and all.... I am beginning to think hardly of him again. I am afraid of seeing something in those papers ... something that may make me hate...."

She paused, broken down by the overpowering emotion that had taken possession of her, and Mr. Macfarlane was moved, and went over to her and took her hand. "Forgive me," he said, "I will urge you no more; but before taking this with me," he added, laying his hand upon the box, "we will seal it up together." He got some packing-paper and some rope, and he made her seal it up with her own seal. She obeyed him quietly; her sudden and unwonted burst of emotion having left her calmer, quieter, and paler than usual.

When she had parted from these real friends she felt as though she was losing all she cared for; in her repressed life so little affection had ever come to her, save and except that her husband had given her.

The papers were safe and out of her hands. This was a fact she dwelt on with great satisfaction when the last sound of the carriage broke through the quiet. Mrs. Dorriman went out. She was going up the hills to say farewell to the old people to whom her going was a real grief, and before going went to give Jean orders to prepare something against her return, and something for the following day.

Jean was looking full of importance, and her mistress, well accustomed to her ways, knew that she had something to tell, had something to reveal, and that she intended to be questioned. "What are you going to do, my poor Jean, when we part to-morrow? You have not yet told me."

"We are not going to part here," said Jean, a look of triumph on her face.

"No," said Mrs. Dorriman, who felt this coming parting sorely. "I supposed you would go to the station and see me off. I am glad of that."

"Further than that," said Jean, emphatically.

Mrs. Dorriman looked up at her. What did she mean?

"I am going all the way to Renton itself," said Jean, in a tone of determination.

"But my dear Jean—my brother...."

"Your brother's not mine, and I have nothing to do with him, nor he with me. I'm going to the town of Renton, and I've got a situation there; do you suppose I would let you go where I could never see you—or you me? No! no! I settled it first in my own mind and then I arranged it with other people, and the same train that takes you takes me, and my kist's just away with your things, in the same cart."

Mrs. Dorriman could not speak, but the forlorn woman kissed the ruddy face before her—half her trouble seemed lightened—and Jean, touched and awkward under so strange a demonstration, patted her back with a hard and hearty hand and disappeared from her mistress's eyes.

Mrs. Dorriman walked up the river-side with a happier heart than she had had lately. With one friend near her in the shape of Jean she felt as though nothing mattered quite so much; she needed some comfort. With all the enthusiastic love for the beauty of the home she was leaving for ever, she was also leaving the little self-made duties that had become pleasant to her. She had to face the sorrow of those who had become her friends; she could promise them nothing from a distance—she had nothing of her own; she did not suppose her brother would continue to give her an income; she must guard against making promises she could not fulfil.

The same words met her all round, "What a pity you're going! It's we that will miss you, my dear. Oh, what is it for? Is it for company's sake?"

They could not get over it, her hands were shaken till they tingled again. When she was going home one of the eldest of the old women stood out from her doorway like an old prophetess. Her grey hair was smoothed back under her *mutch*, her black eyes sparkled, and her wrinkled face showed up white in the gloaming.

She was the daughter of a man famous in his day, a man who had had the gift of second sight, and though she had not inherited his gift she was looked up to, she had so many of her father's sayings at her fingers' ends, and she had much of his manner.

"Come here," she said, "and set ye down." Mrs. Dorriman could not do this, but she asked her to go towards home with her. It was getting late, and the light was fading fast. Christie was attached to Mrs. Dorriman especially because she and her forbears had lived near the old home on old Mr. Sandford's property, and she had a great deal to say about the way the sale of the place had been predicted and foreseen long years before by her father.

This evening, not unnaturally, she was full of it all. "I mind weel," she began in the solemn tone appropriate to the subject, "hearing my father tell what he saw, and he knew he had seen what meant evil to the place and to the Laird, and he grieved about it, indeed he did."

"Was that when he saw a light?" asked Mrs. Dorriman.

"It was a light and it was not a light, my dear, it was something of fire."

"Tell me about it again, Christie. I get confused about it sometimes."

"You see, my dear, the common folks, some of them have ghosts and see spirits, and so on, but the gentry, the real old gentry, they have a different kind of ghost, there are *things that happen*—you'll understand."

At all events, Mrs. Dorriman understood what Christie meant to express, and even at that moment and time of unhappiness the idea presented to her of the superior ghosts bestowed upon the gentry made her smile.

"Well, Christie, it may be so," she said, "but the idea is new to me."

"It is not new to us, and it was not new to my father. I do not mean that spirits are different, though we all know that spirits take different shapes; but when the head of a house goes, or any misfortune comes nigh him, there will be strange things seen. My father saw these things—it has not been given to me to see them—perhaps so is best. My father had many dark hours, those that

have these gifts must go through great anguish. I have seen him sitting up at night and looking wild—wild. I have heard him say strange things. It was awful...."

"And about this fire?" asked Mrs. Dorriman, a little anxious to get home now the darkness was making the footpath difficult to see.

"Ah," said Christie, "many and many a time I have heard that story. He was in his house, the house high up the hill under the wood, and was restless; the hour was coming upon him, and he could not breathe. He threw open the door and stepped out in the darkness. You'll mind the steep hill that went up to the house, and how the old house itself stood up away from everything?"

Mrs. Dorriman made a gesture of assent. The recollection of her old home, and the way in which it had been sold to the first bidder, was inexpressibly bitter to her. She was depressed and sad, and felt as though she had small need of other and painful memories, on this, her last evening here.

"From the east and the west, from the north and the south, gathered darkness—so black was the night that not a thing was to be seen—the hill where your father's house stood was but a shadow, and the lights in the windows shone out with a wonderful power.

"The heavens were in gloom from a gathering storm, and the wind was howling up and down, and up and down—none but my father, who understood things, would have stood as he stood and faced it. Then the clouds opened, and a great ball of fire came down; it broke over the house, my dear, over the house, and divided itself into three pieces—only three; and a piece went on the east corner, and one flame touched the south and one the north, and only the one corner, the one from the west, was left untouched, and that meant a great deal, and then the fire met and fell on the house itself." Christie's voice was so impressive, her manner so solemn, that Mrs. Dorriman, though the story was one she had often heard before, felt as though she was hearing it for the first time.

"What did it mean?" she asked breathlessly.

"It meant, my dear, what happened. Your father lost the lady (she came from the south), and that was one misfortune, and a very great one; then he lost his suit—the law-suit about some land in the North. Then he died himself, poor man, and that was the third thing—and the house was sold."

"So the misfortunes were complete?" and Mrs. Dorriman pressed forward a little and shivered. It was impossible not to be uncomfortably impressed by Christie—her tall figure and commanding gestures looming large beside her in the ever-increasing darkness.

"Not complete, my dear—not ended. No, that was what my father always said, he talked often and often about it, that is why it is written upon my brain. All he said came true, and why should this not come true? He saw it all to the end and he read it, and he was meant to read it." She dropped her voice in saying this, and once more was silent.

The two came to the little gate and bridge that spanned the burn and led to Mrs. Dorriman's place. She turned and took Christie's hand: "I feel it is the end," she said, speaking with that sob in the voice which is more pathetic than weeping; "you know this place is gone from me, and that I shall never, never see it again!"

"Yes, you will," said Christie, firmly; "my father said what I will tell you now—though I was not to speak of it to all. That night I told you of—when the fire-ball divided and fell—there was one corner of the house untouched; and when the fire and its great redness died away, he saw a silvery light rise, and it came from that corner and spread and spread like a flood of moonlight over everything, and the light was just above where you lay, my dear, a baby not many weeks old, and I shall live to see you do as you please, and live here or there, or in the old house, at your pleasure."

She raised Mrs. Dorriman's hands to her lips, kissed them fervently, and, uttering an impassioned prayer in Gaelic, she left her and moved up the hill. Mrs. Dorriman went home; she blamed herself for taking comfort from words which were the wild visions of a superstitious woman, but she did take comfort. By nature easily impressed, easily held up and as easily lowered by passing influences—the conversation with Christie had filled her with a sort of courage.

To live as she pleased and where she pleased, to go back to the old home, every corner of which was so dear to her! Such a dream filled her with unreasonable happiness; she threw out her hands as though she was throwing off a burden, and she said softly, though aloud: "I will believe it! I do believe it! it will help me!"

Jean announced the dinner, and was pleased to see her mistress looking brighter and happier than she had looked since she knew that she had to leave Inchbrae. Her satisfaction was extreme, for the thought, not very unnaturally, came to her, that the fact of her going with her mistress was sufficient to account for it, and she scrupulously performed the small services required of her with an increased attention. She always felt as though she had charge of her mistress—now she felt as though in some way that charge was increased.

The morning was unpromising. The wind was high, and the rain, only for that reason, was not a downpour, but blew in fitful gusts against "all corners of the house at once," Jean declared. She was meditating the possibility of putting off the journey, and spoke to Mrs. Dorriman about it.

Mrs. Dorriman was standing irresolutely at one of the windows when a dogcart appeared in the short avenue, and in another moment two men dismounted, rang the bell, and walked into the little hall.

Jean with all the air of outraged dignity appeared upon the scene, and was greeted by these words,

"We have come to take possession for the new proprietor; send some one to take the horse round and get some breakfast ready immediately."

Jean would not trust herself to speak; she went past them straight up to Mrs. Dorriman's room. She found her mistress pale but composed, dressed for her journey with her bonnet on. She began to speak but was hushed by an uplifted hand.

"Come, Jean, we will go," she said.

The noise of the two descending the wooden staircase brought the men into the hall, and Mrs. Dorriman's pale composure awed them a little.

Before they had time to speak she spoke to them.

"Sir," she said, turning to the elder of the two men, "you are here by my brother's orders, not mine. I am leaving just now, but I protest against the sale of this place, which is mine, and I intend one day returning to it."

With a slight bend of her head she went out into the rain, and before the two men could recover themselves she was seated in a waggonette which had been ready for some time, and, accompanied by Jean, was soon whirling along the road; her heart so hot with indignation that the pain and sorrow of going away was merged in that feeling.

At the station were the Macfarlanes with many a thoughtful gift for poor Mrs. Dorriman, and it was not till the train steamed out of the station, not till the last wave of the friendly hands grew dim in the distance, that the poor woman's fortitude gave way, and that, seated alone with no prying eye upon her, she wept, and the soreness of her heart grew better as the tension gave way to this feminine luxury.

The journey was troublesome more than long, there were two or three changes, and at one station two travellers got in accompanied by a bright-eyed middle-aged woman. At first Mrs. Dorriman was too much wrapped up in her own sad thoughts to take heed of what was passing, but she was at length roused by hearing her brother's name mentioned.

"John Sandford is coming out in a new light," said the lady, laughing and showing a row of pretty teeth. "Fancy his adopting two girls!"

"I am sorry for the girls. Who are they?" asked the elder of the two men.

"I have not an idea—but I should think he had some strong reason for going out of his usual way."

"I am very sorry for the girls too," laughed the lady, who looked as though she had never had any acquaintance with sorrow herself.

"They are probably in some way a charge upon him. John Sandford's not a man to do anything for nothing, it's not in him."

Mrs. Dorriman knew she ought to say something, but she literally had not the courage to throw such discomfiture among them.

"He's had a nasty illness, and the doctor thinks he may have more attacks of the kind. He does not think him the strong man he looks."

"Then perhaps he is doing some act of charity as a compromise with Providence," said the lady; "just as some men who have never been charitable or even just leave their wealth to some charity, as a sort of make-up."

So her brother was ill! This, perhaps, was why he had sent for her. But the two girls, who could they be? These two new ideas so suddenly presented to her made Mrs. Dorriman oblivious to all that was going on. She would have young girls with her and so she would not be alone, and none but those who have tried it, know how depressing long-continued loneliness is, especially to one who (like Mrs. Dorriman) was by temperament, one of the women who cling to others, and to whom acting and thinking for herself was perpetual grief and pain.

From the bewilderment of this future, which looked so much brighter to her with those figures in the foreground, she was once more roused by hearing, this time, not her brother's but her own name mentioned.

"About Mrs. Dorriman; no one really knows the rights of that story. Dorriman was as good a man as ever lived, and he had heaps of money when Sandford lost his. How it all changed hands is more than any one knows, but Dorriman died poor, and Sandford lives rich. One day the truth may get known."

"The widow lives, does she not? I think some one said so," and the lady smiled as though there was something amusing in the fact of Mrs. Dorriman's existence.

Poor Mrs. Dorriman, shrinking from it and yet impelled by a sense of right to speak, feeling that she ought to have spoken before, now leaned forward and said in her sweet, clear, timid voice, "I am sorry; I should have told you before. I am Mrs. Dorriman. I am going to my brother Mr. Sandford's house."

Then, with a heightened colour, she leaned back again.

The three talkers, who were a neighbouring manufacturer, his wife, and a friend, were naturally taken aback and made profuse apologies to her.

Then the lady, a Mrs. Wymans, said, with her usual smile,

"It was really your own fault; it was really very wrong of you to let us talk, really wrong. I hope we have not said anything bad."

And Mrs. Dorriman made no answer. She gave a slight bow, feeling too heart-sore and too unhappy to speak. Yes, how did all that money change hands? How was it that she was left so poor and allowed to drift wherever her brother chose to make her drift? For the hundredth time this question, which she now heard asked in a careless voice by a stranger, started up before her. Was it true that one day she would know? This last conversation drove the words of Christie into the background for a time, and when she arrived at the station she was in a whole whirl of mingled feelings, in which doubt and grief and indignation and hope all seemed struggling together.

Jean, helpful and alert, saw her into a cab and her luggage arranged on it and then bravely said,

"Only for to-day. I will be down seeing you to-morrow."

Then the tie between her and her mistress seemed quite broken as she lost sight of her, and, sitting down upon her kist, heedless of the curious looks of the "fremd folk" she had come amongst, good-hearted, brave Jean burst into bitter tears and *would* cry, she said, to herself. Yes, now Mrs. Dorriman was not there to see it she would cry, it would do her good.

She was sitting on her big box—the kist that contained all her worldly wealth—the tears streaming down her face and her pocket-handkerchief crammed into her mouth, when a porter came to her, too busy to be fully sympathetic, and yet with a certain gruff friendliness that was very comforting to her.

"And where are you bound for, my bonny woman?" he said, wisely ignoring her tears; "are you going to bide in the toon or are you going on by another train?"

Jean, called back to self-command, rose, and, fumbling in the bosom of her gown, where she kept her birth certificate, her money, her keys, and other valuables, drew out, after some false attempts, the address of the place she was going to, and, in a short space of time, her kist was put upon a hurly and she was following it thither.

CHAPTER V.

In the meantime, had the four people who were now to meet known anything about each other's thoughts they would have been spared something upon the one hand, and on the other they would have seen cause for much greater anxiety.

Mr. Sandford knew nothing—but he feared a great deal, and when he saw the fly appearing he was surprised himself at the sensations he was conscious of.

Afraid of nothing as a rule, it was quite incomprehensible to him that he should feel uncomfortable; his sister had always been afraid of him, what was changed?

Why did one momentary look in her face so disturb him? It must be that his illness was still affecting him.

Grace and her sister saw it come with different feelings. Grace was resolved to take her stand from the first, and Margaret was so much occupied with her anxieties for her sister that she forgot to have any anxieties for herself; and into this small group of people, intensely interested, and full of suppressed excitement, came the slight pale woman, herself conscious of so much conflicting emotion that she had not much room for acute observation.

"So you are here," said John Sandford, as he gave her his hand. Kissing between these two had never been in fashion; and then in a manner that he meant to be imposing, but which only succeeded in being pompous, he pushed the two girls towards her.

"There," he said, "go and welcome her; Mrs. Dorriman, my wards, Grace and Margaret Rivers."

Grace held out her hand, with an air which was entirely lost upon Mrs. Dorriman, who was conscious only of one overpowering wish, to go to her room and cry without being observed.

She was composed because she had in years gone by learned self-control—any exhibition of feeling seemed only to place her at her brother's level of sarcasm.

Margaret, stirred to the depths of her kind and unselfish heart, gave an appealing look at her sister, and then bending timidly she kissed the pale cheek and said something in a kindly manner about resting and a cup of tea.

Mrs. Dorriman was surprised and moved at the girl's action, and allowed herself to be taken upstairs and looked after in her own room with a feeling akin to gratitude.

The evidence of friendship offered just when she was feeling so forlorn came to her as a ray of sunshine. The house, so bare and so desolate-looking in its exterior, had struck her painfully as she went up to it. Her last home, with its wooded knolls and a lovely background of hills, was vividly present to her.

Why, if her brother did not want money, had he sold the place? Surely he must have had some liking for a home where so many generations had lived and died, and, as her eye took in the ugly garden and the closely-built streets at a stone's throw only of his gate, her wonder increased.

She was conscious of a perfect sinking of the heart when she thought that here must probably all the rest of her days be spent.

Christie's words rushed into her mind, and then came the meeting at the hall-door, and Margaret's sweetness.

Yes; that was a real comfort to her, and no caress ever was bestowed with greater results; the drop of kindness just when she so needed kindness sank into her heart. Whatever the days might hold for her in the future, this would always be gratefully remembered.

Poor Margaret, having left her, went to congratulate Grace, as she did herself, upon so pleasant a surprise. Instead of the disagreeable and authoritative woman they had pictured to themselves, here was a gentle and timid lady, whom it would be easy to love. Full of this relief, she found Grace in their own room.

She was leaning against the shutters, and her eyes were fixed upon the town. Margaret knew by instinct that she was ruffled.

"Anything wrong?" she asked, brightly, going up to her, and laying her hand affectionately upon her shoulder.

Grace made no reply, but she gave a little shrug, and dislodged her sister's hand.

"What is wrong, Gracie?" asked Margaret anxiously; "what have I done? Are you vexed with me, dear?"

"Vexed with you! oh, dear no! but you really are very dull, Margaret. You make life here difficult for me."

"I make life more difficult for you!" And Margaret coloured, partly from a just sense of Grace's unfairness, and partly because she was indignant as well as hurt.

"How can I put that Mrs. Dorriman in her place, when my sister, my own sister, makes such a fuss about her?"

"It never occurred to me that she was a person you would think of putting in her place."

"That is just what I complain of."

"She seems to me so gentle and so timid. I think it will be more difficult for her to take up a position than you think. I cannot fancy her ever saying anything to you you may not like."

"If she does, I will soon let her know my opinion about her; but you heard what Mr. Sandford said, and I mistrust these quiet women. I feel as though she might be as obstinate as possible. Did you notice, her upper lip?"

"You are so much cleverer than I am, darling, and so much quicker. No; I only saw that she felt coming here very much, she looked ready to cry."

"Well, Margaret, if you think yourself wiser than I am, I give it up. As I said before—making a fuss about her at the very outset makes my part very much more difficult; and after all your violent professions it seems hard that on the very first opportunity you fail me, and take up a line of your own."

Poor Margaret! Though it was not the first time that Grace had accused her of swerving in her allegiance to her, it was the first time such an accusation had been made on such serious grounds.

Very real tears stood in her soft eyes as she held out her hand to her sister and said—

"What do you wish me to do? What can I do to please you?"

"To please me! Nothing; only for your own sake, Margaret, for the sake of being a little consistent, you need not gush over her, and pretend to like her, before you know whether she is for us or against us."

She turned away, and began to change her dress, her head held high, not yet forgiving. Margaret felt as though the luxury of tears would be a relief, but she thought she would make one more

effort to win back her sister's cordiality.

"I am sure," she began, while her lip quivered nervously, "I mean nothing. I was sorry for her, and showed I felt sorry, but I think I shall hate her if her coming is to make differences between us."

"It need not make any difference if you are only true to me," said Grace, firmly. "Leave her alone and watch me, and you can do what I do."

"I never can," pleaded Margaret. "And oh! Grace, sometimes, when you are disdainful, I feel as if I must go and console. You don't know how hard it is for people when you draw yourself up and say something cutting. I always feel so sorry for whoever it is."

"You are a little goose," said Grace melting a little at this tribute to her power, "you exaggerate everything about me."

But she did not think so.

She threw her arms round her sister now with a protecting gesture she herself was unconscious of, and hurried to get ready for dinner, in a way that Grace Rivers hardly would have done some days before. At any rate, she had learnt one lesson—not to be late for anything Mr. Sandford was connected with.

The two girls went into the drawing-room only as dinner was announced by an insignificant little bell, and Mr. Sandford marched off with his sister.

Placing her at the head of the table, he said in his most pompous manner, "It is my wish that you act as mistress of my house, and that all should consider you in that light," and he glared round as though many were there to hear this, and not only two girls who already understood this.

Mrs. Dorriman, conscious of an action antagonistic to his wishes, sat silent, feeling as though she were a traitor; never was there any one more acutely self-tormenting, more sensitive about anything she did, than this poor lady. She was perpetually worrying herself about trifles she might, or should, have done or left undone, and this was no trifle; though she little thought that her presence in her brother's house, and her being uprooted from her little home, was due to the colour and agitation that had betrayed to her brother that she had knowledge of the papers he wished to possess.

She roused herself after a time and was then for the first time conscious of Margaret's changed manner.

All the sweetness and kindness which had so cheered her advent, and lessened the pain of her arrival, had gone, and was replaced by a cold indifference—which was Margaret's only possible way of being unlike herself.

Poor Mrs. Dorriman imagined that she was in some way in fault, and blamed herself for her abstraction, but her efforts were quite unavailing—the girl's one anxiety was to prove her loyalty and allegiance to her sister. She was conscious of a dawning feeling of affection for the little woman who sat looking pale and sweet opposite Mr. Sandford's massive figure. She had felt her clinging arms round her, and the feeling had been of comfort and sympathy, but Grace decreed otherwise, and Grace's word was her law.

Never, perhaps, sat four people together whose thoughts were of so different a nature; when four people live together, generally, there is, at any rate a bond of union, some interest, in which, however much they diverge in their thoughts towards it, forms, at last, something in common—here there was nothing!

Mr. Sandford, at other times an acute observer, noticed nothing to-night. The face of his sister opposite to him affected him strangely. No one had so faced him since his wife had died, and he was so busy looking through the long vista of years, and seeing the one creature he had ever loved, looking back at him from the past, that he ate mechanically and did not speak.

At length he roused himself and addressed Mrs. Dorriman, "I hope you will bring things into better order," he said abruptly; "if the cook cannot do better than this, you must change her. I look to you. I'm not a dainty man, but I pay for the best and I intend having the best."

"And I will do my best," said Mrs. Dorriman, gently.

"You should know about things. I do not know how it was done, but there was some comfort in the old place, and I suppose you had something to do with that."

"Of course I did see about things. I do not know if they were very comfortable."

"They were," he said, emphatically, "and you will find they want stirring up in this house. The morning I was taken ill there was not one soul out of bed. I rang and rang and only a wretched girl answered. You must alter all that. I expect you to keep everyone and everything in order, and in good order too; and," he added—looking round, not at the girls but well above their heads—"if any one gives trouble, they go!"

Mrs. Dorriman felt her heart sink. The old manner, the old hard-handed way of laying down the law, brought to her mind times when in almost these very words she had read changes distasteful and unfortunate for her; something of that helpless feeling of her childhood came to her, when

she had been left to struggle on without care or affection, when her nurse had been banished, and she had to put on her clothes, and perform for herself all that, till then, had been done by kindly hands. For, though we live to forgive many wrongs, and time mercifully softens our regrets, and blunts the edge of our sensibilities, there are two things we may learn to forgive, but we never learn to forget—a wrong done to us in childhood, when we were too helpless and too young to protect ourselves, and a wound to our self-love in later life.

There was a prolonged silence, which became at length a noticeable one. Then Grace, feeling that it lay with her to show how little the purport of Mr. Sandford's words affected her, said in a light tone,

"Do you ever see people here, Mr. Sandford?"

"See people!" he echoed; "you can see plenty of people whenever you look out of the window. See people! why it would be a pleasanter place if there were not so many to see."

"Of course I do not mean in that sense," said Grace, with dignity; "I mean, do people call here?"

"I have no doubt plenty of people will call now," he said, with mock solemnity, which for the moment took her in, as he gave an old-fashioned bow in her direction.

Grace bridled a little; her influence was beginning to make itself felt even on this rough man, she thought.

"I am not sure that the callers are just in your line," he said, after a momentary pause. "Some are I doubt beneath your level, and some I fancy a good bit above it."

"No one can be above Grace's level," exclaimed Margaret, "she is so clever, and——"

"Tut, tut," he said, "I wish every one had so good a trumpeter, but Grace is nothing very wonderful—I have not seen any proof of her cleverness. Come now, Margaret, what can she do? Can she sew a seam, knit a stocking, turn her hand to any useful thing, eh?"

"Grace could do everything of the kind if she chose."

"Then she had better try; it's worse to have talents and let them lie idle than to be born with none."

"If it is necessary," said Grace, still speaking in a measured tone. "I think I could do these things. I do not think knitting a stocking requires a great deal of intellect I must say."

"But it requires industry, and I think you are not industrious; however, my sister, Mrs. Dorriman there, will arrange what you are to do," and, rising in his usual abrupt fashion, he left the room, leaving Grace in a state of mind which is difficult to describe.

Next day, breakfast over, Mrs. Dorriman went to see the cook, outwardly calm but inwardly with very great trepidation.

She herself was one of those quiet people who have a genius for household management, and she was blessed with that happy absence of irritability and anxiety to domineer, which wins its own way without any violent commotion.

Mrs. Chalmers, for some years so completely her own mistress, was as ready to go off into a blaze as a well-laid fire. She had quite made up her mind to one thing, that if she was interfered with she would go. She valued her place or rather had valued it because she was entirely her own mistress, free to get up and go out and come in without any let or hindrance from any one. She did not mind having these people, for the extra work fell more upon her underling than upon herself, but interference she would not have.

She had put on her best cap and apron, ready to be summoned, and she would then and there give out her mind—perhaps resign her place; but, instead of being summoned, Mrs. Dorriman came down, looking so quiet and yet so evidently resolved to do what she felt to be right and with such a friendly air and so much politeness, that Mrs. Chalmers's unaccustomed knees bent, and before she had time to take her stand she was talking respectfully to Mrs. Dorriman and evidently anxious to please her.

Mrs. Dorriman was shown all the lower part of the house. What a contrast she thought it to the wide passages and large rooms of the old home. She gave her meed of praise, made Mrs. Chalmers propose the dinner, made a few suggestions, and went upstairs, leaving Mrs. Chalmers comfortably satisfied that she need not give up her place—indeed, anxious to surpass herself and please the new mistress.

Such is the charm of manner, even down to those who do not in the least understand why they are charmed or in what way it affects them.

Mrs. Dorriman's next step was one which required much more courage. She felt that Margaret at sixteen could not have completed her education, to use the stereotyped phrase—for when is our education complete? She called the girl to her and began, in the low voice which, to a close observer, would have betrayed effort and a great shyness, to speak to her about her work and her idle hours.

"You are young to have left school; too young to give up steady work," she said gently; "shall we

talk it over together?"

"Grace knows so much. Grace can help me," said Margaret, terribly inclining to this kindly woman and held back by her sister's words.

"Has Grace any plan? Suppose you call her," said Mrs. Dorriman gently.

"Grace," she began, "about Margaret; are you going to read with her, have you made any plan? Because she is too young, and, indeed, you are too young, to leave off all work."

"I think, as I was at the top of my class *always*," said Grace, bristling up, "that you may safely leave this question to me. I think it so much better, Mrs. Dorriman, to make you understand at once that neither Margaret or I will stand any interference."

"I am afraid, without what you call interference, I cannot do my duty," said Mrs. Dorriman, quietly, but with a flush of colour in her pale face that rose and died away again immediately. "What do you do in the mornings? We do not know each other, my dear Grace; we are to live together; will it not be for our mutual comfort and happiness if we agree to try and like each other?"

Grace was a little moved by this appeal, but she was unused to be put in the wrong and could not accept the situation gracefully.

"There is nothing but that horrid old piano with jingling keys. I cannot play upon it, or I should play to you."

Mrs. Dorriman went towards it, opened it, and struck a few chords; they responded with harsh discords. She let the lid down with a little sigh, music was to her a second nature.

"No, you cannot play upon that," she said, "but books. What books have you both read? Do you like reading?"

Grace and Margaret looked at each other. A few pages of history each, read as a task; a few biographies of excellent people as Sunday reading; a few poetical extracts learned by heart: this was the sum total of their knowledge—all else in their empty minds a barren waste.

"If you will help me to unpack my books, we may perhaps find something we might like to read together," said Mrs. Dorriman; "and if you would like to prove to my brother that you are industrious," she added, laughing a little, "we can easily get some wool and produce a stocking."

Margaret looked a little eagerly at her sister; she was just at the age when she missed the regularity of the school life, and when time hung heavily upon her hands. The new feeling of interest and occupation held out by Mrs. Dorriman was very pleasant and gave her the first home-feeling she had in that house.

But a glance at Grace again threw her back, and she said with some hesitation that it would be nice to unpack the books, and appealed to Grace for some sign of consent.

Grace, however, was in no mood to be pleased with any suggestion of poor Mrs. Dorriman's, and, muttering something about having something to do in her own room, she went off alone there, in stately silence and a very bad temper.

Mrs. Dorriman led the way to her room upstairs; where, by her wish, her heavy luggage had been placed, and the lids were unscrewed, and they set to work doing their spiriting gently but very slowly, as the girl opened many volumes, and desired to know the history of each. But she knew too little to be interested, really interested, in anything. Grace would have concealed her ignorance and merely passed everything over, but Margaret was more natural, and Mrs. Dorriman was by turns amazed and amused. The girl seemed to have heard of no one, and to know so little on every conceivable subject that, every now and again, her questions were absolutely ridiculous.

A rare edition of Spenser, exquisitely bound, was handled reverently by Mrs. Dorriman. It had been a favourite book of her father's, and Mr. Dorriman had had it rebound for her.

"What is that?" asked Margaret, very innocently; "oh, I see, the man who wrote in what is called black-letter writing."

"My dear," said the amazed Mrs. Dorriman, "surely you cannot have been taught that."

"Well, there is something funny about his writing, so that trying to read it was no use."

"I hope to convince you of the contrary," said Mrs. Dorriman with suppressed merriment; not for worlds would she have hurt the girl's feelings by laughing at her, and Margaret went away.

Then she seemed to see herself with certainly more education, but very ignorant still at the age of seventeen, thrown so much upon herself and her own resources for all amusements and happiness—turning to these books, and losing herself in silent delight as one treasure after another opened to her enraptured eyes.

Her husband, himself fond of reading and anxious to win her love in any way, had spent a great deal in filling her library with books. She had editions which were priceless of various old authors, and the most perfect possible collection of poetical works, including many of those tender French poets from whom in these days it is so easy to borrow without detection, so

completely are they out of date and forgotten; and, who living lives apart from their fellows, seem to have kept their old words and chivalrous sentiments pure and free from the worldliness and the grossness of their time.

But she was recalled to the present by Grace's voice, and then she looked round to see where she could put her books. There was but one little bookshelf in her room. She filled that and then went into the drawing-room to see what could be done there.

She found Margaret in tears, and Grace looking flushed and defiant.

But she had resolved to take no notice of anything not immediately directed to herself, and Grace left the room.

Relieved by not being asked for any explanation, Margaret threw herself now again into the matter. The bookshelves, standing almost empty, were soon comfortably filled, and then Mrs. Dorriman, who had a happy gift of arrangement, moved the tables and chairs about, made a comfortable corner for her brother, and gave a look of home to the room which it had sorely needed, by which time the morning had passed away.

In the afternoon Mrs. Dorriman wished to go and see how Jean fared; but she did not want to be out of the way if the girls wanted to go out with her.

Before she rose to find them, however, she heard the hall-door shut, and she saw them walking down the avenue.

"They might have said something to me," she thought, but she understood immediately that this was another protest made by Grace against any "interference."

She went off herself, not sorry to be alone, feeling the squalor of the narrow streets through which she passed—like all people who are easily impressed by the absence of any beauty in life. She felt for the poor human beings who toiled so hard for such a bare and unlovely existence. The grey houses with their dirty, ill-kept doors, and the "common stairs," upon which went so many weary feet. In front, a bit of trodden-down mud and a black stream, in which dirty ducks and dirtier children paddled. Her spirits sank lower and lower. At length she arrived at the address she had got from Jean, and was asked to "walk up the stair" by a shock-headed girl, without any attempt at tidiness, "busy," and evidently imagining that in that fact lay excuse enough for all disregard of appearance.

Jean, clean, trim, but with eyes that told their own tale of weeping, was scrubbing a floor; unaccustomed to such treatment, the shutters and woodwork all glistened, and the floor was nearly finished. It was one of the rooms, part kitchen, part bedroom, which you obtain in towns where overcrowding is the rule. The window was small and high up—worse than this, it could not open.

"And is this your situation? This the place you were coming to, my poor dear Jean?" asked Mrs. Dorriman, in faltering tones.

"'Deed, my dear, I may just say, without vanity, I could get mony a situation; but I am here working housekeeper to two lads—kin to myself, my dear. No one to hurry me or hinder me, and little to do. So little, I'll be often down bothering you."

She spoke lightly, afraid of giving way. The sight of Mrs. Dorriman brought back all her own misgivings of the day before; when she had found herself in an airless room, with nothing but filth and dirt around her, and not a "kent face" near her.

But Mrs. Dorriman must never know that she had made a sacrifice to be near her; and with a fair attempt at a laugh she said—

"You know, my dear, I was always ill to command. Better this than be under a mistress who might be a harder mistress than ever you were to do with."

Mrs. Dorriman could not speak. She looked round the room to see in what way she could help to make things comfortable. She resolved that something should be done to the windows, and she noted other things. But the feeling uppermost in her mind was, that it would not be for long. Jean and herself—they would at no distant day wend their way back to the hill-side together.

"And are you happy? Are you comfortable, my dear?" asked Jean, "How is it with you?"

"I am comfortable, Jean, and have all to make me comfortable; but, like you, I miss the great purple hills, the life and light of the sea, the freedom and brightness of Inchbrae."

"And yet you speak cheerfully, my dear;" and the poor woman looked wistfully at her former mistress.

"I speak cheerfully, Jean," and Mrs. Dorriman rose and laid her hand caressingly upon the old woman's shoulder, "because, Jean, the darkest and longest day comes to an end; you and I will go back to the light and the sunshine. We shall go back, Jean, there again."

"But the place is sold; it has passed into the hands of a stranger," said the old woman, wondering.

"We shall go back," said Mrs. Dorriman, firmly. "Yes, Jean, that hope keeps me from despair; that conviction comforts me. We shall go back to Inchbrae once more," and so saying she left her.

CHAPTER VI.

In spite of a good deal of open opposition on the part of Grace, Margaret, full of the enthusiasm of a girl whose intelligence after being long cramped suddenly finds an outlet, threw herself heartily into a systematic course of real study, and the mornings flew on pleasantly. Mrs. Dorriman, who had read a great deal during the lonely hours she had spent, had theorized after the fashion of solitary readers. Her views of life were not unnaturally entirely pessimist, she rejected many high and great ideas from a dislike to what she conceived to be exaggeration. Her character was very far from firm, and she was conscious of this and other shortcomings, but her sweetness of temper saved her from being soured. She had a craving for happiness, without believing in its being possible for her. Her spirits were always low, and the effect of the harshness of her brother, and of the neglect she had suffered from in her youth, would probably pursue her all her life, and affected her now.

She carried this negation of hope even into her religious exercises, finding comfort chiefly in passages about resignation; and, though she had a vague belief that in the future she might have some share of bliss, she never expected it on this side of the grave.

Then another and a most terrible question troubled her greatly. She did not look forward with any profound rejoicing, to the prospect of once more meeting with her husband whom she had forgiven, but whom she had never loved.

That hope that spans the chasm between us and the future, is not always the comfort it is supposed to be, and indeed much may be said about her want of wisdom in dwelling upon problems which must remain unsolved.

She was too timid to take her fears and show her anxieties to any one capable of helping her at all. She was conscious of feeling disloyal to her husband in this matter, which was often a trial to her, and she indulged sometimes in speculations which unsettled her and did not tend to comfort her.

Poor woman! When Margaret put those pointed questions to her common to girls who have begun to think out things and want help, she read and re-read various authors only to come to the unsatisfactory previous conclusions. In this respect the association was not productive of much good on either side, but, excepting in this, the results were to make both happier.

Mrs. Dorriman, married so young as to be barely out of childhood, had the tenacity of opinion and the strong bias in favour of her own conclusions always to be found where the mind has dwelt upon itself, and has not been enlarged by friction with other minds, a bias which no amount of reading tends to modify, since each book is read and digested, almost one might say distorted, by the views brought to bear upon it, a mode of reading which may be compared to looking at a bright and a rainy day through the same smoky glass which gives everything its own hue. But the very exception she took at times, served to arouse Margaret's own powers of thought, and to make her reflect upon her reasons for liking and disliking opinions, and the language in which those opinions were put before her. Many fine sounding phrases fell to pieces when treated this way, and many lovely poems became to her so much more when she followed out a thought therein shadowed forth.

Grace could in reality do nothing to stop this reading, and, though at first she made many bitter observations, she had not the heart to destroy her sister's comfort in these mornings; and indeed, at certain times, when her own idleness became oppressive, she went and sat with them, preserving her independence by making no remarks, standing, as it were, aside and taking no part in any discussion, as though her own mind had been long made up and that these questions had been grappled with and settled by her long ago.

Mrs. Dorriman, who was always more timid when Grace was present, was always relieved when she did not appear, and then took herself to task for the relief. There was no doubt that Mrs. Dorriman brought a great increase of comfort to the place, everything was well looked after, and Mr. Sandford recognised that it was so, without exactly knowing in which way a change had been made.

The one restless and dissatisfied person was always Grace. The monotony of the days became to her absolutely terrible. She had all the discomfort of having put herself upon a pinnacle without any admiring crowd to make up for the isolation. It was difficult for her to come down. Advances of friendliness and proffered affection had been made in vain by Mrs. Dorriman and now no effort was made. Perhaps the hardest trial of all was the perceptible loss of her sister's blind admiration for all she said. To Margaret, Grace was still beautiful, graceful, and full of talents, which only needed recognition to dazzle the world; but she began to think it just possible that Grace did not quite understand things affecting herself and Mrs. Dorriman; and instead of accepting her conclusions, as she had done all her life, without question, she began now to endeavour to argue with her, and though Grace bore her down by a flow of language and silenced her she remained unconvinced and Grace herself knew it. This change, this falling-off in her allegiance, was laid to the charge of Mrs. Dorriman, and when occasions arose that poor lady was told much, which wounded her sorely, about setting the sisters against each other.

There were times when Grace paced her room in a perfect frenzy of impatience. Her life was

slipping away, she thought, and there was no break, nothing in sight. What was the use of being what she was—fitted to reign—when there was no kingdom? Were her gifts—for she believed in her gifts—all to be useless to her?

They had been four months together now; she had seen the snowfall turn black and smutty and lose its beauty under the influence of smoke. Some half-dozen people had called, but they came to see Mrs. Dorriman. In a thousand little minute things she found herself of no account. This was not her natural sphere, and she longed for something in which her merits would be recognised. A good deal of her dissatisfaction was entirely unknown to Mrs. Dorriman, but she had so kindly a heart that she longed to give the girl some interest in life. It was sad to see her day by day more dull, more apathetic, and more discontented.

"Will you not come and look into the housekeeping with me, Grace?" she said, one morning when she saw her, without even the pretence of a book in her hand, throw herself down on a lounging-chair, looking as usual bored and dull.

"What good would it do?" asked Grace, surprised by the invitation.

"I think a notion of housekeeping is a very useful thing. You may have a house of your own some day."

"When that day comes I may learn it. There is not much to learn, I suppose—any intelligent person can order a dinner."

Mrs. Dorriman said no more.

It was rather surprising to Grace that Mrs. Dorriman was so fond of going into the town, and evidently liked going alone. What took her there? Idleness being the mother of curiosity as well as of mischief and other things, she never rested till she found out that she always went to one particular street and to one particular house.

Unsuspecting Mrs. Dorriman felt as though a bomb-shell exploded under her feet when Grace said at dinner:

"What is the name of the person you go to see at Baxter's Houses, Mrs. Dorriman?"

The poor woman coloured and looked nervously at her brother as she answered:

"An old servant of mine, if you wish to know."

Her colour and her nervousness gave Grace a sort of inkling that something more lay behind, so she said with a laugh:

"You must be much attached to her as you seem to go and see her every second day."

Poor Mrs. Dorriman was ready to cry at the suddenness of the attack. She answered something in a low voice which was heard by no one—but she required no defence. Mr. Sandford, usually absorbed in his dinner and taking small share in the conversation, looked up keenly as Grace put the question, and when she asserted the visits were of such frequent recurrence he received a certain shock. An old servant—who was she? But he was not going to have his sister bullied by any one but himself, and he thundered out with an emphatic slap upon the table:

"What business is it of yours, I should like to know, who my sister visits or does not? I consider it very impertinent and uncalled-for your speaking in that way to her; and I blame you," he said turning to his sister, "for letting her get the upper hand; you should keep her down, you should keep her in her place."

Grace rose, white with anger. Margaret trembling rose also.

"Sit down, both of ye," he said, in a tone which awed them both, and they sat down. When they eventually left the room Grace went to her bedroom and Margaret followed to console her.

But the consolation was not so great because Margaret, while grieving for her being wounded, could not think her in the right, and was much too honest to say so; and to her sister no consolation could come unless she was entirely placed in the position of an injured martyr.

In the meantime Mr. Sandford sent for Mrs. Dorriman. He could not be happy till he had spoken to her about this. He did not choose that she should be bullied but he also did not choose that she should have old servants and people in her interests at hand.

"Who is this person living here, and in your confidence?" he asked roughly.

"My old maid, Jean."

"What made you bring her?"

"I did not bring her; but, supposing I had, if I did not bring her to your house, it cannot matter."

"It matters, because you are keeping to my wish ostensibly, but, in reality, you are opposing it."

"I do not pretend to understand you," and Mrs. Dorriman's spirit rose. This was going too far. "You break up my home; you bring me here; you deprive me of the comfort of my personal attendant—and to what end? What is the use of my being here?"

"Of course you cannot understand. You cannot afford a separate house. There are certain papers your husband had, which might have made all different. You *might*," and he looked at her earnestly and anxiously, "have found receipts and be better off; but the purport of everything would have to be explained to you, and, after all that has come and gone between me and your husband, it would be as well not to let a stranger step in."

Mrs. Dorriman shrank. She also had this fear; but we say a thing to ourselves that we cannot bear to put into words, and now it was dreadful to her to hear this. Her spirit died again, and she said helplessly—

"I cannot give up seeing Jean."

"How did she come here?"

"When I told her you would not—could not—have her here, she said nothing, but she sought and found a situation here. She has been ill; and she has had no comforts; and I *must* see her!"

There was a pause. Mrs. Dorriman looked at her brother anxiously. He was evidently thinking over something. At length he broke silence—

"What is the tie between you?" he asked, abruptly. "Has she any of your things in charge?"

"Things!" she said, surprised. "No. Why, poor thing—where could she put them? No, she has no charge of anything; and the tie between us is but the tie of long service and great trustworthiness. You are a rich man, brother, and can command services; but to be poor and to be alone is to know what faithful service given you from affection is."

"That is a high-flown idea," he answered; "that is the sort of thing the doctor said. I never found that sort of service available. I was also to derive much satisfaction from the society of young people. I cannot say that the society of Grace Rivers affords me any satisfaction; I think she is as disagreeable a girl as I ever came across."

"She has all the lessons of life to learn," said Mrs. Dorriman, gently.

"She had better learn them soon," he said, gruffly, "if she intends to remain under my roof."

"If she could marry, and have a home of her own," and Mrs. Dorriman sighed, for this did not always bring happiness.

"And why should she not marry?"

"There is no reason, except——" and Mrs. Dorriman made a startled pause.

"Well," said Mr. Sandford, "except—pray go on—you really are very trying sometimes. What upon earth are you afraid of?"

"To marry, you must have a chance of seeing people."

Mr. Sandford reflected upon this answer, then he said—

"You do not know it, but do you know sometimes you say very sensible things."

Mrs. Dorriman smiled faintly, and left him, relieved beyond expression that nothing more had been said about Jean.

But her satisfaction did not last long. Late in the afternoon of the next day she was told a woman wished to see her, and Jean—much too ill to have left her bed—stood before her, pale, defiant, and all her spirit roused to resistance.

"The master has ordered me away," she said, "he came to-day and bid me go. He threatened and stormed!"

She was flushed and feverish. All through the cold wind of the early spring she had come, fever in her veins, and burning in her head; and now she dropped down upon a chair and shivered, looking wild, and evidently was on the verge of delirium.

The dinner-bell rang unheeded, and when Mrs. Dorriman was fetched she sent word she could not come.

Mr. Sandford, angry and amazed, went to her room—to find Jean on a sofa, talking loud and fast, incoherently, and Mrs. Dorriman pale and composed, attending to her. She met him with reproach.

"How could you? How could you?" she began. "She was ill, poor thing! and you told her to go. But she shall not go! I will nurse her. My poor, poor Jean!"

Mr. Sandford himself was startled. To do him justice, he had not seen that the poor woman was so ill. In the height of her illness, upheld by a strong resentment against him, she had come to his house, and there she must remain.

No persuasion would induce Mrs. Dorriman to consent to her removal to the hospital or to allow any one to take her place by Jean's bedside.

The doctor came and went constantly, Mrs. Dorriman, submissive and timid when she herself was in question, was neither of these things as regarded Jean.

That bow-windowed room coveted by Grace was made into a bedroom for her, but she would not sleep out of Jean's room; she allowed no other hand to tend her. Mr. Sandford was astonished and touched. This was the weak woman he had scouted, and whom he had thought so incapable. He watched her come and go with a perpetual amazement, and learned by that poor woman's bedside something of the service love can give and does give, and which no money can buy.

It was a sad household because Mrs. Dorriman was missed by all, but as there is generally a bright spot somewhere, so in this instance Grace thought she had found it, and that now she had her opportunity.

She rearranged the drawing-room, making the very moving of the furniture a protest against Mrs. Dorriman's position as head—she interviewed the cook, throwing so much command into her manner that she was met with direct antagonism. All the servants were in arms against her, the dinners were bad, the servants discontented, and the household bills heavy. Grace knew nothing of expense, nothing of the commonest rules as a guidance, and she allowed no one to suggest or of course tell her anything. Mr. Sandford recognised the loss of his sister's services the moment he was deprived of them; and Grace had the mortification of hearing him say to her,

"It is to be hoped you will be soon able to take your own place again. The discomfort is terrible, and we never get anything fit to eat, and everything is at sixes and sevens."

Watching his sister's ways with the servant she so regarded, he could not help asking himself whether supposing he was ill, as ill as this, he could command the same devotion. He expressed this to Mrs. Dorriman one day; she looked at him gravely and said without any emotion:

"If you were ill, I should try and do my duty."

He turned abruptly and left her; he had hoped for something more, and yet what reason had he to expect it?

When Jean got better and required less attention, Mrs. Dorriman found that all her powers were wanted in a different direction.

Between a spoiled undisciplined nature like that of Grace Rivers, and a character whose salient feature was love of power, such as Mr. Sandford possessed, it was impossible for the constant association to go without friction. Margaret was in a state of perpetual alarm, giving her sister right always, from habit and unreasoning affection, and therefore no real use to her, and the first day Mrs. Dorriman found herself able to take up her round of daily duties, she found Grace, not Margaret, waiting to speak to her, Grace in a state of excitement she did not try to repress, who plunged into the subject of her troubles with an abandonment and vehemence which went far to frighten the gentle little woman, who was expected to console, and understand, and sympathise all in a breath, at a moment's notice.

"Your brother hates me, why does he have us here?" Grace began; "it is cruel! Why does he not let us go where at any rate we might be free and lead our own lives, Margaret and I."

She paced up and down, her hands clasped before her, an angry flush upon her face—pausing every now and again to look at Mrs. Dorriman whose delicate forehead was ruffled, and whose attitude spoke of weariness.

"Has any thing happened? What is the matter? What has gone wrong?" Her voice sounded cold and unsympathetic to Grace's ears. It acted like a drop of cold water on heated iron.

"Of course you don't care," she burst out with, "you care for nothing; nothing seems to move you; nothing rouses you; but can you not see my sister and I are miserable and wretched?"

"Grace," said the elder woman, and her voice was full of real kindness, "would you mind sitting down, it tries me sorely to see you dashing about this way, and—I'm not very strong just now. I have had a good deal of fatigue lately."

"I am sorry," the girl said in somewhat a hard tone, throwing herself into a chair, feeling that all she had to say was more difficult to say when she was deprived of her manner of saying it.

"Let us talk it all out, Grace; all the bitterness, all the disappointment, everything that is making you wretched. What is it you wish to do? What is it particularly you complain of?"

"Mr. Sandford is so unkind: he speaks so harshly to me. I know he hates me."

"And you have tried to win his affection, you have done all on your side to make him like you?"

"I know it is no use. And he does not appreciate me in any way."

"Appreciate you?"

"At school I was always first and everyone knew I was clever—since—and—here he takes no notice. If he dislikes us, why must we live here, why may we not go?" Grace persisted, anxious to cling to her point and gain it.

"I am afraid you have never quite understood your position, Grace; that you really know nothing about it; and if I explain it to you you will perhaps be very angry."

"I think I understand our position," said Grace, with a slight toss of the head, "we are his wards,

Margaret and I; he is our guardian."

"You are quite wrong, Grace; he is nothing of the sort."

"Then why does he arrange for us? I was always told he was our guardian," and Grace opened her eyes wide, and looked at Mrs. Dorriman, surprised out of her usual self-assertion.

"You know he, my brother, is in no way related to you, except by marriage?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"When your mother died—your father being long dead, poor child—there was nearly nothing——" Mrs. Dorriman hesitated. It seemed so hard to tell this girl what she had to tell her.

"Nothing! but we have an income, Grace and I?"

"You have a small income, because my brother gave up his wife's, your aunt's, little fortune, and added to the little, the very little, there was, and managing it skilfully—there is as you say a little income, but Grace, my dear child, do you suppose that such an income would enable you two to live in any comfort as you have been accustomed to live? There is little over one hundred a year."

"Is that all?" asked Grace, her face crimson; "we thought that was only an allowance out of our money, we never dreamt there was nothing else. You are quite sure?" she asked, her face paling again; she felt this a blow she could never recover from.

"My brother welcomes you to his house, he makes me give up my pretty and quiet home to come and be here so that all should go well. He has a rough and a hard manner, but to you, Grace, he has been good, to you and Margaret he has been very generous."

"Is this really the truth?" asked Grace; "do you mean to say that we have nothing, Margaret and I, and we are not his relations? Why, why has he done this? He does not care for us. What is his motive?"

"He cared for your mother's sister, Grace. He loved his wife with a passionate affection time has not changed. Her anxiety was about you, left to the world's mercy. Is it fair to him that his kindness should be met with scorn, and that, owing him what you do, you should take exception to his manner and defy him openly?"

Grace was silent, kept silent by surprise and by a passionate and impatient remonstrance against the position she was placed in. It was intolerable to her to have this weight of obligation with no affection to lighten it.

"He weighs us down with the sense of obligation," she said at length; "if he were really generous he would make the load lighter."

"He is a human being and imperfect," said poor Mrs. Dorriman, who, while acknowledging the truth of this, felt it came ungratefully from the lips of Grace Rivers, who owed him so much. "Now, Grace," she went on, after a thoughtful silence on the part of each, "let us examine into your other grievances. I think I have given you good reason for accepting the home my brother offers. It is not beautiful I own. It is to me everything I most dislike, but he chooses it and there is no use in wishing it to be bettered."

"Then you, too, are dependent upon him?" said Grace; "of course you are or you would not so surrender your house, the hills and rocks and river you have talked of so much, without a strong reason."

"I am not discussing my position or my grievances," said Mrs. Dorriman, stung by a careless word flung at random and making so perfect a hit.

But Grace, this new idea in her head, found Mrs. Dorriman much more tolerable to do with. She was a fellow-sufferer, and, as such, to be felt for; there was a perceptible change in her tone when she said,

"I think at our age we might see people sometimes. I get frightened when I think that perhaps all our youth may pass in this way and no possibility of a change."

"That is a very natural thought. I also have had the same idea. I have already spoken to my brother."

"And what does he say?" asked the girl eagerly.

"He agreed to make some effort; then poor Jean was ill, and everything has been left as it was."

"And now she is better you will speak again?"

"Yes, I will speak again; and now one word more. I hope what I have told you will make you more inclined to accept my brother as he is, whatever his faults may be. However harsh he may have been to others, he has been good and kind to you."

"I must first become accustomed to the painful idea of owing him so much," said Grace, in a tone of anything but humility and full of a patronage, in her way, that made Mrs. Dorriman regret she had revealed her own position to her, and she soon rose and left the room.

Meaning to be kinder to her, Grace's manner was more of a trial to Mrs. Dorriman than it had

been before. Unmerited impertinence is bad enough, but to be patronised by a girl who had no tact and a great belief in herself, was quite beyond ordinary trials.

Just at that time, before Mr. Sandford had time to note the difference in Grace's manner, he received a letter which made a change in the household eventually, though this change dawned but gradually on the minds of those who were affected by it.

The girls noticed that his manner became more important, that he read and re-read this letter during dinner several times and kept it beside his plate, a thing unknown in his previous history; then, in a pompous voice and addressing his sister, he said,

"Mr. Drayton, a person for whose family I have a high regard, comes to-morrow to consult with me on important business. We must ask him to dinner."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Dorriman, not fully aware of the importance he attached to this arrival.

"He is a man of enormous wealth, enormous wealth, and comes to consult me about some investments." He rolled out these words with immense emphasis, and looked round at the three faces to see what impression his announcement had made.

"Is he good-looking?" asked Grace, with some interest in her manner. "Is he amusing?"

"Is he a friend of yours, John?" Mrs. Dorriman asked gently. "I never heard his name before."

Margaret was mute.

"How can I tell what you consider good-looking," he answered, roughly. "He is a fine strong well-built fellow, and has seen a great deal of the world, and he is a successful man, which is more than being good-looking or amusing, let me tell you."

"If he has seen the world he will be at any rate interesting," said Mrs. Dorriman, rising; but when they had reached the door he called her back, and said in a tone of mystery:

"You spoke of society and giving the girls a chance. I don't wish Margaret away, but if George Drayton takes a fancy to Grace she will have to take him."

Mrs. Dorriman shivered: this speech recalled her own youth, when she had to "take" the husband he had chosen for her.

Instinct often gives a woman the right weapon to use, and she said now hurriedly:

"If you let her know this, if you tell her this, she will set herself against him."

He looked at her with that sort of surprise which always came to him when she showed anything of the wisdom of the serpent he considered her so completely without.

"I think you are right," he said, slowly; "but I mean this marriage to be, and you understand if you see a way of helping it I expect you to help it on."

"If I like the man—if I approve," she said, in a low voice, but with a firmness unusual to her. "And if she likes him."

Mr. Sandford laughed his usual sarcastic laugh.

"*If! if! if!*" he exclaimed. He was going to say something, but there was a look in her face that warned him he had better not. He turned sharply round and went off to his own room.

"Grace, my darling!" whispered Margaret to her sister as they stood in the window that night with the grimy world before them hushed into silence, and the stars shining down upon them, "perhaps this will be the Prince."

"It does not sound like it, Margaret," she answered, scornfully. "A manufacturer, and a man no longer young."

"We cannot tell," said Margaret. "But it may be, oh, I hope, I hope it may be your prince, and that he may be charming and everything your prince ought to be."

"I hope so," said Grace, whispering also, and in a voice trembling with some suppressed feeling. "For, Margaret, I am very, very wretched here, and I sometimes think if I see no escape for myself, if no change comes, I shall die. Oh!" she exclaimed, breaking into the silence of the night with a passionate cry she could not repress, "if life holds nothing more for me than this, then give me death!"

CHAPTER VII.

That finality of all things, whether of happiness or of misery, brought Jean's long illness to a close—and the pleasure Mrs. Dorriman had in seeing her recover was often now tinged with sorrow when she thought of the separation that must follow.

Her brother had been forbearing, but his patience must not be overtaxed. Mrs. Dorriman knew nothing of those changes of feeling which softened Mr. Sandford towards her and any one she loved. She stood no longer to him in the antagonism he himself had placed her in. If she was acting against him in any way, if she knew what he dreaded, she might know he was satisfied that the knowledge had come without understanding. Her great sweetness of temper was something soothing to him, her kindness to her old servant, the unfailing cheerfulness towards her, was a sort of surprise to him. He found her no longer, in his eyes, a weak woman, whom he could keep by him, and under his authority, but a woman full of unexpected tenderness. Towards himself the habit of years gave her a certain submissiveness; he began to wish, as he lay, often wakeful, that this could be changed. But affection! He had no hope, no belief, in this as possible from her to him. He had blighted her life; her crushed spirits were a standing proof of this; and then he would laugh himself to scorn.

His illness must have left some weakness—why was he now beginning to think in this way? All his life, since his wife's death, he had given no love anywhere, and expected none. Then an uncomfortable remembrance of the doctor's speech about recurring illness made him shiver. If he were to be ill how could he carry out his plans, how could he rise to the position he intended to rise to?

He was a far richer man than any one thought, and he was accumulating money. When he had made what he intended to make safe out of all the risks of trade which he liked so little, he would buy the place where his wife's people once had lived. They had scorned him till they found he was rich, and he chiefly wished to sit in their "high places" for this reason. He intended winning an election, being returned for the county, and then—he could not think of marriage. The one pure unselfish feeling he had was the love for his wife, and his devotion to her memory. He could never think of placing another beside him.

His sister would be there, and then he would go off into long reflections about the girls: Grace who was beginning to be so oppressive to him, and Margaret who was a little like *her*.

All unconscious of his softened feelings towards her, poor Mrs. Dorriman, in the meantime, was cruelly troubled and perplexed. What she was to do about poor Jean, she did not know. Inchbrae was not her home, she had followed her mistress from the old place thither; besides, what comfort could there be in seeing strange faces and strange people there? It was Jean herself who cut the Gordian knot and brought things to a climax.

She was much too high-spirited a woman to remain one moment anywhere as an unwelcome guest, and she determined that she would herself seek Mr. Sandford and say a word of gratitude to him for the shelter he had given her, and, if she found him "quiet," she intended pleading her own cause; a cause which, if hers, was also Mrs. Dorriman's. Jean had that strong belief in herself which is the mainspring of many a brave action. She was, above and beyond this, a woman whose prayers went up with a faith which was beautiful and pure. Though religious phrases were more in her heart than on her lips, every action of her life was in a great degree guided by this great and secret strength. She was single-minded, full of prejudices, and had a keen sense of humour, seeing much to amuse her in ordinary things. She was passionately devoted to Mrs. Dorriman, and though she was too proud of her, in a right way, to allow it to any one, she knew that she required some one near her to befriend her—that, to use her own expression about many another person, she "gave in" too easily.

It was the very day Mr. Drayton was expected. Mr. Sandford, who was ruffled about some trifle, made an unusual fuss about something at breakfast which was not well done, and sent it out with orders that it was to be made over again.

Mrs. Chalmers, already making much of that something extra which falls heavily where all is as a rule on a simple footing—lost her temper: and, with all the delight of being able to reach the man whose uncomplimentary remarks about her performances were so frequently gall and wormwood to her, declared she would go there and then and would do nothing more for the household. She arrayed herself in her bonnet and shawl, and sat firmly upon her box, hoping and indeed expecting that she would be asked to stay—at any rate for that day—in view of the expected visitor, and fully resolved upon obtaining concessions if she did remain.

But Mr. Sandford, with all the ignorance of a man who had never been obliged to think of details, never for one instant thought about the dinner, took her at her word, and insisted on her going there and then.

Mrs. Dorriman's dismay first taught him that he had acted hastily, and annoyed and worried by the whole affair he went off to his own room.

He was trying to forget it all, and was turning over some papers, when a loud knock, evidently given by a determined hand, came to disturb him.

In walked Jean, her bonnet on, her shawl over her arm, looking like going, in complete ignorance of any disturbance, as she never put her foot downstairs.

Mr. Sandford glared at her, he was not "quiet" she saw, so she intended to express her gratitude, which was the right thing to do, and then depart and not say that word about remaining which she would fain have done.

She was a handsome and imposing figure, her kind and homely face, pale from the effects of her

recent illness, was surrounded by a full-plaited border of lace, her print gown was a purpose-like gown, and she had a shawl folded neatly across her chest. She was the picture and type of the good, unspoiled, old-fashioned, country servant. Her manner was full of respect, and free from any servility.

"I am come to speak my thanks to you, sir, before I go;" she began, "I have been a great trouble. Now I am well, I will thank you and go my way."

"My sister, not I, looked after you," he said.

"She did that, but there's no one like her in the world."

The two looked at each other, her keen brave blue eyes saw the expression in his and could not understand it.

"You think much of my sister."

"I think all the world of her. She has need of love and care, and kindness—I will always give her what I can."

"What are you going to do when you leave this?" he asked abruptly.

"I am going to get a place somewhere near. Yes, maister Sandford, you will not like it, but it is my only pleasure to be near *her*, and she needs me."

"What place will you get in Renton itself? There are no gentlefolks there."

"I'll get some place; I can put my hand to anything, the Lord will provide for me," said Jean in a low voice.

"Why need you go? Since you and my sister cannot live apart, stay," he said; and, trying to hide the fact of his giving in from kindly motives, he continued sternly, "I do not choose my sister to be running through Renton streets at all hours—as you and she won't part, stay!"

"I am not sure, sir."

"What do you mean, you are not sure?"

"I must be guided by Mrs. Dorriman's wishes, and other things."

"Well," he said, roughly, "I have asked you to stay, and you can speak to Mrs. Dorriman and do as you like."

He was conscious of a great wish that she should stay; but he could think of nothing more to say.

"There is no room for me, sir, and I am afraid you say it now, and will be sorry afterwards; and the end would then be worse than the beginning. It would hurt Mrs. Dorriman more."

"You can do as you like," he said, more determined she should stay, since she opposed his will, "but I cannot reconcile your affection for Mrs. Dorriman with your determination to leave her."

"Can you not?" said Jean, her blue eyes flashing a little. "Can you not, sir? Can you not see that the bread of dependence is bitter to her and bitter to me? You took her from her own home, and her own quiet life—for some reason of your own—but I know it was ill done. If I am here, it is another weight upon the wrong side."

"Do as you like, and leave me, in Heaven's name!" he exclaimed, impatiently.

"Heaven had not much to do with her being taken away," said Jean, firmly, "but I do not wish to speak about what I know imperfectly after all. What I wish to speak about is just this—Do you really want me to stay, and is it all for her sake? or is there something else?"

"The woman will drive me mad!" said Mr. Sandford. "What else could there be? No! I do wish you to stay; and with regard to Inchbrae," he said, in a lower voice, "had I known she cared so much ——"

"She did care," said Jean; "she greeted till I thought she would wear herself out; but she is getting over it a bit, and she knows that one day she will go back."

"Ah!" said Mr. Sandford, "what is that about going back? The place is sold."

"Yes, it is sold," said Jean composedly, "and can be bought back any time. Your sister knows the prophecy, and she'll go back to it in God's good time. Till then we are content—she and I."

"Some old woman's story," muttered Mr. Sandford. "Now you will be good enough to go and leave me."

"I will wish you good day, sir; it's not good-bye, till I know Mrs. Dorriman's wishes."

Jean left the room, and Mr. Sandford took his hat and went out. Nothing Jean said held much meaning for him, but her manner impressed him; and he went off to look into some business matters, never for a moment thinking it curious that his changed feeling towards his sister had made him try to persuade her old servant to stay in his house.

When he went home Mrs. Dorriman's face was more cheerful than he had yet seen it.

"I should like to know how we are to get any dinner," he said, afraid of her thanks.

"Oh! brother, there is Jean."

"Well! what of that?"

"She is a first-rate cook, and she has agreed to stay; and she is getting on with everything; and it is like a dream," said the poor woman, in a perfect flutter of gratitude, and relief, and happiness.

Her brother looked at her wonderingly.

"You are an odd little woman," he said, but not unkindly. "It does not take very much to upset you," but he was glad all the same.

He had always felt uncomfortable about Jean since he had found out how much his sister was wrapped up in her; and he now felt rather grateful to her for coming in to his plan so readily.

It was dark when Mr. Drayton arrived, and only Mrs. Dorriman was waiting to receive the two, who came in together.

Mr. Drayton was a pleasant-looking middle-aged man, with a countenance wanting expression, a manner very nearly as undecided as poor Mrs. Dorriman's; fair curly hair, which was beginning to turn grey, and a child-like way of speaking. Any one judging him at first sight would have said at once he was one of the men who go through the world unsuccessfully. Sanguine to a fault, perpetually disappointed, only perpetually to spring up again.

He had a very absent manner, and frequently missed hearing important facts, because he was thinking of other things. Passionate and kind-hearted, only believing in himself to a certain extent, led by any stronger mind than his own, and making mistakes he himself laughed at when it was too late to remedy them. He was tall, extremely slight, had very sloping shoulders, and was inconsistent in his dress—at one time wearing rough and ill-made country clothes, and at another particular to a fault about the cut of his things and the shape of his boots.

His father had made the money, and had left it all to him. He had been an affectionate son and a most disappointing partner. People said the business would not hold together two years; he had now held it together six since his father's death, because Mr. Drayton had a warm affection for the manager, Mr. Stevens, was guided by him, and did nothing of any importance without consulting him.

Mr. Sandford had, at that time, a great project in hand, a project requiring far more capital than he could furnish without disturbing his own investments.

He had met Mr. Drayton once or twice and looked upon him as a man through whom and by whom a great deal might be done.

He had urged his coming to Renton for two very different reasons; he intended him to marry Grace Rivers, and he arranged it so completely in his own mind that he never even put the case conditionally. He was beginning to dislike Grace extremely, she interfered in so many little things. It was all very well for Mrs. Dorriman to allow it; she was, and always had been, one of the women born to be ruled by every one round her, but he objected to the perpetual assertion of herself which forced Grace to be always, so to speak, on the disc of the family life, to the exclusion of the others.

She annoyed him, and he had, from the first moment of this discovery, resolved to marry her to some one who would take her off his hands, since, in these days, getting rid of her in any other way might lead to comment. He was resolved that Mr. Drayton, who always declared he *must* marry, and who, in his lighter moments, declared himself to be too much bewildered by the enormous amount of beauty and accomplishment he met with to be able to choose, should have no such bewilderment now. What Grace Rivers would do, whether she would like or dislike the man, was to him a matter of no moment, he never thought of the marriage as affecting *her* in any way; and had Mr. Drayton been repulsive and hideous, or even much older, it would not in any way have made the slightest difference in his arrangements. Grace out of the way, Margaret would be all by herself with his sister, and he was beginning to love Margaret; indeed, the society of the women round him was both softening his character and developing a certain kindness in him which no one had ever given him credit for. The one soft place in his hard heart had been his love for his wife, and since that time the only disinterested kindness had been shown to her orphan nieces. Though he told himself that it had all been for *her* sake, and that it did not increase his happiness, yet, when he was coming home after a long and wearisome day, it was pleasant to know that there was some one to meet him, some one who looked after things for him. The gentle face of Margaret was always a pleasant thing to look forward to, and, even as regarded his sister, her even temper and great sweetness had taught him, as we have seen, a sort of respect, and his suspicions about her were lulled to rest. He had hurried home to be in time to go himself to the station and meet Mr. Drayton.

Little did that individual know of the many plans made in connection with him. He was a little bored by the length of his journey and glad to get out of the train. He was too good-tempered a man to be cross, and he was flattered by the importance Mr. Sandford attached to his coming. This was something like success, he said to himself, to be sought by a man of so much influence.

Sending his portmanteau on to the house, the two men walked up together, and soon Mr.

Sandford was taking his guest upstairs, to find no one there but Mrs. Dorriman. This rather disconcerted him; he had intended to find a look of comfort and home and the three sitting as he usually found them, and there was only his sister.

"Where are Grace and Margaret?" he asked, with the frown upon his forehead which bespoke displeasure.

"They have gone to their room," she said, in a deprecating manner; "it is later than you think."

"Ah, you are punctual, I see," exclaimed Mr. Drayton, with an unrestrained laugh which accompanied most of his remarks. "I shall have to take care; I could fancy your brother a terrible tyrant in the household, so strict. I am right, eh?" and he laughed again, still more cheerfully than before, not having the vaguest idea that he had spoken that true word in jest which is often a painful enough truth.

Mrs. Dorriman found her conversation more terribly common-place than ever. She had made much of the slowness of the train and had been met with another laugh, as though some indescribably funny joke was wrapped up in its tediousness. She had asked if the country round Mr. Drayton's house was like Renton; was it equally smoky? and he, laughing as ever, asserted it was worse, much worse, and then a pause had come. The poor woman was growing nervously aware of the silence and she resolved to break it, dreading to say something which would bring that laugh back, quite unaware that Mr. Drayton was himself shy, and that he laughed because it was the only way of concealing his shyness.

What terrible sufferings a man must go through afflicted with shyness; a woman may suffer but at any rate she is in her rights. She may be timid and shy and self-conscious, it is all part of a quality belonging to her, though in an exaggerated form—but a shy man!

There is, to begin with, a feeling as though it were not a misfortune but a fault; it is contrary to all preconceived notions of what a man's character should be; it is out of place, and the unfortunate man who is so afflicted seldom meets with pity or sympathy. With an inkling of this truth, Mr. Drayton concealed his shyness by an overpowering amount of cheerfulness. He was consistently, perpetually, oppressively cheerful; and having once assumed this character, it soon became a confirmed habit. After all, to be incessantly cheerful, and in apparently superabundant high spirits, is a less afflicting thing than the habit of looking at life through a smoky glass, and depressing every one round one by melancholy facts and a lengthened face.

Mr. Sandford came now to the rescue unintentionally, by carrying Mr. Drayton off to dress, and, with a sigh of relief, the poor little woman went off to her own room.

Dinner was ready, the guest—with an immense expanse of shirt front, was standing on the rug, talking to Mr. Sandford, when the door opened, and Mrs. Dorriman and the two girls came in.

The moment they saw him all interest in him vanished. They saw only a prosperous middle-aged man, whose laugh was noisy and vulgar. He was Mr. Sandford's friend, so they need have expected nothing better, they thought.

Mr. Drayton, who had never understood that the people living with Mr. Sandford were young girls, was astonished. They took so little notice of him that he was piqued. He was a man accustomed to consideration from every one—especially from the young ladies he knew. The indifference he now met astonished him. His most amusing stories, which he told with tears in his eyes and roars of laughter afterwards, were received with rounded eyes, and not a smile in sight. The girls, indeed, thought him ridiculous, and Margaret's grave young face never relaxed for a moment.

From indifference, Grace's expression rose to disdain, and Mrs. Dorriman, as usual, had the whole brunt upon her shoulders.

How that poor little woman tried to do her duty! to show a polite interest, and to smile, when smiles were expected; while the ungrateful man counted her interest and approbation as nothing, and tried to win, at any rate, attention from the other two.

Even to Mr. Sandford, not himself an acute observer, there was something strained in Mr. Drayton's laughter, something unfriendly in Grace's expression. The moment he discovered it—the instant he read tacit disapproval and opposition—he was the more resolved that these two should bow to his decision, and accept his arrangement.

He observed, also, that it was Margaret who attracted most of his guest's attention. That must, of course, not be allowed; he must give him to understand at first that Margaret was out of the question. He did not wonder at it, however. There was a winning sweetness in Margaret's expression that must please every one. Young as she was, there was a composure, a repose of manner, wanting in her sister. It was the difference between one character absolutely forgetful of self and one full of self-consciousness.

Conversation is never more difficult, than when it ought to be there, never more spasmodic than when people meet—who know nothing of each other's likings or dislikings—and who have none of that light talk which dwells on politics, great events, and the last new song in one and the same breath.

Grace was intent upon the impression she was making. He was uninteresting, but, all the same,

her silent disapproval of his noisy manner would put her in the position of being superior to all this uncalled-for merriment.

Margaret watched Grace, and felt sorry for the unconscious Mr. Drayton—so sorry that she began to talk to him—listening with a sense of completely missing the jokes when his laugh broke into his speech.

There was one subject of satisfaction to Mr. Sandford, the dinner was excellent; and this fact went far to soothe him. Men, though superior beings, are apt to feel this important affair, and Mr. Sandford was one of the men who felt any failure in this direction with great acuteness.

After discussing with playful heaviness those topics of conversation started by Margaret, Mr. Drayton threw a bomb-shell down by saying to Mrs. Dorriman—

"I saw a pretty little place you lived at till lately. I went over to see a boat I had heard of. A pretty place, but lonely. I dare say you got tired of the sea. The sea is a very dreary thing to me; I am ill when on it; cold when near it, and I hate it when I see it. Ah! ah! ah!"

"I love the sea," said Mrs. Dorriman; "it is to me a friend and a companion. There is always something grand to me in its monotony, as in its angry moods. I love it best when it sends showers of spray up into the air, and comes dashing in in all its might."

"Then what made you——My dear Mr. Sandford, are you aware that you gave me a violent and painful kick just then? I wish to goodness you would take care, if you knew what a start you gave me!"

"I am sorry," said Mr. Sandford, as the ladies rose and left them.

"I am sorry I hurt you, but you must not speak of Inchbrae to my sister. She lost her husband there, and altogether it is a painful subject."

"But she did not seem to dislike my talking about it."

"She conceals her feelings, but it is, I assure you, not a subject she cares to discuss."

"All right! I'll accept your view, but upon my word your kick is still painful."

"I had no other way of stopping you."

"Then you did it on purpose!" and this new light upon the subject sent Mr. Drayton into the loudest and longest fit of laughter he had yet indulged in.

It was not till next day that Mr. Sandford had an opportunity of saying that word to Mr. Drayton which should make him understand that Margaret was out of his reach.

Mr. Drayton's idea of making himself pleasant to the young ladies was buying some of those endless and useless trifles to be found in what are called fancy warehouses; and Mr. Sandford, meeting him when his own work was done, found him surveying with much satisfaction some gilt goats dragging a wobbling mother-o'-pearl shell car all on one side, with gilt wire wheels.

"I think Miss Margaret will like this," he said, his face beaming with satisfaction.

Mr. Sandford's face was a study. That a rational being with money waiting for investments, which fact alone was sufficient to fill any man's mind, could be enchanted with a trumpery toy, and actually spend money upon it, was an amazing idea to him, and he looked at Mr. Drayton closely, as though he might see something in his countenance calculated to explain it to him.

"You need not trouble to take gifts to my nieces," he began, gruffly, "especially not to Margaret."

"Why especially not to Margaret?" asked Mr. Drayton, as he once more looked at his purchase with admiring eyes.

"Because Margaret's a mere child, and her life is pretty well arranged for her."

"Well, that is a pity. I think she is a great deal the nicest of the two. I doubt Miss Grace has a touch of pride in her. She looks as if she thought a deal of herself; always begging your pardon for saying so," he added, laughing heartily.

"I am not sure I think pride unbecoming in a girl," said Mr. Sandford, after a moment's reflection, "Miss Rivers is good-looking."

"Now, I don't think her a patch on Miss Margaret," said Mr. Drayton. "Well, it's just as well you told me that *her* future is settled; I am not at all sure, not at all sure, I might not have been hit."

They left the subject and plunged into other matters, but Mr. Sandford quite forgot to take into account one thing, that the very way to encourage any one to like or care for anything is to put it out of his reach—forbidden fruit is as tempting now as in the days of our first parents, and he never, as far as his own wishes were concerned, did a more unwise thing than in adding this incentive to the slight dawning of admiration Mr. Drayton had for Margaret Rivers.

In the meantime the girls discussed him with all the intemperate feelings of youth, added to the disappointment of his being so exactly the opposite of that coming prince who was to rescue poor Grace from the uncongenial home.

"His laugh goes quite through my head," said Grace, pettishly, as she sat in front of the little mirror, and unplaited her hair for Margaret to brush. "What an odious man he is."

"No, not odious, for he is good-natured," said Margaret, gently, "but I wish he did not laugh so; it makes me feel so melancholy; and oh, Grace, how difficult he is to talk to."

"Difficult! say impossible. And Margaret, we thought it might be the prince," and Grace folded her hands, laid her chin upon them, and stared at herself in the glass.

"The prince will come, Grace; you will see."

"No, Margaret! I do not believe in him. I believe in nothing now. All my hopes are dead. What have they to live on? We shall go on living here for ever till we are quite old and grey, and we shall never see any one younger than Mr. Sandford and his friends, and never see the world, or know any other life," and she lowered her head in a fit of despair.

"Grace, darling! you do not really think that all your many perfections were given to you only to be thrown away; this despair is unlike your usual bright brave spirit; and we are not so unhappy now. You are not so miserable here, now, Grace?"

"Yes," said Grace, fiercely, "I am miserable. I am sick of my life here; of the ugliness of everything. I hate it, Margaret. I hate it more than I can say."

"And I was growing contented," said poor Margaret, with a little suppressed sob; "I am so much less gifted than you, darling, so much less full of restless life; you must forgive my being so different, so easily satisfied—it was selfish, I might have thought of you." She put her arms round Grace affectionately.

The sisters sat in silence and then Grace spoke again—

"The only good thing I know about Mr. Drayton is that he lives in the South; I envy him that, I envy his being near London; it is the only merit he has."

"When I said he was good-tempered," rejoined poor Margaret, anxious as ever to bring her own conclusions, even about trifles, into harmony with those held by her sister, "I think he is good-tempered as a rule, but I fancy if he were to be vexed or disappointed in any way he would be persistently angry. I do not think he would forgive easily."

"In other words you think him vindictive. Well, Margaret, I think you are right. And I also think him not worth talking about, I think him hateful," and Grace rose and stood before her dressing-table again. "Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, "what it would be, to me, to leave this place, to go away, once again to England; though school was tiresome, it was better than this. I would give all I am worth in the world to get away. Sometimes I dream, Margaret—I dream of floating away—of hearing beautiful music and lovely voices. I am so happy! Then I wake—and I am *here*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Drayton, in the meantime, took greater pains to talk to Margaret, to discover how he could please her, with no particular object in view; but she interested him, in the first place, and the fact of her life being "arranged for" made her still more interesting. Besides, paying marked attention to all she said and did enabled him to leave Grace alone. He was not a sensitive man, but Grace's impertinence was much too open not to go home to him. She despised him and showed she did so far too openly, and from passive disapprobation he began to dislike her heartily. The girls were right, his was a character that was vindictive. He was wrapped up in a thick skin of self-esteem; he was good-humoured and cheery so long as he was admired and his vanity satisfied by flattery, direct or indirect, but once his self-love was pierced or wounded it rankled, and woe to the person who had inflicted the wound.

His visit was drawing to a close; he had been with Mr. Sandford for some days, and so far nothing had come of it. Grace was out of the question, and Mr. Sandford saw it. The investments he wished him to make were equally undecided; Mr. Drayton would do nothing without consulting his manager, and was waiting to hear from him. He extended his visit for two days, and he spent those two days in trying to make Margaret understand something of his feeling for her. Mr. Sandford was at his office all day and Mrs. Dorriman said nothing; and though Mr. Drayton's way of looking at Margaret and his fits of absence might have enlightened him he thought he had made all that so impossible that it never gave him any uneasiness, and in two days he would be gone.

But the old story was repeated in this instance. Mr. Drayton, in hurrying home to have a word with Margaret, managed to slip, and, falling the whole length of the flight of stairs at the office, came down on the stone flags at the bottom with a bruised shoulder and a sprained leg, and of course had to remain at Renton.

Mr. Sandford had to go to his office daily with the full consciousness that his unwelcome guest was making the most of his opportunities. Still he hoped things might come right in the end.

Poor Mr. Drayton hardly regretted his accident since it placed him near *her*, Margaret, the lady of his dreams. For love had come to him in a violent fashion, and he acknowledged to himself that if she would not listen to him he would be miserable all his life.

Love plays such strange pranks in its flight. In this case it gave the self-confident man timidity; his noisy laugh was modified, his manner softened. He was very much in earnest.

Margaret never for one moment thought of his meaning anything. She was very sorry for him, as any kind-hearted girl might be for the sufferings of any one or even any *thing*, and this pity gave her voice a still more dangerous softness. Each day found him longing to speak to her and losing courage when she came near him. He was longing to know what the *arrangement* meant that Mr. Sandford had dwelt upon. Longing to hear from her, about herself and her future, because, once he knew that, his course would be plain. If there was really nothing in which her heart was interested would it not be possible to alter things? She was so young she could not already have met her fate.

She was so often with Mrs. Dorriman he seldom saw her alone; it was with a throb of pleasure that he saw her come into the drawing-room alone one afternoon, some snowdrops and ivy-leaves in her hand. She had been walking, and she had thrown back her cloak and pushed her hat off her head a little, and she came forward to fill some glasses with her flowers, unconscious of his emotion, full of some thought which had suggested itself to her whilst she was out, and a smile breaking the gentle gravity which was her habitual expression.

"There are still many glasses to fill," he said, as, lying a prisoner upon the sofa, he watched her accustomed fingers arranging and re-arranging the pure, white blossoms with the glossy background of leaves.

She looked up with a little smile and a heightened colour.

"Those are to stand empty till to-morrow; Grace wishes it. I thought you would like a few to look at, but to-morrow Grace is going to arrange all the flowers."

"What is that for? Is to-morrow a great festivity? Miss Grace does not generally give herself any trouble for nothing," he said laughing.

"My sister takes trouble when she thinks it necessary," said Margaret, with a pretty, dignified reproach, quick to resent the slightest implied disapprobation of her beloved Grace; "to-morrow will be my birthday. I shall be seventeen," she said, with full consciousness of her advanced years.

"Seventeen," he murmured, "only seventeen!"

"Did you think I looked more or less than that?" she asked gaily.

"I hoped you were more than that," he said in a confused tone; "I knew you were very young, your uncle told me that. He told me something else about you," he went on trying to gain courage, and trying to read her countenance, which without a shadow of suspicion was turned towards him in all its sweetness and candour.

"I hope he gave me a good character."

"Your character needs no giving; it is written in your face."

He spoke in a lower and more hurried tone, and she once again raised her eyes to his in surprise.

"Is it true? what does he mean when he says your future is arranged for? Is there any one?" he brought out in quick agitated tones. Margaret was startled; if her uncle had said this, he meant it, and she knew enough of his will to dread having to submit to any thing he chose for her.

Her whole being rose in protest:

"My life is not arranged for, though I do not know what those words mean, and there is no one," she added very vehemently.

He saw how true her words were, and he hurried on afraid of losing courage, of not being able to say what he wanted to say, if he paused.

"Margaret," he said in a tone that compelled her attention, and trying to raise himself as he read her face. "If you have no one, if there is no one, if you are free to be won, may I not try and win you?"

Poor Margaret shrank back.

"No!" she said, breathlessly, "oh! no!"

"May I not try?" he pleaded. "I am more than double your age, but need that matter? I never have loved any one, and I think I could make you happy. I should not expect you to love me in the same way, and I could give you much, I could surround you with luxuries, and grudge you nothing for your happiness, you should not be dependent."

"If I loved you for these things I should be unworthy, do you not see that?"

He did not heed her.

"You know you do not care for this narrow life, you would like being in the South, in London, you should have a house where you liked, you should do what you liked."

"I cannot," said Margaret, red and pale alternately, "I am sure you mean to be kind, but your words are hateful to me. They are bribing me. No! better to live anywhere, better to be as we are, and as you say dependent, than to be false to ourselves. I cannot say anything else, and oh! pray, pray, say nothing about this to any one, do forget it. It is quite, quite impossible."

His voice was broken by disappointment and a sense of helplessness.

"I cannot forget it," he said, and, hearing Mrs. Dorriman's voice, Margaret left the room hurriedly.

He dwelt upon her words in the way that people have of hugging a painful remembrance. There *must* be some one else he thought, and he tried so to comfort himself, but in vain. His vanity was wounded, but he was too thoroughly in love with her to heed that so much, he was cruelly hurt. What was the use of the flattering assertions of his people? he had always been assured of success if he wanted success, and now he had failed.

He was very silent, subdued, and unhappy. He longed now for recovery; the place was hateful to him. He dreaded seeing Margaret again; he was afraid Mr. Sandford might read his story; he was irritable and restless, and very very miserable.

On the top of this came the answer from his cautious manager strongly advising him against Mr. Sandford's scheme, and giving very excellent reasons with which he could not but be content.

He was so fully aware of his own incompetency, that he never for a moment disputed his conclusion; but he was too much upset, too much unlike himself, that night, to go into anything in the shape of business, and he was wheeled into his own room early, pleading headache, and happy to escape from the family party that evening, and be alone with his unhappiness.

His absence created no surprise. Mr. Sandford was indifferent; he was a little annoyed by some checks he had met with in his business things, and a little more irritable than usual, a little harder about Grace's shortcomings, and very violent and disagreeable to her all dinner-time.

Margaret was still unhinged. Mr. Drayton's words had agitated her, and she was sorry for him, more sorry than she could express, when she saw how really he suffered. She could not understand how it was that he could see any merit in her, while Grace was by; only to be sure, Grace had been so persistently antagonistic. But for that she, Margaret, would have escaped, and Grace would have known what to say so much better. Thinking it over she was afraid she had been unkind, but she had been so taken by surprise.

It was not till the sisters were in their own room, and the house was hushed for the night, that Margaret told Grace what had happened.

Their favourite way of talking when the weather made it possible, was standing at their open window—a window that looked a little away from the town; the clear air predominated over the smoke of the busy town then, and what remained was hardly perceptible. The great deep blue sky of night with its "thousand eyes" made up to them for the dull darkness of the days. When it was chilly, one plaid covered them both as the two young faces looked out into the stillness, and whispered their thoughts to each other there.

"Grace," said Margaret, in a low tone, feeling shy even with her sister, her other self, about the great event of the day, "I have something to tell you, something we never dreamed of, that you will be as much surprised to hear as I was."

She clung a little closer to her sister, putting her arm round her waist.

"Have you?" asked Grace, wonderingly, but not roused to much curiosity as yet: "it is wonderful that anything can happen in this place. Every day is like the day that has gone before; each day is as dull and as empty of anything we can care about."

"You will be surprised, Grace; but I want you to promise not to laugh at him."

"Laugh at him!" re-echoed Grace. "Is it Mr. Sandford?"

"No, he knows nothing, and of course we must not tell him."

"Him—you said I was not to laugh at *him*," said Grace, suddenly startled into consciousness. "Is it anything connected with Mr. Drayton?"

"Yes," murmured Margaret, in a low voice, "he spoke to me this evening. He told me, Grace, that he—loved me. I was so sorry about it."

"Why should you be sorry? It must not be thought of in a hurry; but we must try and be sensible about it," answered Grace.

"It does not require much thought," said Margaret, surprised, almost bewildered, by her sister's quiet tone, as if the question could be weighed. "I told him at once it was quite impossible of course."

"But you need not have done it in such a hurry, why not think it over?" Grace spoke as though she was disappointed.

Margaret was conscious of the keenest pain she had ever known in all her life. She paused for a moment, almost breathless. Her sister, then, saw a possible conclusion widely different from hers: that she did so seemed to set them further apart in feeling than they had ever been. "You yourself have done nothing but laugh at him, we have laughed together," she said in a pained voice; "he was to be the prince, and he came, and you yourself said how middle-aged and uninteresting he was—do you forget, Grace?"

"I do not forget, Margaret, darling, it is true; but if I encouraged you to laugh, and in so doing have spoiled the future for you—and for me," she added, in a lower tone.

"Spoiled the future!" exclaimed Margaret, wondering, "we think differently. I am sorry, I was very sorry, because he cared so much—but no future with him is possible. Think, Grace, how annoyed we have been by his noisy laughter, by his endless jokes, by his very ways. How is it you forget?"

"It is different," said Grace. "Mind, I do not say, take him; but I say you might have thought of it for a little while. What did he say, Margaret can you remember?"

"I can remember some; he was very kind; and he said something about making me happy and about living where I liked in London, or anywhere, and giving me luxuries. I hated his saying all that, and I said so. I said it was like a bribe."

"It was not nice," said Grace slowly, "he ought not to have said it. And yet—oh, Margaret!" she exclaimed, fervently, "think how near we have been to the realization of our dreams! To leave this hateful place—which is choking me, and making me wretched—to go away, to live in the centre of all that is worth living for!"

Margaret was perfectly overwhelmed at this discovery. Grace was disappointed; she wished her to marry this man, whom she had laughed at, and turned into the bitterest ridicule, ever since she had seen him, and had seen that he was not in the least like the expected prince who was to rescue her!

The poor child could not get over it. She stood still clasping her; but she felt as though her world had crumbled to pieces at her feet. She was roused from the deepest and cruellest pain by feeling Grace's tears dropping fast upon her. Grace was weeping, and she was the cause of her tears. She struggled with a feeling of indignation also. A sense of being unfairly and unjustly put in the wrong, made her less hurt than angry after a moment. It seemed as though in a supreme moment of her life her sister had failed her.

"Grace," she said, after a long silence seemed to have made her voice startling, "if this had come to you, would you have done it?"

"How can I tell?" said Grace. "Nothing comes to me, it seems."

"But you can imagine—you can put yourself in my place."

"No, I cannot! We are so different—you and I."

"And yet we used to think alike, up till now, Grace. I have always seen the wisdom of your thoughts; you surely cannot counsel me to marry a man who has never appeared to me in any but a ridiculous light."

"No, I do not counsel it," said Grace; "but I cannot help seeing that this was a chance for us both, and that it has gone."

Margaret shivered.

"It is getting cold," she said, abruptly, "and I am tired."

She kissed her sister with a long, lingering kiss. It was as if she were bidding farewell to the sister she had known, so much had her words jarred upon her heart and hurt her.

Grace slept. Through the uncurtained window, with no blind between her and the bright stars she so loved to look upon, Margaret lay awake.

She was only conscious at first of a vivid and keen disappointment. All Grace's cutting speeches about this man's inferiority were fresh in her memory, and now—she thought it possible! Then she thought of all their high expectations when they left school, and of the way in which Grace had been made a sort of leader among them. Grace, who had never really worked, who only did things when she felt inclined, whose work was, as often as not, done for her, and who took all for granted, as due to her personal influence—why had she the position she took up? Softer thoughts succeeded these; during their long stay at school how often Grace had defended her from the oppression of others. How often she had used her influence in her behalf; how often stood out till she had obtained some concession for her.

Loving words and caresses, the numberless little actions that knit sisters together, floated before her. The times without number when she had been filled with pride; and how proud she was of Grace. If she could be seen; if only the world could see her, she would have it at her foot—so she had always thought, so she thought still. Then as a flash came the thought, "Could I do it?" She thought of all it might give Grace; of the many things she might have in her power; and she began to feel once more bewildered; her brain was getting weary; her eyes were closing, and her lips framed the words, "I cannot do it," as she sank into slumber.

The stars looked down upon her innocent face—ruffled with the first real care or sorrow it had ever known—they faded as the day strengthened; and then came the blaze of early morning, and the long shafts of light everywhere, and her seventeenth birthday had come.

She met Mr. Drayton that day with an overwhelming sense of consciousness, but she was reassured by his manner, perhaps she had exaggerated—all unwittingly—to Grace and to herself his despair and his passion, for he met her with a smile in which there was nothing to be seen save good-will, and he congratulated her upon having reached so advanced an age in something of his old manner; then he produced his birthday-gift, a ring, deep-set with stones, and with a half-laughing reference to her uncle, Mr. Sandford, for permission, put it into her hand. She took it unwillingly, feeling afraid that in taking it she was in some way giving him cause to think she might change, and she felt no change was possible for her. But she was obliged to accept it and to put it on, and, on the whole, the day passed off well. Mr. Sandford looked anxiously for some indication of any liking between Mr. Drayton and Grace, and was disappointed afresh to see none.

Mr. Drayton was obliged to go, and his going put an end to all hopes about an investment, and the disappointment in two quarters made itself felt in the home party, but was skilfully veiled by Mrs. Dorriman, whose duty it seemed generally to be to stand in the breach and turn all storms and disagreeables aside.

These things, however, once more made Mr. Sandford think of the past. The interest in the present and the anxiety he had felt to arrange matters had driven the past further from him.

Poor Mrs. Dorriman, as she caught her brother's eyes fixed upon her, little thought how he was weighing her in the balance, wondering whether she would show herself more pliable now in the matter of those papers and how best he could talk to her about them.

She herself had put the subject away from her when she first entered his house. She had a confused notion that even thinking of them was treachery whilst under his roof; having done this the companionship of Margaret and the small round of household duties filled up her time and her thoughts; she strove hard to do her duty, and she did it well, giving nothing a divided attention. By degrees the papers and their possible contents became as a forgotten tale. She had the consciousness that they were there, but they were not before her mind now.

Something might have been uttered by Mr. Sandford, had not his attention been drawn to Grace. She had spoken some words that had roused even gentle Mrs. Dorriman to indignation, for the words had reference to Jean.

"Her illness was nothing much," she was saying, "and she gained her point. She got poor Mrs. Chalmers out of it and stepped into her shoes. I liked Mrs. Chalmers myself."

"It is very unfair to say this of Jean," said Mrs. Dorriman, with a heightened colour; "she never meddled or interfered, and I never asked her to stay; she stayed because Mrs. Chalmers left suddenly and we had no one else."

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Dorriman, but *why* did she leave suddenly? There are two sides to every question," said Grace, with her little air of superiority, caring nothing really about the question, but in rather a state of irritation, and arguing merely because she had no other way of venting her ruffled feelings. She was unreasonably cross, first because Mr. Drayton was not what she had expected, and then because something might have come of his visit and nothing had come, and she saw before her the monotony of days, and nothing, no excitement, nothing in sight. Her spirits were low and when this was the case she was always cross.

"What are you driving at?" exclaimed Mr. Sandford angrily; "what do you know about it?"

"Only that that Highland woman, Mrs. Dorriman's servant, managed to get Mrs. Chalmers out of the house. I suppose I may have an opinion on the subject?" said Grace, her colour rising and her temper also.

"You have no business to say anything of the kind," thundered Mr. Sandford, too angry to restrain his voice, sending terror into the timid soul of his sister and making Margaret turn pale, while she instinctively rose and stood by Grace; "Mrs. Chalmers ventured to be insolent to *me* and she left, as all people may expect to do who venture to show insolence to me or mine."

"If *you* have an opinion I may have mine," persisted Grace, too much roused herself to feel afraid of him.

"You may have an opinion but you are not entitled to express it in my house," he answered, still more irritated by her manner; "you can wait for that till you have a house of your own, a thing which appears to me very problematical, since no man would care to have an upsetting, conceited young woman as a wife with no fortune, or looks, or any single recommendation."

Grace was pale with anger. Margaret turned upon him like a young lioness.

"How can you say such unkind, such untrue things?" she exclaimed passionately. "Oh! Grace, my darling, do not heed him."

"I do not heed him," said Grace, magnificently, wounded and stung beyond belief, and quivering with passion, "but I want to know why you keep us in your house, hating us so evidently—we will not stay, we will go. You offered us a home, and now you speak as though we were a burden. We

will go, Margaret."

"Speak for yourself, I offered you a home for the sake of one I loved. I did not know you then. When I saw what you were, I still kept that home open to you for the sake of your sister; you put yourself above her in everything, you have made her believe you her superior in all things, but she is worth a dozen of you, and so every man in his senses will think as they know you."

Grace was in tears by this time, and Margaret tried to get her to go out of the room, but she was struggling forwards, she would not go till she had said something, and she meant the last word to be very cutting.

"Brother," said Mrs. Dorriman, imploringly, "you are wrong; you are saying things now in the heat of passion that you will be sorry for afterwards. It is hard to be obliged to eat the bread of dependence, and to have it cast up to you."

"It is her own fault," he said, angrily; "she gives herself airs and graces as though she were above the ground she treads upon. It makes me ill the way she goes on, and she must hear it!"

"Spare her now."

"Oh! I'll spare her, but she has to lower her head; even Drayton would have nothing to say to her, though I did my best, and praised her up to the skies when I spoke to him."

"That is more than enough!" sobbed Grace, as with Margaret clinging to her she rushed to her own room, and the sisters sobbed out their misery in each other's arms.

But crying would not help them; they resolved to leave the house, to go far from this, *where* they did not exactly know; they did not know any one except their school-mistress, and having left her with flying colours it seemed terrible to them to have to go back and face the wonder and the pity they would meet with.

They were both so young and so inexperienced. They sat thinking, not wholly miserable now because they were conscious of a sort of excitement and they were together.

Grace at that moment could not help thinking what a small beginning generally leads to large conclusions—this beginning had been so very, very trifling.

She had been walking up and down one day to obtain the amount of exercise she conceived necessary to her well-being, the day had been damp and she kept to the gravel in front of the house.

Jean, who was at the open window, to use her own expression, trying to get strong, was talking in her rich guttural voice to Mrs. Dorriman, who was in the room, though out of sight, and was watching her.

Conscious of observation—though only the observation of an old woman—Grace, who was proud of her way of moving, stepped forwards and backwards with still more daintiness than usual. She heard Jean say—

"What gars Miss Rivers walk yon way, hippity hop from ane side till another?"

And then in a moment she answered her own question—

"Ou, aye, the gravel's hard; and she'll have corns."

Grace retreated, with a feeling of hatred against her. This little affront was the cause of her impertinence to Mrs. Dorriman, and all that had followed.

Nothing could be done that night, and when the long chilly evening came to an end the sisters crept into bed. They had come to no resolution, they only intended to go away; but it may be noted that in this emergency Grace's superiority failed to assert itself—it was Margaret to whom she turned; Margaret, who, barely beyond childhood, was to think for both.

The last thing Mr. Sandford wanted was to have the difficulty solved in any way derogatory to the position he had taken up, of befriending two girls who had no real claim upon him. If they left his house, all Renton would hear of it, and put their own conclusion upon it.

Like all men who act and speak in a passion he was very angry if he was taken at his word. He found it so easy to forget his harsh sayings, that he never could understand that other people should have any difficulty in doing so.

He had wished to wound Grace and bring her down, and then was annoyed by her retreat. Mrs. Dorriman had so often smarted from his tyranny in old days that she could fully understand and sympathise with the girls; and the incessant rudeness of Grace to herself did not prevent her feeling for her.

Mr. Sandford had implied, and almost said, that he had offered Grace, so to speak, to Mr. Drayton, who would have none of her. She was womanly enough to resent the insult for Grace, as representing girlhood, and she was so indignant with her brother about this that she, for the time, lost all sense of dread. He would not come upstairs, but he sent to request her to go to him to his own room, where he was sitting sending long puffs of smoke across the room. He saw her glance at his pipe, and laid it down—the act in itself spoke of a changed feeling towards her. She keenly remembered in old days how persistently he had made her write for him and talk to him,

while the fumes of his pipe had made her feel so ill she could hardly do either.

"Well! what is to be done?" he began, looking at her keenly underneath his shaggy brows.

"I am sure I do not know," she answered, helplessly.

"Well, you had better think. What is the use of being a woman if you cannot arrange things?"

And Mrs. Dorriman thought; and then spoke out her thoughts—a thing new to her when her brother was in question.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Dorriman, like most shy people, spoke quickly when she had anything to say that cost her an effort, and she said rather abruptly, though with a little deprecating air, "You see, you were wrong—you must feel that now."

"I feel nothing of the kind, and I do not see it, either. This is a new tone for you to take with me."

"It is a right tone just now, you asked me to help to see what could be done. Grace can never forgive what you said—never."

"Why not?"

"Was there any truth in it? Did you really speak to Mr. Drayton about her?"

Mr. Sandford sat looking straight before him. He could not quite remember at first how it had been. Had Mr. Drayton spoken first, or had he mentioned Grace to him in the first instance? Then he remembered, "Drayton spoke of Margaret. He said something about her admiringly. I did not want him to have any notion of Margaret—I did not know how far it might go. I wished him to like Grace, and I did say something. Yes, that is true. He would not see it, and I am not surprised; but, at any rate, he led up to it, he spoke first."

"Then it is not quite so bad for her. I may tell them this?"

"You may tell them anything you like."

"I only wish to tell them the truth."

"Just as you please."

"Brother!" and Mrs. Dorriman leaned forward a little, and her gentle face flushed a little, "these children are living here with you by your wish; you must not make it hard for them."

"Saul among the prophets! Why, you are coming out in quite a new light."

Mrs. Dorriman shrank back again. She might have answered him and said that for these girls she had more courage than for herself, but she knew the wisdom of silence and she held her peace.

"What do you think they will do?" He asked the question with assumed indifference.

"I think they will go away. They are both high-spirited girls. Margaret feels it so much—she feels any slight offered to Grace more even than Grace does herself; she is perfectly devoted to her sister."

"You must prevent their going—at any rate in this way," he said, not looking at her, but looking straight into the fire.

"How can I prevent it?" said the poor woman, helplessly; she felt as though life was very hard to her.

He did not answer her, but went on looking straight before him.

Then an inspiration came to her. "If I went with them somewhere, after a time perhaps they would come back."

"That would do," he said, slowly.

"It would cost something," she said, always nervous when money matters were in question, and looking at him anxiously.

"You can have any money you want," he said, carelessly. "When would you go?"

"We should have to go at once—to-morrow. I am quite sure the girls will want to be off at daylight." She thought to herself that had she been so insulted she would not have waited till daylight. "I think it will be better to go as soon as possible, and Jean will take care of you."

"I am not afraid of myself, thank you; it is only going back to the days before you came."

She said no more, but wishing him good-night she went upstairs. To-morrow gave but little time for any preparation, and then she had to arrange where she could go with the girls. In this matter she could be guided perhaps by their wishes. She called Jean, who generally sat up for her, and

told her in concise words what was to happen.

Jean was fairly taken aback, not unnaturally her first thought was about herself. "Is it me, ma'am, that is going to be left to look after Mr. Sandford? I shall never be able to get on with him."

"Yes you will, dear Jean, you please him already, he is always saying how well everything is done."

"Oh, I'm not afeard for him when he's in a good way," said Jean, stoutly, "but what will I do when he gets *rampagious*? I'll be feared of my life of him then."

"Oh, Jean, do not make difficulties," said poor Mrs. Dorriman; "it is hard enough, and in the wide world I do not know where I am going with these girls!"

"That's bad," said Jean, sympathising fully with the position of affairs; "it's a hard case to go to an unkent place, with other people's children too!" She made no more difficulties, she put everything ready, but she strongly advised Mrs. Dorriman to prevent the girls going early. "Go at a reasonable hour, and why not?" she insisted. "What is the good of setting people's tongues wagging? they'll aye be speaking whether or no, but no harm comes if the things they say have no legs to stand on."

The early morning roused Grace and Margaret, and they went to the window and looked out.

The night had been bright, and, though the moon had not been visible, there had been that soft starlight which is so mysterious and beautiful. With a vague hope of seeing a fine morning which would inspirit them they drew near, and gazed blankly at the scene before them.

A grey, leaden-coloured sky, a hopeless, pitiless rain, mud everywhere, and everything cheerless, drooping, and miserable.

Tears came into Grace's eyes, and she and Margaret clung together for a moment.

"We must go," said Margaret, to whom nothing else seemed possible.

"I suppose we must," said Grace, looking blankly before her.

Their spirits sank. Margaret, moving softly so as to disturb no one, dragged out first one then another of their boxes. She was resolved to go on with the preparations. She had been more deeply wounded than even Grace by those words of Mr. Sandford's about Mr. Drayton; and then came this terrible thought—was *his* offer the consequence of something said by Mr. Sandford? If so, how doubly glad she was all had ended as it had. Grace, always easily influenced by the aspect of things, was in a terrible state of depression.

She turned her head round once or twice and watched Margaret, but she never offered to help her. She did so hate discomfort! and the prospect of going out and facing the dirt and rain and cold broke her down. Her spirit had forsaken her, and sitting there with a plaid thrown over her she cried miserably.

Margaret was too much occupied to notice that her sister's face was persistently turned away from her. She was kneeling facing the door, while with hands trembling a little from cold and partly from agitation she was putting into the bottom of the boxes their heaviest possessions. She would not take time to think of the future, of where they should go, or what they were to do. To get away—that was her thought, to be far from this hateful position for Grace, to shield her from all chance of hearing anything so hard again....

Noiselessly she went on, and mechanically, trying how the little old work-box took up least room, placing it sideways and lengthways with that carefulness regarding detail which is often the outcome of great excitement, when she was startled by a knock at the door.

The sisters involuntarily drew together—Grace having dashed the tears away from her face. It was Jean, a tray in her hands and some hot tea for them. She took the whole thing in at a glance, saw the look of depression in Grace's face, and Margaret's expression of resolution.

"My bairns," said the good woman, "if without offence to you I may call you so—I heard you moving; work is ill on an empty stomach, and the morning cold. Take up your tea, it will do ye good. And now," she went on as the girls took her advice, "what is it all about?"

"Mr. Sandford has cruelly insulted us," said Margaret, reddening, "and we are going away."

"And where will ye go?"

"I—we do not know—but we *must* go away from here," both the young voices chimed in.

"Well, it's no my place to preach—an insult's ill to put up with—but Mrs. Dorriman has one of her headaches, and I've to ask you to go and see her at a reasonable hour, ye ken. I trust she's sleeping now. She's been saer put about. She's going away too."

"Going away—Mrs. Dorriman is going away! then," said Margaret, "she has taken our part."

The sisters looked at each other.

"And did you ever know Mrs. Dorriman take any part but the part of the weakest?" asked Jean. "See how she stood by me—not but that your case and my case are two different ones—yes,

bairns, they are very different. Mr. Sandford may have a rough tongue, I'm no denying it—whiles I myself am afraid of him—but you're no exactly kin till him, and he offered you a home, and has been good to you in many ways. It's no my business to preach," insisted Jean, "but I think it's an ill return to him to set all the tongues wagging about him. Go! of course you can go, but you can leave his house decently, and not in a mad-like way, particularly as you do not seem to be expected anywhere else."

"He said very terrible things last night," said Margaret, "and we must go."

"I'm not saying anything against it," said Jean, coolly, "but you cannot go till you have seen my lady, and you cannot see her till a reasonable hour. She is going too, and she is going on your account, and you owe her that much. See," she continued, looking at Grace, who was knocked up and ill now from the agitation and want of sleep. "Your sister is ill—go back to bed, my bairns," she said, "and I'll bring you something by-and-bye, and you must see Mrs. Dorriman before you go away—before you make any plans."

Grace was too glad to lie down, never very strong; she was suffering now, and Margaret, vexed at heart, saw that Jean was right. Grace ill, it would be cruel to make her move,—cruel, if not impossible. She was herself too much excited to go back to bed. She went on when Jean left the room, arranging her things in the open boxes, moving quietly, as Grace, worn out with her crying and the emotions of the morning, sank into sleep.

As Margaret watched her, and noticed the swelled eyelids and look of unhappiness, she blamed herself for not having thought of her grief and sorrow before. Nothing she thought then would be too hard for her, no sacrifice too great for her to make on her behalf. She knelt down beside her sleeping sister and offered up her innocent and earnest morning prayer, and she went on making quite a solemn vow to make her happiness her chief object in life, never to think of herself, but to put Grace before her always.

She rose comforted, as we receive comfort from a great resolve—the decision seems to bring its own strength with it.

Turning to the window she saw that the day was more hopeless than ever; rain in the country pattering on the green leaves brings with it a refreshing and not altogether a melancholy sound; the effect of a heavy rain is to wash the grass into brilliancy, and leave glittering traces for the first sun-rays to turn into beautiful prismatic effects; but rain in the outskirts of a town where every pathway is of coal-dust and the mud is black from the same cause—when the rain brings down with it dirt and blacks and insoluble portions of the grimy smoke—is a dreary and wretched thing. Only those who do not live in their surroundings, whose imagination lifts them up and beyond these influences, or are too busy to heed them, are not weighed down by them.

She was startled to see a cab coming up to the house. She looked out, and with indescribable feelings in which relief was uppermost she saw Mr. Sandford and some luggage drive off towards the station.

It was breakfast time, and just as she was turning to go downstairs, and went to see if Grace was still sleeping, Mrs. Dorriman came to the door and Grace started up.

Margaret met her with a little misgiving. She only knew the fact as Jean had told it to her. Mrs. Dorriman was also going away, and on their account, and obeying her first impulse she said to her, "Is it true, you are going away also? Are you vexed with us? But you know we cannot stay."

"Children," said Mrs. Dorriman, and her soft sweet voice imposed silence upon them both, "you took my brother up wrongly. Mr. Drayton spoke first, and the sting is gone I think, then—had it not been so I could understand, and I can feel for you; but my brother said I might tell you the truth, and this is the truth. But he sees, and I see, that the life here is not suited to you—you cannot expect my brother to change his habits and his home for you. His business is here and here his home must be. But he has given me leave, he has given me the means, to go with you somewhere for a time. I think this wise—we will go somewhere and have a change and begin in a new way when we come back. The first question is where do you wish to go?"

Grace and Margaret heard this speech with an emotion and thrill of gratitude. Grace felt as though she had never done Mrs. Dorriman justice. To go somewhere, anywhere away from this, and yet not have to regret it—to go as she had thought it impossible to go! Words failed her, and it was Margaret who thanked Mrs. Dorriman, and who expressed something of the relief and gratitude they both felt.

Mrs. Dorriman was not insensible to the charm of Margaret's affection; but she was not a woman given to much demonstration. She closed the question at present by telling Grace to lie still. She would send her her breakfast, and, taking Margaret with her, they went downstairs. It was to a woman of her temperament a very strange bewilderment now, to have the world to choose from, and not know where to go.

One plan after another was discussed by her and Margaret between the demolition of one scone and the attack upon another. The question was not settled, but Margaret felt thankful in her heart of hearts, giving Mrs. Dorriman credit for the whole arrangement of the difficulty.

When Grace, refreshed, though still pale and bearing traces of agitation, in spite of her sleep, joined them, the great matter was again talked over.

"We cannot go from here," said Mrs. Dorriman, with unwonted firmness, "till we have settled where we are to go, and are sure of rooms."

"Will not that take very long?" asked Margaret.

"Once we agree about the place—writing and hearing in reply will take little time—we can telegraph," said Mrs. Dorriman, with a certain pride in her unlimited powers. She had, never of her own free will, sent a telegram in all her life.

Then a brilliant idea came to Margaret. "Let us go South, and try one place first; if we do not like it we can try another."

Grace was enchanted.

"And now," said Margaret, who seemed to be taking up a new position that morning, "We owe you so much; what do you like best?"

"Oh, my dear!" said poor Mrs. Dorriman, her long self-repression giving way, and surprising the girl by her glistening eyes and brilliant flash of colour, "give me the sea and the hills;" and though, as half ashamed of having shown her craving for both these things, she added, hastily, "Put me out of it, my dear; never mind me. I can be happy anywhere." Their first move was soon decided upon now. To one of the lovely bays at the mouth of the Clyde they resolved to go, and with hearts fluttering with excitement, at one moment studying the Railway Guide, at another a map, they decided to go to Lornbay, and then hastily resumed their packing. Three days came and went swiftly, and satisfactory answers having been received about rooms in the best hotel, Mrs. Dorriman, not without various doubts as to her fitness for this great responsibility, found herself alone with the girls, leaving Renton with all its varied experiences behind them in its murky vale of smoke.

It often happens that the realization of a wish brings with it a certain fear as to whether the intensity of the wish has been altogether full of wisdom, particularly is this the case when we are conscious of having thought of ourselves, to the exclusion of any other consideration.

Of the trio who were whirling to the mouth of the Clyde, Grace was the most disturbed and the one least able to enjoy the change of scene, the one upon whose spirit lay the shadow of a reproach.

She was conscious of having from the first placed herself in a position of antagonism to Mr. Sandford. She had intended him to recognise her merits, and to allow her to influence him as she had influenced those school-companions to whom she had been as a superior being. But she had forgotten to take into account his temper, his prejudices, and his passions; and, though she now recognised that she had failed, she blamed his obtuseness, and not her own powers, for the failure.

Margaret was evidently much to him; she was nothing, and the one person who had come there, though he fell far short of being a prince, had utterly also failed to see in her any attraction.

This also she imagined was due to some fault in him and not in her. Margaret had a way of effacing herself, of putting herself so completely out of the question, that Grace's vanity was almost excusable. Reared in the belief of her possessing many gifts, flattered by the small world around her, it would require a much severer blow to her pride than Mr. Sandford's rudeness and Mr. Drayton's blindness, before she learnt how wide a difference exists between the value we put upon ourselves and the value placed upon us by outsiders who are not biassed or prejudiced in any way in our favour. To the indifferent world poor Grace would simply be an ordinary-looking girl who gave herself airs. But she had this still to learn.

The beauty of the late spring was filling every copse and valley through which they passed. Everywhere was the budding forth of those tender hues which bring a sense of quiet refreshment to the eye; on every sheltered bank the primroses were gazing at the passers-by like faint stars from their deep leafy beds. The mountain torrents here and there were quivering with excitement as they raced down the hill-sides bubbling over with the joy of having escaped from the imprisonment of the winter's frosts. When the train stopped they could hear the twittering and singing of birds; all these things of everyday occurrence and of no importance in everyday life, perhaps; but to these three, who had felt the great want of the fresh beauty of country life, and had passed some months without any of these cheering influences, they came as a breath of Paradise.

Grace began to respect Mrs. Dorriman when they changed stations, and she saw the quiet practical way in which everything was arranged. Then they sped on their way along the banks of the Clyde, and an exclamation burst from Margaret's lips. Mrs. Dorriman's eyes were moist. The sea came in sight where the river widened; the evening light was falling over it all touching with a golden gleam the ripple of the water. Some yachts were lying at anchor. Away to the South rose faint blue hills as on the West. Even Grace, too much self-absorbed as a rule to be passionately alive to natural beauty, felt it all, as she had never in all her life felt any scenery before. The movement and life all framed in this exquisite scene thrilled her. She forgot herself, her hopes, her ambitions, and all else, and, unconsciously holding Margaret's hand, she found herself giving back an answering and a sympathetic clasp.

The bustle of arrival came as a break to the high-strung feelings of Mrs. Dorriman. She had not been to this place since the days of her girlhood; when her father had gone for change and she

had accompanied him. Can any one look at the scenes of their youth and compare the still-remembered visions of those days with the blank reality of their lives? All seems unchanged, everything seems to have stood still. We remember the gnarled trunk of that tree, its very boughs seem hardly to have lost a twig; the same wild flowers grow under and around the great grey stones, where so often we gathered them, with supple limbs that sprang across the burn as lightly as any roedeer. Now we stoop stiffly, our suppleness is gone from us, and we are afraid of even the stepping-stones; they are still there, but we are woefully changed. Mrs. Dorriman was not old enough for so painful a contrast, and her activity was still stirring her to action, but the elasticity of her spirit was gone. She could still feel things keenly, but her powers of enjoyment had gone; she feared more than she hoped, she had lost the freshness of her feelings; she was saddened and subdued, the habit of her mind was depression, she expected evil and not good. Nothing for so long had come to her in the way of pleasure, that she had ceased to think happiness could come to her at all, and she drifted on in her life without any aim, only trying to do what was right. Even heaven seemed to her a vague and far-away dream, which was not to her a positive joy because of that uncomfortable distaste we have alluded to about her husband's perpetual companionship.

But when their informal but comfortable meal was over and they had separated for the night she stood long looking down on the moving lights upon the water; the black hulls of the larger ships sent dark shadows in vivid contrast to the moonlight rays, the boats flying about with their twinkling lights; the splash of oars came up to her in the stillness; every now and again a hoarse cry rang out as boats hailed each other, snatches of song came up on the light wind that fanned her face. She could hear the cheerful unrestrained laughter ringing out. Over all, the moon shone down resplendent, and the soft wind, hurrying from the south, was warm and pure, tasting of the sea over which it had come so many many miles.

It was one of those times in her life when her whole nature protested against unhappiness. She understood but vaguely (we generally do understand it vaguely) what would give her happiness, but she craved for a higher and a fuller life; the perpetual repression, the subjection of her very ideas to a stronger mind, chafed her, and as she clasped her hands the thought that at the moment comforted her was that here she could have freedom—here it would be more like home.

How long she stood there! The lights went out as the boats came in-shore, the sounds died away, the feeling of being free seemed to show her all at once how much she really feared her brother, and then slowly rose before her once more the thought of those papers.

This problem always filled her with pain, the same dread of still further learning to distrust her husband, the same irresolution came over her, she turned round quickly and shut the window, shutting away that painful remembrance with a resolute determination not to think of it just now, and putting it away from her with all her power. Even as she prayed she was conscious of that something she would not think of, as a secret sin may be covered up and concealed in a corner of our mind (knowing that it is seen) and passed over, while we confess every other.

The morning broke exquisitely fine, light clouds enhanced the sunshine. The girls, with few regrets in their past lives, came to breakfast with "shining morning faces" full of the happiness of a delightful change and all the pleasantest expectations of what the world held for them there. Grace was radiant; Margaret's more composed face reflected her sister's expression. They went out, hurrying Mrs. Dorriman's slower movements with a naturalness and impatience she did not dislike as they seemed so near her; and they looked about them with the full enjoyment of girls who had never seen anything of life, except in the serried ranks of schoolgirl's fashion, and who now stopped to look at every shop window in the long street running round the bay, alternating this close attention by watching the boats, upon the other hand, glide to and fro.

Mrs. Dorriman was very nearly as much taken up as they were, and entered fully into their pleasure. She was not superior to the charms of caps, which she wore with a mental protest, having great quantities of hair, but which she thought frightful, and which, she was always trying to improve upon.

They had just turned away from an array of these necessary evils when she noticed a lady coming towards them leaning on the arm of a very tall young man. She was walking very slowly, and evidently was using his arm from no conventional sense, but as really requiring it.

As she drew nearer she fixed her eyes inquiringly on Mrs. Dorriman's face, made a hurried pause—moved on—turned back, and said in a voice of inquiry, "Annie Sandford?"

"Lady Lyons! Yes—I was Annie Sandford—I am Mrs. Dorriman."

"And these?" inquired Lady Lyons, turning with languid grace to Grace and Margaret.

"Miss Rivers and her sister," said Mrs. Dorriman, who never knew exactly how to put their connection with her brother concisely, and determined to explain it at her leisure.

"Oh," said Lady Lyons, evidently requiring some further explanation now, at the present moment.

"My brother's wards—he is their guardian."

"Oh!" again said Lady Lyons, but this time in another manner; she thought she understood.

Then she introduced her son, and he dropped behind and talked to the girls. Lady Lyons slipped her hand under Mrs. Dorriman's arm and they walked on together.

"Delightful," began young Lyons, turning impartially to each sister in turn, "to find unexpected acquaintances in this dull little place."

"We only came last night, we do not think it dull," they said in a breath. Grace adding, for fear of his looking down upon her, "we have not had time to find it dull."

"What have you seen, so far?" he asked; adding in a breath, "not that there is anything really to see."

"We have seen —— caps," said Grace laughing.

He laughed with full understanding, and quoted "The ruling passion...."

Margaret felt annoyed, and could not quite see why she should be annoyed. Still her innate loyalty made her dislike even a covert sneer, and looking at him full in the face she said, "What is there to see here that you think interesting?"

He laughed merrily; "How severe you are,—very severe. Some people like the sea, others go into raptures about the hills; it depends upon whether you like nature or human nature. There is no choice here, there is only the sea and the hills, always the hills."

"We think the place lovely," said Margaret, "and we have seen so little, only school and then Renton. Renton is such a smoky place."

"But Renton Place is a fine place," he rejoined. "I have all my life heard of Mr. Sandford as being a millionnaire."

Margaret laughed. "We used to think it would be a fine place standing in a large park. I believe we thought (Grace and I) that there would even be deer there, but it is quite different—a square house, a short avenue, and the town just outside the gates."

Mr. Lyons looked puzzled. "How strange!" he began, when Grace interrupted him. "All very rich men have whims," she said, in a tone quite unlike any Margaret had ever heard her use before. "Mr. Sandford's whim is to live close to Renton, where he coins money, I believe."

"It will be all the better for those who succeed him," the young man said, looking more attentively at Grace than he had done as yet.

"Yes," said Margaret, in her straightforward way, "but that is a question that does not interest us."

"My dear Margaret, you should not make these very positive assertions," said Grace; "you know nothing, really. My sister is very young, Mr. Lyons, and young girls always draw their own conclusions, often without anything really to go upon."

Mr. Lyons laughingly said her youth was very self-evident. "How beautiful is youth!" he exclaimed, with mock solemnity, and Mrs. Dorriman was startled to hear them all on such a familiar footing already.

She and her friend parted with enthusiasm. Poor Lady Lyons really out of health, and having many, many troubles to bear, was unfeignedly pleased to meet Mrs. Dorriman again; and Mrs. Dorriman, while conscious of much short-coming in the matter of friendship, as she could look back only upon acquaintanceship, and nothing more, was much flattered to find herself of so much importance to another.

At the dreary school where Mrs. Dorriman had been educated; Lady Lyons, then an older, stronger, and handsomer girl than herself, had been.

Mrs. Dorriman could not remember that they had been friends, but now the old familiarity made them more than acquaintances, and they met with that common ground of "old times" which bridges over so much.

As they neared their hotel a man was standing on the steps and lifted his hat. It was Mr. Drayton.

CHAPTER X.

Nothing reconciles one to a place so much as finding one's self not wholly left out in the cold as regards acquaintances.

Beautiful scenery, except to some exceptional souls, does not take the place of all human companionship. The interchange of thought with one's own species is an especial necessity when the small home duties that usually fill up time at home, are taken from one.

Mrs. Dorriman, who paid great attention to all the details of household matters, and had a pleasant sense of ably fulfilling those duties, would have felt stranded had she been left at Lornbay without any one of her own age and standing to talk to and nothing to do. Even in the matter of caps it was a pleasure to find an appreciative listener, and Lady Lyons, a woman whose range of interest was limited to the fluctuations of her own health and the welfare of her son, could listen and give intelligent attention.

Mrs. Dorriman was fulfilling her brother's wish in remaining at the hotel. She was filled with great doubts as to the goodness of the food, and resisted all attempts to inveigle her into preferring disguised dishes. She had a horror of anything made up except when she knew who had the task in hand; and her occupation was gone now she had to accept the dinners as they were, and had nothing to do with the ordering of them. She would have infinitely preferred lodgings (which she had never had), and had visions of wholly ideal landladies, and great powers of interference.

Once her spirits became accustomed to the scenes around her, she would have felt dull missing her Inchbrae occupations, had it not been for Lady Lyons. Lady Lyons had seen a great deal more of the world than Mrs. Dorriman; but seeing the world does not always imply fuller understanding. It is quite possible to see a great deal and take in nothing. Lady Lyons was a woman who had arranged her ideas before she left the paternal nest, and, partly from ill-health, partly from a limited understanding, she was narrow-minded and prejudiced, and everything was measured by her own standard, and that was as small as it could be.

Her character acted fatally upon her son. She had been left a widow young (with a moderate fortune and this only son). People went into ecstacies over the way in which she gave up her life to her son, which meant that he never went to school. He was educated upon her lines—under her own eye. She was desperately afraid of the wickedness of the world, schools were full of iniquity, therefore he never went to school. Companions he had none. She was afraid of his knowing boys with school experiences. Paul Lyons was content, knowing nothing better. He grew up narrow, selfish, and consequential, his world bounded by his mother and himself, with no developed intelligence, no nobility of thought, no aims, no aspirations, thinking himself in all ways superior to other men, and interested in nothing outside his little molehill.

Then came one brief terrible experience.

Lady Lyons, worse than usual in health, was ordered to a watering-place in the South of France, and to winter in Nice.

She knew nothing of the world; and of course Paul, who had never stood upon his own feet anywhere, was equally ignorant. Before he had been many days in the little place he had been taken in hand by the worst possible class of men; and at Nice he got into every conceivable scrape, lost money all round at Monaco, was fleeced and put into all sorts of disgraceful positions by those who told him they would make a man of him; and found himself terribly in debt, ill, and threatened with all sorts of penalties before he had been six weeks in the place.

Lady Lyons, gently obtaining the air in a Bath-chair, which, with a strong misgiving about the means of locomotion, she encumbered herself with, dreamed on in blissful ignorance.

She had given her son "principles," she thought, and she imagined that to be enough.

Paul was forced to get money from her, but he told her very little; indeed, the poor lady always talked of Paul as having been robbed, and in talking of his adventures spoke as though he had been an unblemished knight who had been robbed because his principles were too good to allow him to win, and on these occasions, though the young man would colour, so much grace was left in him, he would make a grimace when she was not looking, expressive of her foolish innocence and belief in him.

This beginning once made, he went down-hill rapidly. Once a young man reared in ignorance of the world conceives sin to be a sign of manliness, his fate is sealed.

Before he was utterly ruined, however, he was pulled up short by a long and terrible fever he was very long of recovering from. Lady Lyons, who, though a feeble, narrow-minded mother, was an affectionate one—the strain of anxiety was too much for her, and his recovery was followed by her having a paralytic stroke.

When poor Lady Lyons recovered she was feebler than before, and her son learnt, almost for the first time, that her income was almost entirely derived from a pension (her husband, a K.C.B., and an Indian General, this was secured to her); and that when she died the little place in Cumberland, and a few thousand pounds, upon which he had already given heavy bonds, was all he had to look to.

It was too late to begin a profession; he knew too little to be able to pick up anything. There was but one course open to him, and this was to marry some one with money. He had a tall figure, and was good-looking, though he had a weak face, and he was convinced himself that when he saw some one that "fetched" him, and that he was inclined to throw the handkerchief to, it would be picked up with enthusiasm. There are some men who think in this way.

When Lady Lyons came to Lornbay, hoping to derive benefit from its balmy air, Paul Lyons of course came with her. His best trait was his affection for his mother, though he despised her ignorance of the world, and was openly indignant with her having kept him in leading-strings all his life, and not having given him "a chance with other fellows."

Lady Lyons used to argue feebly with him about this. "See, my dear Paul, how much nicer and better you are than other young men," she would say, with a sigh. "Schools teach boys so much wickedness," and Paul would shrug his shoulders, and say something ambiguous which puzzled her.

This was the young man whom fate and Mrs. Dorriman introduced to Grace and Margaret Rivers. Every day now there was some walk undertaken, or some little expedition made in which Paul Lyons joined.

Lady Lyons had that motherly feeling that Paul, being her son, was such a safe and pleasant companion for every one. She was quite amused that Mrs. Dorriman considered it necessary to act as chaperon. "It is only Paul," she would say, with a little laugh.

"But he is not 'only Paul' to us; he is a young man and no relation. I do not want to be ridiculous, but I have the responsibility, and I want to do what is right."

This little speech about the responsibility forged another link in the chain of events, though Mrs. Dorriman spoke in innocence of making any chain. It is not given to us always to know when we are making history.

"My dear Paul," said Lady Lyons, when the mother and son were yawning through the remains of an evening shortly afterwards, "I think I have made a discovery; those two girls, the Rivers girls, are either rich or going to be very rich. That is why poor dear Mrs. Dorriman makes such a fuss about them, and herds them about so."

"I made that discovery long ago, mother," and Paul laughed. "The difficulty in my mind is, are they going to be even, or is one going to be heiress, and the other have a poor competency."

"My dear Paul, you will have to be careful; how clever you are! I never thought of that." And this new idea made Lady Lyons hold her knitting so carelessly that she dropped some stitches, a fact (as usual) she never discovered till she had done a good bit, when she was intensely surprised to see a very large hole, and could not imagine how it got there.

"I don't know about being clever, mother, the girls make no secret of it to *me*."

"My dear Paul! is it as far on as that?" and Lady Lyons looked up at him from her sofa with a truly admiring maternal look.

"I don't know what you mean by as far as that," said Paul, inserting his first finger with immense difficulty between his tight masher collar and his much harassed throat; "but they talk in a way I cannot help understanding. Old Sandford is coining money and saving money, that means something like wealth to his heirs or heiresses."

"It does indeed," said Lady Lyons, with sparkling eyes. "Paul, it is so strange, but when you were quite a tiny baby your poor old nurse used always to say you were born to marry a rich lady. How often I laughed at her—and now it will come true. My dear boy!"

"I think you are going too far now, mother; I feel a long way behind you. I cannot find out anything about any definite promise. We do not know anything about Mr. Sandford."

"I know a great deal about him," said Lady Lyons, eagerly. "Mrs. Dorriman talks so much about him; not that perhaps she has really told me much," she added, with a sense of having held out false hopes; Mrs. Dorriman's confidences about her brother being, she now remembered, entirely about frivolous matters, his fondness of old-fashioned dishes, and so on, and his dislike to others.

"Of course, mother, I shall be careful not to lead either of the young ladies to fancy I am in earnest till I know something definite."

"Of course not, my dear," said Lady Lyons, absently. Then suddenly a look of intelligence came into her face. "Oh! my dear Paul, how stupid I am. I remember quite distinctly now, Mrs. Dorriman answered some remark I made about Margaret's looks, and said, 'I admire her very much, and I am sure my brother does, he never takes his eyes off her. He says she is the image of his wife, and like her in disposition; that is why he is so devoted to her.' I remember her words so well now; but I can easily talk about it again and get her to tell me something more."

"I think she told you enough," laughed her son, and he walked up to the window humming a tune, and his mother, after trying in vain to get him to talk to her, soon grew sleepy and went to bed.

Long after she left he paced the room; then he lit his candle and prepared to go to bed also. There was a smile upon his face, which lingered till he was fairly in bed. Then he murmured something to himself, "I am glad it is Margaret," he said, and turned round and went to sleep.

In the meantime the girls were happy, though Grace was a little restless. To go out walking, to meet two or three people, to eat and drink and sleep, was not enough for her; she wanted something more, she had a perfect craving for excitement. This was not the life she had dreamed of. But for Paul Lyons it would be worse, but between her and Paul had arisen a kind of perpetual give-and-take in words which satisfied her since it occupied all his time. Margaret was nowhere as regarded this, and Grace was happy in having the one cavalier within reach entirely at her service.

Indeed, Margaret, with the unnecessary frankness of a girl, piqued him by her open and undisguised sentiments of not only indifference, but dislike.

There is an instinct in unspoiled girlhood which is often an unerring guide. Margaret disliked Paul Lyons from the first; the ready change of tone, the slighting observations at every moment about Mrs. Dorriman's tastes, which Grace thought so natural and so witty, displeased her. She thought him worse than he was. His manner to his mother was so careless, and he so openly

scoffed at her views, that she did not give him credit for the hours he spent beside her when she was ill, or for the affection he had for her. She thought him hateful. She had a high idea of what a man should be, and her limited experience had not been happy. One great relief was the fact that, save and except that one meeting on the steps of the hotel, Mr. Drayton remained invisible. Indeed when they met in this spasmodic and unpremeditated way he was waiting for a steamer to take him many miles in another direction, and had gone, determined, however, to return at the earliest possible opportunity.

After the conversation with his mother, Paul began to take much greater pains to recommend himself to Margaret. He was like most of us—attracted towards her by seeing her what he would wish to be. She had so much of what he lacked. She was quiet, reserved, singularly fearless on those rare occasions of asserting herself, and so openly disapproved when he said or did anything giving the lie to his professions, that he caught himself feeling ashamed of himself. Under the gaze of her pure and unclouded eyes he felt unworthy, and she awoke in him the desire for something better. He began to look back with disgust and weariness on the portions of his life when he had fancied he had seen life and lived; a better and truer manliness became visible to him.

She was much younger, but so much wiser, he thought; he, by degrees, fell from profound admiration into despair, and then rebounded from despair to hope as she was kind to him, and found himself hopelessly in love, before he well knew what he was about.

The sincerity of his love was proved by its real humility. What had he to offer this young brave who had talked so glibly about throwing his handkerchief? When his mother prattled to him of his perfections he felt bitterly humiliated. The serene grace of Margaret's manner, the limitless indifference as to his presence or his coming or going, was a terrible mortification to him, and he could go nowhere for consolation. His mother's sole idea of consolation he knew would be flattery, and he had learned to hate it.

Margaret's intense devotion to her sister was to him something beautiful and wonderful, though he could not at times resist enlightening her about her own superiority, only to regret it since his doing so made Margaret cold to him and angry with him.

"You make an idol of your sister," he said to her, one day; "you think her so beautiful. You are much more fair, and far, far more lovely."

"You should not say these things even to me," said Margaret, seriously, "though I know you cannot help trying to flatter me—it is your way of making conversation, I think."

"I wish you only knew how thoroughly in earnest I am," he said, passionately. "You cannot realize how much better I feel when with you; what a good influence you have over me. This is not flattery."

"It sounds very much like it," said Margaret, turning her grave young face towards him, and allowing a little smile to light up her eyes.

"Now you are laughing at me," he said, in a hurt tone. "How can I make you believe me?"

"Here comes your mother," said Margaret, much too unconscious of his meaning to be in the least embarrassed. "You have done your best to amuse me, and if you have failed it must be my own fault—not yours."

She turned lightly from him and he watched her with wrathful looks. Why did she always turn his speeches aside, and treat him as of no consequence? What was it that caused him so completely to fail with her? Why was it she was so different from other girls?

Grace, for instance, accepted his speeches (in which he was conscious of no meaning) as her due, with evident satisfaction. She believed everything he said to her, implicitly; and when, as sometimes happened, he showed something of his real strong devotion for Margaret to appear, she accepted it as if it were an indirect compliment to herself. Her vanity was of the open and undisguised order, and so completely enveloped her, that no sarcasm could wound, no snub hurt her; and he was often sarcastic, and often unintentionally snubbed her, and repented, till he saw that both were equally lost upon her.

What a delightful thing it must be to live encased in an armour of this kind; to be impervious to those friendly and unfriendly hits the world at large thinks good for poor humanity.

Grace had not much acquaintance with the world, but the few people she knew never could touch her, and Mr. Paul Lyons was sometimes astonished and sometimes amused to see how she sailed through her life, delighting in the idea that every one round shared her own supreme belief in her superiority.

How hard he tried to get Margaret to believe in him a little—forced to confess, time after time, that he had failed. She was always the same, sweet, cold, and utterly indifferent.

Lady Lyons' efforts to obtain information from Mrs. Dorriman were equally failures in another direction. What could she tell, being herself in utter ignorance of her brother's position?

A woman who had had any experience of the world must have seen through the mother's transparent efforts to know something tangible. Mrs. Dorriman did not, in the least, take it in. She talked placidly enough upon the various topics brought forward by her friend; but she was a

perfectly truthful person; she could not invent, she had no imagination, and, therefore, she could neither suppose anything or suggest anything.

"It must be such a comfort, my dear Anne, to have a very rich brother to fall back upon," said Lady Lyons to her one day, watching her face a little eagerly as she spoke.

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Dorriman, dubiously, reflecting that, when she was in need of anything, it was always very hard to ask him for it.

"What an immense thing for those girls, unless, indeed, he were to marry."

Mrs. Dorriman looked up, much puzzled by her friend's tone.

"I suppose it is a good thing for them," she said, slowly. "I never think my brother will marry again; he did so love his wife—poor thing!"

"Very nice, very proper," said Lady Lyons, "and, for the girls' sake, let us hope this frame of mind may continue. I am sure, my dear Anne, for their sakes, you would throw your influence against such a step. At his time of life——"

"He is not an old man," said Mrs. Dorriman, very hastily, "and, as for influence—my dear, if my brother wished to marry any one I should probably hear nothing about it till he introduced his wife to me. When he makes up his mind he acts," said Mrs. Dorriman, thinking with a little shiver of her own marriage and other things.

"I am not sure that I think that quite nice in a man," and Lady Lyons unclasped a narrow bracelet that she wore, and clasped it with great care; anxious not to look too much interested, and longing to know more, all the same.

"My brother is not dependent upon women's society; he never has been. His own mother died young, and then he went away—I never was much to him."

"Poor man! But now, my dear Anne, you should humanize him a little. If once he grows accustomed to having you and the girls, he will miss you all, and he will miss the girls whenever they marry."

Mrs. Dorriman did not answer. Yes, he would miss Margaret—he was anxious to keep her.

Like all people with a motive, Lady Lyons was very much afraid of her motive being discovered; and she hesitated now, impelled by her great desire to be able to guide her son, and to find out, before it was too late, something definite about "those Rivers girls."

"The girls are I suppose so well off that his marrying or remaining unmarried can hardly affect them," she said, taking up her knitting again, and narrowly watching Mrs. Dorriman's placid face.

"Oh dear no!" said that poor little lady, taken by surprise, "my brother has helped them very much—they really owe him a great deal."

"Ah! then he is sure to provide for them," said Lady Lyons, "comfortably, especially for Margaret."

Mrs. Dorriman looked up at her a little startled. Had she said anything?

"We know nothing. He is fond of Margaret. He was fond——" She stopped short, she could not say that this move, originated by Grace and followed up by Margaret, had hurt and offended him. She knew he was offended, but all that passed belonged to the sanctity of home. She felt guilty in some way. Reticent and reserved generally, how came she to have allowed Lady Lyons to touch upon these matters? With a little movement of her head and shoulders, expressive of resolution, she faced Lady Lyons and said calmly:

"I would prefer not discussing my brother's intentions, which I do not know. I know really nothing, and conjecture is useless."

"We will not discuss his intentions," said Lady Lyons, with a cheerfulness she did not feel; "a man who has shown himself so good and so kind is not likely to throw these poor girls penniless upon the world—I can safely prophesy that Margaret will be his heiress." She smiled at Mrs. Dorriman, who had no answering smile to give back. She was startled and vexed with herself. She had no right to speak about her brother. She was confident that his actions would be governed entirely by the feeling of the moment. He liked Margaret; if Margaret offended him, his liking would not save her from the effects of his displeasure. She was beginning to understand him, to see that everything had to be subservient to his will, that the greatest and strongest trait in his character was his love of power.

After this conversation, Lady Lyons lost no time in giving her son warning.

"Nothing is settled," she said. "It may be Margaret, but he is a younger man than I thought, and he may marry; my dear boy, you must do nothing rashly."

He turned the subject with a laugh, in which to speak the truth there was not much merriment. His passion for Margaret was at any rate sincere, and with his frequent opportunities of meeting it became utterly impossible for him to conceal his feelings from her.

Before she could stop him, he was hurriedly telling her his story, looking in her face, which

showed vexation and regret, but no passion, no love, no response to his devotion.

He read his answer there, and his despair moved her. She was grieved and dismayed; to her he had always seemed so inconsequent, such a trifler, how could she ever have believed that he was capable of so strong a love?

But her great comfort through it all was the very foundation he put himself upon; he would be guided in all things by her, she would be his good genius, his conscience. He would always do as she wished. She would be his guardian angel! This made refusal easier.

She shrank from his outstretched hands.

"I cannot," she said. "I cannot! It is impossible. I can never never give you the love you ask."

"You think so now, Margaret—I may call you Margaret—you are so young you do not know; will you not try, can you not let me hope?"

"Do you not see," she said, with the soft rebuke in her eyes that an angel might have had, "that love must come? And there is something else."

"Will you not tell me?" he spoke in a lower voice.

"I shall offend you."

"You cannot offend me."

"When I love—if I love—it must be a man," she said, and her face glowed, "a man who does not require the guidance of a weak girl, but who does what he has to do from a high sense of right, who has high aims, who is above me in all things."

"This is folly!" he exclaimed angrily; "you would ruin all my happiness from some vague and ideal sense of right. You will never meet with this ideal. All men will look up to you, beautiful Margaret. You will never find one above you."

"Perhaps not," she said, "but then I will never love."

They parted, she grieved but firm, and he miserable and dispirited. He felt the truth of much that she said, and was sufficiently in love to think her just while he deemed her cruel.

"Had my mother acted differently," he thought, with bitterness, "had she made me play a man's part!" and then a blush of shame rose to his face. "Why blame her? Was this worthy?" He strode off and sought in rapid motion to still his disappointment. No one must ever know, and Margaret was so young. At some future time, perhaps.

Thus it happened that when poor Lady Lyons gave him her well-meant caution his laugh was full of bitterness.

She noticed, however, and took great credit to herself for having so influenced him that her son avoided Margaret; and not in the least understanding, simply thinking that he was following her advice, she thought that his avoidance was perhaps too marked. Mother-like she must interfere a little, he should draw back but not so pointedly as to make going forward impossible; supposing....

"You are a dear, good boy," she said fondly to him in the evening, when, with a book before him and his gloomy eyes fixed on the fire, he was sitting, dreading her observation of his countenance; "you are always so good in following your poor old mother's advice. I see you leave the Rivers girls alone. You must not overdo it, dear. If there is money—if it would not be an imprudence it would not be a bad thing, and then, you know, they might resent your having given them *quite* up. Could you not keep friends without——"

"Without what, mother?" he asked, in a hoarse voice which startled her a little.

"I am hunting for a word, my dear," she answered candidly; "I want a word to express my meaning and that would not sound too strong."

Paul laughed ironically.

"Hunt on, mother, and when you have found the word you can tell me again."

"It is so tiresome of you to laugh, but what I want to say is, that there would be no harm in your paying a certain amount of attention, always providing you did not *quite* commit yourself."

"And if the girl got fond of me," asked Paul, looking at her with glowing eyes, "what then, if I had not committed myself?"

"My dear Paul! No well-brought-up girl would think of getting fond of you, would be in love with you, till you had said something. At least," said Lady Lyons, drawing herself up and looking very virtuous, "in my younger days girls would have thought it very wrong."

"Now it strikes me, mother, that this idea of yours is very cold-blooded and cruel; does your love for me so blind you that you cannot see this?"

"I am cold-blooded and cruel! Oh, Paul, what have I done," said the poor woman helplessly, "that you should call me bad names like this?"

"I called your idea cruel and it is cruel," said Paul hotly, "you do not think of what you advise me to do. Heaven knows there is nothing in me to win a good girl's love, but you advise me to try and do so, and yet, while in act I am saying I love you and begging her to love me in return, I may feel free and be free because in *word* I have said nothing. I call it shameful, mother!" He rose and walked hurriedly up and down the room, then, softening at the sight of her distress, he bent down and kissed her. "Forgive me if I seem harsh and unkind, but I am very unhappy, most miserable," and, sitting down again, he laid his face upon his arms.

Poor Lady Lyons, living in her monotonous round of small duties, never excited or allowing any interest not touching her son to disturb her, was singularly perplexed. Something seemed, all at once, different. She and her son had frequently had differences of opinion, but he had, at those times, offended, and she had complained, and she had always been so glad to forgive him. Now suddenly he blamed her! She could not at once put herself into the new position. Her feeble mind, bounded entirely by her affection for her son, saw nothing outside this horizon.

The reconciliation, when it came, was not so entirely satisfactory to her feelings, for Paul did not say he was sorry: on the contrary, he argued with her and left her to feel the burden of a defeat. She went to her room, and, as she sipped the thin gruel which solaced her evening hours, two or three tears trickled down her face, and she was conscious of a new and a very painful experience having suddenly confronted her.

At the same hour Margaret and Grace were standing watching the moonlit sea—a scene which never palled upon Margaret, and which from idleness Grace shared.

Paul Lyons's love and his appeal to Margaret was not spoken of even to her sister. Poor boy! his affection must be sacred from careless eyes.

As they watched the sea—suddenly into the most vivid light came gliding a stately yacht.

Her white sails were stretched to catch every whisper of the light wind, and she looked like some great lovely sea-bird, fluttering to her nest.

The sisters had grown familiar with the various ships and yachts that made shorter or longer journeys and returned to their moorings here, but this was something new.

They watched it take up its place with a certain curiosity, watched the lights move, heard the short sharp words of command ring across the water, all unconscious of the new interest that, in all ignorance, she was bringing into their lives.

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Sandford returned from his journey, knowing that when he arrived at home he should find no one there. He had chosen that time to leave home because it was the easiest way of avoiding an explanation, which, he half recognised to himself, must take the form of an apology.

It was perfectly true that he thought his sister took an exaggerated view of what had passed, but that sense of right and wrong which does not desert a man for many years convicted him of blame. It was not possible for any high-spirited girl to submit to the footing he tried to put Grace upon, but he had grown to dislike her, and he did not at all mind having hurt her. The only question was about Margaret.

Yes! Margaret was different. He thought often of her expression, of the way in which she roused herself to indignation when Grace was in question; and he regretted his want of control on her account. Could things ever come quite right between them again?

There are some truths which make themselves felt without being thought out, far less spoken or put into words, and one truth was present to him then. The moment the faintest question of obligation creeps into close relationship between one and another person, and that the suspicion of gratitude becomes *possible*, that moment the character of the subsisting love changes in a subtle way. Between friend and friend it is different; there often one receives, the other gives; but in the case of near relations the expectation of a little gratitude makes the difference between them. Among sisters a sort of communism is one of the uniting ties; a common property, a right to share, and one of the disappointments of life is when from some outside influence or some change in position, this close tie drifts into a relative position of inequality.

Mr. Sandford knew that in befriending and adopting his wife's nieces, who were no kin to him, he was acting in a kind, if not a generous, way; he had helped to educate them and he had offered them a home. For these things he deserved that they should consider him and be grateful to him. But, on the other hand, if he made the home intolerable to them, he neutralized the gift and spoiled its flavour.

Besides that fondness for power, which was part of his very character, he conceived that he had obtained by his spontaneous actions a certain right over them, and he fully intended exercising that right. Then, with all the unreasonableness of a man who never could see both sides of a question, he was thoroughly disappointed that they did not show him more affection. He wanted to be called "Uncle," but he never said so, and the girls, to whom he had always been an a

"unknown quantity," had never thought of so natural an appellation.

He liked to be feared; he also wished to be loved, especially by Margaret, towards whom he had the strongest leaning.

As he went up to his own house, he missed the calm, sweet gaze of his sister and the gay, girlish voices; the house struck him painfully, it was so cheerless and so dull. He was expected, but not so soon. In the drawing-room was silence and chilliness; there was no fire in the grate, the rug was rolled up, all looked as though almost there had been a death; and with a shiver and a great sinking and depression he went to his own room—that small room downstairs where his plans were made, and his successes, and his failures, faced and mastered.

Here a fire was slowly beginning to light, and the room was cold. Anne would have seen to this, he thought, forgetting that he had returned some hours before he had intended, finding that a person he wanted to see on business, had gone South.

The room was scrupulously tidy, but so cheerless; he tried to remember how it had all been long ago (he thought it was long ago), before he had been ill, before his sister Anne and the girls had come to him; and he remembered the dreary and desolate feeling of illness creeping over him, and how he had then suffered.

A pile of letters, neatly arranged, lay upon his writing-table, and he looked them over. There was one from his sister and he took it up.

It was not very long, but it filled him with a certain uneasiness. Mrs. Dorriman, always anxious to fulfil her trust and to show herself worthy of her responsibilities, sketched their life for his benefit, and, without laying undue stress upon the fact, let him know that another person was ready to show his appreciation for Margaret. And he so wanted Margaret to be at home with him, at any rate for some few years. She was so young, and, if her sister was only disposed of, he thought she would grow to like him.

Why was it always Margaret?

Mrs. Dorriman also mentioned the glimpse they had had of Mr. Drayton, the man he had hoped so much from, who seemed so frank and who was so reserved, and who had disappointed and baffled him in so many ways.

He also wanted Margaret. He had been there by accident. Of course he would go back again, and Mr. Sandford rose and paced the room, stopping to stir the fire violently, so violently that the newly-lit sticks collapsed, the coal smothered the flickering flame and the fire went out.

With an exclamation of annoyance, Mr. Sandford rang the bell. It was answered by Jean, nerved for the occasion, who had been matching for an opportunity to speak to him, much too greatly in awe of him to walk in upon him without an opening.

She looked at the fire and understood what had happened, went off for fresh sticks, laid and new-lit the fire in a few seconds, and then confronted him, and asked him if he wanted anything else.

"When am I to have dinner?" he asked, abruptly.

"You can have something to eat now if you please; dinner can be any time after seven," said Jean. "You look cold, sir?"

"The house is like an iceberg," he said in a grumbling and complaining tone, "quite enough to give one cold."

"It's cheerless and dull, and cold enough, sir, without any one, but just only a man," said Jean. "It's not much comfort to a man being alone."

"Have you heard from Mrs. Dorriman?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly, sir, she writes whiles to me."

"I have a letter, I suppose she is well?"

"She does not complain of ill health; not that Mrs. Dorriman's given to complaining," said Jean; "she'll put up with a great deal, will Mrs. Dorriman, sooner than speak a word."

Did she mean anything by this? Mr. Sandford glanced keenly at her, and thought it best to say nothing.

"What time do you wish to eat your dinner, sir?" inquired Jean.

"Oh! any time after seven," he answered, and there was a certain weariness in his tone that struck her.

She said no more, but looked at the fire, now blazing, and went back to her domain.

It was still early in the afternoon, though the want of clearness in the air all round the place made it soon dark.

On a table, tidily set out and looking comfortable, was Jean's tea, though the teapot, one of those delightful brown earthenware affairs, producing somehow such superexcellent tea, was on a hot plate in front of the fire.

Jean made some delicate toast, and arranged a little tray; she poured off the first cup, resolving to give him of the best, and was soon in his room again. Her great panacea for all ill was in her hands, and Mr. Sandford, who wanted comfort and warmth, and did not understand how much he wanted both, was sitting looking moodily at the fire, conscious that life was altogether wrong with him somehow.

He received Jean's attention without much apparent gratitude, but when she had gone he did turn to it for consolation, and eat up all the toast, as Jean noted afterwards with much satisfaction.

Then he read his letters, feeling better; and one letter he held in his hand for a long while.

Mr. Sandford while known to be a rich man was never talked of as a speculative man. He was one of those people considered "very safe all round." No one took greater pains than he did to inquire into securities, no one was keener to detect a possible risk, and his investments, his financial ability, all together gave him a position he thoroughly valued.

But, as in the most perfect characters there is a flaw, and as in armour there is a vulnerable place, in business relations there is sometimes a weak point.

He was not large-minded enough ever to own himself wrong. He could not bear to be suspected of having made a mistake; and he sometimes found himself on the horns of a dilemma, and found the horns were very pointed.

He was so fond of power, of dictating and directing, of leading with a hard and heavy hand, that he sometimes took a wrong view of a matter, and then sacrificed his own interests rather than be proved wrong.

At this moment he was confronted by a terrible mistake. He thought and thought till he was tired how to face it and get out of it. He could not disturb his other investments, except at a ruinous loss. He had been so certain, that he had locked up for a time the floating capital he could generally fall back upon, and he found himself for the very first time almost stranded.

It was not only the possibility of heavy loss, but the fact he knew so well, that, when all was known, as it must be known—unless he could manage to tide it all over—it would shake his position all round.

Cold drops stood out upon his forehead as he rapidly considered all these possibilities. He saw, as in a long vista, all he cared for, all he had toiled for, swept away, and himself standing there, without a friend, the laughing-stock of the very people who now flattered him, and tried to benefit by his superior understanding on financial questions.

He seized a train-book. There was just one chance—Mr. Drayton.

His sister had mentioned him, and he felt quite certain that, as he had seen his nieces at Lornbay, he would make his way there again.

He would go there and he would manage it. There was no ruin to Mr. Drayton, and no loss of position. Supposing he lost—all the world looked upon him as an amiable fool as regarded business matters. He had no position to lose; it would not be a fall such as his own would be; and there would be no loss. It was only a temporary embarrassment.

He rang once more, and Jean saw that he was now in quite his old peremptory, masterful mood.

"Let me have something to eat at once, and tell Robert to pack my things again. Why he does not answer my bell I cannot make out. What is the use of him?"

"Not knowing you would be home so soon, Robert went to do some messages; but I expect him in in a moment or two. Then I'll not sheet your bed?"

She spoke in an inquiring tone; her thrifty soul anxious not to crumple the linen now airing, if not required.

"I have to go at once. I am going to Lornbay. I suppose you have no message?"

"I'll no trouble you with messages. I aye use my pen when need be," she said, very calmly, and hurried off to get him that something to eat which is never a great difficulty in the hands of an experienced cook.

It may be said that she did write to her mistress, as she always called Mrs. Dorriman, that very night, and gave a graphic description of Mr. Sandford's arrival.

As frequently is the case, the pith of her letter lay in the postscript.

"You will be glad to hear, mem, that, though he was most fashious and pernickity, he was not just very rampageous, and he drank his tea and eat up all the toast," wrote Jean, who had never before known him condescend to such simple fare.

After all, Mr. Sandford did not start that night. He reflected, that, as he was anxious, he must not show his anxiety; and also that feeling of indisposition which he did not recognise made him put off his journey till the following day, a postponement which met with Jean's fullest approval. Why people should spend their nights, rumbling and tumbling along, when they might be in their beds, was one of the most surprising things in life to her, and she thought it "wise like" not to do it.

But this postponement made one difference, instead of bursting upon them all as a surprise, Mr. Sandford was expected. The trio were alone, and no one, so far as he could ascertain, was staying there interesting to him.

Mrs. Dorriman was glad he had come. She was always thankful to share any responsibility; and she thought him looking ill—which fact always softened her towards him.

Her feeling for him had, indeed, much changed, and she never thought bitterly of his old misdoings towards her. Time, which softens a grief, heals many a difference; and, though she always had the consciousness of having been hardly used, she constantly found herself making allowances for him, and compassion was beginning to tone down all her sources of irritation against him.

Jean's letter, posted over-night, arrived just after breakfast; the girls were dismayed; they had parted from him with angry feelings, and now, how were they to meet? Margaret, calling Grace in vain to accompany her, set off for a long expedition among the lower hills that crowned the heights behind Lornbay. From high up she obtained a larger view, and, with Tennyson in her hands, with whom she spent all her happiest moments, she prepared to wander far, not sorry to be alone, and feeling secure from the companionship of Mr. Paul Lyons or of any of those common-place, if friendly, women who had by degrees gathered round Mrs. Dorriman and who tried Margaret's patience sorely.

Would a day ever come to her, she often thought with girlish impatience, when the interests of life would be narrowed to a new pattern in cross-stitch or crewel-work, and to the want of taste in some person's way of setting a bow on the side of a cap. These trivial matters lay so far outside anything that contained possible interest to her, that she despised the people who evidently considered them of consequence.

Margaret also was beginning to make another discovery, and one that filled her with pain and even terror. She had too candid a mind not to own a truth to herself, however unwillingly, and the truth which frightened her and dismayed her was the wide difference existing between her sister and herself. She had all her life looked up to Grace, admired her and worshipped her. Every day now showed her that Grace had, in all ways, a lower standard than she had. She was contented to spend her time in perfect and complete idleness; she would no longer even talk upon matters of any importance with her sister. All those questions of religious thought which crowd upon a young girl when her mind begins to draw its own conclusions and she shakes off those boundaries and lines which have, up till then, been the accepted guides for all her belief, were too evidently distasteful to Grace to be persisted in. We feel it as irreverent to allow a careless hand to touch our holiest and highest thoughts as we do if a scoffer enters a church with us. Poor Margaret, often perplexed, asking herself questions that have always baffled the wisest men, blamed her own want of perception for not understanding. She had a high ideal, a desire for the best, and she was often miserable because of a supposed short-coming of a faith that was not unwavering. To turn to Grace, who was, she thought, so far her superior in point of cleverness, would have been such an endless comfort to her.

But it was not only in these deeper things that the sisters differed. Grace, full of vanity, was insatiable in her appetite for applause. She took endless trouble to obtain attention, conceiving attention invariably to mean admiration. Not all Margaret's love for her could conceal the fact from her widely-opening eyes, and to the higher character of the severe young sister this intense vanity was almost a worse fault than one perhaps of a stronger type. It seemed to her to be so absolutely beneath the dignity of a woman, and of such a woman as Grace.

In the room they shared together every candle was brought to bear upon the glass, and the time Grace took to curl and crimp and crisp her hair left Margaret none. Luckily, by chance, her long, thick hair was simply smoothed back and twisted in a coil that required but a few moments to arrange.

Those moments, during which Margaret's grave young eyes were fixed wonderingly upon her sister, were full of grief to her. Then Grace's habit of laughing off a question, her little transparent caprices and deceits, filled the younger sister with apprehension. Imaginative as she was, the truth exaggerated itself to her inexperienced eyes, and she saw her sister drifting from her and slipping each day down to a lower level, while she stood by helpless. These thoughts filled her mind, to the exclusion of other things; she tried to read, she tried to enjoy the great stretch of water, the faint, blue hills with the varying lights, but her heart was heavy, and she sat down at the foot of a sharp and rocky gorge and gave herself up to melancholy reflections.

Then something happened—what, she never rightly knew—but there was a sudden shout, a rushing and falling of the rock under which she was sitting, and a figure vainly endeavouring to protect itself came crashing down and lay helpless a few yards from where, with the instinct of self-preservation, Margaret had sprung. For one second she stood breathless, trembling all over with the sudden shock and fright, then she rallied and went quickly up to the prostrate form, lying so still that she was afraid death would confront her.

She took courage, and moved the checked deer-stalker's cap that had fallen over the face, and she saw a man, not very young, his eyes closed and his teeth clenched, a look of agony impressed upon his features.

With the necessity for help came strength; she flew down to the burn and dipped her handkerchief in water, bathed his mouth and eyes and forehead, and then, seeing how he lay, all

of a heap, she gently moved him so that he might breathe more easily, then she knelt and prayed with all her heart. It seemed long before he showed any signs of life, and the poor child was getting very nervous and very anxious; she could not leave him alone there, she thought, till she knew how it would be; and she went on dabbing his face and hands, with a very faint hope of his responding to her efforts. But at last life, that had been so nearly shaken out from the great massive frame, began to tingle once more through his veins, and, after a long shuddering sigh and a smothered exclamation of pain, his eyes opened and stared back at hers in complete bewilderment. He had heard her praying.

"I saw you fall; there was no one else; are you very much hurt?" said Margaret, anxiously, all in one breath.

"I am afraid I am," he answered, and the deep tones of his voice were full of suppressed pain.

"Can you move at all? Should you be afraid of being left? Shall I go for help?"

He struggled for self-command; it was evident the pain was almost overmastering him, and Margaret's heart was so full of compassion she had no longer room for nervousness. She was touched beyond measure when she noticed that in the midst of all his suffering he thought of her, and that he was trying to suppress all signs of what he was enduring. He could not speak for a moment or two, then he said hurriedly,

"My men are looking out for me. If you can, tie a handkerchief to my stick. They were to pick me up here." In a moment or two he said, "If you do not mind staying—till—they come—" and to poor Margaret's dismay he went off again into insensibility.

She acted as he had told her and had the comfort of seeing a boat come off. She did not notice from which ship it came, but she hurried back to his side, and renewed her efforts with her dripping pocket-handkerchief.

Then, when the men were landing, she went down to the shore towards them and told them there had been an accident; and, in a moment or two, the unfortunate hero of the adventure was surrounded by strong arms, and evidently anxious helpers, and Margaret glided away. She felt very tired as she walked homewards. Anxiety is always a much greater fatigue than physical exertion, and she drooped as she reached the hotel. Then she dragged herself upstairs and was pleased to find herself alone with Mrs. Dorriman.

Mrs. Dorriman was placidly engaged in doing up her accounts, and was satisfied to find that her brother, if he wished to do so, might inspect them without being able to find fault. But Mr. Sandford was not at all either stingy or exacting, as far as money matters went; and Mrs. Dorriman, as she wrote out the conclusion, could not help giving a sigh when she thought how entirely the method and neatness of it all was thrown away, since no other eye would probably ever see this well-kept book save her own.

She looked up to see Margaret—pale to her lips—sink wearily into a chair; and she was up and alarmed directly.

"An accident," murmured poor Margaret. "Oh, no, not to me," she went on as Mrs. Dorriman's alarm increased; and then the fright and fatigue and all else broke her down, and she cried; and the poor bewildered woman was even more at her wit's end than usual.

Margaret could not go down to luncheon; as usual with her whenever unduly excited, her head throbbed violently, but she refused to go to bed. "I have had no accident, I am not hurt," she said, laughing a little hysterically, "but I thought he had been killed. It was so dreadful."

Mrs. Dorriman petted her, and made her have some soup, and left her on the sofa, while she went to find Grace and go downstairs.

Later on, there was a commotion downstairs, a bustle as of a new arrival. Margaret heard it without connecting it with her adventure. That apathetic feeling of languor which generally succeeds excitement had come over her, and she lay quiet, not sleeping, not even thinking, all her senses lulled into absolute repose. Into this came Grace, excited, bubbling over with news.

"Margaret!" she exclaimed, rushing up to her sister's side, and speaking in her high clear treble voice, "a poor man, the owner of that lovely yacht we saw come in last night, has been nearly smashed to pieces, and they have brought him here. His name is Sir Albert Gerald, and I saw him carried in. He is wonderfully handsome, and it was quite romantic to see him on his boat-cushions all carefully arranged, and carried shoulder-high by his boatmen."

"I know," said Margaret, putting her hand up to her aching head, "I saw him fall, Grace. He fell beside me, where I was sitting, and I thought he was killed."

"You saw him fall! Margaret, what an adventure, and did he speak to you? Did he see you? Who was there?"

"His boat's crew brought him home, you said?" and Margaret, who could not enter into all the particulars, just turned wearily over as though anxious to be left alone.

And Grace turned away. Margaret had seen him fall, but this was all, she thought.

That evening brought Mr. Sandford to Lornbay. Grace was the first to greet him, and any emotion that might have marked the meeting was entirely swept away by her coolness.

Margaret felt more, but she was struck by a look of worry and ill health visible in his face, and she was sorry for him, and her sorrow gave her manner a kindness he was not prepared for. He did not trouble them much with his society, but went off to discover when Mr. Drayton was likely to arrive; an unexpected smoothness had characterized his meeting with the girls, for which he felt duly thankful.

There were numbers of letters awaiting Mr. Drayton's arrival. Several in the well-known hand of his manager, the man who so steadily opposed all schemes, such as the very one Mr. Sandford was there to press upon him.

Not unnaturally, the landlord, and every one else connected with the place, was full of the terrible accident which had brought Sir Albert Gerald to the hotel, and it was also feared to his grave, for he was very ill. One arm was broken in two places, and he had sustained, it was feared, some internal injuries, which rendered his recovery problematical.

Mr. Sandford heard without more than a passing interest the story of the accident, told with that minute attention to unimportant details, that characterises a narration in the hands of those to whom all strange events appear in an exaggerated form. He did not know this man's name, though one day he was destined to know it well. He was sorry for him and that was all.

The person who felt Mr. Sandford's arrival to be of very real importance was Lady Lyons—next to her, her son. Lady Lyons, who always saw less or considerably more in every action which touched her in any way, and of course her son, came to a conclusion immediately.

"This I consider good," she said to the amazed young man, continuing a thought aloud as she sometimes did, and thereby somewhat bewildering him.

"Mother! What do you consider good?"

"Mr. Sandford's arrival; is it possible, my dear Paul, you do not understand the full importance of this. Have you not realized what this means?"

"Certainly not."

"Men are so dreadfully dense," said the mother, with a gesture of impatience.

"Will you enlighten me, since I am only a man and so dense." He spoke in a tone of good-humoured banter.

"My dear Paul," she began, looking at him with much affection, "you have been a dear good son, a dutiful son, and in this instance I am sure a wise one—you have kept away from Margaret Rivers till something was known. Do you not see now in the arrival of Mr. Sandford an anxiety to see—not his nieces, from whom he parted not so long ago—but you, Paul, *you*! He has probably heard something from Mrs. Dorriman (in that quarter, my boy, I have not left a stone unturned), and he *may* have heard that Margaret is inclined to respond. Eh! Paul? You see therefore he comes himself to know if you are worthy!"

"My poor, dear mother," said Paul, "if men are dense as you say, still the imagination of women is quite beyond belief."

"Imagination founded on fact, my dear Paul."

"Mother," he began, in a tone of which she could not comprehend the bitterness, "will it wound you to know that in this matter I was not so dutiful a son? Forgive me, but love was stronger than duty. I tried hard to win Margaret, I pleaded with her, she must have seen that I was in earnest, she must have known I loved her.... She refused me, mother, refused me as one beneath her, and she was right, she said I was a boy and a trifler. I have told you, as you were building false hopes, but I cannot speak of it again."

He turned away, and his mother sat upright in her great astonishment. All mortification at his not having after all taken her advice was forgotten in her supreme surprise at her son's having actually been refused.

Naturally her motherly view of the question made this strange to her; she was so astounded that she lost the power of speech for the moment and gave vent to little helpless exclamations which required no answer.

Then abruptly he left her, feeling too deeply to bear to hear her discuss it. At this moment Mr. Drayton was returning to Lornbay, trusting to find Margaret still there, and not anticipating the arrival of Mr. Sandford, or, in short, any change in their arrangements.

It was natural that Margaret should ask, from day to day, how the poor wounded man was getting on. In a life in which no great incidents had occurred, such an adventure, in itself, was full of intense and painful interest, but she always remembered the wonderful self-command and the thought of her; at such a moment, the pain must have been frightful, and yet how he had tried to suppress all outward signs of it. The expression in his dark eyes haunted her; such a glimpse of the man's real nature had been given her. Should they ever meet again? She thought not; already something was said about their going home, and perhaps they might go before he was well. She was utterly unconscious, upon her side, of having done anything worthy of thanks, and she was not quite sure whether, if they met, that short but agonized hour would constitute acquaintanceship.

After fluctuating between life and death, however, for many weary hours, Sir Albert Gerald rallied. He was thirty-two, in the very prime of his youth and strength; unfavourable symptoms disappeared one by one, and he began to rally. His first thought, as he was returning to full consciousness, and that all his pain and agony were gradually yielding to his strong powers of recovery, was of the girl, who, looking like a pitying angel, had bravely sat alone with him, and had, by her presence of mind, saved him; and he had seen her tears. Had she not been there.... There would have been a late search; his men might have thought it strange that his expected signal was not made and might have looked for him. Then he told himself it would have been too late. He lay wondering who she was, where she lived, and how he could ever thank her, not knowing her name, when one day his servant was arranging his books, and he asked him to put one or two beside him, he might feel inclined to read. He lay still, however; terribly weakened as he was, he dreaded moving. He was so bruised and so battered it seemed impossible he should ever stride across the hills and follow any of his old occupations again. His eye dwelt idly on the binding of the books before him, and he wondered if it would bring back suffering if he looked into one.

Thoughts become monotonous when they are full of a certain fear; then, with that quick recognition of small facts that often accompanies great prostration of strength, he saw a strange book lying amongst his own. With great caution and not without some pain he drew the book towards him, and, with all the difficulty of a man accustomed to use his right hand, now so useless, he opened it. "Tennyson!" he said softly to himself; then he looked at the fly-leaf and saw written, in an unformed girlish sprawl, Grace Rivers. "How did that book get among mine?" he thought, perplexed and puzzled. The attentive John came in again and his master asked him the question.

"It was lying by you when you fell, Sir Albert. I did not know it was not yours."

"Ah, I see," said his master, pleased by the conviction that he now knew the name of the girl who lived in his memory so distinctly. A little later he called his servant to him and complained of the dulness he felt lying there.

"Perhaps the landlord would come and talk to me; that would be better than nothing."

"Yes, Sir Albert."

"Unless he is busy. I have nothing particular to say to him. You will explain this to him."

"Yes, Sir Albert."

"Mind you make it clear," continued the sick man, but John was out of hearing.

Time seemed to pass more slowly now a certain expectancy weighted its wings, but Sir Albert ruled his spirit in patience. It was very pleasant to have a clue; never had he felt so much interested in a young lady before. This was natural; he had never required such assistance before. It was altogether exceptional. There was quite the foundation of a romance, supposing him to be younger than he was and not so sensible. A younger and more susceptible man might have fallen in love there and then. And then he laughed a little. That was indeed absurd!

END OF VOL. I.

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