Title: A Fair Mystery: The Story of a Coquette

Author: Charlotte M. Brame

Release date: January 27, 2013 [EBook #41932]

Language: English

E-text prepared by Robert Cicconetti
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(http://www.pgdp.net)
from page images generously made available by
Internet Archive/American Libraries
(http://archive.org/details/americana)

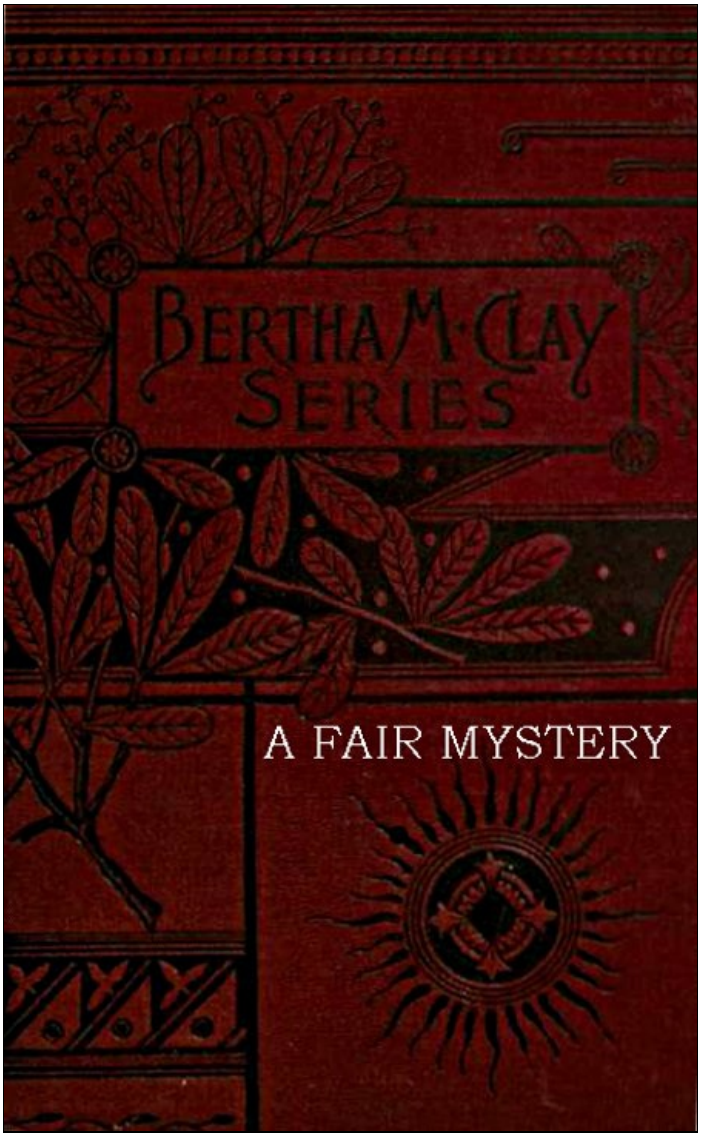
Note: Images of the original pages are available through Internet Archive/American Libraries. See http://archive.org/details/fairmystery00bramiala

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

In the numbering of chapters, XIV was omitted in the original book.

Inconsistent hyphenation, punctuation, printing and spelling errors have been corrected silently.

The author of this work, Charlotte Mary Brame, was known under the pseudonym Bertha M. Clay in North America.



A FAIR MYSTERY

BY

BERTHA M. CLAY

AUTHOR OF "DORA THORNE," "BEYOND PARDON," "LOVE WORKS WONDERS," ETC.

NEW YORK
INTERNATIONAL BOOK COMPANY
17 AND 19 WAVERLEY PLACE

A FAIR MYSTERY.

THE STORY OF A COQUETTE.

BY CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME.

CHAPTER I.

A VOICE AND A FACE IN THE NIGHT.

"Hush! For the love of mercy, hush, I cannot bear it!"

But that which called forth this protest was only the lisping prayer of a little child at its mother's knee.

Patty Brace lifted the white-robed figure to her lap, and rested the brown head on her bosom.

"Mark!" she said, in mild remonstrance, looking at her husband.

"I say I cannot bear it. You have her pray, 'God bless my home.' It is too much."

"But why not? On this wild, stormy night, when other little ones may be out in the dashing rain and moaning wind, is it not right to pray, 'God bless our home?'"

"But how long will we have a home, Patty? Think of to-morrow! oh, Heaven help me to-morrow! Ruined, disgraced, going out from the home where I was born, and forced into exile. I cannot bear it. We shall never have a home again, and our child will grow up homeless!"

"Dear Mark, you cannot go out disgraced when you have done no wrong; and homeless you will not be, for home is where the heart is, and in any land we three will be together, and Heaven over all."

"I cannot feel as you do, Patty. I am not gentle and good as you. I blame myself that by going security for that smooth-tongued rascal, whom may a curse——"

"Hush!" said Patty, with sudden authority. "Mark, you shall not curse friend, neighbor, nor enemy. It is not your nature; it is wrong. If you curse any one how can you look to have prayer answered?"

"Prayer!" said Mark, bitterly. "I begin not to believe in prayer, or goodness, or any such thing. You have prayed, and that innocent little victim on your bosom has prayed, in her baby way, and has Heaven heard? No! We lose our home, and I was born here!"

Heavier grew the round brown head of the two-year-old child on Patty's breast, the little tanned hands fell apart with a sleepy grace, and the plump, sunburnt face took the moist flush of childhood's deep rest.

Patty looked at her husband. He leaned against the wooden mantel-shelf, the ruddy light of the fire leaped across his sorrowful face, and the wife saw his bronzed cheek wet, with not unmanly tears.

Beyond him, in the range of her vision, was the window looking toward the garden, and between the bushes of lilac and guelder-roses, Patty had a swift vision of a tall woman, robed in black, a thin white face, looking eagerly into the cheerful farm-kitchen.

She leaped to her feet. But the vision had faded; only the wind swept the wet lilac boughs against the pane, only the guelder-roses looked like tall, dark, draped forms in the stormy night.

"What is it?" said Mark, as she started.

"Nothing," said the wife; "little Mattie sleeps; I must carry her up to bed." She chided herself for her fancies.

"Nothing!" said Mark. "I have become nervous and womanish with my misery. Do you know, Patty, even now I keep looking for some one or something to come and save me."

"It is never too late," said Patty. "Heaven could save you now—save you even by so frail a thing as this baby child."

She passed to the upper room, and left Mark still in his misery hastily retracing his past, in gloomy thought. Patty returned and stood wistfully, her hand on his arm.

"Don't despond, Mark. We are young, strong, loving. We will give honest work for honest bread."

"It is not right for the innocent to perish with the guilty," cried Mark, vehemently; "for you and baby Mattie to perish with me."

"You are not perishing, and how have you been guilty."

"I seem to have been guilty, somehow, all along. My father left me this farm in fairly good order, the lease for my life and one after me. I could not rest content. I must improve the land, and improve the outbuildings, and improve the breed of my cattle and sheep, like a fool."

"No, like neither a knave nor a fool; like an enterprising farmer, wanting to improve his prospects and grow with the age. Did not the Duke of Downsbury say you were one of his best tenants, and that you were a pattern of good farming and industry?"

"And then," said Mark, intent on saying bitter things of himself, "I had a thousand pounds, my father's savings, and instead of leaving it where he placed it, at safe, low interest, I must let the men of the great new Bank of Downsbury persuade me to give all to them for big interest; and that bubble burst, the bank collapsed, swindled every one, and left me nothing."

"No blame to you, and you were left your good name. Are you not known, in all the country, as Honest Mark Brace?"

"I must be a scoundrel some way, Patty, to have such luck."

"Go on and tell your sins," said Patty. "You married a girl without money, Patty Leslie by name; you took care of her widowed mother till she died; and you were so foolish as to have a little girl-child, who can only eat and not earn."

"Heaven bless her and you!" said Mark. "Marrying the best wife in the world was about the only good deed I ever did——What do you start that way for again, Patty?"

"Hark! I heard such a strange noise—a pitiful wail."

"Not further off than my heart," said Mark. "I heard nothing. Once married, Patty, think how harvest after harvest has been poor, and seasons bad, so I could not lay up a penny."

"Not your fault——Mark, I *know* I hear a cry."

"No, no; my ears are keen; I hear nothing. It is the storm. Even the wind and rain are crying after the out-going of the Brace blood from the farm of Brackenside. Oh, Patty, why could I not let well enough alone, and not go and sign security for that villain, Amwell?"

"You did it out of pure heart-kindness. You thought him honest and in trouble; you helped him."

"And he left me with a hundred pounds to pay. He meant to do it all along. He robbed me; I robbed you; and to-morrow my goods must be seized. The crops will be bid off as they stand in the ground, and the farm tools and the house goods with them, for this terrible security. I have tried everywhere to get help. I spent all to-day seeking for some one to lend to me. But since Farmer Dobbs holds a mortgage on my live stock for the debt the burning of the big barn brought me into, I cannot get any help. The lease must be sold to finish paying up Dobbs. I will not run off in debt like that scoundrel Amwell, and, with what is left, we can emigrate. Patty, oh, how can I go! I love every stick, and every tree, and every sod. My mother and father lie here in yon churchyard, and I had hoped to lie by them."

Honest Mark Brace covered his face with his hands, and his strong, tall figure shook with the storm of his sorrow. He loved every foot of this land, where, boy and man, he had sung at his work and lived popular and respected. A fine, stalwart young Englishman, intensely a home-lover, it seemed to him impossible that other skies could be so blue, other breezes so jocund, other fields so green, as these that blessed his birthplace.

Patty, in mute sympathy, clasped her arms about his neck, friend in woe as in joy. She, too, loved and suffered. But hers was a cheerful, hopeful, pious soul: she could not despair as Mark did. Mark had been loudly accusing himself where he was guiltless; now, with the inconsistency of misery, he turned to declare his own uprightness and, by implication, the injustice of Heaven.

"Why has this come to me? Other worse men have happier fortune. Have I swindled men like the bankers, who carried off my all? Have I lied like Ned Amwell? Did I ever cheat in my men's wages? Have I sent the poor empty from my door? Have I failed to pay my tithes, or missed church on Sundays? Do I drink? Do I swear? Do I ever go to sleep in church? Why, then, have I such trouble?"

The wild minglings of crimes, errors, and peccadilloes might have made a disinterested listener laugh. It did not make Patty laugh, nor did it call forth an answer. She turned an intent ear to the outer world and said, uneasily:

"Mark, listen! Other souls are in pain. It is not the wind that I hear—not the dashing rain. I have heard sobs, and moans, and crying in the night—a child crying—like a little baby soul that has lost its way and can find neither earth nor heaven."

"Your fancies make me mad," cried Mark, angrily.

"My troubles are real, and so will yours be to-morrow——"

Shrill and clear the cry quivered on the air. He, too, heard it.

"It is little Mattie," he cried. "Run to her."

And he followed Patty, fleet-footed, up the stairs.

But little rosy Mattie slept tranquilly, and the two came slowly down. Patty opened the kitchen window, and the swirling rain drenched her dark hair as she leaned into the darkness.

"Come in; there will be nights enough to face storms," said Mark, hardly. "We are only both fanciful; or, as my old grannie used to tell me, since we are flitting from the hearth where we have kept warm so long, the souls of my ancestors are mourning for my sorrow. Poor old grannie! little she knew how I should leave the old roof-tree."

Patty sprung to her feet.

"Mark, come with me! It is no fancy—no spirit. It is real; some human being out in this tempest. Let us search everywhere, and give the homeless a shelter this last night that we have a home."

She ran from the room, and Mark followed her into the stone-flagged entry. Her vehemence carried him away. He reached over her shoulder, and aided her trembling hands to undo the door-bolt.

Starless the night; no balm on the summer air; the raw chill of autumn brooding under the beating rain; a murky heaven over land and sea; and once again that wild, only half-human wail, coming up now from their very feet!

Patty sprung into the dark, vine-draped porch; the red light from the kitchen crept fitfully to the threshold, and close beside the door-sill, lay a bundle in the poor shelter of the latticed porch.

From that bundle came, shrill and piteous, that miserable cry.

CHAPTER II.
A FAIRY CHANGELING.

"Mark! Mark! it is a child, a poor forsaken baby," said Patty, stooping down and gathering into her womanly arms the weeping waif-fragment of the seething sea of humanity so strangely drifted to her door. "A child! Dear Heaven! such a very little child!"

She hurried into the kitchen and laid the bundle on the table in the circle of lamplight, and with careful, eager fingers, began to loosen the wrappings.

"A child!" said Mark, amazed and dull—"a child!"

Then with sudden anger he cried out:

"A child, to the homeless! A child to us, who will not be able to care for our own—a child for forced exiles! Why did they not carry it to the poor-house? There, at least, it might have stayed!"

"Hush, dear!" said Patty. "God only asks of us duty for to-day. To-night we have a home, and can take the stranger in. God will take care of it to-morrow."

"Not that I grudge the poor little wretch," said Mark, looking over his wife's shoulder.

Patty unpinned the tartan shawl, and snugly wrapped within lay a little babe; a delicate veil covered the small face within the lace and satin cap, and Patty lifted in motherly hands one of the most singularly lovely infants that sun had ever looked upon. Dimpled, snow-white, with exquisitely molded features, and neck and hands; soft rings of golden, silken hair, a faint perfume of costly odors breathing from its garments.

Patty's tender heart melted at the divine innocence, loveliness, helplessness of the little one, and raising the rosebud face to her own, she kissed it softly again and again.

This motion caused the white cashmere cloak to fall back, and Mark gave a cry at some dark thing broadly pinned against the quilted satin lining.

As his wife kissed the babe, murmuring: "Little, lovely angel! Who sent you? Who could abandon you?" Mark unpinned this object and held it near the light. Then he gave such a cry that his wife, clasping the babe closer, turned to him in alarm. In his shaking hand he held a packet of bank-notes. He cried out:

"Patty! Patty! Did God send this? See! Just the amount of my debt! Patty! Patty! am I safe? Is this ours?"

"How much is there?" she demanded, breathlessly.

"Twenty fives! A hundred pounds!"

"Mark, just what we owe?"

"Just that. Oh, Patty, we are saved!"

He staggered to a seat, white and weak, and then, first, Patty realized what his anguish of soul had been. The strong young farmer shook like a reed; drops of perspiration rolled over his face.

"But is it ours?" demanded Patty, sitting down also, and beginning to unfasten the baby's cap and cloak.

"See if there is anything more—any message—any word—quick—oh, Patty, Patty. I am weak!"

Patty rose up, stroked his cheek, kissed him, said: "Courage, Mark! Heaven has helped us!" and then she set to searching the child.

On the lace bosom of the little dress was sewed a letter. She unfastened it and held it to her husband.

"You read it, Mark. I am so frightened, my eyes are dim. See, it is to us; it says on the outside —'To Mark and Patty Brace.'"

Mark restrained himself, and as Patty softly rocked the child to and fro on her breast, he read aloud:

"To you a most sorrowful mother sends this little child. You have never seen that

> mother, probably you never will; but she has heard of you—of honest Mark Brace and Patty Brace, his kind, good wife. Oh, be tender to this little child, deprived of father and of mother. Be patient with it; think how its mother's heart ached at parting: think of your own little child. Let this baby be yours, and your child's sister. It is lovely and white as an angel. Will you try to keep its soul white and pure, and bring it up simply, like your own, just to be good? There is a little mark on the right shoulder—a little red leaf. But I may never be able to claim my own again. Then let it be yours, and rear it, as you will answer for it to God. With the child the mother sends you a hundred pounds, and every year will send you the same. This is a child of noble blood and honest birth. Its mother prays you, for the sake of mercy and pity, to make no effort to find her. Never show this letter, never try to learn the child's surname; her Christian name is DORIS. Will you say you have taken charge of the child for a lady who has gone abroad? Say only that, and night and day a heart's best prayers will go up for you, who are good to little Doris."

Mark and Patty looked at each other in silence.

"Oh, Mark! you doubted—doubted God and prayer!"

"Did I? May God pardon me—I was wild with misery!"

"Whose child can this be?" said Patty.

"Patty," said Mark, "if we use this money, as we must and shall, it is part of a bargain, you know—a bargain to keep the child tenderly and faithfully, and make no effort to discover who sends it. We must keep faith."

"It will be very easy to be loving and tender to such a lovely baby," said Patty. "Look, did you ever see anything so wonderful, so beautiful, in all your life?"

"Fair as an angel," said Mark, gently kissing the wee white hand. "God bless the baby, the little angel baby that saved us."

"A hundred a year! This is very much money, just for keeping one little child," said Patty.

"We must pay ourselves what is fair, and keep the rest to educate the child, or make her dower."

"And we must keep her soul white and fair. The letter says, we are to train her like our own, Mark."

"Only, Patty, it is a child of noble blood, and if, some day, the mother claims her, she must not be ashamed of the child, Patty."

"Oh, Mark!" cried Patty, in terror, "suppose the mother is in all this storm? Go, Mark—take a light and look for her. Do go!"

"She cannot possibly be lingering here, Patty."

"Oh, Mark, she is no doubt waiting to see what we will do. I am sure I saw her looking in the window before I took Mattie to bed."

Mark took a lantern from its hook by the chimney-side, and went out into the storm. There was no trace of any one. The gate was fastened, no foot-print marked the gravel walk; nothing but sighing wind and plashing rain filled the darkness. He returned to the house.

"There is no one. Whoever was here has done the errand and gone. I cannot believe it yet, Patty. My debt is paid! my home is saved! I shall live where my fathers lived, and die where they died; and all by means of *this little child*. I feel as if I could never love it enough!"

Patty looked at the babe on her arm. She cried:

"How could a mother give up such a lovely creature! I would rather die! Oh, poor mother! Mark, a heart has broken to-night in this storm."

"I wonder if the poor soul was married?" said Mark.

"She must have been! Look at the letter, Mark. It is the letter of a good woman. She wants the child's soul kept white and pure. A wicked woman would think of the body, but not of the soul!"

The child opened its eyes—eyes like spring violets, softly blue. It stirred uneasily. Patty went for milk to feed it.

"There are no clothes with it, Mark. Whoever knew us to write to us, knew about little Mattie, and expected us to let this baby wear her clothes, and be reared just like our own."

She went for a night-dress that had been worn by Mattie a year before, and taking off the infant's rich clothes, put on instead the simple little gown. About the child's neck was a gold chain, with a locket; in the locket was a tress of curly golden hair, and one of dark shining brown.

"Mark," said Patty, "let us put the letter and the locket and these rich clothes away. Some day they may be needed to show whose child this is."

Mark folded the articles together and locked them in a strong box, which for years had held the especial valuables of the owners of Brackenside Farm. Never before had such singular treasures

been placed among those simple rustic relics.

"Now," said Patty. "I shall take this baby up and put her in Mattie's trundle bed; they are sisters now."

She carried the wee stranger up-stairs and laid it by her own little daughter. Mark held the light.

"There is a great difference between them," said Patty, as she looked at the two little ones in the same bed. "It is not only that one is two years and one is two months, but one looks like a child of the nobles, the other like a child of the people."

"The people are the bone and sinew of the land, and the heart, too," said Mark, sturdily. "I don't believe a mother of the people would give such a baby away in this fashion. You note my words, wife; it is *pride*, rank pride, that has cast this child out among strangers."

Patty sighed, still looking at the children. Little Doris, a jewel child, pearly skin, golden hair and brows, and a little red mouth like a thread of rubies; Mattie, brown, plump, sturdy, child of soil, wind, and sun.

"I like my own best," said Mark, bravely, "if she is not half so fair. Our Mattie has what will last all her life—a warm, true, honest little heart in her strong little body."

"Of course you will like our own best," said Patty half offended. "It would be a fine story if the coming of this little beauty could crowd our girl out of the first place in our hearts."

"I wonder if they will love each other," said Mark.

"Of course they will, as they are to be sisters," said Patty, with edifying faith in humanity.

"And I wonder if she will love us?"

"Surely, since we are to be her parents, and will be always kind and faithful to her."

"I hope so," said Mark, shaking his head; "but there are some things, Patty, that do not mix well—as, say, oil and water—and belike blood will tell, and this little lady will not take to our homely ways. Besides, we shall always be considering how much is due her for that hundred pounds a year; and I, for one, will always be remembering how she came like a little angel to save a home that is like my heart's blood to me."

Then they went down-stairs, leaving the dark child and the fair child sleeping together.

CHAPTER III.
A DAUGHTER OF PATRICIANS.

Mark and Patty Brace sat down again by their hearth-stone. They were too much excited to think of sleep. Mark made up the fire and trimmed the lamp, and ruddy glow and golden gleam seemed the joyful reflection of their strangely-brightened fortunes.

Honest Mark, who seldom thought of even locking his door when he went to bed, suddenly felt that thieves might break in to steal that blessed hundred pounds that saved him from ruin. He buttoned the notes up in his waistcoat, and longed for the day-dawn when he might pay his debt and be free.

Upon Patty's simple heart rested the shadow of a new care. It was to her upright spirit a terrible responsibility to rear a stranger's child. What disposition would this little one inherit?

Could she obey that unknown mother's behest and keep this soul white and pure? Suppose the child should be willful, full of faults, proud, hard to govern, in all points the opposite to her own simple, gentle, good little girl—would she be able by love and kindness to govern and mold her into goodness? And suppose the child grew day by day into her heart, until it seemed like her very own, and then that unknown mother came and took her away? Suppose, too, that after all her humble cares, when the mother came, she should be dissatisfied and complain of the rudeness of the child's rearing?

But Patty need not have feared that; she had herself the best of good breeding, that which comes from a generous, thoughtful, unselfish spirit.

Then she began to wonder who was the mother of this babe. She told over to herself all the ladies of the adjacent village of Brakebury; not one had a hundred pounds a year to spare. She thought of all the ladies she had met in the narrow limits of life, in which she had never been fifty miles from her home. There was not one whom it would not be the utmost absurdity to charge with the maternity of this charge.

"I give it up," said Patty aloud, with a sigh.

"Give what up?" asked Mark, starting from a reverie.

"Guessing who is the mother of this little Doris."

"So you should give it up," said honest Mark, stoutly. "A bargain is a bargain, Patty, and you know all that money is not to pay for one baby's milk, tendance, and bits of clothes; nor is it to buy our faith, for faith cannot be bought; but it is given us as pledge of a secret kept with that child's mother, and to use to defend that secret; and so we must. Questions, Patty, we must not ask nor answer; if curiosity is troublesome, we'll even bear it till it dies out naturally; we are paid for the trouble of bearing our neighbor's curiosity."

"That is true," said Patty; "we will make silence our rule."

So they sat by the fire, while the storm ceased, the winds fell, the rain-heavy grass and leaves lifted themselves, the east brightened with a new day, the birds broke forth into matin-song, and then a broad bar of sunshine fell over the kitchen floor, through the very window where the black-veiled figure had stood the night before.

"Mark," said Patty, "here is a new day."

"And a very happy day," said Mark. "I shall go pay my debt the first thing; and then, Heaven helping me, when this harvest is gathered in, I can settle with neighbor Dobbs and stand up a free man. After that, Patty, I'll starve before I beg, borrow, steal, or go security. In my eye, it's all one; it's robbing your own or your neighbors in any case."

How happy felt Mark Brace that morning, as, with springing step, and whistling like a mavis, loud and clear, he strode off to Brakebury to pay his debt. His sinewy hand trembled convulsively as he took his receipt.

"I'm as thankful as you are, Mark," said his creditor; "it would have gone to my heart to ruin you. I lay awake all night thinking of it; but I must have this money or be sold out myself, and my wife is ill in bed, and my old mother blind, and cleaving to this home she was born in as ivy cleaves to the wall."

"I know how it goes," said Mark; "I've felt it. And after this, I'll hold the Scripture rule, to owe no man anything but to love one another."

Mark felt his heart large enough to love all the world that morning, especially that golden-haired mystery who had brought him safety. He hurried home, longing to be at work again. He felt energy for everything. Never had there been such a fair day, never such a lovely home, never such beautiful fields, standing thick to the sickle. Heaven be praised, he was his own man again!

He met his laborers coming to the work. In answer to his questions, one said that, crossing a field after dark, he had met a tall woman, in black, veiled, carrying a bundle which, at the time, he fancied might be a child. Another, returning late from the Blue Boar, had passed a tall woman, in black, veiled, hurrying on, with empty arms swinging at her side, but heard her sob and moan as she went by.

This was all Mark Brace heard about that eventful night.

The neighbors, finding a golden-haired, dainty babe in Patty Brace's cradle, said, wisely:

"No doubt she was well paid." "Mark Brace had seemed flush of money of late." "It was well to have friends. The child very surely belonged to some great lady."

But whether its mother lived or was dead, or where she was, Patty never opened her lips to tell; and, after two months, gossip died away, and the baby at Brackenside Farm was an accepted fact.

One person asked questions with more show of authority, and to him Mark and Patty told part of the truth. This one person was the Rector of Brakebury. They told him that the child had been left at their door, with a letter and a sum of money. The letter said the child was legitimate and christened, and that the hundred pounds would come each year. The rector was so astonished at this story that he told it to his bishop when he dined with him.

"And what kind of a child is it?" asked the Bishop of Lansdown.

"The most marvelously beautiful creature; fairly angelic."

A few weeks later, in November, the bishop was dining with the Duke of Downsbury, and bethought himself to tell the tale, beginning:

"Does not the village of Brakebury belong entirely to your grace? and is not Mark Brace one of your tenant farmers?"

The bishop told the story, as he told every story, admirably.

"And they have no clew to the child's family," asked the duchess.

"Not the least. It was the most cleverly-managed thing I ever heard of in my life."

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, Lady Estelle Hereford, the duke's only child, asked her mother:

"What was that story the bishop was telling?"

Lady Estelle was not nineteen. Her mother felt that this tale of a foundling was not a proper thing

to pour into the ear of innocence.

"Really, my dear, I was shocked at the bishop's speaking of such a thing before you," said her Grace of Downsbury.

"Why, mamma, there may be nothing really wrong about it after all," said Lady Estelle, quietly, and the duchess privately thanked Heaven for her daughter's simplicity.

"There is always some wrong where there is concealment," said the duchess, with decision. "Honor does not shun the day. I prefer you do not talk of it, Estelle."

"But, dear mamma, I want to know. So little happens here in the country, I hoped it was something to interest me."

"No, my dear. Only a little child, left at Mark Brace's door—with some money—and I think that is all, my dear."

"And Mark Brace is going to keep the child, mamma?"

"So I understand. Very admirable, honest people, the Braces."

"It is just like a novel, mamma—nicer than a written one. I am sick of novels, as I am sick of everything. I would like to see that child, if it is so pretty, mamma."

"My dearest love! But Brackenside is fifteen miles off, and you could not go so far in this chill autumn weather. You know the doctor says you must get to Italy at once."

Lady Estelle leaned back as one completely bored and weary of life, and toyed with her fan and flowers. A beauty, an heiress, a duke's daughter, Lady Estelle had been for a year and a half the idol of the most fashionable circle in London. Proud, stately, cold, calm, with sudden gleams of tenderness and fire in her great violet eyes, she had been courted by some of the noblest men of England, and dismissed each with the same indifference. But the excitement of gay life, or a nervous shock received in traveling with her friend, Lady Agnes Delapain, in Switzerland, had stolen the wild-rose tint from her cheek and the elasticity from her graceful step, and baffled physicians ordered her to be taken to a warmer climate.

"I am sorry to lose you again, Lady Hereford," said the bishop, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

"Thank you. But I am rather glad to go. I may find in Italy something to amuse me, or wake my cold, calm soul to romance. Here, it seems to me, it is very dull. Only the little incident that you told to-day rises over the prosaic."

Lady Estelle, with a swift glance, assured herself that the duchess was at the most remote corner of the room.

"Ah, yes, that has a flavor of romance," said the bishop.

"And you say the child is healthy and pretty?"

"Both, I am told, to an unusual degree. It has the fatal gift of beauty."

"Why fatal?" asked Lady Estelle, with listless politeness.

"Not fatal to those born to rank, parents, and every care, but fatal to the poor, the unprotected, the unknown. I cannot imagine a more terrible gift to a friendless girl."

"I never thought of that," said Lady Estelle, and then her brief interest in the little child seemed to pass into the gentle indifference with which she regarded all the events of life.

For hours afterward Lady Estelle Hereford thought of the fair foundling that had been left at Brackenside Farm, and an uneasy feeling came over her as she reflected upon the bishop's words:

"The child possesses the fatal gift of beauty. I cannot imagine a more terrible gift to a friendless girl."

CHAPTER IV.
THE MARBLE PSYCHE.

Mark Brace was the tenant of the Duke of Downsbury, as his fathers before him had for many generations been the tenants of the duke's ancestors; yet no two lines of life seemed to run farther apart than those of the duke and the farmer. The duke respected and appreciated his tenant, and the tenant sturdily held loyal faith in his duke, as the noblest duke in England.

Yet, when Downsbury Castle was shut up, and all the family were abroad, seeking, year by year, health for the patrician daughter, that absence of the noble patron made no change in the current of life at the farm. Patty and Mark, when the duke came to their minds, hoped he would find for his only child the health he sought.

"How we should feel if our Mattie was delicate!" said Patty.

"What a pity it is," said Mark, "that the duke has no son. He has hoped and hoped, but now he knows he will be the last Duke of Downsbury."

"But Lady Estelle will get strong, perhaps, and marry, and he will have great comfort in his grandchildren," said Patty.

Meanwhile, at Brackenside Farm, little Doris grew every day in beauty and brightness. Never was such a winsome wee thing. Patty felt sure the saucy blue eyes would count many victims when Doris bloomed into girlhood's beauty. Patty was tender of her charge, as of some strange tropic bird that had fluttered into her homely nest. Mattie, with her frank simplicity, adored, waited on, yielded to, her "little sister." Honest Mark fell a complete slave to the fascinations of her beauty: he could not give a severe look, nor a reproving word: the twining of those dimpled arms around his neck brought instant submission to any whim of Miss Doris.

"Mark, Mark, you are like all the men—you think the world and all of a pretty face," said Patty, laughing.

"She's just a wonder, and I *can't* cross her," said Mark. "Not but I like Mattie best. You can rely on Mattie, somehow: she's worth twenty of this pretty Doris; but I *can* say 'no' to her, and I can try to train her up to be a good woman; but this little golden and pearly thing is just like a butterfly or a humming-bird to me, that's a fact. And then, Patty, we have had luck ever since she came; her hands brought us blessings."

Was it any wonder that it came about that when one child was to yield to the other, Mattie yielded to Doris? Mattie was older and stronger, and, truth to say, yielded more readily. If Patty called on a child to help her, to pick up toys, or a spool, or run to call Mark, was it not natural that Mattie, true, industrious child of the house, was the one called on, rather than the child who paid a hundred pounds a year? Was it strange that, thinking of that lady-mother, who might any day come to claim her own, Patty protected the snowy beauty of her nurse-child with nankeen mitts, and sleeves, and wide-brimmed hat? Did it seem less than honest, when one considered that yearly hundred pounds, and the gentle birth, to give the child finer shoes and daintier garments than little Mattie had?

Thus it came about that pride, and vanity, and indolence, and imperious self-will, were nursed insensibly in this child, whose soul Patty greatly desired to keep white and pure.

Mark Brace, too, felt the duties that the yearly payment pressed upon him. When Doris was three years and a half old, he said to his wife:

"We must make her mannerly, lest her mother should not be satisfied. When she gets big she must learn music and languages; now she must learn to sew and to read. We will let our Mattie learn what she does. She is our only child; we can afford it."

"And you mean me to teach them?" asked Patty.

"Oh, no, wife. You are too busy. We will send them every day to Brakebury, to the Misses Hopwell."

The Misses Hopwell were very genteel ladies; a surgeon's daughters, fallen into narrow circumstances, and keeping a little school, very genteel indeed, where they taught the making of samplers, the tables, reading, writing, the globes, etc., in prim, old-fashioned style.

To this "ladies' school" went Mattie and Doris every day, in a little wicker cart, drawn by a donkey, beside which ran a bare-foot farm-boy as their charioteer. And so time went on, and Doris had been four years at the farm, and news now spread abroad that Lady Estelle Hereford was better at last, and the duke was coming home.

Back to England finally, and the castle was filled with guests.

"I believe," said the duchess to the duke, "that the best thing for our daughter would be a happy marriage. She is over twenty-two. If we could rouse her up to take any interest in any one—all she lacks is animation. She is a Psyche before the coming of Cupid. I heard a gentleman in Italy calling her 'the marble Psyche,' speaking to a friend."

"I cannot understand it," said the duke. "During her first year in society she seemed animated and interested. I believe I even once spoke sharply to her for dancing twice with Captain Rodney Alnwick."

"You were quite right," said the duchess. "I spoke to her myself about him. He was entirely ineligible in every particular. But that all passed by. I thought she liked him a little, and I was glad when he exchanged his regiment and went off to India. A ne'er-do-well family, if an old one."

"We must bring together the best *partis*," said the duke, "and she may fancy some one. I long to see her settled, and to have grandchildren about me."

The guests came; and among them, calm, gracious, lovely, went Lady Estelle, untouched by adoration, a goddess moving in a nimbus of her own impregnable repose.

There was a dinner-party given for the Bishop of Lansdown, and, as usual, the bishop was full of stories, and told them well.

"I remember," said Lady Estelle, "before we went abroad, you told me some story that interested me—something about a child——"

"No doubt—about the child left at Mark Brace's door."

"Perhaps that might be it. I suppose it has been claimed."

"Not at all. Mark has it yet, and shows himself a most honest man in his care of it."

"Ah! In what way?"

"He not only adores the child, but he rears it delicately, and he means to educate her."

"Yes? And can one be educated at Brakebury?" said the soft, caressing, languid, scarcely interested voice.

"The child is very young yet. She goes in a little donkey-carriage to a really nice little school, kept by two ladies in reduced circumstances. When she gets too old for that school, Mark means to find a better one for her."

"Quite thoughtful of him; and the child is pretty?"

"More pretty than I can tell you. I am sure she is nobly born. I saw her after service the day I held confirmation."

"And her parents have never been found?" asked the duchess.

"No; and surely never will be. Great care has been taken to secure secrecy, and Mark feels bound to maintain it."

"I do not know but it may be quite as well," said her grace; and then dinner was announced.

CHAPTER V.
"I WANT TO BE JUST LIKE YOU."

"My dear Estelle," said the Duchess of Downsbury, "I had hoped that with returning health you would have more earnestness and animation—be more like your early self."

"Possibly my early self was a great simpleton, mamma, and as for animation, most girls are overdoing that. Calmness, what you call indifference, may be my style. Don't you think people like it, mamma?"

"Your style is simply perfection," said her grace, "and there are two or three eligible men here just now who plainly think so; if you could only give them a little encouragement."

"I'm quite sick of eligible men, mamma. Is it ten or a dozen that I have 'declined with thanks?' I do not give them encouragement because they offer themselves soon enough without it. They don't interest me."

"And what will interest you?" asked the perplexed duchess.

Lady Estelle waved to and fro, in a meditative manner, her feather fan, as if considering what she *could* desire.

"I believe, now I think of it, it would interest me to go and see that child the Bishop of Lansdown told us of."

"My dear, that is not a nice story at all. It is suspicious."

"But the Braces are very proper people, and the child may be a very nice child. Brakebury village belongs to us, and I think I never was there. In fact, I have never been over half our estate, nor do I know any of our people."

"It is hardly necessary that you should, Estelle."

"Because I am not a son and heir, mamma, that is not my fault. I think I should rather have been a boy than a girl. As a boy I might have found something to interest me."

She was relapsing into indifference.

"We will go and see the child by all means," said the duchess, hastily. "To-morrow at eleven the carriage shall be ready, and your father will accompany us; he wishes to look over the estate a little."

At noon next day the ducal party were whirling over the broad, level Downsbury roads toward the home of honest Mark Brace, who, all unconscious of coming honor drove his team afield, while Patty guided her household affairs in their usual shining order.

It was Saturday and there was no school for the little ones. Mattie, in brown linen dress, was trotting about after her mother, helping here and there, active and useful. Little Beauty was making bouquets for herself; dressed in white, because white she *would* wear continually, and

decorated with a sash and shoulder knots; and deprived of these ornaments she shrieked vigorously.

"And this," said Lady Estelle, as they drove up, "is Brackenside. I did not know it was so pretty. A fit place for a romance."

Honest Mark, abashed but happy, was anything but a hero of romance as he came up to greet his duke.

"Good-morning, Mr. Brace," said the duchess, frankly. "We have heard so much of your little foster-child, your fairy changeling, that we drove over to hear her story and to see her. We would like, also, to see your wife and your own little girl."

Mark Brace told the story in his matter-of-fact way, as he ushered the guests in the seldom-used parlor, the pride of Patty's soul.

"It is not half so romantic a story as I thought," yawned Lady Estelle; "but let us see the child since we are here."

Mark withdrew to summon his family.

"Goodness, mamma!" drawled Estelle, "what a stiff, hideous place; framed samplers and horsehair chairs. I should die of it. It is well we are not all born alike."

She lost herself in contemplation of a tall, eight-day clock.

Enter Mark, leading Mattie, and Mrs. Brace carrying the golden-haired mystery.

The child was beautiful as our dreams of angels. One small hand rested on Patty's shoulder, the other hung in a graceful curve; her large, clear, smiling eyes met her august guests, sweet and unabashed. The duchess raised her hands.

"She is perfectly angelic!"

"A true fairy," said the duke, taking the child from Patty, and standing her, as a thing to be admired, on the table.

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Doris," said the child, with a gracious little inclination of the head, extending her hand with ease, as if she had now found suitable acquaintances.

Fair, pearly fair, her cheeks and lips mantled with the dainty bloom of the wild rose; her hair like spun gold, flowing over her molded shoulders; her eyes large, shining as stars under dark brows and lashes, fearless, free, not a trace of rustic embarrassment; taper fingers, ears like small pink shells, true child of the nobles, set now among her peers.

"Estelle! do look at her!" cried her grace.

Estelle roused herself from contemplating the clock; she drew off her gloves, and the jewels gleamed on her hands, as she took the child's soft palm, and gently stroked her golden hair.

"You are like sunshine! Speak to me, little one."

"Will you tell me what to say?" asked Doris, promptly.

"What would you like best of anything—tell me?"

"I would like to be *just like you*! I want to be tall, to have rings, and your pretty dress, and ride in a carriage. I don't like brown clothes, and donkey wagons."

Her little lips curled with scorn, as she looked toward Patty.

"Oh," said Lady Estelle, shocked and remonstrant, "would you not like best of all to be good, *very* good?"

Doris broke into a frank, silvery laugh, showing dimples and pearly teeth.

"No," she said, with charming candor. "I like pretty things more than being good. Mattie can be good for us both. I am pretty. To be good is *so* dull," she sighed with grace.

The duke laughed heartily, crying:

"Woman, true woman!"

"Not true woman at all," said the duchess, indignantly, "a very vain little girl."

"*All* little girls should be good," said Lady Estelle, sagely.

Doris laughed again incredulously, with all her heart.

Patty Brace stepped forward, looking distressed.

"Please do not believe her—she is very good, most of the time, unless she is crossed. She has that odd way of talking, but Mark and I try our best to teach her goodness, and so do the ladies at the school. She will be good, I am sure."

"Poor child," said the duchess, "I hope so."

"Promise me that you will be good," said Lady Estelle.

"Oh, I'll promise; but then, I don't keep promises. I don't think I shall be good. I shall laugh in school, and eat all the red apples, and run away to ride, when I am told not."

"Very small sins, overcome in time," laughed the duke.

"Perhaps you would like me to sing for you," said Doris, and with a voice sweet, strong, and clear, she broke into an old ballad, caught from Patty's lips, but vastly improved in her rendering. Her visitors were enchanted.

"You are a very clever little lady," said the duke.

"Oh, yes, I *am* a lady," said Doris, positively, "and when I am big I shall be *just like you*," she added to Estelle.

"We must go," said Lady Estelle Hereford, hastily. "Mamma, I feel quite warm and faint. I want outdoor air."

CHAPTER VI.
FAITHLESS AND DEBONAIR.

The duke placed a shining gold sovereign in the hand of Doris, and another in the hand of the quiet Mattie. The duchess looked at the honest, healthy, pleasant face of little Mattie, her frank brown eyes, and simple, rustic manners, and said, suddenly:

"I like this child best. She promises better; she fits her place; she will make the world better for her being in it."

"Thank your grace," said the gratified Patty. "I hope so. But little Doris is very good, too, only we cannot help spoiling her; she has such curious ways."

"Perhaps you wish to see me dance," said Doris, who had been placed on the floor. "Mattie can't dance; she won't learn the steps. I learn, and I make some steps; see me."

Full of grace as a true fairy, she caught one side of her little white gown, and with a glance of veiled coquetry at the duke, began to dance.

The duke clapped his hands in hearty admiration.

The duchess, looking at her daughter, saw that she was deadly pale.

"My dear; you are ill; you are over-fatigued!"

"No, no, I am quite well," said Lady Estelle, calm and proud; "I only want fresh air; the room is close."

They made hasty adieus, and Mark followed them to the carriage; Mattie stood, a good little figure, framed in the doorway. Doris danced like a butterfly over the turf near the gate.

Mark, overcome by his great honors, returned to the parlor, and refreshed himself with a draught of cowslip wine.

"Here's an uncommon bit of civility, Patty," he said. "A duke is a duke, say what one may! And what a duke ours is! And what a rare gracious lady is the duchess! But the Lady Estelle—oh, she is rather a proud piece, I fear. But God bless her, she's young, and doesn't know what life is yet. I hope she'll live to be a comfort and honor to them. Patty! Why don't you speak, my girl? You are pale as the dead. This visit has overdone you."

"Oh, no; I'm only—*thinking*—very hard, Mark."

Mark knew of old that when Patty set herself to hard thinking she might as well be let alone, so he went off to his work among the barley. But Patty worked that day with a burden on her heart.

"Well, well," said the duke, as they drove back, "I did not expect to see such a wonderfully beautiful child. Even lovelier than you were, Estelle, when you were little."

"Was I pretty?" asked the languid Estelle. "Yes, this child is pretty, and seems to be rather bright."

"The prettiest, brightest child I ever saw," said the duke.

"But such shocking ideas! I never saw so young a child with such bad tendencies!" cried the duchess. "It is easy enough to see how she will end."

"How will she end, mamma?" said Lady Estelle's slow, sweet voice.

"Very badly, my dear. She loves luxury; she is willful; she is scornful. She will hate the plain ways of those good people, and they will be able to do nothing with her. Gifts and beauty—dangerous

dower for this young bird of paradise, in a wood-dove's nest."

"They are bringing up their own child well, I fancy."

"Yes, my dear; she *is* their own; they understand her; they are under no restraint concerning her."

"Honest Mark worships that little beauty," said the duke; "his eyes followed her every movement. She will govern him, and so much the worse for her. Your *protegee* will have tragedy as well as comedy in her life, Estelle."

"Why call her *my protegee*?" said Lady Estelle, indolently. "Surely I have sins and follies enough to answer for, papa, without assigning to my protection a child of whom my mother prophesies such evil."

"I wish we could do something for her," said the duke.

"What could we do? She is admirably well kept; she goes to school. If that good Patty Brace could not succeed with her, could we, where life and fashion would fill her head with nonsense? Perhaps I only speak so because I am constitutionally indolent."

"You are quite right. She has too much flattery and indulgence now," said the duchess.

"Sometimes I think that simple, unworldly life is best for everybody," said Lady Estelle. "I get tired of society and display, and fancy I should like to wear a print gown and lie all day under an apple-tree in bloom."

"But apple-trees don't bloom all the year, and the ground is often outrageously damp," laughed the duke.

"And these simple people cannot lie under trees all day, or much of the day; consider they must be making butter and cheese, and curing bacon," added her grace.

"So?" drawled Lady Estelle. "Then no doubt I had better stay as I am."

"My dear girl," said her father, seriously, "it is time to reconsider that determination to stay as you are. Not long ago you refused the Marquis of Bourne. You said he was too old and too plain. Now I have a proposal from the Earl of Seaton for your hand. He is neither old nor plain; he is in every way eligible."

"Now you are boring me again, papa," drawled Lady Estelle.

"But, my dear, I approve of the earl. I really wish to see you married. What shall I say to him?"

"Tell him to go away and not trouble me, papa."

"My daughter, he deserves a better answer. You are my only child; I shall not live forever; I must consider your future. Marriage will contribute to your happiness."

"I am happy enough, papa."

"Then think of our happiness—your mother's and mine. Oh, Estelle! when I saw that lovely little child, how I wished I had a grandchild like that!"

A ruddy blush dyed Lady Estelle's face, and she was silent.

"Daughter," said the duchess, "do not wait and refuse all offers from some romantic fancy about falling in love. That does not belong to your rank. Perhaps your nature is not to love any man very passionately: but you will care for your husband when you are married, and you will love your children."

Lady Estelle drooped her eyelids until the long lashes rested on her swiftly paling cheek.

"Mamma, I *hate* the word marriage!" she said, with far more than her usual vehemence.

"We will drop the question at present," said her mother, anxiously. "You are looking very pale and ill. This long ride has been too much. I wish I had not permitted it."

Yes, Lady Estelle was the worse for her visit. She looked paler each day, and often when alone she whispered:

"Faithless and debonair—faithless and fair; faithless and debonair!"

The duke soon concluded that he must begin his wanderings again in search of health and strength for his idolized only child. The suitors were sent sway, the castle was closed, and the family of Downsbury went far from Brackenside and little Doris.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL, ALL IS VANITY.

Meanwhile, at the farm little Doris grew under the protection of Mark and Patty, and yearly, as

the day came round which was the anniversary of her arrival, Mark received a hundred pounds, in golden sovereigns, or in fresh, new Bank of England notes. And Mark, in his sturdy honesty, and far-seeing common sense, developed rare qualities as a guardian. Plain man as he was, he guessed at what a girl of good family or high social position should know, and preparing Doris for that position to which some day her unknown mother might call her, he resolved that she should receive accomplishments.

Fortune favored him. In Brakebury lived a Frenchman, a political exile, a gentleman of high accomplishments. Monsieur D'Anvers was held in great awe in the village; his courtly grace, the foreign tongues he spoke, the pictures that he drew, the water-color landscapes which he painted and sold in London, his playing on various instruments—all lifted him far above his neighbors.

To Monsieur D'Anvers went honest Mark, when Doris was eight years old, and offered him fifty pounds a year to tutor the two little girls, the brown and the fair.

"You will teach Mattie what she wants to learn, and what she can learn," said Mark; "but Doris can learn anything, and I want you to teach her all you know."

So Doris was taken daily to her tutor, as she had been to the school of the Misses Hopwell, and the old French courtier bowed down and worshiped her, as in all her life did all the men who were brought into contact with her. To teach her was a labor of love. Her aptitude was marvelous. She learned to speak French and German fluently; she drew and painted with taste and skill; her little fingers, with some inherited grace, flew over the ivory keys, or touched the shining cords of harp and guitar. Manners—the manners of courts—the banished Frenchman taught her, and she learned them intuitively.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the old gentleman; "but this child is lovely! She surpasses Ninon D'Enclos and Diana de Poitiers! She has spirit, wit, originality—everything that is admirable! A queen might be proud to be her mother!"

Doris swayed and enchanted her old preceptor. Mattie, quietly studying French, drawing, and English literature, was left far behind by her foster-sister, who was speedily learning all that the tutor could teach.

"You should have been born a princess, *ma belle*!" the old man would say, delighted with some flash of wit, some piquant performance. "What will you do with all your beauty here on a farm?"

"Am I very beautiful?" demanded Doris.

"More beautiful than Helen, for whom thousands died; than Cleopatra, who had the world's conquerors at her feet! What will you do with so much beauty?"

"Make the most of it!" and the words jarred on the aristocrat.

All men said the same. Even the rector unwisely cried:

"Little maid, you have beauty enough to turn your head. Do not let it make you proud."

"Who made me beautiful?" asked Doris.

"God, my child."

"Is it not right to be proud of God's work and gifts?"

"You have beauty enough to be a snare," said the doctor.

"God gave me my beauty, and God is good, and does not set snares," said Doris, quickly, making Mark and the doctor laugh at her ready wit.

"A beautiful body is nothing without a beautiful soul," said Mark, mindful of the letter saying, "Keep her soul white and pure."

"I would rather have a beautiful body than a beautiful soul," said Doris, promptly.

"Why, my dear?" demanded the good man, in amaze.

"Because my body is where people can see it. Who can see my soul?" said Doris, scornful of her best possession.

Mark was shocked.

"That comes from every one praising you so foolishly; you will be ruined!" he exclaimed.

"Mattie can have the beautiful soul, and I will have the beautiful body," retorted Doris. "Monsieur D'Anvers says wisdom is the best gift, the gift for kings. I say beauty is the best gift, the gift for queens; and queens have always ruled kings."

Mark shook his head. It is hard labor to rear an eagle in a sparrow's nest.

"Mother," said Doris, one day, when she was twelve, "this shall not go on longer—I'm sick of it."

"What, my child? Of what are you sick?"

"Of the village, of the farm, of our way of living. I hate it. If I am kept here longer I know I shall run away."

"My dear, are we not good to you?"

"Oh, yes, you are good, of course; but it is not goodness I want; it is change; I want something new—some more *style*."

"But how and where, Doris?"

"Send me to boarding-school. I want to know more of the way ladies do and live. We see no one here. If Mattie does not want to go, I ought not to be kept home. I have learned all Monsieur D'Anvers knows. I talk French and German as fast as he does—we go over the same old things."

"That is true, mother," said Mattie. "Doris is a great scholar. I cannot go away from home; I don't want to; I love to stay and help you; but let Doris go."

"I will ask your father," said Patty, hesitatingly.

"And he'll say to let the child have her own way," said Doris, with a laugh.

"Well, I must consult your father."

"Consult my father!" said Doris, with wonderful scorn.

She had a singular contempt for all about her, though no hint that she was other than the child of the Braces had been given her.

She had her way; she went to a fashionable boarding-school. For her clothing and tuition honest Mark paid the entire hundred pounds each year. She elected to visit schoolmates at vacation, and for four years Brackenside Farm knew no more of the golden-haired mystery.

At sixteen she came home again, beautiful as a fairy, ripe for mischief, mad for display—a tireless reader of French novels.

She looked about that home of rustic goodness, and covert scorn dwelt in the violet eyes and sat lightly on the chiseled lips; her parents were "so plain," her sister Mattie "a country simpleton."

They on their part rose up to do her homage; they bowed down and worshiped at beauty's shrine. And was she not most beautiful?

> "Beauty was hers in dower, such as earth
> Doth rarely reckon 'mid her fading things:
> A glory lit her tears, and in her mirth
> Shook the sweet laughter of translucent springs."

Already an adept in coquetry, she sighed at once for a victim for her charms. Alas! she found him near.

"Are there any new people?" she asked of Mattie.

"Only Earle Moray."

"Eh? A decent sounding name. Who is he?"

"A poet and a gentleman," cried Mattie, enthusiastically.

"A poet? Poets live, I understand, in garrets."

"But Earle has some money," said Mattie, simply.

"Earle? So? You seem to know him rather well."

Poor Mattie blushed crimson.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE YOUNG COQUETTE.

> "For some had perished in her stern neglect—
> Fell on the sword of their own hope and died;
> While she in triumph, scornfully erect,
> Swept o'er their ashes with the skirts of pride."

Before returning to Brackenside, Doris had demanded a room for herself, and for this room certain furnishings. She did not know that Mark and Patty would say to each other:

"It is only fair, since we have for her a hundred pounds a year;" but she did know that her will would be law to them.

She brought with her, when she came back to the farm, many little adornments, purchases of her own, or gifts from her school friends; and these Mattie dutifully arranged for her, just as she had polished the windows and nailed down the carpet, and ironed the curtains before Doris came. Doris never thought of helping her. She perched herself, Turk fashion, on the foot of the bed, and

issued her orders as a good-natured little mistress to her maid. There were knickknacks for the toilet-table, pictures for the wall, a little book-case of hanging shelves.

"Your room will be fit for a princess, Doris," said Mattie.

"For a princess!" said Doris, with scorn. "If I were half a princess, or only rich, I would clear out the rubbishy things at once. You might have them, Mattie, since you like them. I would have gold-mounted furnishings for my dressing-table, silk hangings, velvet carpets, upholstery in plush and satin, gold, white, pale-blue. I would have exquisite marbles, and pictures that cost a fortune each."

"But you never saw such things," said Mattie.

"No; only I have read of them, and find in myself a fitness for them. I would give *anything* for such luxury."

"Do not pine, dear, for what you can never have."

"I may have it some day," said Doris, defiantly.

"But how would you get it?"

"By my beauty. The world belongs to beauty."

Mattie was shocked. She was putting the books on the shelves, and her honest face clouded. She said to Doris:

"I fear your books are worse than none. How did you come to get such books? I have heard Monsieur D'Anvers say some of these were vile trash; and I notice sentences in the others that are not fit reading for a young maid."

"They are French," said Doris.

"That does not make them better. There are good books to be had in French; and you have Byron for your only poet. I have heard our rector say Byron is unfit reading for girls."

"You ridiculous, strait-laced creature!"

"And I don't quite like your pictures, dear. The *subjects* are not pleasant to me. These French beauties were famous for vice. La Pompadour, and Diana, and the rest. This Cleopatra is too scantily attired to suit my taste, and this Trojan Helen is not a nice picture. I would have chosen Joan of Arc, and tender Margaret More, and sad Hecuba, and martyr Margaret. Pictures should elevate our souls."

"My goodness, Mattie! have you been taking lessons of that gentleman poet you mentioned? Where does he live!"

"At Lindenholm—his mother owns it, and came there two years ago, when she was left a widow. Her husband was a curate."

"Then I don't believe your Earle Moray is very rich. He is just a farmer, if he has only Lindenholm. I remember the place, half villa, half farm-house, with great linden trees around it. Does he write books?"

"He has written one small one—'Songs of the Country-side.' I have it here. You can read it; it is like music."

"Ta, ta! I hate poetry. What does the man look like?"

"Why, he looks as he is, a gentleman, a good man."

"I foresee I shall have a surfeit of goodness here. If the man is neither rich nor handsome, he will hardly pay to flirt with, unless one is desperate."

"To flirt with!" cried Mattie, aghast. "You would not *flirt*, Doris?"

"And why wouldn't I?"

"Why, it is wicked. It is cruel, it is deceitful."

"Hear the girl talk!" cried Doris, flinging herself back on the bed with peals of musical laughter. "Why, goosey, I flirted with every male creature I set eyes on at school."

"But I thought they did not allow such things."

"Allow? You will undoubtedly be the death of me, with your simplicity," said Doris, sitting up, her golden hair distractingly rumpled, her eyes shining with glee, her dimples dancing like tricky sprites among the deepened roses on her cheeks. "*Don't* you understand that it was our chief aim to do what we were not allowed? Men, I admit, were scarce. The writing-master was engaged to one of the teachers; but I flirted with him until *she* nearly cried her eyes out; and after he withstood me three months he surrendered at discretion, and I laughed at him. The French master vowed he would kill himself on my behalf; the music-master fell so conspicuously into my power that the preceptress dismissed him, and got a gorgon of a woman in green spectacles in his place. As for the dancing-master, he played the fool and erred exceedingly whenever I was in sight; so the girls said it was better than any theater."

"Doris, I am ashamed of you."

"What odds does that make, so long as I am not ashamed of myself?"

"But you will not act in that way with Earle?"

"Why won't I? Are you afraid of losing him?"

"He doesn't belong to me," said Mattie, blushing.

"How soon am I likely to see him?" demanded Doris.

"To-morrow. Every day. His mother wants him to be a farmer. She manages Lindenholm now, and sends him to take farming lessons of father. Father thinks everything of Earle, and so does mother."

"A farmer! The game is not worth the candle. I wouldn't be a farmer's wife for anything. I loathe being a farmer's daughter."

"I don't," said Mattie, with spirit. "I'm proud of my home, my honest race, my good, sweet mother, my dear father."

"How queer!" said Doris, meditatively. "Now, I couldn't see anything to be proud of in all *that*. I should be proud of a coach and grays, and men in livery—of suits of jewels, of a French maid, of velvet, satin, lace, brocade dresses."

"Doris," said Mattie, anxiously, "*have* you any soul?"

"Soul? If we cannot live without one, and soul makes the heart go, I suppose I have; otherwise, I don't feel aware of the property you mention."

"I believe you are only jesting, to tease me. You were always brighter than I am, and a real rogue. You have higher ideas and better intentions and wishes than you say."

"No, really I haven't—not one bit."

"Why, then," said poor Mattie, deeply distressed, "it must be your moral nature that is lacking."

"*Moral nature?* That's just it," said Doris, with infinite satisfaction. "Moral nature—I haven't any. I think all the nature I have must be immoral; I always side with the sinners in all stories."

Mattie had finished arranging the pretty little room. Doris jumped from her place on the bed.

"Really you have made it look very well, considering what you have to do it with. A sort of household fairy, you, Mattie; your name should be Brownie. Now we will play you are my maid. I am going to bed, and I like to have my hair brushed a long time. It is good for my nerves, and good for my hair. Will you be my maid?"

"With great pleasure," said Mattie, letting down the golden flood of Doris' silken hair. "How beautiful it is!"

"I think I am beautiful every way," said Doris, calmly.

"You are, indeed," said Mattie, without the least envy.

"Your hair will not brush straight! It is all in wavy clusters."

"You will brush it every night, and then I shall like you."

"Surely I will brush it, when you wish. But I like you in all cases," said Mattie. "And I want you to be good, dear."

"And not flirt with Earle Moray? Or other men? I'll not promise that. Flirting is my nature. I will flirt with this Earle until he puts his heart in my hands, and I will crush it up *so*—as I do this rosebud—and drop it—*so*! You watch and see how it is done, Mattie."

Tears rushed to Mattie's eyes. She hurriedly left the room.

"In love with him! Jealous! Oh, delightful! Here is something to amuse me. I thought I must surely die of dullness here, but I can flirt with the 'gentleman and poet,' and drive this preaching little puritan mad with envy, and that may fill up a year for me. Then, if the prince has not come along to woo, I shall go out somewhere to seek my fortune. Anything but stagnation. I will go where no one of the name of Brace shall follow me."

Meanwhile, Mattie, in her own neat, snug room, sat in the moonlight, mourning over the perverseness of this beautiful beloved sister, and trembling for Earle Moray, whom she called her friend, and held far dearer, without knowing it. How could any man help loving such a dazzling creature as this Doris? And his manly, noble heart must then be crushed and flung away like that ruined rose? She looked up to the moon-lit sky. There was her helper and her friend. She prayed:

"God keep poor Earle."

Then, comforted, she sought her bed and slept the sleep of faith. Doris slept the sleep of youth and abounding health, until Mrs. Brace awoke her.

"It is almost seven, dear. I let you sleep late this morning."

"This late? Now, mother, you might as well know I made my own hours for rising, and I will never rise at seven!"

Patty sighed, and left her; she knew Doris would always have her own way.

CHAPTER IX.
POET AND GENTLEMAN.

"I sat with Doris, beloved maiden,
  Her lap was laden with wreathed flowers:
I sat and wooed her, through sunlight wheeling,
  And shadows stealing, for hours and hours."

Rose the sun over an idyllic day; the white clouds floated softly over the summer blue; the poppies blazed in scarlet splendor through the grass; the bearded barley stood in sheaves, and through the meadows of Brackenside, that prosperous farmer, Mark Brace, led his men to their work.

Earle Moray, whose mother looked on poesy as the macadamizing of the road to ruin, and desired nothing better for her son than the safe estate and healthful, honest life of a farmer, had come to take a lesson in stacking corn.

It is true that farm work was not especially attractive to Earle the poet, but pleasing his mother was attractive to Earle the son; the friendship of honest Mark was attractive to Earle the man; and Earle had common sense to know that every man is better off for knowing how to win his bread from the field. Therefore, came Earle to his lesson.

"My sister has come!" said Mattie, meeting him with a boding heart. "She has grown more lovely than ever in these four years. You will write poems about her when you see her. Her face is a poem, her voice and laugh are poems!"

"And where is the phœnix of girls?" demanded Earle.

"Down there under the great elm, watching the reapers. I will introduce you to her," said Mattie, who thought this fatal introduction should be well over with, the sooner the better.

Perhaps Doris was in a less impish mood to-day. Frank Mattie did not dream how Doris had meditated all the morning on the new situation, and had dressed for conquest. In rustic surroundings she would play the rural queen. Her dress was a simple print, a white ground with little green sprays of maiden-hair traced on it. At her neck a knot of pale green, through which was carelessly drawn a flower; in her gleaming hair a cluster of hop blossoms; her wide straw hat at her feet was trimmed with a wreath of hop-vine; over her shoulders fell her wonderful hair. She held a book in her lap; one white hand rested on the page, the other brushed back a truant curl; and she lifted her lovely eyes in innocent, pleased expectation, as Mattie and Earle drew near.

The heart of Earle Moray stood still with surprise, then it leaped as if it would break its bounds, and a flood of passionate admiration fired his whole being. Oh, how divine a thing she was, this naiad in the meadow-land; all poetry should wait as handmaid at her feet. Why was one born to sing, unless to sing. Those shining eyes, those dimpling smiles, that flush of dawn upon her cheeks, well becoming the young morning of her maiden life. Oh, daughter of the gods of Hellas! Oh, "being fit to startle and surprise," looking at her, this boy-poet, whose soul had until now only stirred in its sleep, and murmured in its dreams, awoke to full and perfect life.

Mattie looked into his flushing face, his kindling eyes, and saw that words, if she had dared to utter them, would now be fruitless to warn him of Doris. She could only in her secret soul hope that Doris was less cruel than she had said, and so send up in silence to the ear of Heaven, that prayer:

"God save Earle Moray!"

Earle looked at her.

"Mattie! What is on your mind? Do you want to say something to me?"

"No—yes—only—that you must remember that my sister is only a child, and takes nothing seriously. You will not mind any nonsense that she says."

"Surely she will speak as she looks, like an angel."

They drew near the elm. With what consummate art were the violet eyes drawn down from contemplation of their native skies to comprehension of earth's lower things! With what a sudden start at the *abandon* of her own position on the grass did Doris greet Mattie and the "gentleman-poet!" She saw the flush on his cheek, the ardent flame lighting his dark eyes. She said to herself:

"I shall have no trouble here; he is at my feet already. Thank fortune the man is handsome; and what an air he has! I shall not waste time on him, as it would be wasted on a clod-hopper. He will be good practice for better times."

"Ah," she said, as Earle asked permission to sit on the grass at her feet, "I don't know that you belong there. Are you a worker or an idler? Mattie is a worker; if you are industrious and good, you must go with her or my father. I am an idler; if you are naughty and idle, you belong with me."

"I am of still a third class—I am a dreamer. Here let me sit and dream of heaven."

Mattie turned away, fearful and sick of heart; the mischief was done.

"Dreaming is even better than idling," said Doris. "And here is a real land of dreams. See how the poppies bend, sleepy with sunshine; the sunshine is a flood of refined gold; the bees fly slowly, drunk with perfume; the butterflies drift up and down like beautiful, happy, aimless thoughts. Let us dream, and live to be happy."

"One could not do better," cried Earle. "Here shall be our lotus-land, and you are a fit genius for the place, Miss Brace."

"Now, at the very beginning, I must make a treaty with you. Are you coming here often?"

"I hope so."

"Then, unless I am to hate you on the spot, you must not call me Miss Brace. I detest the name! If there is one name above another that I hate, it is that name Brace! It is so common, so mean—a wretched monosyllable!"

"But you would grace any name!" cried Earle.

"I don't mean to grace that very long!" exclaimed Doris.

Earle opened his eyes in uncontrollable amazement.

"You don't know what it is to suffer from a wretched, short, commonplace name. Look at me, and consider that I am called, above all things, Doris Brace! Horrors! Now, your name is fairly good. Earle Moray. There is a savor of gentility, of blood, of breeding, about that. You can venture to rise with such a name. I can only rise by dropping mine, and that I mean to do."

Earle laughed. This was, after all, the pretty, captious nonsense of a little child.

"But Doris is a sweet name. It fits this sweet, home-like landscape. Doris, the lovely shepherdess, has been sung and painted for centuries."

"But I have no genius for woods or fields, and I am afraid of sheep. However, Miss Doris is better than—Miss Brace."

She reached for a poppy growing in the grass, and the book fell from her knee. Earle picked it up, and saw what it was.

"*This!*" he exclaimed, in genuine consternation.

Now, Doris absolutely lacked the moral sense that would make her ashamed of the book, or revolt at anything she found therein. But she had native wit, and she saw that she was on the point of instantly losing caste with Earle Moray on account of this literature.

"Eh? What kind is it?" she said, with enchanting simplicity. "I bought it on the train late yesterday, and since I came out here I have been too happy to read it. Isn't it a nice book?"

"I should say not," said Earle.

"How do you know, unless you have read it?"

"I know the author's reputation; and then, the title!"

"Dear me! And so I must not read it?—and my one-and-six-pence gone! Whenever I try to do particularly right, I do wrong. Unlucky, isn't it? Now the last word my French teacher said to me was, 'By all means keep up your French; you have such a beautiful accent.'"

Earle looked relieved. Here was an explanation of exquisite simplicity. There was no spot on this sweet, stainless lily.

Mattie came back.

"Doris, mother thinks you had better unpack your trunk. Your dresses will be rumpled lying in it so long."

"You unpack it, like a dear! I shall ruin my things taking them out; and then, I can't go in, it is so lovely out-of-doors."

"Did you not put the things in, to begin with?" asked Mattie.

"No, dear; one of the girls did. The *girls* loved to wait on me, Mattie!" This with sweet reproach.

"But mother thinks you are keeping Earle from work."

"Go away, Earle!" said Doris, giving him a dainty little push. "If you stay idle here, I am to be called in and set to work. After that stuffy old school this four years, I cannot stay indoors. Go, Mattie, and tell mother if she insists on my coming in, I shall appeal at once to my fairy godmother to turn me into a butterfly."

Mattie walked slowly away.

"That's all right," said Doris, with satisfaction. "They all end by letting me have my own way."

"And how does that work?"

"Well. Don't you suppose it is always a very nice way?"

"It must be, indeed," said Earle, heartily.

He thought to himself that so charming a form must shrine only the tenderest of hearts, the sweetest of souls, and her way must always be a good way.

The girl was infinitely more lovely than one could look for in the child of Mark and Patty Brace, the sister of gentle Mattie; but being the child of Mark and Patty, and sister of Mattie, she must be a sharer in their goodness, that sterling honesty, that generous unselfishness, that made these three everywhere beloved and respected, patterns of domestic and neighborly virtues.

Thus thinking, Earle sunned himself in the radiance of her smiles.

CHAPTER X.
A WASTED WARNING.

While Earle Moray watched Doris, and lost himself in delicious fancies of a soul fair as the body that shrined it, Doris, on her part, gazed on him with awakening interest. She had expected to see a young countryman, a rhymster who believed himself a poet, one with whom she could "flirt to pass away the time," and "to keep in practice"—not this gentleman in air and dress, with the cultivated musical voice, the noble face, the truthful, earnest eye.

Said Doris in her heart, "I did not know that little dairy-maid Mattie had such good taste;" and in proportion as the value of Mattie's love increased before her, so increased her joy in winning it away. Not that Doris had any malice toward Mattie personally; but she had a freakish love of triumphing in the discomfiture of others. Slowly she yielded to the fascination of Earle's presence. She told herself that "the detestable country" could be endurable with him to play lover at her feet. To her, mentally arraigning "the detestable country," spoke Earle:

"I love this scene; fairer is hardly found in any book of nature. What is more lovely, more suggestive, than a wheat field with golden sheaves?"

"I am a true child of the cities," said Doris, "despite my country birth and rural name. I was just thinking how superior are the attractions of paved streets, filled with men and women, and lined with glittering windows. But if you will tell me some of the suggestions of the wheat field, no doubt I shall learn from you to think differently."

How charming was this docile frankness!

"It suggests earth's millions filled daily with bread. It suggests that gracious Providence, by long and lovely processes, forestalling man's needs. It brings to mind the old-time stories of Joseph's dream of bowing sheaves, of Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz."

The stories of Ruth, Rebecca and Esther were the three Bible stories that Doris knew; the face of Doris lighted as she answered:

"Oh, I like that! I have imagined Boaz—tall, grave, stately, dark; and Ruth—young, and fair, and tender. I cannot quite fancy how Naomi looked—like other old women with a sad history, I suppose—but the words are lovely."

"'Whither thou goest I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"

His voice took a deep, passionate tone, and his eyes filled with the light of love.

"Mattie says you are a poet!" cried Doris. "Are you?"

"I wish I could say 'I am.' Time will prove me. I have the poet's longing. Shall I ever reach the poet's utterance?"

"Why, I think you have it now," said Doris, sweetly.

"It is because you inspire me, perhaps. As I came toward you, I wondered whether you were Tennyson's 'Dora' or 'The Gardener's Daughter.'"

"Oh, neither! I am very different! They were content with trees and flowers, and humble ways. Was it not Dora who 'dwelt unmarried till her death?' I shall not do that. I shall marry and fly from the country-side. I can *live* among people in the city."

"What! cannot you live the truest life where wind, and rain, and water-fall, and birds make music? the flowers mark the sweet procession of seasons—all is calm, and security, and innocence."

"Tell me," said Doris, bending forward, glee in her sapphire eyes, her small hand thrilling him as she touched his arm; "tell me, poet, are *you* content? Do *you* not long for fame? To sway your fellows, to be rich, to make money?"

"Oh, money is the lowest of all objects. What is money to love?" demanded Earle.

"Money, just as metal, may be a low object, but money as money, as getting what we want most, is a high object. Think of what it can buy. Think of gorgeous pictures lighting your walls with beauty, of flashing jewels and gleaming marbles, of many-fountained gardens, of homes fit to live in, not stuffy little farm-houses, with windows under the eaves. Tell me, are you content? Will you live and die a farmer? Is not this money a thing worth winning to lay at the feet of love? Will you not spread the wings of your soul for a wider life? Have you not ambition?"

"Yes!" cried Earle; "I have ambition."

The dimpling smile showed the shining pearly line of little teeth; the soft fingers of the little hand touched his hand as she withdrew them; and, leaning back against her oak tree, she laughed joyously:

"I have found a fellow-sinner."

"Ambition can be noble, rather than evil, and to aspire is not to sin. Who could help being ambitious, with you as the apostle of ambition? You enforce with your beauty each word that you utter!"

"You think me *beautiful*?" said Circe, in sweetest wonderment, as if she had not studied dress, look, pose, gesture, minutely to enhance her wonderful and rich endowments of nature.

"Words cannot tell how fair. A verse keeps singing through my brain; it is this:

> "'And she, my Doris, whose lap incloses
> Wild summer roses of sweet perfume,
> The while I sued her, smiled and hearkened,
> Till daylight darkened from glow to gloom.'"

Ah, this was something like, thought Doris, to be wooed and flattered in poetry. She dropped her dainty lids, the rose pink deepened in her cheeks, and she gave a slow, sweet sigh.

"Did you make that poetry?"

"No: but would I could make immortal verses, for your sake," said Earle. "The world should hear of you."

The world! Oh, rare delight! Had she not dreamed of driving men mad for love, of making poets sing, and artists paint her charms? And these conquests were begun.

She looked up archly. She knew when to check the tides of enthusiasm and adoration, that they might grow stronger for the repression.

"Away with poetry, my singer, here comes prose."

Over the field toward them strode honest Mark Brace, looking for his neophyte in rural toils. Mark's round face was crimson with heat and exertion, but a broad smile responded to the pretty picture these two young lovers made under the tree. He cried, heartily:

"A deal you are learning this morning, Master Earle. Will you put off your lessons in wheat-stacking till next year? Lindenholm farm, at this rate, will be a model farm to the county when the madam turns it over to you."

"I was not in working humor," said Earle.

"Work won't wait for humors," quoth Mark. "And for you, my pretty miss, I don't doubt your sister is making butter and your mother cooking dinner, while you are playing shepherdess under a tree."

"Do I look as if I could work?" laughed Doris, springing to her feet and extending a wee rose-leaf hand. "I am only for ornament, not use. But I will leave Mr. Moray, for 'evil communications corrupt good manners,' and I have made him lazy. Good-bye, poet. 'Blessings brighten as they take their flight;' so I expect to look more and more charming as I depart homeward."

The minx knew that she had done enough that day to turn Earle Moray's head, and it would be well to let the effect deepen in absence. She danced off homeward, and Earle whispered under his breath:

> "Against her ankles as she trod,
> The lucky buttercups did nod;
> I leaned upon the gate to see—
> The sweet thing looked, but did not speak—

A dimple came in either cheek,
And all my heart was gone from me!"

Mark Brace looked after his Fairy Changeling in dire perplexity. To him work, honest labor—winning bread from the soil, was noble and happy; in all the words of Doris rang some delicate undertone of irony and scorn, of what he most esteemed. Fair, fair, indeed, but was it not selfish of her to let those whom she deemed her blood, work, and she stay idle? Yes, there was the hundred pounds, and she was not really their blood, but of some idle never-toiling strain.

More and more his hands were bound concerning the beauty, as she grew up in his care. He wished he could explain her to Moray, but he could not. Honor held him to silence. He could warn. He spoke suddenly, laying a hand on the lad's arm.

"Earle, I like you vastly. You are honest, good, a gentleman. I should be sorry indeed to see you giving your time, and mind, and setting your heart on that pretty, idle lass of mine."

"Sorry, Mark? Why sorry? She is sweet and lovely!"

"If it were Mattie, now," said honest Mark, speaking, not as a father or match-maker, but as a man. "Well and good. I'd not say a word. A man's heart may rest in Mattie—Heaven bless her! But Doris is of quite a different strain. In her there is no rest. One could never find rest in her. Never—never."

Earle tried to smile, but the words struck home, and were fixed in his heart beside the thought of Doris.

Meanwhile Doris danced off home, and framed her lovely countenance in the vines about the kitchen window.

"And what have *you* been doing?" asked Patty, reprovingly.

"Turning Earle Moray's head," responded Doris, promptly.

Mattie started and paled a little.

"He thinks I'm lovely!" cried Doris, with a laugh.

"So you may be, but no thanks to you," said Patty, "and if you set yourself to head-turning, mark my words, child, there will some terrible evil overtake you both."

CHAPTER XI.
THE FOSTER-SISTERS.

Summer day glided silently after summer day, and at Brackenside Farm Earle Moray was re-telling for himself the story of Eden—the love of one man for one woman, to him the only woman in the world. Alas, that his had not been a more guileless Eve! The love-making was patent to every one, and the family at the farm wondered where it would end. Mark Brace was truly sorry that Earle had set his heart on the lovely, fantastic Doris; and yet, honest man, he did not wonder that any young fellow should be beguiled by so fair a face, and he could not but be heartily amused at the queenly airs with which the farm foundling, believing herself a tenant-farmer's child, received the homage of Earle Moray, poet and gentleman, owner of the little estate of Lindenholm.

Good Patty Brace was, on her part, greatly perplexed. With woman's keen intuition in love, she perceived the intense sincerity of Earle's passion for Doris, and saw as well that Doris was entirely without heart for him. The girl admired him, loved his flattery, desired to be some one's chief object, but would have tossed him aside as easily as an old glove if a more dashing adorer had made his appearance. Besides, if Doris gave consent to Earle's wooing, would Mrs. Moray be well pleased with her son's choice? Mrs. Moray of Lindenholm was a thoroughly practical woman, and would see at a glance that the idle young beauty would be a very unreliable wife for any man, especially for one of moderate means.

"What fools men are in love matters," quoth Patty to herself—"at least most men!" with a thought backward to Mark's sensible choosing. "This dreamer and verse-writer would have done well to choose our Mattie, who would help him on and make him happy his life-long. But Doris is only fit to marry a lord, as no doubt she sprung from a lord; but where a lord is to come from as a suitor goodness knows, not I."

And, of all who saw the summer wooing, Mattie was the most deeply touched, but gave no sign. When she felt the sharpness of the pain when Doris asserted empire over Earle, then Mattie first guessed that she had set her love upon him; and she gave herself the task of rooting out lover's love, and planting sisterly affection in its stead. Her gentle face grew graver, her soft brown eyes had a more wistful light, but not a thought of jealousy, or anger, or envy. God was good to Mattie in that no ill weeds throve in her maiden soul. Doris did not find the sweetness she had expected in tormenting her, for Mattie gave no signs of torment—rather for Earle than for herself she was sad, and that with reason.

It is sad to see a young man love absorbingly, madly, giving up all for love. Doris became his one idea. Even his mother, while she knew he was attracted by a pretty daughter of Mark Brace, did not guess his infatuation. Scarcely an hour in the day were the young pair parted.

Earle had told Doris of the poet's old recipe for a lovely complexion, washing in morning dew; and Doris, to preserve the most exquisite complexion in the world, went out, when the sun rose, to bathe her cheeks and brow with the other lilies and roses in the dews of the dawning. Earle met her and rambled with her through flowery lanes. When his supposed studies in farming began, he was rather lounging at the feet of Doris than learning of Mark Brace; yet so eagerly did he hurry off to the farm, that his mother blessed his unwonted attention to his duty.

He dined at home, not to leave his mother lonely, then off again, and his farm studies consisted in reading poetry or tales to Doris, under trees, or wandering far into the gloaming with her in Brackenside garden. His heart poured itself out in Herrick's grand old song "To Anthea:"

"Thou art my life, my soul, my heart,
  The very eyes of me—
Thou hast command of every part,
  To live and die for thee."

His rich young voice rolled forth these words with deep feeling.

Doris laughed at the song at first, but his earnestness in singing it touched her a very little.

"I shall always think of you when I hear that song," she said.

"Think of me! Yes, but if it means that we are to be parted, and you think—just to remember—Doris, I should die!"

He was fervid, handsome, romantic, brilliant in love's first golden glow, hard to resist.

She smiled at him.

"Let us fancy we will not be parted," she said sweetly.

Earle came hurrying up one day after dinner.

"Now for a long evening in the garden!" he cried. "I have brought a new drama; the poetry is exquisite. We will sit in the arbor under the honeysuckle, and while the summer wind is full of the breath of flowers, I will read you the sweeter breathing of a poet's soul. Come, Doris—come, Mattie—let us off to the garden."

Mattie's face flushed with joy; it was so sweet to find some pleasure she could share with him.

Earle read; his voice was full of fire and music. Mattie listened entranced. Doris half forgot her favorite dreams of herself in gorgeous crowds, the center of admiration. The gloaming fell as he read the last lines.

"It is beautiful, in its poetry," said Mattie, "but not in its idea. I cannot love the heroine, though her face is fair. Beauty should be united to goodness, and goodness has not this cruel pride. To think of a woman who would let a brave man die, or risk death, to win a smile! I always hated the lady who threw the glove, and I think the knight served her well, to leave her when he returned the glove, for she had no idea of true love."

"Beauty has a right to all triumphs," cried Doris, "and men have always been ready to die for beauty's smile."

"A good man's life is worth more than any woman's smile," said Mattie. "The man's life, the woman's life, are Heaven's gifts, to be spent in doing good. We have no right to throw them idly away, or demand their sacrifice. I never liked these stories of wasted affection. They are too pitiful. To give all and get nothing is a cruel fate."

"Oh, you little silly country girl," laughed Doris, "you do not think that beautiful women are queens, and hearts are their rightful kingdom, and they can get as many as they like, and do what they please with them."

"You talk to amuse yourself," said Earle, "that sweet smile and voice fit your cruel words as little as they would suit an executioner's sword."

"What is slaying by treachery in love better than murder?" asked Mattie, eagerly.

"It is a very exciting, piquant, interesting form of murder," retorted her wicked little sister.

"How can any one enjoy giving pain," cried Mattie. "I have read of such women, but to me they seem true demons, however fair. Think of destroying hope, life, genius, morals—for what? For amusement, and yet these sons all had mothers."

"You are in earnest, Mattie," said Earle, admiringly.

"I feel in earnest," said Mattie, passionately.

"Pshaw, there is much spider and fly in men and women," laughed Doris. "Women weave silvery nets in the sun, and the silly men walk straight in. Who's to blame?"

"You talk like a worn-out French cynic," cried Mattie.

"Well, who *is* to blame?" persisted Doris; "pretty women for just amusing themselves according to their natures? or silly men for walking into danger, being warned?"

"It should not be a woman's nature to set traps for hearts or souls. You know better, Doris," urged Mattie.

"If I could be rich and great, and go to London, and live in society, you'd see if I would *do* better," retorted Doris.

"You two remind me of verses of a poem on two sisters," said Earle. "Their lives lay far apart.

"'One sought the gilded world, and there became
A being fit to startle and surprise,
Till men moved to the echoes of her name,
And bowed beneath the magic of her eyes.'"

"Yes, that means me," said Doris, tranquilly.

"'But she, the other, with a happier choice,
Dwelt 'mong the breezes of her native fields,
Laughed with the brooks, and saw the flowers rejoice;
Brimmed with all sweetness that the summer yields.'"

"That, then, is Mattie."

Mattie looked up in gratified surprise.

"If you are complimenting Mattie, I won't stay and hear it; I reign alone!" cried Doris, half laughing, half petulant, and darting away she sought her own room, and refused to return that night.

It was often so. When she had sunned Earle with her smiles she withdrew her presence, or changed smiles to frowns; so he was never cloyed with too much sweetness. When Doris withdrew, in vain he sang under the window, or sent her love-full notes. The summer sun of his love had its settings, its shadows, its thunder-clouds, yet Earle loved and was happy.

CHAPTER XII.
BEAUTY BECOMES IMMORTAL.

It was the good custom of Mark Brace to close the day with prayer; and sometimes a word or two of the psalms for the day penetrated the sedulously deaf ears of Doris.

Such happened to be the case one August night, and set the beauty thinking. She was perched on the sill of the dairy window, next morning, watching Mattie make butter, but her brow wore a perplexed frown, and a look of curiosity not provoked by butter-making was in her blue eyes.

"What is the matter? What are you thinking of, Doris?"

"I am thinking that I am an example of Scripture truth."

"In what particular?" asked Mattie.

"In the particular of tumbling into the pit, or catching in the net, duly set forth by me for other people."

"I don't quite understand you."

"Then you are even duller than usual, and, as I may no more speak in parables, I will expound myself clearly. I deliberately endeavored to entrap and entangle Earle Moray into loving me, for my summer pastime. I did not duly consider that I might fall in love with him myself."

"Why not, if you desired him to love you?"

"That was merely part of beauty's dues, child. Why not? He is not rich enough, or great enough; he cannot take me to London, and make me a society queen."

"Certainly not. You did not expect that."

"True. And I did not expect to fall in love with him."

"But you have? Surely you have, he loves you so much."

"Eh? Do you want me to love him? I thought you wanted him."

"I only want him to be happy," said Mattie, turning away, with a blush.

"Perhaps I love him a little. I am not capable of loving much," said Doris, with exceeding frankness. "My chief affections are set upon the pomps and vanities of this life, which I presume

were renounced for me in my baptism."

"Don't be so wicked," cried the scandalized Mattie.

"And yet I don't know that I could say 'yes,' if Earle asked me to marry him. I might, and then repent, and take it back. I suppose, if he asked father and mother, they would say 'yes,' and be fearfully awkward about it."

"You shall not talk so about them!" said Mattie, indignantly.

"I don't feel to them as you do—why is it? I don't feel a part of the Brace family. I like you, Mattie; father amuses me with his outspoken, homely ways; I don't consider mother much. She is good, but commonplace, like brown bread. In fact, you are all too rustic, and homely, and pious, and common-sensical for wicked me. Are you done with that butter? Why don't it grow made? I am sick of life. Earle is off to Brakebury for his mother. It is only half-past eight, and I feel as if I had been up a century. Come with me to get blackberries."

"I cannot. I have much dairy work to do yet," said Mattie.

"I wish you *would* go for blackberries for supper," said Patty Brace, coming in. "You don't seem disposed to do anything useful, Doris—suppose you try that."

"I take care of my room, and my clothes," pouted Doris, "and that nearly kills me. I wish I had a maid!"

Patty laughed.

"Well, child, the woods are cool and beautiful, and you are tired of doing nothing. Take this basket, and try and fill it with blackberries."

Fearful of being asked to do some more practical duty if she rejected this, Doris picked up the basket, put on a pair of gloves, tied her sun-hat down under her distracting little chin, and set forth toward the knoll, a place famous for blackberries. The grass was long and thick, the aftermath of clover loaded the air with fragrance, scarlet creepers ran along the hedges, and at the knoll, with purple stems and green and orange leaves, grew the blackberries in globules of polished jet. An inspiration of industry seized Doris, and she filled her basket; the soft little tips of her fingers were dyed crimson with the fruit. She lingered over her task. Earle might return, and it would be pleasant under the trees, birds singing and grass rustling about them, while Earle talked poetry to her.

But Earle did not come, and something in the silence of nature set this thoughtless creature to thinking.

It was one of those solemn hours of life when our fate hangs in the balance. What of her future? What should she do with herself? Should she give up her frantic ambition, her intense desire after excitement, riches, and splendor, and, accepting an honest man, settle in a simple, comfortable home, and grace it as a good wife and mother all her days? Could she do that?

Should she refuse Earle Moray, on whose lips an offer of himself and his all was trembling? Should she send him away? She scarcely felt ready for that. She had grown to love him a little—just a little—but more than any one—except herself. Should she fly this homely, quiet life, these good, uncongenial people, fly to the great city, and set out under a feigned name to make her own way in the world, as singer, actress—any wild, adventurous path that might find her at least a lord for a husband? Should she?

"Can I give him up? Can I leave him to Mattie? Will he ever be famous and rich enough to make it worth while to nourish my little bit of love for him into real love, if I can ever love? Oh, for some good fairy to rise up and tell me what to do!"

She started in sudden fear, for surely a step was coming close to her, some one from the other side of the coppice, who had watched her unseen. Not a fairy. A gentleman. A very presentable gentleman, who said:

"I beg pardon. Do not let me alarm you."

Then the two looked at each other.

Doris saw a handsome, middle-aged man, palette on his thumb, box of paints under his arm, portable easel in his hand; wide-awake hat, velveteen suit. She promptly summed him up —"artist."

He saw—Doris; Doris, mold of beauty; naiad in grace; innocence in her startled eyes; face of an angel; mien of a wood nymph. He began to believe in the gods of old. He said to himself, "Maid or spirit? Mortal or vision?"

"Forgive me for startling you," he said; "but I have been watching you as you stood under this tree——"

"I hate to be watched," interrupted Doris.

"As a man I was guilty; as an artist, guiltless, for an artist, above all things, loves and serves his art, and considers all he sees as subservient to it. I came to Downsbury in quest of studies in still life. For years I have had an ideal of a face that I wished to paint in my best mood: a face after

which all should wonder. I have searched cities and country; I have wandered in my quest for that face through other lands; and when I saw you under the tree, I was all the artist—all lost in art—for yours is the face I have been seeking for my canvas."

"Why, do you mean I would make a picture—a real picture?" demanded Doris, with studied simplicity.

"Yes; ten thousand times yes! Under this greenwood tree, your basket at your feet, your hat swinging in your hand, your eyes lifted—yes, a picture to be known and praised forever. Child, I will make your beauty immortal."

This was what she had dreamed.

A poet was singing her praises, and would do so, whether she played him false or not; and here was an artist to paint her for a world to admire.

Could she who so inspired men tie herself to the narrow bounds of one humble, rustic hearth? Never!

"May I paint you?" demanded the artist. "May I set you in canvas, in immortal youth and loveliness, to live years, perhaps centuries hence, in deathless beauty?"

"The picture—the face—will live! Where, in those far off ages, shall *I* be?" asked Doris, earnestly.

Gregory Leslie thought the word and mood strange.

"The best part of you is immortal," he said, gently.

"And what would you call my picture?"

"'INNOCENCE.' Yes, 'INNOCENCE' should be its name!"

"But what in me seems to you the image of '*Innocence*?'"

Stranger question still. But he answered as an artist:

"You have an ideal brow, rounded at the temples as the old masters painted their angels. Your eyes are large, bright, clear, as seeing more of heaven than earth. Your lips have the most exquisite curve. The form of your face, its coloring, your hair, are all simply perfect!"

"You shall paint my picture!" cried Doris, joyously, changing her mood. "You need ask no consent but mine!"

CHAPTER XIII.
"FAITHLESS AND DEBONAIR."

"Doris, you must not do it. I cannot bear it!"

"I don't see what difference it makes to you, Earle, and you have no right to interfere, and do it I surely shall."

Thus Doris and Earle on the theme of portrait painting.

Gregory Leslie was too astute a man, too experienced, to take his wandering naiad at her word, and paint her picture, asking no consent but her own. Never had a girl so puzzled him. Her rare beauty, found in so remote and rural a district; her delicate hands, soft, cultured tones, exquisite, high-bred grace, in contrast with her very common, simple, if tasteful, dress: and then her words, so odd—either purest innocence and simplicity, or curious art in wickedness. Who and what was the young enchantress? Then, too, her smile, the turn of her neck, her *way* evoked constantly some shadowy reminiscence, some picture set far back and grown dim in the gallery of his memory, but surely there. Again and again he strove to catch the fleeing likeness, but at once, with the effort, it was gone.

"If you want to paint me, begin!" said Doris, child-like.

"Pardon. It would inconvenience you to stand here; the sketch even would take time. It must be a work of care. I shall do better if I have your permission to accompany you home. Also I must ask your parents' consent."

"*They* don't mind!" cried Doris, petulantly, after some little hesitation. "I am only a farmer's daughter." She flushed with bitter vexation at the thought, but seeing the artist immovable in his purpose, added: "I live at Brackenside, it is not far; you can easily come there."

"If you will permit," said Gregory, with courtesy.

"You can come. I have no objection," said Doris, with the air of a princess.

She picked up her basket, and moved away with the grace, the proud bearing of "the daughter of a hundred earls."

Gregory Leslie marveled more and more. As an artist, he was enraptured; as a man, he was puzzled by this new Daphne.

Doris, seemingly forgetting her new cavalier, yet taking a rapid side look at him, considered that he was very handsome, if getting a little gray; also, that his air was that of a man of the world, a dash of the picturesque added to the culture of cities.

She wished Earle would meet them, and go into a spasm of jealousy. But Earle was spared that experience, and only Mark, Patty, and Mattie Brace were at the farm-house, to be dazzled with the beauty's conquest.

Arrived at the gate, Doris turned with proud humility to her escort.

"This is my home. I do not like it. Most people think the place pretty."

"It is a paradise!" said Leslie, enthusiastically.

"Then it must have a serpent in it," quoth Doris.

"I hope not," said Leslie.

"It has. I have felt it bite!"

Mark Brace, with natural courtesy, came from the door to meet them.

"This is an artist that I met at the knoll," said Doris, calmly. "He is looking for subjects for pictures. I think he mentioned his name was Mr. Leslie, and he wishes to paint me."

"Wants a picture of you, my darling!" said honest Mark, his face lighting with a smile. "Then he shows his good taste. Walk in, sir; walk in. Let us ask my wife."

He led the way into the cool, neat, quaint kitchen-room, hated of Doris' soul, but to the artist a study most excellent.

Then did the artist look at the Brace family in deepest wonder. Mark had called the wood-nymph "my darling," and asserted a father's right; and yet not one line or trace of Mark was in this dainty maid.

Leslie turned to study Patty, who had made her courtesy and taken the basket of berries—dark, strong, plump, tidy, intelligent, kindly, plain. Not a particle of Patty in this aristocratic young beauty, who called her "mother" in a slighting tone.

Then, in despair, he fixed his eyes on Mattie Brace—brown, earnest, honest, dark, sad eyes, good, calm—just as little like the pearl-and-gold beauty as the others.

Meanwhile Mark and Patty eyed each other.

"I want to speak to you a minute, Mark," said Patty; and the pair retired to the dairy.

Doris flushed angrily, and drummed on the window-sill.

"Behold a mystery!" said Gregory Leslie to himself.

"Mark," said Patty, in the safe retirement of the milk-pans, "this needs considering. Doris is not our own. To have her picture painted and exhibited in London to all the great folk, may be the last thing her mother would desire: and her mother is yet living, as the money comes always the same way."

"I declare, Patty, I never thought of that."

"And yet, if Doris has set her heart on it, she'll have it done—you see," added Patty.

"True," said Mark. "And people will hardly think of seeking resemblances to middle-aged people in a sort of fancy picture. Better let it be done under our eye, Patty."

"I suppose so, since we cannot hinder its doing."

They returned to the kitchen.

"We have no objection, if you wish to make the picture, sir," said Mark.

"I should think not. I had settled *that*," said Doris.

"In return for your kindness," said the artist to Patty, "I will make a small portrait of her for your parlor."

So one sitting was given then and there, and others were arranged for.

When Earle came that evening he heard all the story, and then, being with Doris in the garden, they fell out over it, beginning as set forth in the opening of this chapter.

"I cannot and will not have another man gazing at you, studying your every look, carrying your face in his soul."

"If you are to begin by being jealous," said Doris, delighted, "I might as well know. I enjoy jealousy as a proof of love, and as amusing me, but I like admiration, and I mean to have it all my

life. If ever I go to London, I expect to have London at my feet. Besides, if you mean to sing me, for all the world, why cannot Mr. Leslie paint me. You say Poetry and Art should wait at the feet of Beauty. Now they shall!"

It ended by truce, and Doris agreed that Earle should be present at every sitting. This calmed Earle, and rejoiced her. She thought it would be charming to pit poet and artist one against the other.

But the sittings did not thus fall out. Earle grew much interested, and he and Gregory took a hearty liking for each other. Gregory admired Doris as a beauty, but his experienced eye detected the lacking loveliness of her soul. Besides, he had no love but art, and his heart shrined one sacred pervading memory. Daily, as he painted, that haunting reminiscence of some long-ago-seen face, or painted portrait, grew upon him. He looked at Doris and searched the past. One day he cried out, as he painted:

"I have it!"

"What have you?" demanded Doris, curiously.

"A face, a name, that you constantly brought to mind in a shadowy way—that you resembled."

"Man or woman?" demanded Doris, eagerly.

"A man."

She was disappointed. She had hoped to hear of some reigning belle of society.

"Was he handsome?" she asked, less interested.

"Remarkably so. How else, if your face was like his?"

"But how can it be like a stranger I never heard of?"

"A coincidence—a freak of nature," said Leslie, slowly.

"And what was he like?" demanded Doris.

"*Faithless and debonair!* False, false and fair, like all his line. It was a fatal race; he no worse than the rest."

CHAPTER XV.

"I WILL BE TRUE—FOREVER."

Despite all the love eagerly made by Earle, and readily accepted by Doris, there was no formal engagement. A hundred times the decisive words trembled on the lips of the poet-lover, and he chided himself that they were not uttered. But then, if she said "no," what lot would be his? As for Doris not being prepared to say "yes," she deferred decision, and checked Earle on the verge of a finality, for she was not ready to dismiss her suitor. If he fled from Brackenside, what pleasure would be left in life?

She had soon ceased her efforts to flirt with Gregory Leslie; he regarded her with the eye of an artist—what of his feeling that was not artistic, was paternal.

At first, she had hoped that an opening might be made for her to city life. She had wild dreams that he could get an engagement for her as an actress or concert-singer, where wonderful beauty would make up for lack of training; she built wild castles in the air, about titled ladies who would take her for an adopted daughter, or as a companion. But Gregory Leslie was the last man to tempt a lovely, heedless young girl to the vortex of city life.

She told him one day of some of her longings and distastes. She hated the farm, the country. She wanted the glory of the city—dress, theaters, operas, promenades.

"Can't you tell me how to get what I want?"

"Child," said Gregory, "you would weary of it, and long for peace. You have a devoted young lover, who offers you a comfortable home at Lindenholm."

"To live with my mother-in-law!" sneered Doris.

"An admirable woman. I have met her."

"It would be just this dullness repeated all my life," said Doris, tearful and pouting.

"It would be love, comfort, safety, goodness. Besides, this young Moray is one of our coming men. He has native power. I am much mistaken if he does not make a name, fame, place, fortune."

"Do you suppose he will one day go to London and be great?"

"Yes, I do."

"I would like that. A poet's lovely home, where learned people, and musical wonders, and famous

actors, and artists *like you*, Mr. Leslie, come; and we had flowers, and pictures, and song, and gayety."

"It is pleasant, well come by. You might have it all, as Mr. Moray's wife, if at first you waited patiently."

Earle took new value in this ambitious girl's eyes.

Meanwhile, warned by the experience with Leslie, which might have turned out so differently, had Leslie played lover, and offered London-life to Doris, Earle resolved to press his suit, and urge early marriage. He must have some way of holding fast the fair coquette. To him the marriage tie was invulnerable. Once his wife, he fancied she would be ever true. Yes, once betrothed, he believed that she would be true as steel. So one fine September morning, when Leslie's picture was nearly finished, Earle came up to the farm, resolved to be silent no longer. He met Mattie first. He took her hand.

"Mattie, dear sister-friend, to-day I mean to ask Doris to be my wife. Wish me success."

Mattie's heart died within her, but the true eyes did not quail, as she said:

"I hope she will consent, for I know you love her. Heaven send you all good gifts."

"If she does not take me, my life will be spoiled!" cried Earle, passionately.

"Hush," said Mattie. "No man has a right to say such a word. No one should ever throw away all good that Heaven has given him, because of one good withheld."

"Does she love me? Tell me!"

"I do not know. There is no way but to ask her."

They heard a gay voice singing through the garden. In came Doris, her arms laden with lavender flowers cut for drying. She came, and filled the room with light.

"You here, Earle!" cried Doris. "Come up to the coppice nutting with me; the hazel bushes are full."

She held out her hand, frank and natural as a child, and away they went together.

Doris was fantastic as a butterfly that day. She danced on before Earle. She lingered till he overtook her, and before he could say two words, was off again. Then she sang gay snatches of song. She noted his anxious, grave face, and setting her saucy little head on one side, trilled forth:

"Prithee, why so pale, fond lover,
  Prithee, why so pale?
For if looking well won't move her,
  Looking ill must fail."

Finally, at a mossy seat under an oak tree, he made a dash, caught her, drew her to his side, and cried:

"Doris, be quiet and hear me; you *shall* hear me; I have something to tell you—something important."

"Bless us!" cried Doris, in pretended terror. "Is it going to rain? Are you going to tell me something dreadful about the weather, and I have a set of new ribbons on!"

"Dear Doris, it is not about the weather; it is an old, old story."

"Don't tell it, by any means. I hate old things."

"But this is very beautiful to me—so beautiful I must tell it."

"If you are so distracted about it, after the fashion of the Ancient Mariner and his tale, I know you have told it to at least half a dozen other girls."

"Never!" cried Earle; "never once! It is the story of my love, and I never loved any one but you."

"You have the advantage of me," said Doris, with a charming air. "It seems you have loved once; I never loved."

"Doris! Doris! Don't say that!" cried Earle, in agony.

"Not? Why, how many experiences should I have had at my age?" demanded Doris, with infantine archness.

"Yes, you are a child—a sweet, innocent child. But love me, Doris. Love me and be my wife. You know I adore you. Do not drive me to despair. I cannot live without you! Will you be my wife?"

Doris looked thoughtfully at Earle. From her eyes, her face, one would have said that she was realizing for the first time the great problem of love; that love was dawning in her young soul as she listened to Earle's pleading.

But in her heart she was telling herself that this play of love would give a new zest to her life at

the farm, would add a little excitement to daily dullness; that, even if she promised, she need not be bound if anything better came in her way. Earle Moray might be the best husband she could find. What was it Mr. Leslie had said about him?

Earle, unconscious of this dark abyss in his idol's soul, sat watching the wide, violet eyes, the gently parted lips, the pink flush growing like the morning on her rounded cheek.

He put his arm gently about her.

"Doris, answer me."

"Can't I wait—an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year?"

"No!—a thousand times no! Suspense would kill me!"

"Why, I wouldn't die so easy as that."

"Doris, answer me. Say yes."

"Yes," said Doris, placidly.

Earl caught her in his arms, and kissed her fervently.

"Is that the way you mean to act?" laughed Doris, sweet and low. "Why did you tell me to say 'yes,' and get my hair rumpled, and my dress all crushed up that way?"

"You are mine, my own Doris! Tell me, no one else shall ever make love to you, or kiss you—you will never be another's?"

"Of course not," said Doris, with delicious assurance.

"You will be true to me forever."

"Yes; I will be true forever," said Doris.

If she played at love-making, she would play her part perfectly, let come what would afterward.

"And you will marry me? When will you marry me?" urged this impetuous young lover.

"How can I tell? This is all very pleasant, being lovers; and then you must ask—the people at the farm." She spoke with reluctance. It always irritated her to call the honest Brace family "parents, sister." "I can't be married till they say so. And—there's your mother."

"They will all agree to what will make us happy."

"And will you agree to what will make me happy?"

"Yes, my darling, with all my heart and soul!"

"Then you must build up fame, and get money, and go to London to live, for I do not love this country life. Only think, to live in London among the *literati* and the noted people! We will surely do that Earle?"

CHAPTER XVI.
A BETROTHAL DAY.

Gregory Leslie, seated before his easel, saw the young couple returning to the house. No need to tell him what had happened. The triumphant lover was in every line of Earle's face. Gregory Leslie sighed. Earle had won the most beautiful girl in England for his wife; but the artist was a deep student of human nature, and he read in Doris a disposition intensely worldly and selfish, an ambition that nothing could satisfy, a moral weakness that would break a promise as easily as Samson broke the seven green withes.

Doris ran away from Earle into the garden, and left him to enter the house alone. Gregory was the first one he saw.

"Wish me joy!" he cried, exultantly.

"With all my heart. What you have won, may you keep."

"I have no fear," said Earle, the gentleman. "She loves me."

"You have the original; I the picture. This picture will wake the curiosity of the world," said Gregory, looking at his work.

"But you will not tell who or where is the original? I do not wish my Doris to be pursued by a crowd of idle, curious people."

"On honor, no," said Gregory, holding out his hand.

Then Earle went on to find Mark and Patty.

Patty heard the news with a bewildered shake of her head.

"There's no counting on Doris," she said. "I thought she was playing with you. We shall see how it will turn out. I hope you will be happy."

"I am sure they will," spoke up Mattie, and left the room.

"There's your mother to be consulted," said Mark.

"She will be ready for anything that makes me happy."

"And Doris is too young. She cannot be married for a year yet," said Mark, decidedly. "She must have time to know her mind and to settle herself. If it were Mattie now, I'd feel different. Mattie is two years older, and she has a steadier nature."

"But it's not Mattie, thank fortune, for Mattie is my right hand," spoke up Patty, sharply; for she had read a little of her own child's cherished secret.

Earle was so overjoyed to get the promise of Doris, that he counted the year of probation a day, and saw nothing of Gregory Leslie's incredulity, of Patty's hesitation, of the anxiety of Mark, or of Mattie's shy withdrawing. These young lovers are selfish, even the best of them.

Patty roused herself to do justice to the occasion. She set forth a table with her best damask and the few old pieces of family silver; she spread out the choicest of her culinary stores, and invited Gregory Leslie to dine, and Mattie crowned the board with flowers, and put on her best dress, while Doris played the young *fiancee* to sweet perfection. Yet the keen eyes of the artist read not only Mattie's hidden pain, but Patty's sorrow and anxiety, and saw that Mark was not a rural father, joyful in a good match for his child, but a man in dire perplexity, uncertain what was right and wise for him to do.

"This girl and all her surroundings are a mystery," said the artist to himself.

Earle Moray saw no mystery; all was broad day in the light of his love. It seemed high noon even, when he went home at night, and the heavens were lit with starry hosts. Doris had kept him late, not unmindful of the mother watching alone to hear her boy's tale of wooing, mindful of her, rather, and finding it a pleasure to tantalize the unknown mother by a long delay.

But once free of the beguiling voice of his little siren, Earle remembered heartily his mother, and hurried to her as if his feet were winged with the sandals of Apollo. He flung open the gate with a crash; his joyous tread rang on the gravel walk; he dashed into the house, and into the sitting-room, and dropping on his knees by his mother, clasped his arms about her waist and cried:

"Mother! she is mine!"

"Heaven bless you, my son!" said his mother; but she sighed.

"You will go and see her, mother, to-morrow? You will see how wonderfully lovely she is; witty and accomplished, too; you are sure to be charmed, mother!"

If he had chosen a beggar maid, like King Cophetua, the mother would have made the best of it. Yet in her secret heart Mrs. Moray thought Earle too young to marry, and, besides, this girl was very young, and who knew if she would be a good wife. Earle's poetizing and dreaming were bad enough, but his love-making was even worse! Still his mother hid her fears, and sympathized and helped him plan his future, while in her soul she blessed Mark Brace for that year's delay.

Accustomed from childhood to open his heart to his mother, Earle poured forth to her the full story of his love, his adoration, his intoxicating passion for Doris. The mother heard and trembled. His was not the love of a Christian man for a wife, but of a pagan for the idol in his shrine. She felt that this love could not be blessed or bring blessing; it was earthly, infatuated, unreasoning, terrible. She trembled; yet trembling did not foresee the stormy and dreadful way that this love should lead her boy, nor in what horror and blackness its grave should be!

While Mrs. Moray and her son forgot the flight of time, one in anxiety, the other in overflowing joy, Mark Brace and Patty, at Brackenside Farm, also kept vigils. They were perplexed to know what was right.

"It was terrible to send us a child in that way," cried Patty. "We cannot tell what we should do with her."

"I think we can," said Mark. "We were told to do as by our own. We would give Mattie to Earle, if they both wished it. We can give Doris. No doubt her mother will be glad to know that she is safe in the care of a husband."

"But if they come to reclaim her, as I have expected?"

"They gave her to us, unasked, and must abide by our decision. Besides, here is a year's delay, and the engagement no secret. If the unknown mother watches her child, let her make known her rights and interfere."

"And the letter said she was of noble blood."

"Earle Moray is a good man, a gentleman, a scholar."

"But what would he think of this secret? They believe Doris to be ours, the same as Mattie."

"There's the rub," said Mark; "but here, to be honest, we must break silence. Not to Doris, but to Earle. We must tell Earle and his mother all the truth that we know. Married life goes ill, Patty, begun in mystery."

"Possibly Mrs. Moray will not consent."

"I think it will make no difference. If it does, we have done our duty, and that is all our trouble. I believe her mother is some poor timid soul, secretly married, and perhaps now dead, and the father also."

Patty sighed, and a look of trouble and conviction was in her face. She had thoughts about Doris that she did not tell even to Mark.

"Love and trouble always come together," sighed Patty.

"Doris has been a great help to us, as well as a great care," said Mark. "Her money saved us from ruin, and put us on our feet. I have done honestly by her, and have not forgotten that she has helped us. But I admit she fills me with anxiety, and is a strange element in our home. Once she is well married and gone, I think we shall be very happy together. I'll save this year's hundred pounds to give her a good outfit, and give her next year's hundred for a wedding present."

"She has had *all* the money since she was twelve," said Patty.

"True, but for the first twelve years I did not spend the half of it on her."

Next day Earle brought his mother, and proudly presented Doris to her.

Mrs. Moray, making allowances for the enthusiasm of a lover, had expected to find a rosy, pretty country girl. She saw a dainty, high-bred beauty, of the most exquisite and aristocratic type. She looked in wonder at Doris, then helplessly at Mark and Patty.

"How little your daughter resembles you!" she cried.

Patty blushed, honest Mark studied the carpet pattern, the pretty lips of Doris curled scornfully.

Mrs. Moray suspected a mystery. Mark Brace spoke up:

"I'd like a word with you and your son in the garden, ma'am."

Doris watched the three angrily from the window.

"What is father saying that I may not hear? See how oddly Mrs. Moray looks, and Earle too! What is he saying?"

"Perhaps that he has no fortune to give you," hinted Patty.

"My face is my fortune," cried Doris, pettishly.

"Dear child, do not be so vain! Suppose you lost that fortune."

"Then I'd kill myself. I would not live unbeautiful!"

Poor Patty held up her hands in horror.

CHAPTER XVII.
A SHINING MEMORY.

Yes, Mark, in plain phrases, had told his story. Mrs. Moray had opened the way, saying, frankly:

"Have you anything to tell us?"

"Yes. Doris is not my daughter. She was left, being two months old or thereabouts, on my door-step, with a letter and a hundred pounds. Here is the letter for you to read. I have done my best for the girl, and I love her. I have tried to meet the wishes of her unknown mother. And of that mother and her history I know no more than you. If this makes a difference, now is the time to speak."

"It makes no difference," cried Earle; "only, if possible, I shall love her more than ever, she having no kith or kin."

"I saw she did not look in the least like any of you," said Mrs. Moray, thoughtfully.

Mark smiled.

"Yes, she is fine china, we are delf. I have never hinted this thing to Doris, and whatever you decide, I wish the secret rigidly kept, as I have kept it."

"What is there to decide!" cried Earle. "We are betrothed."

"Your mother may think differently," said Mark.

"Of course I am very sorry that the girl has no name or position," said Mrs. Moray.

Earle flushed.

"Her name will be our name, and her position I will make for her; and it will be honorable, I promise you."

"You are a stanch fellow," said Mark. "But I pledge you to keep this secret always. The idea of being a foundling might make Doris miserable, drive her half wild. Or it might set her up to some queer caper. She has a fine spirit of her own."

"Is she hard to manage?" asked Mrs. Moray, anxiously.

"I never found her hard to manage," said Earle, the dauntless.

"I hope you'll tell the same tale twenty years from now," said Mark, with a laugh.

He felt glad this matter was settled.

"We shall never mention it," said Mrs. Moray, yielding to the inevitable.

"And on the wedding-day I'll give her a hundred pounds, and she shall have a hundred pounds in her outfit."

"You are very generous, Mr. Brace," said Mrs. Moray.

"Doris is quick and keen. She'll ask you, Earle, what we were saying out here. You may mention the hundred pounds."

Just as he had foreseen, Doris questioned Earle, and he told her of the promised outfit and the wedding gift.

All this reconciled her more to the idea of marrying.

"My mother sha'n't interfere with what I get for my outfit," said she to herself. "I'll dress like a lady for once. One hundred pounds in clothes will make a very fair show."

Alas, Patty, in her thrifty mind, had already destined part of this hundred pounds to sheeting and table-clothes, blankets and pillow-cases! A hundred pounds for clothes! Fie on the extravagance! A white mull for the wedding gown, a black silk, a cashmere. This was Patty's notion of a suitable bridal *trousseau*!

"A hundred pounds on my wedding-day to use as I like."

"You may be sure I sha'n't touch it," laughed Earle.

"A hundred pounds! That is kind of him; but it is not much. I could spend it in one hour in London."

"Spend it in an hour. I'm glad you are not fond of money."

"I *am* fond of it. Money is the salt and essence of life."

"And you marry a man who has almost none?"

"But a man who can, who must, make a great deal."

"Suppose I should not?"

She looked at him in alarm.

"Suppose you should not? I tell you I would rather die than be mean, and plain, and poor, all my life."

"Dear child, you do not understand. You have exaggerated ideas. You shall never be left to suffer. Cheer up. I will make money, and you, my little idol, shall spend it!"

"That is fair," cried Doris, joyously. "I'll buy no end of things."

Gregory Leslie finished his picture of "Innocence," and took it away, knowing it should grace the walls of the Academy the next May. At Brackenside he had found an artistic ideal, and reached the acme of his art life. Doris wondered a little, the while she had inspired the artist, she had not conquered the man. Earle and Gregory made a compact of friendship and parted—to meet in pain.

Earle entered into a very happy winter. As Doris had inspired the artist so she inspired the poet; and Earle sang as he had never sung before. A little volume of his verses found a publisher, and public approval, and though the recompense did not at all meet the idea of Doris, yet she told herself that fame led the way to fortune.

Indulged by Mark and Patty, and waited on by Mattie, while Earle was in daily raptures over her charms, as bride-elect Doris managed to pass the winter at the farm with some content. Mark had hired for her a good piano, she had a store of French novels, and she sedulously refused to have any steps taken in the matter of wedding paraphernalia.

And yet, as the weeks crept by, Doris began to be weary of lover and friends and country home,

and her longing for the gay world and all its glories filled her fantastic heart.

"Oh, why does not some lord with a coach and six come along and carry me off and marry me?" she cried one day as she sat in the window, lazily watching the falling snow.

"Surely you would not give up Earle for any lord!" cried Mattie.

"Wouldn't I! I only hope for his sake I'd not be tempted. If the lord had money enough, and jewels enough, and memorial castles enough I'm afraid, Mattie, you'd be left to console Earle."

"Child, don't talk in that reckless way," said Mrs. Brace.

"I'm only telling the truth. I find in myself a natural affinity for lords," said Doris, and Mrs. Brace sighed and flushed.

Well, the winter passed, and the love-making of Earle was becoming an old story, and farm life a weariness to the flesh, but still Doris hid her vexations and unrest in her heart. The hawthorn bloomed, when Mark came in one day, crying cheerily:

"Here's something like old days. The duke is coming home for good, and Lady Estelle is finally quite well and strong, but unmarried still—more's the pity."

"They've been away long," said Patty, uneasily.

"Ay. How long is it since I've seen his grace? Not since they all came here."

Patty looked warningly at him.

He stooped to tie his shoe.

"The duke been here!" said Doris. "The duke and his family to a common farm-house!"

"A farm-house is not so poor a place, missey," said Mark.

Doris sprung up.

"I remember—now I remember! I've had gleams of it, and wondered what I was trying to think of. They came in a gorgeous coach, with men in livery that I thought quite splendid; the duke, a tall, grand man, and with him two ladies?"

"Yes," said Patty, shortly.

"I can see my memories best in the dark," said Doris, shutting her lovely blue eyes. "It is a vague dream of a fair, proud face, a shining, lovely lady all in lace, and silk, and jewels!"

"That was Lady Estelle Hereford," said Mark, carried away.

"Lady Estelle Hereford! There's a name worth wearing! Why did not I have such a name—not that hateful Doris Brace!"

"Your name is good enough," said Mark, tartly.

"Why did they come?" demanded Doris.

These people were not good at fine evasions, but Mark made shift to answer:

"The duke is my landlord; it is only proper for him to see his best farm now and then."

"Did they see me?" urged Doris.

"Listen to Vanity! As if she was the show of the house!" said Mark.

"So I am. What here is worth seeing in comparison?"

"If that doesn't beat all!" said the scandalized Patty.

"Yes, he saw you," said Mark; "and now your next question will be, 'Did he admire me?' I won't answer you."

"There's no need; it goes without saying. Of course he admired me if he had eyes. I must have been lovely. Why did you not have my picture taken? I must have looked just like one of Correggio's little angels."

"Whose?" asked Mark.

"You didn't act much like an angel, if I remember right," said Mattie, quietly.

"Who cares for the *acting*, so long as one has the looks?" inquired Doris, with simplicity. "Share and share alike between sisters, you know, Mattie. I'll *look* like an angel, and you'll *act* like one!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN AVERSE TO MARRIAGE.

The Duke and Duchess of Downsbury had been so long absent from their home, that on their return they felt the greatest pleasure and keenest interest in every one whose name they remembered. Lady Estelle had outgrown her weakness of constitution. For many years it had been quite uncertain how her illness would terminate. It was not so much a malady as a wasting of strength, an utter absence of all hope or energy, a strange languor that attacked both body and mind.

Doctors recommended travel; travel fatigued her; they recommended change; change wearied her—nothing on earth seemed to have the least interest for her. Beautiful, high-born, blessed with every advantage that wealth and rank can give, she was afflicted with that most terrible of all diseases, hopeless *ennui*. Then, after a time, her physical health failed her, and it became a question as to whether she would recover or not. It was the one great trial that her devoted parents had to bear. They would have given all they had, all they cared for most, to have seen her happy, bright, light of heart as were others. That was never to be.

On this morning, early in the month of May, the duchess and her daughter were alone in the drawing-room of Downsbury Castle; a May morning that should have rejoiced the heart of a poet—crowned with golden rays of the sun, musical with the sweet song of birds. Lady Estelle stood at the window, looking over the trees, a wistful expression in her fine eyes. She never moved quickly when any thought or idea occurred to her; she never turned with the rapid movement peculiar to some people. An idea had evidently occurred to her now, for her face flushed, the white skin was for some minutes dyed scarlet; she waited until it died away, then she turned slowly and glanced at the duchess.

"Mamma," she said, "have you heard how the interview between papa and his agent passed off?"

"Quite satisfactorily, I believe," replied the duchess; "everything is prosperous. The tenants are all well, and there has been no misfortune among them."

Lady Estelle crossed the room; there was a beautiful stand of white hyacinths, and she bent over, caressing the beautiful buds.

"Do you remember the farmer we went to see?" she continued, "What was his name?—the man with the honest face?"

"Mark Brace?" replied the duchess.

"Yes," said Lady Estelle; "Mark Brace. Do you remember him, and that simple, gentle wife of his, and the two children, one as brown as a berry, and the other as fair as a lily, with hair of shining gold?"

"I remember them very well," replied her grace. "Indeed I could never forget that child; she was the most beautiful little creature I ever beheld; but she gave promise of being one of the worst."

"Oh, mamma, do not say such a thing!" cried Lady Estelle, with more animation than was usual with her.

"Why not, my dear?" said the duchess, calmly. "Great beauty and great wickedness so often go together."

"But it seems such a cruel thing to say of a child—a little child."

"Well, perhaps it does seem rather hard; but then, 'the child gives promise of the man,' and if ever child was precocious in vanity and ambition, that child was. You forget her."

"Yes," said Lady Estelle. "It is so long since, I forget her; but you are generally merciful in your judgments, mamma. It seems strange to hear you speak harshly of a child."

The duchess made no reply. The subject seemed to have no particular interest for her, whereas the beautiful point-lace she was making had great claims on her attention. After a few minutes Lady Estelle continued:

"I suppose nothing more has been heard of the child; no one has claimed her, or the story would have reached us. I must confess that I feel some little curiosity as to what she is like. I should be pleased to see her."

"If the girl bears out the promise of her youth, she would be worth seeing," said the duchess.

The entrance of her husband interrupted her, and she said no more.

The Duke of Downsbury looked pleased.

"My dear," he said to his wife, "I am delighted. I have the finest agent in the country. The accounts and everything else are in the finest possible order. I am so pleased that I thought of giving a dinner to the tenants; it could be no annoyance to you, and it would be a nice little act of attention, after being absent so long."

The duchess quite agreed with the project. It would be a compliment to them, and a pleasure to herself, she said.

The duke smiled to think what an amiable wife he had.

"To all your tenants, papa?" said Lady Estelle, in her graceful, languid way.

"Yes, all of them—rich and poor; but then there are no poor."

She smiled.

"I shall see Mark Brace," she said. "I was just telling mamma that I felt some interest in that child we saw. I should like to know how she has turned out."

The duke's face lighted up.

"That pretty little girl," he said; "the one over whom there was a mystery. I had forgotten her, and the story too. I should like to see her. What wonderful hair she had. I must tell Mark Brace to bring her over."

"Mark Brace is a sensible man," the duchess hastened to observe; "I am sure he will understand. She was a vain child then—she will be even vainer now. No one knows what nonsensical ideas will fill her mind if she thinks she has been invited here; you might do her a great harm by such indiscretion. Tell him to bring her over if he likes; but tell him at the same time, it will be as well for him not to mention it—he is sensible enough to understand."

"I see—you are quite right, my dear—it shall be just as you say."

And Lady Estelle hastened to add:

"You are wise, mamma. I feel some curiosity over her. I have a vague recollection of a brilliant, beautiful child, who seemed very much out of place in that quiet farm-house. But it is so long ago."

Looking at his daughter, the duke hardly realized how long it was—she did not look one year older; perhaps the delicate state of her health had preserved her face from all marks of time. The calm, high-bred features were unruffled as ever; there was not one line on the fair brow, nor round the calm, serene lips; the fair hair was abundant and shining as ever; the light of the proud, brilliant eyes was undimmed. Time, indeed, seemed to have stood still for Lady Estelle Hereford. It might be that she had escaped the wear and tear of emotion, so had had nothing to mar the calm serenity of her life or her features. She went back to her post at the window, and stood once more looking out over the trees. She remained silent, dreamy, abstracted, while the duke and duchess discussed their affairs, their tenants, friends, and neighbors.

"Estelle," said the duke, at length, "are you going to drive to-day?"

"No, papa, I think not; I do not care to go."

The duke and duchess exchanged glances.

"My dear Estelle," said the duke, gravely, "I wish that you did feel interested in going out or in anything else. We were in great hopes, your mother and I, that when you returned you would show a little more animation, a little more interest in the world around you—more capacity for enjoyment. Could you not throw off that languor, and be bright, animated, and happy?"

She smiled, and if that smile concealed any pain, no one knew it.

"I am happy, papa," she said; "but my languor is, I suppose, part of myself—I should not know how to throw it off. I suppose the right thing to do when you propose a walk or a drive, on this lovely May morning, would be to blush—to glow and dimple. I am really sorry that I am so fashioned by nature as to find anything of the kind impossible."

The duke rose from his seat and went to his daughter. He placed his arm round the stately figure.

"Do you think that I am scolding you, Estelle?" he said. "I shall never do that. Nor could I be more proud of you than I am. It is only for your own sake that I speak to you, and because I long to see you happy. I should like to see you married, Estelle, and to hold my grandchildren in my arms before I die."

She started, the calm face grew a shade paler, then she clasped her arms round his neck.

"I am so happy with you and mamma," she replied, "I do not want any other love."

The next minute she had quitted the room.

The duchess looked at her husband with a smile.

"It is useless," she said. "Estelle is like no other woman in the world. I do not think she is capable of love; I do not think the man is born who could win from her a kindly smile, a warm word, or a loving look. She loves us; no one else. I have watched her year after year, and feel sure of it."

"It is strange, too," said the duke, "for the Herefords are not a cold-hearted race. And do you really think that she will never marry?"

"I feel sure of it. I do not think she will ever like any one well enough. There is variety in all creation. We must not be surprised to find it in ladies."

The day fixed for the tenants' dinner came round, and among the others Mark Brace arrived at the Castle in a state of great glory. There had been great excitement at Brackenside when the invitation reached there, and Mark, with considerable difficulty, had mastered it.

"You are to dine at the Castle," said Doris, with that quickness which seemed to take everything in at one glance. "Then, for once in your life, you must have a suit of clothes that pretend to fit you. Yours always look as though you had found them by accident, and had met with considerable difficulty in the way of putting them on."

Mark laughed, but Patty took up the cudgels for her husband.

"I am sure your father always looks nice, Doris."

"Why, mother, how can you judge?"

"It is not the coat that makes the man," said Patty.

Doris laughed.

"You are all brimful of good sentiments, but you are quite wrong; broadcloth makes its way where fustian is trampled under foot. I know all about the genuine stamp, a man's being a man for all that; but it is great nonsense. You believe me, father, there is much in having good clothes—the habit makes the monk."

They looked at her in wonder, as they generally did when she talked above them.

"Have some good clothes," Doris continued. "You have no idea how much the other tenants will respect you if you are well dressed and show a good gold chain."

Mark laughed. The cynicism of Doris always amused him.

Here he saw some glimmer of sense in what she said; so Mark went to Quainton, an adjacent town, and ordered a suit of the finest broadcloth. Great was the excitement when it came home, and the honest farmer stood arrayed in all his glory. He looked very delighted, but stiff and uncomfortable; his arms seemed longer than ever, his hands redder and more awkward; still he tried to do honor to his new estate by carrying it off boldly. To his wife he confided that he should not always like being a gentleman, to be dressed so tightly; and Mark's wife flung her loving arms round his neck.

"You are a gentleman," she said; "one of nature's very own."

The whole family stood by the gate to see Mark drive off. Doris had placed a white rose in his buttonhole; his wife and daughter watched him with pride and exultation in their hearts, while Doris thought to herself that, after all, even a broadcloth suit could not make what she called a gentleman.

"I am sure that no one in the room will look so nice as your father," said Mrs. Brace, proudly; the glories of the new broadcloth had dazzled her. Mattie quite agreed with her, while Doris, with a mocking smile, went away.

CHAPTER XIX.
A PROSPECTIVE PLEASURE FOR DORIS.

The tenants' dinner was a great success. It was well attended, for all were anxious to show that they appreciated and returned the duke's kindly feeling. To Mark it was a dream of glory; he had seen nothing like the interior of this magnificent castle. The state rooms, the superb hall, with its blazonry of shields and armor; the banquet-room, with its groined roof and grand pictures, puzzled him. It was something to be a tenant of such a duke as this. As for the dinner itself, it simply amazed him; he did not know the name of half the dishes or half the wines; as for the fruit, the silver, the servants in attendance, he thought of it all with bated breath.

Doris had desired him, in a whisper, to tell her all he saw, and to be sure and not forget anything. Honest Mark tried to take an inventory, but his mind failed him: it gave way under the strain; he could not grasp the half what he saw and heard.

Mark's wonder was not diminished when a footman, bending very respectfully, asked him to be kind enough to follow him. He arose instantly, and followed through such dazzling and magnificent rooms that he began to think of the wonders of the "Arabian Nights" he had read when a boy. They came to a door that was covered with rich velvet hangings; the footman pushed them aside, opened it, and Mark Brace found himself, to his great consternation and distress, in the presence of the duchess and her daughter, both in evening dress; and the shimmer of silk, the sheen of jewels, were enough to bewilder the honest farmer. Still he had a native dignity of his own of which nothing could deprive him. Although his hands felt more stiff and red than ever, and he was most sorely puzzled what to do with them, still he recollected himself, and bowed to the ladies in a fashion quite his own.

The duchess received him kindly. Lady Estelle spoke no word, but her indolent, handsome eyes, rested on his face.

"Mr. Brace," said her grace, "I am pleased to see you. We have been long absent."

Mark muttered something to the effect: "Heaven bless them, they were very welcome home."

The duchess smiled, and Lady Estelle thought to herself:

"What a simple, honest man he is."

Mark had disposed of his hands to his own satisfaction: one was placed behind him, where it lay rigid and straight, the other hung down by his side as though slightly ashamed of itself. Then he found himself in difficulties over his feet. He had some dim idea that he had heard his wife say it was genteel to stand with the heels together; he tried it, and it proved a dead failure.

The duchess relieved him of all further embarrassment by pointing to a chair. He sat down with a deep sigh that was almost a gasp—thankful to be relieved at last.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Brace," continued the stately lady, "to ask how the child is whom we saw at the farm."

Mark was himself again with something to say of Doris. His face brightened.

"She is not a child now, your grace; she has grown to be a beautiful girl."

"Is she still beautiful?" asked her grace.

"I do not think the sun, when it rises in the morning, is brighter," replied Mark, with unconscious poetry.

"I am almost sorry to hear it," said her grace. "There are more qualities than beauty for a girl in her position, Mr. Brace."

"Yes; but we can't help it."

"And," interrupted the duchess, "have you heard any more? Do you know to whom she belongs? Have you any trace of her parentage?"

Lady Estelle shut her jeweled fan, and laid it on the table. Her eyes were fixed on Mark's face.

"No, your grace," he replied. "We know no more than we did on the day she first came to us. The money comes every year. It always comes from London, generally in Bank of England notes, quite new and crisp; sometimes gold packed in a little box. It never fails."

"It is so strange. There is never a word about the child in the parcels? No questions? No remarks?"

"No; not one," he replied.

"And what have you done with her all these years?" asked the duchess. "She had high spirits of her own."

"She has been to school, your grace; it was her own wish she should go. She was away for four years without coming home."

"Then she is clever and accomplished?" said the duchess.

"Yes," replied Mark; "she is as clever as any lady in the land."

Then his face grew crimson, and he said to himself that he had made a great blunder. Lady Estelle smiled in her usual languid fashion.

"I mean, your grace," exclaimed Mark, "that she is really very clever. She sings like a mermaid," he added, delighted at his own figure of speech; "she can dance, and speaks two foreign languages."

The duchess laughed. It was impossible to help it; Mark's face was such a study as he enumerated this list of accomplishments.

"I should like to see your *protegee*, Mr. Brace," said her grace; "but as she is inclined to be vain, it would be wise perhaps not to tell her that I have expressed such a wish."

Mark looked very wise; he quite agreed with it.

"You might say," continued her grace, "that you are coming over to the Castle next week on business, and bring her with you."

"I will, your grace," said Mark, proudly. "I am coming on business next Tuesday; my lease is to be renewed. I will bring her with me. She is engaged to be married," he added, bluntly.

"Engaged!" repeated the duchess. "Why, she cannot be more than nineteen."

"She is nineteen," said Mark; "and, of course, I shall not allow her to be married for a year."

"You are quite right," interrupted the duchess.

Lady Estelle had opened her fan, and she stirred it gently, as she asked:

"To whom is she engaged?"

Mark declared, in reporting the conversation, that it was the grammar that destroyed him. It made him feel unequal to giving any answer. He turned uneasily in his chair.

"To whom is she engaged?" repeated the clear, musical voice.

"Why, my lady, he is a poet and a gentleman."

"A poet and a gentleman!" repeated the duchess. "That is high praise."

"He deserves it, your grace. He has written a book—I cannot say whether it has been read among the great people; but, with such as us, the verses are on the lips of every man, woman and child."

"What is the poet's name?" asked Lady Estelle.

"Earle Moray, my lady. He lives near us, and his father was a clergyman. His mother is a very quiet, grave lady. She always thought that Doris was my daughter, and when she heard the truth she was quite unwilling for her son to make such a marriage. But he talked her over."

Lady Estelle used her fan vigorously; her face had suddenly grown burning red.

"They are very much attached to each other," continued Mark. "I never saw anything like the way in which he worships her. I am sure that if he lost her he would go mad."

"Let us hope not," said the duchess, with a smile. "Going mad is a very serious matter."

"Then," said the low, sweet voice of Lady Estelle, "your *protegee* is provided for, Mr. Brace? Her future is safe?"

"I hope so, my lady," said cautious Mark. "But as the wedding does not take place for a year, much may happen in that time."

"We will hope it will all end happily," said her grace, kindly.

Then Mark understood that his interview had ended. Lady Estelle murmured a careless adieu: the duchess spoke kindly of Patty, and Mark went home that night a proud and happy man.

He was greeted with innumerable questions; his wife seemed to think that Mark had been the principal person present: that except for the fact of his presence, the dinner-party would have been insignificant. Doris positively bewildered him with questions. Mrs. Brace and Mattie sat with awe and wonder on their faces.

"I cannot answer so many questions, Doris," said Mark, at last. "I tell you what—I am going to the Castle again on Tuesday to renew my lease; will you go with me?"

Her beautiful face flushed crimson.

"Will I? Of course I will," Doris said.

"What would they say?" asked Mattie.

"They would not say anything," said Mark. "I should tell them that my daughter Doris had a great fancy for seeing the inside of a castle; and you may take my word they will be kind enough."

"Let Mattie go," suggested Mrs. Brace.

But Mattie shrank back.

"Oh, no!" she said, "I should not care for it, I would rather not."

"And I would give a year of my life," said Doris.

"You need not give anything," said Mark. "Dress yourself tidily, not finely," he added, with a touch of natural shrewdness. "One does not require finery in going to see a duchess."

"Shall I see the duchess?" asked Doris, opening her eyes wide with surprise.

Then Mark Brace perceived his error.

"I am a poor hand at keeping a secret," he thought. "If you go to the Castle," he replied, "it is very probable you will see the Duchess of Downsbury."

"I shall not be able to sleep from this moment till then," cried Doris.

And when Earle Moray came she could talk to him about nothing but the intensity of the pleasure in store for her. A hundred times and more did Mark repent giving the invitation; he had no peace, no rest; even Earle himself could not persuade her to talk about anything except the grandeur of Downsbury Castle.

"I am quite sorry I cannot go back to school for a few days," she said, "just to make all my school-fellows mad with jealousy."

"Why should they be mad?" asked Mattie.

"You do not know how much they talk about Downsbury Castle," she replied. "My dear, they call England a Christian land, and they pray for the conversion of all pagans and idolaters. There are no such idolaters as these same English, who worship rank, title, and wealth, as they never worshiped Heaven."

"You are one of them, Doris," said Mattie.

"Not altogether. Underneath my worship there is a vein of cynicism, but no one suspects it. If you want to learn a few lessons of that kind, Mattie, you should go to a fashionable boarding-school. I declare that I never heard any one quoted for being good or virtuous; it was always for being nobly born, rich, titled. I learned my lesson quickly, Mattie."

"You did, indeed," was the brief reply, "and it is a lesson that I am sorry Earle's wife should ever have taken to heart."

The only reply was a careless laugh. Doris did not even care to quarrel with her sister, so highly delighted was she at the prospect of going to the Castle.

At length, to the intense delight and the relief of every one, Tuesday came, and it was time to go.

Doris did not love nature. She had no appreciation of its beauties; but in after years she did remember how the sun had shone on this day, and how blithely the little birds had sung in the trees; how sweet was the perfume of the flowers and the fragrance of the hedges as they drove to Downsbury Castle.

CHAPTER XX.

"THEY TELL ME, CHILD, THAT YOU ARE REALLY PROMISED IN MARRIAGE."

It was a busy morning at Downsbury Castle. Several visitors had called, and when Mark, with his beautiful *protegee*, arrived, they were shown into the library to await the duke's leisure. It was evident to Mark that they had been expected, for a tempting lunch was served to them; a lunch the servants called it—to Mark and Doris it seemed a most sumptuous dinner. Mark could not help watching the girl. He himself was strange, embarrassed, confused; the silver fork was heavy, the napkin confused him; she sat with the easy grace and dignity of a young queen, sipping the rosy wine from the richly cut glass, and looking quite at her ease over it.

"You seem quite at home, Doris," said Mark, enviously.

"I feel so," she replied. "I could live happily enough here; it is so easy to be good when one is rich."

He looked at her in dull wonder, as he generally did when she puzzled him.

"But Doris," he said, "that is just exactly the opposite of what the Bible says. Don't you remember the text about the rich man, the camel, and the needle's eye?"

"I remember it," she replied. "Those who have no money long for it, and some desire it so ardently they will do anything to win it; the rich have no need to be envious or jealous."

He was not clever enough to argue with her; the only thing he could do was to tell her she was wrong, and that she should not talk that way.

Before there was time to reply, the door opened, and the duke came in.

He spoke kindly, saying that the duchess was engaged with some visitors, but that Lady Estelle Hereford would see Miss Brace, and would be pleased to show her the pictures and the flowers.

Mark looked astounded at the condescension; even the duke himself felt some little surprise when she had made the offer.

"You had better let the housekeeper take her, my dear," he had said.

"Very well, papa," she replied, carelessly; but after a few minutes she added: "I think it will amuse me to see this young girl, papa. I will show her some of the pictures and my flowers."

"She would be more comfortable with the housekeeper," he said; "but do as you wish, my dear."

When he saw the beautiful, refined, high-bred young girl seated at the table, he changed his mind—it did not seem so certain that she would be more comfortable with the housekeeper. He looked in wonder at her perfect face and graceful figure.

"She looks like a young princess," he said to himself: and his manner almost involuntarily changed—something of chivalrous respect came into it; and Doris, so marvelously quick, detected the change. She saw that he admired her, and then she felt quite at her ease.

He said something to Mark about the agent who was waiting to see him. Then the door opened, and Lady Estelle entered.

As her eyes fell upon the young girl she started, and her face grew deadly pale—so pale that the duke stepped hastily forward, and cried out:

"Are you ill, Estelle?"

"No," she replied; "the day is warm, and warm weather never suits me. Good-morning, Mr. Brace. Is this your daughter?"

Mark bowed to the pale, stately lady.

"This is my daughter, my lady," he replied.

Lady Estelle Hereford, going nearer to her, looked into the beautiful, radiant face. Doris returned the glance, and the two remained for one minute looking, for the second time in their lives, steadily at each other.

"I am glad to see you," said Lady Estelle, kindly. "I remember having seen you when you were a child."

Doris bowed. There was perfect ease, perfect grace in her manner, and the duke, looking at her, was fairly puzzled; that high-bred, perfect repose, that fascinating charm of manner surprised him. He looked at his daughter to see if she shared his surprise, and felt anxious about her when he saw that her face was still deadly pale.

Then he asked Mark to go and see the agent. Lady Estelle, with her rigid lips, smiled at Doris.

"I will take charge of you," she said. "Come with me." They left the room together. "We will go to the boudoir first," she said. "There are some very fine paintings; you will like to see them."

When they reached the boudoir Lady Estelle seemed to forget why they had gone there. She sat down on the couch, and placed Doris by her side.

"I saw you once when you were quite a little child," she said. "How you have altered; how tall you have grown!" She laid her hands on the shining waves of hair. "What beautiful hair you have!" she continued, and her fingers lingered caressingly on it. "They tell me, child, that you are really promised in marriage—is it true?"

There was no flush on that lovely young face; no sweet, tender coyness in the beautiful eyes; they were raised quite calmly to the questioning face.

"Yes," she replied; "it is quite true."

A look quite indescribable came over Lady Estelle; something yearning, wistful; then she slowly added:

"A love-story always interests me; will you tell me yours?"

"I have none," was the quick reply. "Earle Moray asked me to marry him, and I said yes."

"But you love him?" asked Lady Estelle.

"Yes, I love him—at least I suppose so. I do not know what love is; but I imagine I love him."

"You do not know what love is?" said Lady Estelle, in a tone of suppressed vehemence. "I will tell you. It is a fire that burns and pains—burns and pains; it is a torrent that destroys everything in its way; it is a hurricane that sweeps over every obstacle; it is a tempest in which the ship is forever and ever tossed; it is the highest bliss, the deepest misery! Oh, child! pray, pray that you may never know what love is!"

Who could have recognized the quiet, graceful, languid Lady Estelle? Her face shone like flame, and her eyes flashed fire—the calm, proud repose was all gone. Doris looked at her in wonder.

"There must be many kinds of love. I know nothing of that which you describe, and Earle loves me quite differently."

"How does he love you?" asked Lady Estelle.

"He is always singing to me, and these are his favorite lines:

"'Thou art my life, my soul, my heart,
The very eyes of me;
Thou hast command of every part,
To live and die for thee.'

"And that just expresses Earle's love."

The lady's eyes were riveted on the glorious face; the rich, sweet voice had given such force and effect to the words. Then she said, anxiously:

"You will be very happy in your new life, I hope—even should I never see you again—I hope you will be happy."

"I hope so," replied Doris, in a dubious voice. Then her face brightened as she looked round the magnificent room. "I should be happy enough here," she said. "This is what my soul loves best—this is better than love."

The lady drew back from the girl as though she had been struck.

"Faithless and debonair," she murmured.

Doris looked inquiringly at her.

"This is what you love best?" she said. "You mean luxury and magnificence?"

"Yes, I mean that—it is ten thousand times better than love."

"But," said Lady Estelle, "that is a strange doctrine for one so young as you."

"I am young, but I know something of life," said Doris. "I know that money can purchase everything, can do everything, can influence everything."

"But," said Lady Estelle, drawing still further from her, "you would not surely tell me that of all the gifts of this world you value money most."

"I think I do," said Doris, with a frank smile.

"That is strange in one so young," said Lady Estelle. "I am so sorry." Then she rose, saying, coldly: "You will like to see the pictures. You think it strange that I should speak to you in this fashion. As I told you before, a love-story interests me. I am sorry that you have none."

The change was soon perceived by Doris, and just as quickly understood.

"I do not think," she said, gently, "that you have quite understood me. I do not love money; that is, the actual gold. It is the pleasures that money can purchase which seem to me so enviable, that I long so urgently for."

Lady Estelle smiled.

"I see—I understand. You did not express just what you meant; that is a different thing. There seems to me something hateful in the love of money. So you long for pleasure, my poor child. You little know how soon it would tire you."

"Indeed, it never would," she replied, eagerly. "I should like—oh, how much I should like!—to live always in rooms beautiful as these, to wear shining jewels, rich silks, costly laces! I do not, and never have, liked my own home; in some strange way it never seems to belong to me, nor I to it."

Lady Estelle drew near to her again.

"You do not like it, poor child?" she said. "That is very sad. Yet they are very kind to you."

"Yes, they are kind to me. I cannot explain what I mean. I never seem to think as they think, or do as they do. I am not good either, after their fashion of being good."

"What is your idea of being good?" asked Lady Estelle.

"Pleasing myself, amusing myself, making myself happy."

"It is comfortable philosophy at least. What is he like, this Earle Moray, whom your father calls poet and gentleman?" asked Lady Estelle.

Doris smiled. She did not blush, nor did her eyes droop; there was no shyness nor timidity.

"He is fair," she replied, "and he has a noble head, crowned with clustering hair; his face is spiritual and tender, and his mouth is beautiful as a woman's."

"That is a good description; I can almost see him. You love him or you could not describe him so."

"He will be a great man in the future," replied the girl.

Then she started at finding on what familiar terms she was with this daughter of a mighty duke. They were sitting side by side, and Lady Estelle had again taken the shining hair in her hand. Doris' hat had become unfastened, and she held it with careless grace. It even surprised herself to find she was as much at home and at her ease with Lady Estelle Hereford as she was with Mattie.

"Where shall you live after you married?" asked Lady Estelle, gently.

"At Lindenholm for some little time: but Earle has promised me that I shall go to London. I live only in that hope."

"Why do you wish so ardently for London?"

"Because people know what life means there. They have balls, parties, *fetes*, music, operas, theaters, and I long for a life of pleasure."

"How much you will have to suffer?" said Lady Estelle, unconsciously.

"Why?" asked Doris, in surprise.

"Because you expect so much, and the world has so little to give—that is why. But come, we are forgetting the pictures."

In the long gallery they were joined by the duke: curiosity to again see the beautiful face had brought him there. Doris was looking at a portrait that pleased her very much, and her beautiful profile was seen to perfection. The duke started as his eyes fell upon it.

He went up to his daughter.

"Estelle," he said, in a low voice, "who is it that young girl resembles—some one we know well? Look at the curve of the lip, the straight, clear brow!"

"I do not see any likeness," she replied, with white, trembling lips, "none at all; but, oh! papa, I am so tired. I am not so well as usual to-day; I seem to have no strength."

She sat on one of the crimson seats, and the duke forgot all about their visitor in his anxiety for her.

"I will send these people home," he said; but she interrupted him.

"Not just yet, papa; it will be such a pleasure to me to show that pretty young girl my flowers."

CHAPTER XXI.
HER EYES INVITED HIM.

Lady Estelle and Doris went together through the beautiful conservatories that formed one of the great attractions of the Castle, and Doris fancied herself in fairyland. She showed them, that although she might have no particular love for nature, she had a grand eye for the picturesque. Lady Estelle desired her here and there to gather a spray of choice blossoms. She did so, and the way in which she grouped and arranged them was marvelous.

"You have a good eye for color," said Lady Estelle, as she watched the white fingers, with the scarlet and amber flowers. It pleased her to see the girl lingering among them—to see the beautiful face bending over the blossoms.

They came to a pretty little corridor, roofed with glass; but the glass was hidden by the luxuriance of an exotic climbing plant. Great scarlet bells, with white, fragrant hearts, hung down in glorious profusion. In the middle of the corridor stood a large fountain, and the water was brilliant with gold fish. There were pretty seats, half overhung by the leaves of the hanging plant. It was when they reached here that the servant came in search of Lady Estelle; she was wanted in the drawing-room, to see some visitors who had arrived. She turned to Doris, with a kindly smile:

"I am sure you must be tired," she said; "will you rest here? I am sorry to leave you, but I shall not be long."

With the dignified air of a young princess, Doris seated herself, the footman looking on in silent wonder; he had rarely seen his languid mistress so attentive even to her most intimate friends.

Then Doris was left alone in the rich, mellow light. The rippling spray of the fountain and the gleaming of the gold fish amused her for some time: then she took up her magnificent flowers, and began to arrange them.

She was so deeply engaged with them, that she did not hear the sound of footsteps; the velvet curtain at the end of the corridor was raised, and a tall, handsome man stood looking in mute wonder at the picture before him.

There, in the mellow light, was a picture that for beauty of coloring could not be surpassed. A young girl, with the face of an angel, and hair of the purest shining gold; white hands that shone like snow-flakes, among crimson and amber blossoms; the background was formed by the scarlet bells and green leaves of the drooping plant.

He stood for some minutes looking on in silent wonder; and while he so stands, Lord Charles Vivianne is an object worth studying; tall, well made, with a fine, erect figure, and easy, dignified bearing, he would attract attention even among a crowd of men. His face is handsome, but not good; the eyes are dark and piercing; the brows are arched and thick; but the mouth, the key to the whole face, is a bad one. The lips, thick and weak, are hidden by a mustache. It is the face of a man who lives entirely to please himself—who knows no restraint—who consults his own inclinations, and who would sacrifice every one and everything to himself.

The dark eyes are riveted on the golden hair and exquisite face of the girl.

It is some minutes before she becomes aware of his presence, and then something causes her to look up, and she sees those same dark eyes, full of admiration, glancing at her.

She does not blush, but the dainty rose-bloom deepens on her face, and the violet eyes flash back a look of archest coquetry into his own.

That look decided him. If she had blushed or looked at all embarrassed, he, being what is called a gentleman, would have turned away; that glance, so full of fire, of coquetry—so subtle, so sweet—seemed to start something like delicious poison through his veins.

He comes nearer to her, making a most profound and respectful bow. Then he sees her dress, so plain and homely, although coquettishly worn, and he is at a loss to imagine who she can be. The loveliness, the perfect aristocratic grace of face and figure, are what he would have expected from a visitor at Downsbury Castle. The impress of high birth is on both of them, but the dress is not even equal to that of a lady's-maid, yet she is sitting there so perfectly at her ease, she must be a visitor.

Lord Charles Vivianne, with his eyes still riveted upon her, speculates in vain.

"I beg pardon," he says at last. "I hope you will accept my apologies; but I was told that Lady Estelle was here, and I wish to see her."

"She will return very soon," replies Doris. The words are brief and simple, but the eyes seem to say, "stay with me till she comes."

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to a visitor at the Castle?" he asks, with a bow.

Then she blushes, feeling more ashamed than ever of Brackenside and its belongings.

"I came to see the Castle," she replies; "and Lady Estelle is kind enough to show me the flowers."

He understood at once. Then, saying to himself that in all probability she was a *protegee* of my lady's, the daughter of some tenant-farmer, who had, as a great treat, been promised a sight of the wonders of the Castle—he was perfectly at his ease then.

There was no such admirer of fair women in all the world as Lord Vivianne, and this was the fairest he had ever seen. A farmer's daughter, without the prestige of rank and wealth to save her—fair prey for him. Had she been the daughter of a duke, an earl, a baron, he would simply have laid his plans for flirting with her; as it was, he sat down and deliberately said to himself that heart and soul should be his.

Some little faults lay at her door. Her eyes invited him; they said things that the lips would not have dared to utter; they were full of the sweetest and most subtle invitation, gracefully veiled by the long, dark lashes. Lord Charles had done as he would all his life, and now that his eyes rested on this fairest of all faces, it was not likely that he would let anything baffle him.

"You have a beautiful resting-place," he said. "I have never seen anything to equal the beauty of this plant."

"It is very beautiful," she replied; "to me it seems like fairyland."

"I have been staying here for a week," he continued, "and I have not seen half the beauty of the Castle yet."

"You have been staying here!" she said, with unconscious stress on the word "here."

"Yes; I admire the scenery hereabouts. I think it is almost about the finest we have."

"I have never been out of this county," she replied, "so I cannot tell."

He raised his dark brows in surprise.

"You have never been away from home?" he said; "what a pity, and what a shame!"

"Why is it a shame?" she asked, with another of those sweet glances that invited him to woo her.

"Providence does not send such a face as yours in the world once in a century," he replied, "and then all the world should see it." Doris looked pleased, not shy or timid; she was perfectly at home with him, and he saw it. "I must introduce myself," he said, "as Lady Estelle does not return—I am Lord Charles Vivianne—if I dare, I should ask to whom I have the honor of speaking."

She did blush then with gratified vanity and delight. It was something that she should have a handsome lord by her side, and that he should admire her. He did admire her, she knew; she could read it in his eyes and the flattering homage of his smile.

Lord Charles Vivianne!—she wondered whether he was very rich, great, and celebrated. A lord!—oh, if she could only make a conquest of him!

"I wish I dare ask to whom I have the honor of speaking."

And then she raised her eyes with something of defiance, and said:

"My name is Doris—Doris Brace."

He said the name softly.

"Doris! What a pretty name! Now that you have been kind enough to answer me one question, I should like to ask another—do you live near here?"

"I live at Brackenside," she replied. "My father is a tenant of the duke's—he is a farmer."

"Then I was right in my first surmise," he said.

"Pray, what was that?" asked Doris.

"I was watching you for some minutes before you saw me, and I guessed that you were a daughter of one of the duke's tenants."

She raised her head with a magnificent pride and lofty disdain that almost annihilated him.

"That is to say you thought I looked like a farmer's daughter. I thank you so much for the compliment."

"Nay," he replied; "I thought that you looked like a queen."

The dark eyes seemed to flash light and love into her own. It must be admitted that Lord Charles Vivianne thoroughly understood the art of winning women.

"Doris!" he said; "I am struck with the name, because I do not remember that I ever met with any one who bore it before. How beautiful these flowers are! Will you give me one to keep in memory of this, our first meeting?"

She tightened her hold on the scarlet and amber blossoms. He could not help noticing the beauty of the white hand that held them.

"I think not," she replied. "In all the poems that I ever read something is done to win a flower before it is given."

"I have done something to win it," he replied.

She raised her beautiful eyes to his.

"Have you? I did not know it. Will you tell me what it is?"

"If you will promise me not to be angry," he whispered.

She drew back from him and laughed.

"How can I be angry?" she asked. "I beg of you to tell me what you have done to win a flower."

His eyes seemed to light his face with love and passion.

"I will tell you what I have done," he said. "In one minute I have laid at your feet, in silence, the homage that another could not have won in a whole year. Now will you give me a flower?"

He took one of the scarlet blossoms, and in doing so his fingers touched hers.

"I shall never part with it," he said. Then he heard the sound of the opening of the conservatory door, and he knew that Lady Estelle was coming. "Shall you be very angry with me," he asked, in a quiet whisper, "if you see me near your home."

"No," she replied.

Then he arose and went over to the other end of the conservatory, so that when Lady Estelle entered, she could not have any idea that they had exchanged one word.

Still she looked surprised, and not very well pleased at finding him there. He came forward quickly, never even looking at Doris.

"I had hoped to find you here, Lady Estelle," he said. "I have waited your return. I am going over to Hyndlow this morning, and you said that you wished me to take something to Lady Eleanor."

"Yes," she replied; "I will attend to it. I shall see you before you go."

She dismissed him with a queenly bow, and he went, never once looking at Doris, but her eyes lingered on him till he was out of sight; then she looked at Lady Estelle, and they seemed to reproach the duke's daughter that she had not considered her worthy of an introduction.

Lady Estelle perfectly understood the mute reproach, but would not notice it.

"I am sorry," she said, languidly, "that the duchess is so busily engaged this morning. She has asked me to say that she wishes you well in the new life opening to you."

"It is time to go," thought Doris. Her quick tact seemed to be almost a sixth sense. She thanked Lady Estelle for her kindness, and Lady Estelle did what was very unusual for her—held out her hand.

"Good-bye!" she said, with a faint, sad smile. "You will remember our little argument, and always bear in mind that the greatest of earthy blessings is love."

"I shall remember that you have said so," laughed Doris, wondering why the cold, jeweled hand held hers so tightly.

"If I never see you again," said the languid, caressing voice, "I shall not forget you, and I wish you well."

There was something so strange in the lady's face and manner that Doris was half startled.

The usual light, graceful words did not come so easily.

"Good-bye!" she repeated. "This has been the happiest day in my life, and I thank you for it."

She turned away to follow the servant who had come in search of her, but the quiet, gentle eyes of Lady Estelle rested on her until she was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I SHALL NEVER BE A MODEL WOMAN."

Lord Charles Vivianne had been completely spoiled by good fortune. An only son, he had succeeded quite early to a magnificent estate, a large fortune, and an ancient title. As a handsome boy, he had been caressed, indulged, and spoiled; his mother never allowed him to be thwarted in any wish or desire; his father thought there was no one equal to him. They both died while he was still in his early youth, and he was left to the care of guardians who were just as indulgent.

Some young men would not have suffered so terribly from this as he did; but he was not naturally good, and circumstances fostered all the evil that was in him.

Fair women flattered him; he was a great prize in the matrimonial market. He knew that some of the fairest and noblest women in England would have been proud and pleased to have shared his lot; he knew that he could choose where he would, but, although the chains of Hymen might be made of the fairest roses, he would never wear them. He had resolved to have as much enjoyment as possible out of his life, and, to secure that, he decided upon roaming like a butterfly, and marrying when he grew older.

He was wealthy, and the possessor of an ancient title and magnificent estates; but the name of Lord Charles Vivianne was not held in highest honor by the world—it was not one of purest renown.

Husbands with beautiful wives, fathers with fair young daughters, looked reproachfully on him, for neither virtue, honor, friendship, principle, nor pity, ever stood in his way when he had a caprice to gratify or a whim to indulge. He laughed at the notion of a broken heart. In his creed, women were quite an inferior order of creation—they might have souls or they might not, that was a mere matter of belief—they were created simply for the amusement of the passing hour, and to do the real drudgery work of the world. How many women's hearts he broke, how many fair young lives he blighted, will all be known on that terrible day when sin is called by its right name, and there is no gloss thrown over it.

He had had numerous flirtations, but love he had never known. If he saw a face that pleased him, he pursued it until he won it, and then it might perish like a faded rose-leaf—it was of no more interest to him.

Ah, it was an evil hour in which he saw the promised wife of Earle Moray! He had never met any one so lovely; his heart was on fire as he thought of the perfect beauty of her face and figure. There was not the least pity in his heart as he said to himself he must win her, no matter what it cost him; she was well worth some little trouble, and she was willing to be won, if he could judge from her eyes.

The last thing Doris saw, as she drove away from the Castle gates, was Lord Charles Vivianne watching her intently, with love and admiration in his face. He was not so handsome as Earle; he lacked the fair, spiritual beauty of the poet; but he was a lord, and, to some people, that one fact makes the whole world of difference.

Doris went home with her thoughts in a maze, her head whirling with all she had seen and heard; but the one dominant idea was that she had been admired by a lord.

It had been a most unfortunate thing for her, the visit to Downsbury Castle; but for it she might in time have grown reconciled to her lot; she might have learned to love and appreciate Earle; she might have lived and died happily; but for it this story had never been written: it was the turning point in her life; it seemed to bring into sudden and vivid life all the evil that had lain dormant; it roused the vanity, the ambition, the love of luxury and pleasure, the love of conquest and admiration, until they became a living flame nothing could extinguish.

How plain and homely the little farm seemed to her after the magnificence of Downsbury Castle! How homely and uncouth Mattie and her mother were after the languid, graceful Lady Estelle! Nothing pleased her, nothing contented her.

"I have been foolish," she thought; "I wish I had not promised to marry Earle. Who knows but there might have been a chance for me to win this handsome lord. Lady Doris Vivianne!—I like the sound of that name; what a difference between that and Mrs. Earle Moray. How foolish I was to be in such a hurry."

So that evening, when poor Earle came, impatient to see her, longing for one kind word, thirsting to talk to her, he was received with great coldness by her. Ah, heaven! how pitiful it was to see the handsome face droop and sadden, the lips tremble, the eyes grow dim with tears. He might be master of the English language, that he certainly was; he might be master of the heart of poesy, but he was a slave to her, to her whims, her caprices, her humor. It was the first time she had been cold to him, the first time her face had not brightened for him. She did not even smile when he entered the room. He hastened up to her, and bending down he kissed the beautiful face.

"My darling Doris," he said, "I thought the day would never come to an end. I have been longing to see you."

Another time the sweet face would have been raised to his; she would have given kiss for kiss;

she would have welcomed him as he loved best to be welcomed; but to-day she merely turned impatiently aside.

"I wish you would be more careful, Earle," she said. "You make my hair so untidy."

"I am very sorry, dear," he said, gently. "It is such beautiful hair, Doris, and I think it looks even more beautiful when it is what you call untidy."

"There is no reason why you should make it so," she retorted.

Then he looked with wondering eyes into her face.

"You are not well, or are you tired; which is it?"

"I am tired," she replied; "tired to death, Earle. Do not tease me."

"I ought to have remembered your long journey—of course you are tired. You ought to lie down, and I will read to you. That will rest you."

"Pray, do not be fussy, Earle. Other people get tired, but no one likes a fuss made over them."

Again he looked at her. Could this girl, who received him so coldly, so indifferently, be his own beautiful, bright Doris? It seemed incredible. Perhaps he had been so unfortunate as to offend her. He bent over her again.

"Doris," he said, gently, "have I been so unfortunate as to displease you?"

"No," she replied. "I do not remember that you have."

"You're so changed, I can hardly imagine that this is you."

The pain in his voice touched her. She looked at him; his face had grown very pale, and there was a cloud in his clear, loving eyes. She laughed a low, impatient laugh.

"Pray do not be so unhappy because I am cross," she said. "I never pretended to have a good temper. I am always impatient over something or other."

"But why with me? You know that your smile makes heaven to me: your frown, despair. Why be cross with me, darling? I would give all I have on earth to save you from one unhappy moment."

"I am tired," she said, "and I cannot forget the Castle, Earle. I wish so much that I had been born to live in such a place; I should have been quite at home and happy there."

"Are you not at home and happy here?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "Happy in a lonely, dreary farm-house!"

"With the kindest of parents, the sweetest of sisters, the most devoted of lovers, it seems to me, Doris, that you have all the elements of happiness."

She did not even hear him; she was thinking of the grandeur she had seen.

"I call that something like life," she continued—"luxury and gayety. I would sooner never have been born at all than be condemned to spend all my life here."

"But it will not be spent here, my darling; it will be spent with me."

His face glowed; the rapture of content came over it. There was no response in hers.

"I shall change Brackenside for Lindenholm," she said. "I cannot see that it will make much difference. It is only exchanging one farm-house for another."

"But I who love you am in the other," he said, gently. "Oh, Doris, you pain me so greatly! I know that you do not mean what you say, but you wound me to death."

Again she hardly heard him.

"I should very much like to know," Doris continued, "if it is fair to place me, with a keen, passionate longing for life, gayety, and pleasure, here, where I have none of the three."

"None of the three!" he repeated, sadly, "and I find heaven with you." He knelt down in front of her, where he could see her face, and he drew it gently down to his own. "I will not believe you mean this, my darling; if I did believe it I should go mad. Your beauty-loving, artistic nature has been aroused by what you have seen, and it makes you slightly discontented with us all. You ought to reign in a palace, my darling, because you are so beautiful and brilliant; but the palace shall be of my winning. You shall have every luxury that you have seen and envied."

"When?" she asked, briefly, bringing his castle in the air suddenly to the ground.

"Soon, my darling—you do not know how hard I am working—soon as I can possibly accomplish it."

"Work!" she replied. "A man may work for a lifetime and yet never earn sufficient to build a house, much less a castle. Look at my father, how hard he works, yet he is not rich, and never will be."

"But my work is different from his, Doris. There have been poets who have made large fortunes."

"And there have been poets who starved in a garret," she replied.

"But I have not that intention," cried Earle, with a look of power. "I will win wealth for you—the thought of you gives me skill, nerve, and courage for anything. Have patience, my darling!"

"Oh, Earle, it was so beautiful!" she cried, pitilessly interrupting him; "and that Lady Estelle wore such a beautiful dress! She has a strange way of moving—it produces a strange effect—so slowly and so gracefully, as though she were moving to the rhythm of some hidden music. And those rooms—I can never forget them! To think that people should live and move in the midst of such luxury!"

He raised the white hand to his lip.

"They are not all happy, Doris. Oh, believe me, darling! money, luxury, magnificence cannot bring happiness. Sooner or later one wearies of them."

"I never should," she answered, gently. "If I could live twenty lives, instead of one, I should never weary. I should like every hour of each of them to be filled with pleasure."

"That is because you have had so little," he said, wistfully. "You shall have a bright future."

Just at that moment Mattie Brace entered the room, and Doris looked at her with a smile.

"A little brown mouse, like Mattie," she said, "can easily be content. You are happy as the day is long, are you not, Mattie?"

The quiet brown eyes, with their look of wistful pain, rested for one moment upon Earle, then the young girl said, calmly:

"Certainly I am happy and content. Why should I not be? I always think that the same good God who made me knew how and where to place me, and knew best what I was fitted for."

"There," said Doris, "that is the kind of material your model women are made of. I shall never be a model woman—Mattie will never be anything else."

"Mattie is quite right," said Earle. "There is nothing so vain and so useless as longing for that which we can never attain. Come, Doris, you look better and brighter than you did when I first came in. Tell me all about your day at the Castle."

She told him of the duke's kind reception, of Lady Estelle's condescension, of all the beautiful things she had seen, and how the duke's daughter had given her some flowers, and talked to her. But not one word did she say of Lord Charles Vivianne. It was better, she thought, not even to mention that.

"I am sorry you ever went near the Castle," said Mattie, gravely. "I do not think you will ever be quite the same girl again, and I have a presentiment that in some shape or other evil will come of it."

And Earle, as he heard these words, turned away with a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COQUETTE AND THE MAN OF THE WORLD.

Earle wondered much what had happened to change his lady-love so completely. Looking back, he found that she had never been quite the same since the day she went to the Castle. At first he thought it merely a girlish feeling of discontent; that it would pass away in time as the remembrance of all the luxury and splendor she had seen faded from her. Every morning when he arose he thought, "It will come all right to-day; she will put her sweet arms around my neck, and bend her beautiful face to mine, and tell me she is sorry—oh! so sorry, that she has been cold to me."

But the days passed on, and that golden dream was never verified; the coldness seemed to grow greater, and the shadow deeper.

Once, when she was walking out with Earle, she saw Lord Vivianne. He was walking down the high-road, and she knew well that he had been at the farm to look for her. Her heart beat when she saw him as it had never done for the man she had promised to marry. Earle was an ordinary man; this was a lord, and he had been purposely to look for her. He looked so handsome, so distinguished; she turned almost involuntarily from him to Earle, and the contrast was not in the poet's favor. Lord Vivianne was beautifully dressed in the most faultless and exquisite taste. Earle had not the advantage of a London tailor.

As they drew nearer, Earle, quite unconscious that Doris had ever seen the stranger before, made some remark about him.

"He has a handsome face," said Earle, "but it is not a face I like; it is not good."

"Good!" repeated Doris; "that is like you and Mattie. Earle, you think every one must be good."

"So they must," replied Earle.

Then they were both silent, for the stranger was just passing by. He looked at Doris, but he did not bow or speak to her; only from his eyes to hers there passed a strange gleam of intelligence. He did not think it wise to make any sign of recognition before the young escort who looked at him with such keen, questioning eyes.

"He would only begin to ask half a hundred questions about me, which she would find it difficult to answer," he thought; so he passed on in silence, and for a few minutes Doris was beside herself with vexation.

"It is all because this tiresome Earle is with me," she thought. "If I had been alone he would have stopped and have talked to me. How can I tell what he would have said? Perhaps he would have asked me to marry him—perhaps he is going away, and he wanted to bid me good-bye. Oh, if I could but see him alone!"

She looked again at Earle, and it seemed to her that in comparison with this other young man he was so inferior, she felt a sudden sense of impatience that made her unjust to him.

Earle thought no more of the stranger who had passed them on the high-road—it was nothing very unusual—strangers passed them continually. But Doris thought of nothing else. She had begun the walk in the best of spirits, but now she hardly spoke. Earle could not imagine what change had passed over the summer sky of his love. She was impatient, complained of being tired, turned to go home.

He was growing accustomed to her caprices now; and though they pained him, as the unkindness of those we love is certain to pain us, still he bore it patiently; he used to think that as she was young the quiet home life tired her. It would be all right when he could take her away, where she would be happy and bright; still the pain was very keen, so keen that it blanched his face, and made his lips tremble. If she could make him so happy, why could he not suffice for her?

Doris wanted to be alone and to think over what had happened. Lord Vivianne had been there in the hope of seeing her, that was certain. If he had been once, it was just possible that he might come again. She resolved on the morrow to be out alone, no matter what Earle said. Chance favored her. Earle came over quite early, and remained but a short time. His mother wished him to go over to Quainton, and he would not return till evening. "So that I shall not see much of you, my beautiful Doris," he said.

She was so relieved to hear it that it made her more than usually kind to him. She looked up to him with a sunny smile; she held her bright face for him to kiss; she was so kind to him that all his fears died away, and he rejoiced in the sunshine of his perfect love.

She was kind to him, gentle, caressing, loving, because she was going to deceive him. Women are so constituted, they can veil the greatest cruelty with a pretense of the greatest affection.

There was no fear in the heart of her young lover, while she knew that, if the opportunity were given to her, she would assuredly perjure herself.

Earle went away completely happy, and when he was gone Doris breathed freely. She went to the dairy where her mother and sister were busy at work. She looked for a minute with great contempt on the cans of rich milk and cream. Mattie was deeply engaged in the mysteries of curds and whey.

"Mother," said Doris, "you do not want me?"

"Well, for the matter of that, it is not much use wanting you, my dear; you do not like work."

"Indeed I do not. It is such a pleasant morning, I thought of going through Thorpe Woods."

"Very well. Though mind, Doris, it is not quite right for you to go out amusing yourself while Mattie works so hard."

"But if I stay at home I shall not work, so I am better out of the way."

Mrs. Brace knew it was false reasoning; but what was the use of saying so; she had long since ceased arguing with Doris.

"Do not expect me back very early. I may go on to see Lottie Granger," said Doris.

Thinking it wise that no hour should be set for her return, she intended to cross the high-road and linger in the hope of seeing him. There was no fear of discovery. Her mother and Mattie were settled for the day, Earle had gone to Quainton, her father was away in some distant meadow-land. She hoped that she could see her lord, for no time could be more favorable for a long conversation. She was singing up stairs in her own room.

"I must make myself look as nice as I can," she thought.

She inspected her wardrobe; there was really nothing in it worth wearing. She gave an impatient sigh.

There was a plain white hat, trimmed with blue ribbon; there was a black lace shawl and a white

muslin dress. She hastened down into the garden and gathered a beautiful rose; she fastened it into her hat, and it was instantly transformed into the most becoming head-gear. The black lace shawl, by a few touches of the skillful fingers, became a Spanish mantilla, and hung in graceful folds over the pretty muslin.

Her toilet was a complete success; she had that marvelous gift of transforming everything she touched. At school she had been the envy of her companions; she had a taste that was at once artistic and picturesque, and it was nowhere displayed to greater advantage than in her own dress.

When she looked in the little glass all doubts as to the success of her appearance faded at once. There was a dainty flush on her lovely face, the beautiful eyes were bright as stars. What matter the fashion of the hat that covered that luxuriant hair? She smiled at herself.

"There is not much fear, my dear," she mused, "that you will fail in anything you undertake."

Then, in the fair June morning, she went out to meet her doom.

She had not gone many steps on the high-road when she saw Lord Vivianne coming. Like a true coquette she feigned unconsciousness, and pretended to gather the woodbines from the hedges.

He smiled at the transparent artifice. She did not know how well he had studied the nature of woman, how perfectly he was acquainted with every little art.

She muttered a most musical exclamation of surprise. When she turned suddenly round and saw him, she made what she considered a grand effect by suddenly dropping all her wild flowers, as though the surprise had overcome her.

"Let them be," he said; "happy roses do die by so fair a hand. I am so pleased to see you, Miss Brace. What happy fortune sent me on this road?"

She did not play off the same pretty airs on him that had so completely captivated poor Earle; she did not ask him to call her Doris, and say how she detested the name "Brace." Peers and poets require different treatment.

"My poor roses," she said; "I had been so happy in gathering them."

"Never mind the roses," said Lord Vivianne; "there are hundreds more. I want to talk to you. Are you going for a walk? May I go with you?"

"I am going to Thorpe Woods," she replied, "and if you wish to go with me I am willing."

She spoke with the proud grace of a young princess. For the moment he actually forgot she was but the daughter of a tiller of the soil.

"I thank you," he said, gravely; and they turned aside from the high-road to the fields that led to Thorpe Woods.

The day was so lovely that it might have reminded him that life had brighter aims than the wrecking of a woman's soul and the winning of a woman's love; but it did not. The birds sang in the trees, the fair sun shone, the hawthorn covered the hedges, the woodbine scented the air, and they walked on, never even hearing the myriad voices that called them to look from earth to heaven.

"I was so anxious to see you again," said Lord Vivianne. "I tried to forget you, but I could not."

"Why should you wish to forget me?" Doris asked, coquettishly.

"Some men would flatter you," he replied, "and tell you that you are so fair they dreaded to remember you. I tell you the honest truth. I heard something which made me wish that I had never seen you, or that, having seen you, I might forget you."

"What did you hear?" she asked.

"You can guess. I heard that—young, lovely as you are—some one has been wise enough and quick enough to win you."

She smiled a slow, cruel, peculiar smile, and when Lord Vivianne saw that expression on her face, he felt that his victory was won.

"They tell me," he continued, "that this fair beauty, which ought to have the world to do it homage, is to be shut up in the obscurity of a country home; that the fair girl, who might win the hearts of all men, has promised herself to a farmer. Is it true?"

Her eyes were raised to his, and in them there was a cold glitter, as of steel.

"Supposing that it is true, what then?" she asked.

"Then I regret, with my whole heart, having seen you, for I have met you too late."

And after that they walked in silence for some minutes. He gave the words full time to do their work; he saw that they were full of meaning to her, for her face flushed, and her eyes drooped. He continued in a lighter tone:

"Pray do not think me very impertinent if I inquire whether that was your shepherd lover with

whom I saw you yesterday?"

She raised her beautiful head proudly. Because he was her lover, no one should ridicule Earle. She might desert him, betray him, break his heart, but no one should utter one word against him —not one.

"That was my lover with whom you saw me," she said, in a cold, clear voice. "You have spoken of him as a farmer, he is not that. I should not have fallen in love with a farmer. He is a poet and a gentleman."

"He looks like it," said my lord, seeing that he was altogether on the wrong track, "therefore I say how deeply I regret that I have met you too late. You cannot surely, Miss Brace, be angry with me for saying that?"

"I am not angry at all," said Doris, and the beautiful eyes were raised frankly to his. "How can I be angry," she continued, "when you pay me the greatest compliments in your power."

CHAPTER XXIV.
AN IMPASSIONED WOOING.

"This is the very place for lovers," said Lord Vivianne.

They had reached an open piece of moorland, where the shadows of the tall trees danced on the grass, and great sheets of bluebells contrasted with starry primroses. There was a bank where the wild thyme grew, sheltered by a tall linden-tree. The birds seemed to have made their home there, for the summer air resounded with sweet song.

Lord Vivianne drew aside the fallen branch of a slender willow, that she might find room to sit down.

"The very place for lovers," he repeated.

She looked at him with a smile:

"But we are not lovers," she said; "therefore it is not the place for us."

"False logic! fairest of ladies!" he replied; "there is no knowing how soon we may become lovers, though. I feel sure we did not meet for nothing."

"Can a girl have two lovers?" she asked, looking up at him with the frank eyes of an innocent child.

He laughed.

"That quite depends on the state of one's conscience," he replied, "and the elasticity of one's spirits. If two lovers are objectionable, the proper thing is to send one away."

"Which should be sent away?" she asked.

"I should say the one that is loved the least. Tell me, now, do you really love this country admirer of yours very much?"

"I do not understand why you ask me."

"Do you not? I will tell you. Because everything that interests you interests me; your pains and pleasures would soon be mine."

"I have no pains," she said, thoughtfully, "and no pleasures."

"Then yours must be a most dull and monotonous life. How can you, with so keen a capacity for enjoyment—how can you bear it?"

"I do not bear it very well," she replied; "I am always more or less bad-tempered."

He laughed again.

"You improve upon acquaintance, Miss Brace. You are the first lady whom I have heard plead guilty to bad temper. As a rule, women prefer making themselves out to be angelic."

"I am very far from that," said Doris, frankly; "nor am I naturally bad-tempered. It is because nothing in my life pleases or interests me."

"Not even your lover?" he said, bending over her and whispering the words.

She blushed under his keen gaze. Her words had betrayed more than she meant to betray.

Then he added:

"Would you like it changed—this dull life of yours—into one of fairy brightness?"

"I should; but it will not be possible. My fate in the future is fixed—nothing can alter it."

"Yes," he said, gently, "there is one thing that can alter it, and only one—your will and mine."

Then he seemed to think that for a time he had said enough. He looked over the trees, and began to talk to her about the flowers. Doris did not much care about that—she had not come out to listen to the praises of flowers; she would rather ten thousand times over that her lordly lover had praised herself.

While he was talking, she was thinking of many things. Was it a dream, or a reality, that she, Doris Brace, daughter of Mark and Patty Brace, was really talking to a lord, listening to his compliments, that he admired her quite as much as Earle did? It was more like a dream than a reality. He, who had been half over the world, who belonged to the highest society, who had seen and known the most beautiful women in England, to be talking to her so easily, so kindly.

"I must be beautiful," thought the girl, in her heart, "or he would never have noticed me."

Then she recalled her wandering thoughts. The sun was shining full upon them, and all its light seemed to be concentrated in a superb diamond that he wore on his left hand. No matter where she looked, her eyes seemed to be drawn to that stone; the fire of it was dazzling. Then her eyes wandered over the well-knit figure. What a difference dress made. Earle, in such garments as these, would look like a nobleman. Her attention was suddenly attracted.

"You do not answer me," he was saying.

She looked up at him.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I was not really listening to you."

"I was telling you that I ought to have left the Castle three days ago, but I was determined that I would not leave until I had seen you. I do not know how I can tear myself away."

Again she blushed crimson. Could it be possible that he had stayed purposely to see her?

"I should rather think that you stayed to enjoy a little more of Lady Estelle's society," she said.

"Lady Estelle," he repeated. "You do not suppose that any one could find any pleasure in that perfect icicle."

"Icicle! I should never give her that name. She seemed to me, on the contrary, almost sentimental."

"My dear Miss Brace," he said, "it is simply impossible that we can be speaking of the same lady. I assure you that Lady Estelle Hereford is known everywhere as the coldest and proudest of women. She has had many admirers, but I do not think she ever loved any one."

The girl's eyes were now fixed on him in perplexity and wonder.

"Never in love!" she repeated. "Why, she gave me a long lecture about love, and advised me never to marry without it. When she spoke of it her face quite changed, her eyes lost their indolent expression and filled with light. I thought she was the most romantic and sentimental lady I had ever met."

"I can only say that I believe it to be the first romantic idea of her life. She is cold, reserved, high-bred, and graceful, I admit; but as for sentiment, she has none of it."

"We have evidently seen her from different points of view," said Doris. "I wonder which is the correct one."

"I dislike contradicting a lady, but must state that I am likely to know her better than you. I have known her many years, and you have only met her once."

"Still we differ considerably," said Doris.

"And you think it possible that I should remain for her sake? Of all the people in the world she interests me the least."

"She interests me most deeply. I thought of fire and ice, sun and snow, and all kinds of strange contradictions while I talked to her."

"It is for you I remained—never mind Lady Estelle. We will not waste the sunny hours of this lovely morning talking about her. You have not told me yet if you prefer this country admirer of yours to all the world; if you do, there remains for me nothing except to take up my hat and go. I know how useless it is even to attempt to win even one corner of a preoccupied heart."

"Why should you wish to win one corner of mine?" she asked, stealing from underneath her long lashes one sweet, subtle glance that was like fire to him.

"Why!" he replied, passionately; "because I long to win your whole heart and soul; your whole love and affection for myself. I cannot rest; I know no peace, no repose; I think of nothing but you! Why should I not win your heart if I can?"

She shrank back, trembling, blushing; the fire and passion of his words scared her.

"Your face haunts me; I see it wherever I gaze," he continued. "Your voice haunts me, I hear it in every sound. I would fain win you, if I can, for my own; but if you tell me that you love this

country admirer of yours—this man to whom a perverse fate has bound you—if you tell me that, I will go, and I will never tease you again."

Then she knew that she held the balance of her life in her own hands, and that the whole of her future rested with herself. Should she be true to Earle, say she loved him, and so lose the chance of winning this love from a lord, and resign herself to her quiet, dull, monotonous life? or should she cast him from her and betray him?

"One word—only one word," whispered Lord Vivianne, bending his evil, handsome face over her.

"You think such a question can be answered in a minute," she said. "It is impossible. I can only say this, that I liked him better than any one else one short month ago."

He grasped her hand and held it tightly clasped in his own.

"You say that—you admit that much! Oh, Doris, the rest shall follow. I will not leave Downsbury until I have won the rest."

Then his eyes fell upon the diamond ring, shining and scintillating in the sun. A sudden thought struck him: he held her white hand in his own, and looked at it as he held it up to the light.

"How fine and transparent," he said. "I can see every vein. Such a hand ought to be covered with jewels."

She was of the same opinion herself. Then he drew off the diamond ring that shone like flame on his own finger; he looked entreatingly at her.

"I wonder," he said, "if you will be angry? This was my mother's ring, and I prize it more than I do anything in the wide world. I am afraid. Promise me you will not be angry."

It was, to say the least of it, a great stretch of imagination. Lord Charles Vivianne would never have troubled himself to have worn his mother's ring; but even he, bold and adventurous as he was, thought some little preamble necessary before he offered her so valuable a gift.

"There is a strange, sad love-story connected with it," he said, "which I will tell you some day; but it is dear to me, because it was my mother's ring." Then he drew it from his finger. "I should like to see how it looks on that pretty white hand of yours," he said, laughingly; and, as he spoke, he drew the ring on her finger.

It shone and glanced like fire; the sunbeams seemed to concentrate themselves on it; and, certainly, the beautiful white hand looked the lovelier for the ring. He looked at it admiringly.

"You were born to wear jewels," he said. "You ought never to be without them."

She laughed with the faintest tinge of bitterness.

"I do not see from whom I am to get them," she said.

"As my wife you could get them, and everything that your heart could wish. Think of it, and compare a life of ease and luxury with your dull existence here. You will let me see you again? I have so much to say to you."

"Yes," she replied; "I will see you, if I can get away from home."

"You can always do that." Then he held the little hand even more tightly in his own. "I am half afraid," he said, quietly; "but I wish that you would allow me to offer you this ring."

She looked at him suddenly, and with a burning flush on her face.

"To me?" she said, hesitatingly.

"Yes, if you will only make me happy by accepting it as a little memento of the day on which we first met."

"But it is so costly—it is so very valuable."

"If it were not it would not be worth offering to you," he replied. "I should be so happy if you would wear it—it is the first time a jewel has given me such pleasure."

"How can I wear such a splendid ring?" she said. "Every one who sees it will wonder where it came from."

"You will be able to manage that," he replied; "you are so clever. I cannot doubt your skill. Say you will accept it, Doris?" She was quite silent for some minutes, then a low voice whispered to her: "I will hang jewels more costly than this on your beautiful neck, and round your white arms; you shall be crowned with diamonds, if you will. See how marvelously fair it makes that sweet hand of yours. Jewels crown a beautiful woman with a glory nothing else can give. You, above all others, ought to be so crowned, for there is no other woman so fair."

The flush died from her face. She had not quite made up her mind. There came before her a vision of her past lover, with his wild worship, his passionate love; of all the vows and promises she had made to him; of his trust and faith in her. If she took this lord's ring, and promised to meet him again, it meant forsaking Earle. Besides, he had spoken of making her his wife. Was he in earnest?

She rose hurriedly from her seat. He saw that her lips quivered and her hands trembled; she was agitated and confused.

"Give me time," she said. "You frighten me. I can hardly understand. I must go now; they will think that I am lost."

He rose with her, and stood by her side.

"You will keep the ring, Doris, for my sake, in memory of the time when I first saw you?"

"I will keep it," she replied, hastily. "Oh, Lord Vivianne, let me go; I am frightened—this is so different to being with Earle. Let me go."

"You will meet me again," he urged, "say on Friday—you will not refuse—at this same time and same place? I will lavish the luxury of the whole world on you, if you will only care for me."

But now that her ambition was satisfied, was realized, she was frightened at her own success, and hastened away.

CHAPTER XXV.
THE FALSE LIPS OF WOMAN.

Earle was not the only one who found Doris changed. She had hastened home from that interview almost wild with excitement. Could it be that the wildest dream of her life was realized at last; that this handsome lord had offered her every luxury in the world; it seemed too bright a vision to be real; she was obliged to look again at the diamond on her finger to convince herself of its truth.

Mark Brace and his wife, as well as Mattie, wondered when Doris reached home, where her animation and high spirits had gone. Mattie spoke, and she seemed hardly to hear her; her mother asked her some trifling question and she made no answer. She was like one in a dream. As a rule she was the delight and torment of Mark's life. As they sat together in the evening, she would puzzle him with questions—she would tease, irritate, charm, and annoy him. But on this night Doris said no word, and Mark fancied it was because Earle was away. He sat looking at her with great solemn eyes, wondering who could fathom the mysteries of a woman's heart. He had never thought Doris fond of Earle, yet there she was, wretched, miserable, and lonely, because he was away.

How little he guessed that in her mind Earle was already of the past. She had loved him as well as it was in her power to love any one, but that was not much; and now that the grand temptation of her life was before her all regard for Earle sank into insignificance. She was faint with wonder, and amazed that she, Doris Brace should have made such a conquest; her heart beat with delight, then sank with fear. Was he only trifling with her, this handsome lord? Her face flushed proudly.

"If I thought he was only trifling with me," she said to herself, "I should know how to treat him."

Then one look at the jewel on her finger reassured her.

"Gentlemen do not give jewels that cost hundreds of pounds unless they really love and intend marriage."

There was some assurance of success in the gleam of the diamond. She had been obliged to remove the ring lest her mother and Mattie might see it.

On the morning following Earle hastened to Brackenside. He was longing to see his lady-love again; she was so kind to him when they parted—she had been so unusually gentle that he had longed for more kindness. He was at Brackenside before the breakfast was finished. One look at the beautiful face of his love sufficed; she was dreamy, abstracted; she seemed hardly to notice his entrance. No light came in her eyes as she spoke to him; she did not make room for him by her side. When he went up to her and tried to kiss the face he loved so well, she drew back, not angrily, but carelessly.

"I never said you might kiss me every day, Earle," she said.

"I know, my darling, but I cannot help it. It has grown into a custom now."

"When anything becomes a custom it ceases to be a charm," she said, with unconscious philosophy.

Earle looked down sadly at her.

"Doris," he said, "you are so sadly changed to me, I cannot understand it, dear. You say that I have not displeased you?"

"No," she said, carelessly, "I am not in the least displeased."

"Then, what have I done, my darling? I love you too madly to suffer anything to come between us. If I could win your love by dying for it, I would cheerfully die. Tell me what I can do to make you

as you were once to me?"

She raised her head impatiently.

"You are always talking nonsense, Earle. I cannot regulate my words and thoughts as I would regulate a clock. I cannot undertake to be always the same."

"You are charming, but your variety used to be one of your greatest charms. I do not complain of that—the summer sky changes; it goes from crimson to blue, and then white—you changed from grave to gay, and in each mood you seemed to me most charming. It is not that now."

"What is it, then?" she asked.

He looked so wistfully at her that, if she had had any heart, it must have been touched.

"I can hardly tell—I dare not even to myself say what your manner seems to me. Doris, you cannot surely repent of having promised to marry me—it cannot be that?"

His honest eyes grew so dim with pain—his face grew so white—she would sooner, heartless coquette as she was, have stabbed him to the heart than have answered "Yes." She turned away from him.

"I suppose you cannot help talking nonsense, Earle? I am not sentimental myself, and so much of it wearies me. When you can talk about anything else I shall be glad."

As soon as she could she quitted the room, and Earle was at a loss to know what to do or say. He tried to comfort himself.

"She is so beautiful, my darling," he said, tenderly, "and beauty is always capricious; it is but the caprice of a young girl. I must be patient." He tried to school himself to patience, but he felt unutterably sad. There was something in her manner he could not understand. "I know what lovers' quarrels are," he thought to himself—"they are the renewal of love; but I cannot understand this dark, cold shadow which comes between us, and seems to hide from me the beauty and light of her face."

He went out and tried to interest himself in his work, thinking to himself that her mood would soon change, and then the sun would shine for him again. But he found work impossible; he could think of nothing else but the loved one's face with the shadow on it.

He went through the meadows, and stood leaning over the gate. When Mattie saw him she watched him for some minutes in silence, her sweet, homely face full of wistful anxiety, her eyes full of tenderest love. To her simple mind he was as far above her as the angels were; but she loved him as she never loved any one else. She had feared greatly for him, and it had been some relief to her to find that Doris had really promised to marry him and intended to keep her word. It was the first time since she had heard the news of the engagement that she had seen that look of doubt, almost despair, on his face, and it troubled her greatly.

"What can have happened?" she said to herself; then, with a sudden sense of foreboding, it seemed to her what she had always dreaded had come at last.

Involuntarily the girl clasped her hands: "God save Earle!" she said; then she went up to him.

She spoke twice to him before he heard her; then she started in alarm as the white face, with its expression of bitter sorrow, was turned to her.

"Earle, what has happened?"

"Nothing," he replied. Then the sweet, mild, sympathizing face reproached him with kindness. "Nothing has happened, Mattie," he said, "but I am not happy; I am afraid that I have grieved Doris."

"What have you done to her?" she asked, briefly.

"That is what I want to find out and cannot," he replied. "Tell me, Mattie, have you noticed a change in her?"

"Yes," replied the young girl, gravely, "I have, Earle, ever since the day she went to the Castle. I wish she had never seen it. We were very happy until then."

"Yes, we were happy," he replied sadly. "What has changed her, Mattie? Tell me truthfully; never mind about giving me pain."

"I think she saw and envied all the magnificence that was there," said Mattie; "our simple home and homely ways have been disagreeable to her ever since."

"Will it pass away?" he asked, anxiously. "We must have patience with her, Mattie. Who can wonder at it? She is so young and so lovely, it seems only natural that she should care most for what is bright and beautiful. Downsbury Castle seemed like fairyland to her. No wonder that after it we all seem a little tame and dull."

"You can never be tame, Earle," said the girl, indignantly. "How can you say such a thing? Tame indeed! I should like to say what I think on the matter."

Her warm sympathy somewhat reassured him.

He looked up at her.

"You do not think, then, that it is anything serious, Mattie? I am so glad. One so gay and bright as Doris naturally tires of a quiet home."

"I do not think home so very quiet. You are always there, and she ought to find her happiness in your society."

"I am sure she does," he replied, hastily, unable to cast even the shadow of blame on her; "but you see, dear, I love her so that a shadow on her fair face drives me mad."

"You worship her, Earle," said Mattie, gravely; "and in this weary world man or woman who commits that sin of idolatry is certain to suffer for it."

"What can I do to win her smiles again?" asked the young lover.

"I do not know, Earle. I wish your happiness did not depend so entirely on her smiles."

"It is too late to remedy that," replied Earle.

As he spoke he saw in the distance the glimmer of her dress between the trees.

"There she is!" he cried. "I will go to her."

His face flushed crimson, and Mattie watched him sadly as he hastened after her sister.

"How he loves her!" she thought. "Poor Earle! he has no life apart from her; it is almost pitiful to see him."

Doris, believing herself unseen, had gone out hoping to avoid Earle. She liked him too well to pain him, yet every moment she was drawing nearer to the precipice.

"Anything," she said to herself, "is better than the sight of that pained face."

She resolved to go down to the Thorpe Meadow and while away an hour or two there. Earle would not dream of looking there for her; so she went, taking with her one of her favorite French novels. She found a seat in a shady nook. She opened the novel, but she could not read; the romance of her own life was more exciting to her now than any other—that wild romance of which the outward symbol was a diamond ring. She took the ring from her purse and placed it on her finger. How it shone, and gleamed, and glittered! So may the eye of the serpent have glittered in the garden of Paradise. She held out her hand the better to admire it. Her lover's words came back to her: "I will hang jewels on your beautiful neck and round your white arms."

Her heart beat fast. That would indeed be a triumph. What was anything else in the wide world compared to this? Besides, the young lord sincerely loved her. Had he not so declared, with passion and truth burning in his eyes? What was Earle's love—the love of a poor poet—to the passionate rapture of a rich young lord, who was willing to marry her, and could crown her with the rarest gems, give her every luxury in life?

As the thought crossed her mind Earle drew near, at first unobserved by her. His eye at once alighted upon the ring.

"That is a beautiful ring, Doris," he said, "and a costly one. Who gave it to you?" He took her hand and held it tightly in his own, while his face grew deadly pale. "I know but little of jewels," he continued, "but I can tell that this is costly and valuable. Who gave it to you?"

Her face flushed deepest crimson, her eyes flashed fire.

"That is no business of yours," she replied.

But, rather to her surprise, Earle showed no fear of her anger, no irresolution.

"I have a right to ask," he said. "You are my promised wife. Who gave you the jewel you wear on your hand?"

"I refuse to answer you," she replied.

"Doris," he said, and there was more of contempt than of pain in his voice. "Doris, has that anything to do with your coldness to me?"

For one moment she looked at him steadily, then she seemed to remember that defiance and denial would be useless—would only cause inquiries. Her only way out of the difficulty lay in untruth. She smiled sweetly in his face.

"My jealous Earle," she said; "who do you think gave me this ring?"

"I cannot tell," he replied, gravely.

"Will you promise, if I tell you, never to mention it?"

"I promise faithfully, Doris."

"Lady Estelle Hereford gave it to me on the day I went to Downsbury Castle. Are you jealous of her, Earle?"

"No, my darling. I hope the time may come when I shall bring you even brighter jewels than this,"

and he kissed the fair, false hand as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXVI.
THE LAST HAPPY DAY OF HIS LIFE.

"Earle," said Doris, suddenly, "I hope you will keep your promise, and not mention to any person a word about this ring."

"I have never broken my word in my life," said Earle, proudly.

"Because, when Lady Estelle gave it to me, she wished me not to mention it; they would be so jealous at home. Mattie would want one like it."

Earle was indignant at this insinuation.

"You do not understand Mattie if you think that," he said. "She would be pleased in your pleasure, not envious." Doris laughed.

"You think all women are angels, Earle. I hope you may never find out your mistake."

"I hope not," he said. "Of course I will respect your wishes, and keep the most perfect silence. At the same time, I think you are rather imprudent; and any one, seeing such a valuable ring in your possession, would naturally wonder how you came by it."

"They may wonder," she said indifferently. "*I* know, and that is quite sufficient. Is it really valuable, Earle? What do you think it is worth?"

"I am no judge of such things," he said. "It is a large stone, full of fire, and without a flaw. I should imagine it to be worth two or three hundred pounds; it may be worth more, certainly not less."

Three hundred pounds. Why, the bare idea of it was fabulous—to have a lover who could give you such jewels; it was like a fairy tale, and he would hang chains of such round her neck and arms.

Earle wondered why she so suddenly grew abstracted and quiet—it was so unlike Doris, this dreamy repose. It had wanted but little to cause her to make up her mind as to her decision—such wealth as that was not to be despised. Earle suddenly grew quite insignificant in her eyes. When would he be able to give her a diamond worth three hundred pounds? Still, she would not let him even guess what were her thoughts; to-morrow she had to see her young lord lover—she would keep good friends with Earle till then; so she threw aside the many thoughts and ideas which haunted her, and turning to him, was once more her own charming self.

Earle was enchanted; she had but to smile at him, to give him a look of kindness, to evince the least sign of affection for him, and all was well; she was so completely mistress of his heart, soul, and mind, that she could do with him just as she would. He surrendered himself to the charm—he was more happy than words can tell; he said to himself that he had been mistaken, there was no coldness in her manner, no change; it had, after all, only been some little shadow of girlish reserve, some little variation of spirit; she was his own love—beautiful, tender, and true.

Seated by her, in the fair June sunshine, he told her all his hopes and his fears; he told her how he had fancied that her love was leaving him, that she was changing to him, that she had been caring less for him. Now he was delighted to find that she was all that was most kind, most amiable, and winning.

None, looking at the bright, happy face, could have guessed what was hidden underneath it—Earle least of all. Those eyes were full of heaven to him; he saw all truth, all honor, all nobility in the matchless features. Earle believed in her; drinking in the marvelous beauty of her face, listening to the sweet voice, he would have gone to death for her; it never entered his mind to doubt her.

So the summer hours passed, and Earle, completely happy, completely reassured, was in the seventh heaven of delight. They went home together. For long afterward did he dwell on the memory of that day, the last happy one of his life!

He remained at the farm until evening; he seemed unable to tear himself away. The moon was shining, and the stars were gleaming in the sky when he went. He asked Doris if she would walk with him just as far as the garden gate. She did not seem willing, but Mark Brace, who had noticed the wistful expression of the young lover's eyes, said:

"Go, Doris; the night is fine; going as far as the gate will not hurt you."

Unwillingly she rose to go. Another time she would have rebelled, but now the consciousness of the treachery she was meditating forbade that; she would do as they liked for the present.

Mattie held out her hand to Earle, with a grave, anxious look. If she could have saved him; if she could have done anything to help him! She seemed to have a foreboding that all was not well, that Doris was deceiving them.

"Good-night, Mattie," said Earle, in a low voice; "you see the sun is shining for me again."

"Heaven grant that it may always so shine!" said sincere Mattie.

Then she turned away from him abruptly. There were times when she could not bear those outward evidences of his love. She said to herself that Doris was quite unworthy of him—quite unworthy; but that if he had only cared for her, she would have made his life so bright for him.

Then the lovers went out together. Mattie, looking after them with a sigh, Mark Brace with a smile. Earle wishing that each moment of the starlight night could be lengthened into years, Doris silently wishing that there was no love in the world—nothing but diamonds.

Doris walked in silence to the garden gate. The picture was a beautiful one. The picturesque old farm-house lying in the soft moonlight, the moonbeams falling full and bright on the flowers, the fields, and the trees. The laburnums shining yellow and pale; the lilacs filling the air with sweet perfume; the starlight touching the golden head and face of the young girl until she looked beautiful and ethereal as an angel—lighting up the spiritual face of the young lover. Doris leaned against the gate, and directly over her head hung the flowers of the syringa tree. There was a deep, dreamy silence over the whole earth, as though the rest of heaven were lying over it. Earle was the first to speak.

"You look so beautiful, my darling," he said. "How am I to tear myself away?"

"Do not look at me," she replied, "then you will go easily enough."

"Do you want me to go?" he asked, bending a spray of syringa until it rested on her head. "Do you want me to go?"

No need to pain him yet. No need to wound with the point of a pin when she was preparing a sharp sword to stab him to the heart.

"Why should I want you to go?" Doris asked, with one of those sweet, subtle smiles which fire the hearts of men.

"I am so happy," he said, after a time, "here with you in the moonlight, my darling; it seems to me that earth and heaven have no higher bliss to give me. I wish you could see yourself, Doris. The moonlight just touches your hair, and makes it something like an aureole of glory round your head; it touches your face, and makes it like a lily leaf; it shines in your eyes, and they are brighter than the stars. Oh, my darling, all the words in the world could not tell how lovely you are!"

"There is something in having a poet for a lover after all," thought Doris.

"How am I to leave you? When I go away my heart clings to you; it is as though I were drawn by cords that I could not loosen; my eyes will not gaze in any other direction. Oh, Doris, if I could tell you how I love you, if but for once I could measure the height and depth of my own wild worship, if but for once I could tell you how dearly I love you, you would be compelled, in sheerest pity, to love me in return."

"Have I not said I love you Earle?" and her voice was sweet as the cooing ring-dove. "Whatever happens to either of us, be quite sure of one thing—whatever love I have to give is given to you."

He bent down and kissed her sweet, false lips, such unutterable happiness shining in his eyes that the great pity was he did not die there and then.

She lifted her face to his.

"It is not in me," she said, "to love as some people do; but, let what may happen, I do love you, and you have all my love."

He drew the lovely face to his own.

"I should like to take you in my arms and run away with you," he said; "to take you to some lonely island or solitary desert, where no one could ever try to take you from me."

She knew perfectly well that on the morrow she had to meet her lordly lover, yet, when Earle clasped her in his arms, and drew her head on his breast, she mutely accepted his caresses.

What she said was true—she might do what she would, she might love the prestige of Lord Vivianne's rank, she might love his wealth, and what it could bring her, but the whole affection of her heart—poor, mean, and false as it was—had been given to Earle.

As she listened to his low-whispered words, she thought to herself that it was most likely for the last time. The story of woman's falseness is never pleasant to write. When Earle thought that he had detained her as long as Mark Brace would wish her to be out, he said:

"I must go, Doris; it would be just as difficult to leave you in an hour's time as now. Good-bye, my love, good-bye."

Then she raised her golden head and fair, flower-like face. She clasped her soft, white arms around his neck, and said:

"Good-bye, Earle."

It was the first voluntary caress that she had ever offered him, and his heart beat with a perfect rapture of happiness.

She turned away; false, fickle, coquette as she was, the sight of his face touched her with no ordinary pain. How he trusted, how he loved her! Heaven help him! how his whole heart, soul, and life seemed wrapped up in her.

Doris went back into the sitting-room, where honest Mark Brace sat waiting for her, and Earle walked home. He hardly knew how he reached there, the glamour of his love was strong upon him, the moonlight was so fair, the whole earth so fragrant and so beautiful; he crushed the sweet blossoms under his feet as he walked along; he had gathered the spray of syringa, and he held it to his lips; shining among the stars he saw the fair face of his love, he heard her voice in the sweet whisper of the wind; he stood bare-headed under the night sky, while he said to himself, "Heaven bless her!" And when he entered his mother's house, the look of rest on his face, the light in his eyes struck her so, that she said:

"You look very well to-night, my son. Is it poetry or love?"

He laughed gayly.

"As though you could separate the two, mother. My love is all poetry, my poetry all love."

She laid her hand on the fair clustering brow.

"I am afraid that your love is your religion, too," she said.

"I am so happy, mother! What have I done that I should win the love of that pure, young heart? Do not say that I have no religion. I feel that I could kneel all night and thank Heaven for the treasure it has sent me. I shall be a thousand times better man for my love."

But Mrs. Moray was not to be convinced. She did not see Doris with the eyes of her son; she saw the girl's faults more plainly than her virtues—her coquetry, her vanity, her pride; whereas Earle saw only that she was exceedingly beautiful, and that he loved her better than he loved his life.

"It is a terrible thing," said Mrs. Moray, slowly, "for a man to give his whole heart into the hands of a creature as you have done, Earle. Why, what would become of you if you were to lose Doris, or anything happen to interfere with your love to separate you?"

She was startled at the expression of his face; he turned to her quickly.

"Do not say anything of that kind to me, mother; the bare idea of it drives me mad! What would the reality do?"

"It is not right, Earle, to love any one after such a fashion."

"But I cannot help it, mother," he replied, with a smile, "and that is where the whole of my excuse lies."

CHAPTER XXVII.
HOW SHE WAS TEMPTED.

The morrow came, but there was no hesitation on the part of Doris. Perhaps Lord Vivianne could not have done a better thing for himself than giving her that diamond ring; the light of it dazzled her; it reminded her, perpetually, of what might be hers; she might have felt some little remorse or sorrow but for that; when she looked at it she forgot everything except that she could have just as many as she liked of them.

It was in the morning when she went out to meet him; she had, adroitly, sent Earle to Quainton, under the pretext that she wanted some silk and wool; no one else would interfere with her. Mrs. Brace never attempted the least interference in her actions, so that she was perfectly safe. The loveliness of her face was not dimmed by one trace of sorrow or regret, yet she had quite decided upon betraying Earle, and leaving him to break his heart, or anything else that despair might urge him to do.

To have seen her walking through the sunlit fields and lanes, no one would have thought that she calmly and coolly contemplated the most cruel treachery of which woman could be guilty.

Across the long green grass fell the shadow of her lordly lover. He was standing by the stile, and on one side lay the dark woods, on the other rose the spire of the old church at Quainton. The whole scene was so fair and tranquil, it seemed almost wonderful that treachery and sin should exist. Doris trembled when Lord Vivianne came hastily to meet her.

"I began to think you would disappoint me," he said; "every minute that I have waited has seemed like an hour to me. What should I have done if you had not come?"

He took her hand as though it belonged to him.

"Shall we go to that shady spot in the woods?" he asked; "I can talk to you more easily there."

They walked on together, she listening to his honeyed compliments, his whispered words, hardly able to decide in her own mind, which was the braver wooer, the poet or the lord. Then they reached the pretty bank where the wild thyme grew. Lord Vivianne seated himself by her side in silence, then, after a few minutes, he said:

"I have so much to say to you I hardly know where to begin. I am not quite sure of my ground with you yet; I may offend you so seriously that you will, perhaps, order me from your presence, and never speak to me again."

She thought of the diamond ring.

"It is not very probable," she said.

"I am what is called a man of the world," continued Lord Vivianne. "I make no great pretensions to principle, but I can honestly say I have never deceived any one. I always start with a clear and straightforward understanding."

"I think it is the best, decidedly," she said. Then he took her hands in his, and with his eyes fixed on her face, he continued:

"I love you; I think you are the fairest and most lovely girl I have ever seen. I think also that, with your keen capacity for enjoyment, it is a sad thing that your life should be wasted here; I think that your beauty and your grace should make you one of the queens of the world—you ought indeed to be out in the world—it is cruel to keep you here, as it would be to bury a brilliant gem in a dark well." Then he paused, studying intently the expression on the downcast face. "I love you," he said. "I should like to be the one to show you the bright, brilliant world. If you honor me with your love, I can give you wealth in abundance, magnificence, such as would gladden the heart of a queen. I will make you the envy of every woman who sees you; you shall hang jewels at each ear that are worth a king's ransom; you shall have servants to wait upon you; you shall have carriages, horses, anything that your heart can desire. You shall not be able to form one wish which shall not be gratified. Doris—dear Doris—can you trust me? Will you go with me—will you be mine?"

The life he had pictured to her was exactly that for which she longed, and the words of her lover delighted her. Yet, as she reflected, there shone from out the glorious vista of the future the face of trusting Earle—the man she was about to betray.

"It will break Earle's heart," she said, slowly.

Lord Vivianne laughed aloud.

"Not at all," he said. "These country lovers do not die of broken hearts; he may feel very angry at first, but he will forget you in a few weeks, and fall in love, all over again, with some rosy-faced milkmaid."

"He will never forget me," said Doris; "and his despair will be terrible."

She shuddered a little as though some bleak, cold wind were blowing over her, then she said:

"If he knew I had betrayed him, and he found me, he would kill me."

Again Lord Vivianne laughed.

"Lovers do not kill their faithless loves in these prosaic days. An action of breach of promise, a good round sum by way of compensation, and all is over."

"You do not know Earle," she said, quietly. "I should be afraid of him if I deceived him."

"Never mind Earle!" said Lord Vivianne, impatiently; "I should say that it was a great impertinence of any one like Earle to think of winning such a beautiful prize as you. What has he to offer you?"

"His name and his fame," she replied, bitterly.

"What is a name?—and all copy-books of the goodly kind will tell you 'Fame is but a breath,'" he replied. "Never mind Earle, rely upon it that I can find some fair house either in sunny France or fair Italy where Earle will never disturb us. If you are really frightened at him, we will have no settled house, but we will roam over every fair land under the sun. Will you go, my darling, and leave this dull place?"

She was quite silent for some minutes. Perhaps the good and bad angels fought then for the weak, tempted soul; perhaps some dim idea of a heaven to be lost or won came to her; perhaps some vague idea of terrible wrong and deadly sin came to her and made her pause.

"Will you go, my darling?" he asked again, in a whisper.

She raised her eyes calmly to his face.

"Yes," she replied, "I will go."

He did not show his triumph in any extraordinary fashion; his dark face for one moment flushed burning red.

"You shall never repent it," he said, "you shall be happier than a queen."

He pressed her close to his breast, and imprinted upon her willing lips the most passionate of kisses.

"Dear Doris," he exclaimed, "you are mine—mine forever!"

For some moments they stood thus, his arm encircling her graceful waist. Then with an anxiety to complete the business in hand, he said:

"I leave the Castle to-morrow—I have already prolonged my visit to the utmost length, and I must go to-morrow. For your sake and mine, it will be better to avoid all scandal, all rumor. When I leave I shall go direct to London. Will you go to-night? Take a ticket for Liverpool, that will throw them all astray. When you reach Liverpool go to this hotel," and he handed her a card, "and I will join you there late to-morrow evening. The instant I reach London, I will take the express for Liverpool. Will you do that?"

"Yes; I do not see why I should not. I am a great hypocrite at times," she said, "and not particularly good; but I declare to you that I could not spend even a day more with Earle, knowing that I was intent upon deceiving him. Yes, I will go to-night."

"Good; that clears all difficulties. Then there is another thing; leave a letter behind you to say that you are tired of the dull life; that you can bear it no longer, and that fearing opposition, you have left home quietly, and have taken a situation as English teacher abroad. No one will suspect the truth of such a letter."

Gentle Mrs. Brace, honest Mark, loving Mattie—something like regret did seize her when she thought how earnestly they would read that letter, and how sincerely they would believe it.

"There is another thing," said this cold-blooded lord; "promise me that you will, at least until I join you, wear a thick veil. You have no idea what a sensation such a face as yours would make; you would easily be traced by it."

She smiled, well pleased with the compliment.

"Once away over the sea," he said, "and my proudest, keenest delight will be to show the whole world the beautiful prize I have won. Mind, the veil must be so thick that not one feature, of the face can be seen through it."

"I will remember," she said, with a smile.

Then he took from his pocket a purse well filled.

"I know you will not be angry," he said. "You cannot ask for money, or people will begin to wonder why you want it. You will take this."

A faint flush rose to her face.

"I must," she replied, "I have none of my own."

Then she rose; it was time to return to the house she was so soon to abandon.

He bent down to kiss her, and drew the beautiful face to his, just as Earle had done.

Thoughts of her treachery again disturbed her, and she shuddered as though with cold.

"You are tired, my darling," he said. "Go home and rest."

They parted under the trees. He went away, and as she walked slowly home, she said to herself:

"I have killed Earle!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.
A WOMAN RESOLVED.

Mattie Brace stood at the farm gate: she was looking impatiently up and down the road, and a sudden light flashed in her face as she caught sight of Doris. The beautiful face seemed to flash like light from beneath the gloom of green trees.

"Doris," cried Mattie, almost impatiently, "I have been looking everywhere for you. There is a whole roll of newspapers from London; they are directed to you, and I know the writing—it is Mr. Leslie's. I am sure they contain notices of your picture. Make haste—I am longing to see them."

Doris looked up with a shyness quite new to her.

"I am coming," she replied. "Where is Earle?"

She hesitated as she asked the question. There were no depths in her nature; she did not even understand regret—of remorse she had not the slightest conception; yet even she felt unwilling to look in the face of the man who loved her.

"Where is Earle?" she repeated.

"He has not returned from Quainton yet," replied Mattie; and the two girls entered the house together.

On the table of the little sitting-room lay a roll of newspapers, addressed to Miss Doris Brace. The beautiful lips curved with scorn as she read the name aloud.

"Doris Brace!" she said. "Fate must have been deriding me to give me such a name."

But Mattie made no reply; she had long since ceased to answer similar remarks.

Then Mrs. Brace, seeing the sitting-room door open, went in to look at what was going on. Doris looked up at her with a bright laugh.

"I am in a newspaper, mother," she said, "only imagine that!"

Mrs. Brace sighed, as she generally did in answer to Doris. The girl was far above her comprehension, and she owned it humbly with a sigh.

"What do they say, I wonder? Oh, there is a letter from Mr. Leslie!" She opened it hastily, then read aloud:

> "My Dear Miss Brace,—Need I tell you my picture is the great success of the season? All London is talking about it—the papers are filled with its praise. See how much I have to thank you for! There is even a greater honor than all this praise in store; the queen has signified her gracious desire to purchase my picture! My fortune is made; the face that made sunshine at Brackenside will now shine on the walls of a royal palace. No one admires it more than your sincere friend,
>
> "Gregory Leslie."

"There!" cried the girl, triumphantly, "the queen—even the queen is going to buy me!"

"Not you, child," said Mrs. Brace, rebukingly—"only your picture."

"It is all the same thing; the queen must have admired, or she would not have wished to purchase it."

"Gregory Leslie is a grand artist," said Mattie. "Surely some merit is due to him."

Doris laughed, as she always did at her sister's admonitions.

"If he had painted you, my dear," she said, laughingly, "I do not think the queen would have bought the picture."

Mattie made no reply, knowing well that in all probability it was true.

Then Doris opened the papers, and read the critiques one after another; they were all alike—one rapture of praise over the magnificent picture. "'Innocence' is the great picture of the day," said one. Another asked: "Where had Mr. Leslie found the ideally beautiful face so gloriously placed on canvas? Had he drawn it from the rich depths of glowing fancy, or had he seen a face like it?" Another paper told how the queen had purchased the picture, and foretold great things for the artist.

"It is *really* true," said Doris. "I shall be in a palace. Oh, Mattie! I am so sorry that no one will know it is a picture of me; they will admire my portrait, and no one will see me. I should like to go to the queen and say: 'That is my picture hanging on your palace wall.'"

"She would not speak to you," said Mrs. Brace, who took all things literally.

"Hundreds of beautiful faces are placed upon canvas every day," said Mattie; "and I do not suppose any one cares for the models they are painted from."

"I wish I were my own picture," sighed Doris. "I would a thousand times rather hang upon a palace wall than live here."

Then she suddenly remembered how uncertain it was, after all, whether she should be here much longer; in the excitement of reading so much in her own praise, she had almost forgotten Lord Vivianne. As she remembered him her face grew burning red.

"I am glad you have the grace to blush," said Mattie. "You are so vain, Doris, I should be afraid that your vanity would lead you astray."

"No matter where I go my picture will be safe," was the flippant reply.

And then the little council was broken up. Mrs. Brace went away to tell Mark of her fears. Mattie did not care to hear any more self-laudation, and Doris was left alone. Her face flushed, her pulse thrilled with gratified vanity; her heart seemed to expand with the keen, passionate sense of her own beauty.

"If every earthly gift had been offered to me," Doris thought, "I should have chosen beauty. Rank and wealth are desirable; but without a face to charm they would be worth little, and beauty can win them even if one be born without them. I shall win them yet, because men cannot look at me without caring for me."

And as she stood by the little rose-framed window there came to her a passionate longing that her beauty should be seen and known, that it should receive the homage and praise due to it. She, who was fair enough to win the admiration of a queen—she, on whose face royal eyes would dwell so often, and with such great delight!

"I wonder," she thought to herself, "if any of the royal princes will be likely to see that picture. One of them might admire it, and then, if he saw me, admire me."

There was no limit to her ambition, as there was none to her vanity. Had she been asked to share a throne, she would have consented as to a right. Vision after vision of dazzling delight came to her as she stood in the humble sitting-room that was the great delight of Mrs. Brace's heart; life flushed and thrilled in every vein. Doris held out her hands with a yearning cry for that which seemed so near, yet so far from her; the thousand vague possibilities of life rose before her. What could she not win with her beauty—what could not her beauty do for her.

Then Mrs. Brace came in again on business cares intent, holding several pieces of calico in her hands.

"Doris," she said, "I have been thinking that as you will perhaps soon be married to Earle, I may as well order a piece of gray calico for you when I order one for ourselves."

Down went the brilliant vision! The queen who admired her face, the palace where her picture would hang, the glorious prospect, the dream that had no name, the sweet, wild fancies that had filled every nerve—they faded before those prosaic words like snow in the sun!

"Marriage and gray calico! gray calico and Earle!" She turned with a quick, impatient gesture, almost fierce in its anger.

"Oh, mother! you do say such absurd things," she said; "you annoy me."

"Why, my dear? What have I said? You will want gray calico. You cannot be married from a respectable home like this, and not take a store of house linen with you."

"House linen!" repeated Doris. "You are not talking to Mattie, mother."

"I am not, indeed; if I were, I should at least receive a sensible answer. You are above my understanding. If you think that because a gentleman painted your portrait, and people admire it, you will never need to be sensible again, you make a great mistake."

Doris made no reply; a great flame of impatience seemed to burn her heart. How could she bear it, this prosaic, commonplace life? Gray calico and marriage all mingled in one idea! Kindly Mrs. Brace mistook her silence, and really thought she was making an impression on her.

"We have had but this one chance of giving the order; if it is not done now, it cannot be done until next year. Mrs. Moray is such a respectable woman herself that I should not like——"

Doris held up her hands with a passionate cry.

"That will do, mother! Order what you like, do as you like, but do not talk to me; I will not hear another word."

"You will grow more sensible as you grow older," said Mrs. Brace, composedly, as she went away with the calico in her hand, leaving Doris once more alone.

"How have I borne it all this time?" she asked herself, with a flush of anger on her fair face. "Yet, why should I be angry, and in what differ from them? Why should I be vexed or angry? Mattie would have talked for an hour—would have given a sensible answer, while I feel as though I had been insulted. They are my own mother and sister—why am I so different from them? Why does a bird of paradise differ from a homely linnet? Why does a carnation differ from a sun-flower? I cannot tell."

She could not tell. It was not given to her to know that all the characteristics of race were strong within her. But that little scene decided her; there had been some faint doubt in her mind, some little leaning toward Earle, and his great wealth of poetry and love—some lingering regret as to whether she was not forsaking the certain humble paths of peace and virtue for a brilliant but uncertain career.

"If I do this," she had thought to herself, "I shall kill Earle," and the idea had filled her mind with strange pathos. But all that vanished under one unskillful touch. Writing her story, knowing her faults, I make no excuses for her; but if she had had more congenial surroundings the tragedy of her life might have been averted.

She stood by the open window and thought it all over. The rich scent of the roses came in and clung to her dress and her hair; the blue sky had no cloud; the birds sang sweetly and clearly in the far distance; she heard the lowing of the cattle and the voices of the laborers.

Then her whole heart turned in disgust from her quiet home; it had no charm for her; she wanted none of it—she wanted life, warmth, glitter, perfume, jewels, the praise of men, the envy of women; she wanted to feel her own power, and to be followed by homage. What was her bright loveliness for if not for this? Stay here, where all the people were persecuting her about marrying Earle, having a respectable home, and buying gray calico! No, not for such a commonplace life. The beauty of hill and sky, and quaint meadow and shady lane, of blooming flowers and green

trees, was not for her; it was dull, tame and uninteresting.

The greatest queen in all the wide world had admired her face. Was she to remain hidden in this humble, lowly house, where no one saw her but Earle and the few men whom business brought to the farm? It was not to be imagined. She raised her beautiful head with a clear, defiant gaze.

"I do not care," she said to herself, "whether it is right or wrong; I do not care what the price or penalty may be, I will go and take my share of what men and women call *life*."

And from that resolution, taken on a calm, bright summer day, under the golden light of heaven, with the song of the birds in her ears, she never once swerved or departed, let it cost her what it might.

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE FLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT.

"It will be a fine moonlight night," said honest Mark Brace. "If this weather lasts, Patty, we shall have a good balance in the bank by the end of the year."

"Thank Heaven!" said his wife, "a little money is a comfortable thing, Mark; there is always a blessing on honest industry."

It was nearly nine o'clock; a late hour for Mark and his simple industrious habits; but after supper he had taken his pipe and found the conversation of his wife and daughter very delightful. Doris was not with them; she had letters to write to an old schoolfellow; she said she wanted to attend to them that very evening.

Insensibly, the absence of Doris was something of a relief to the honest farmer and his wife. When Doris was present, she kept them in a continual turmoil. They honestly believed themselves bound to correct her, to admonish her, to check her wild flow of words, the careless and often irreligious speech, and she never brooked the correction; so that most evenings in the old homestead were of a stormy nature. It was something of a relief, therefore, to have his homely wife on one side, and his daughter on the other. Honest Mark could indulge in that which his soul loved best; a few homely jests and solemn assurances of his own prosperity, while the bright, beautiful girl who puzzled him, was beyond the reach of his understanding, was busied in her own affairs.

"It is after nine," said Mark, "and I am tired. How was it that Earle did not return?"

"He knew that he could not see Doris," said Mattie, with a smile that was half a sigh.

Mark laughed when he was at a safe distance from her. There was nothing that Mark enjoyed more than what he called Doris' airs and graces.

"She keeps him in order," he said, slyly. "Mattie, if ever you think of being married, take a lesson from your sister, my dear."

"I hope she will not," said Mrs. Brace. "The true secret of being a good wife, Mattie, is to love your husband better than yourself; and though Doris is beautiful as a day-star, she will never do that."

Then Mark looked out into the quiet, white moonlight, and said:

"I shall begin to work in the Thorpe Meadows to-morrow, I hope the birds will wake me when the sun rises." And as he passed Doris' room he saw the light underneath the door. "Good-night," he said; "do not sit up late, writing, or you will spoil your eyes, and then Earle will grumble at me."

"I shall not be late," said Doris.

And Mark Brace, without a thought of the tragedy looming, went on.

Mrs. Brace saw the light, but she had not yet forgotten the cruel reception of her advice about the gray calico.

"Good-night, Doris," she said, without entering.

But Mattie went into the room. The excuse had been a perfectly true one. Doris sat writing still, with a tired look on her face, her round, white arms on the table, and two letters by her side.

"I have finished," she said, looking at Mattie.

"What can I do for you, Doris—shall I stay and talk to you?"

"No," she interrupted; "I am tired, and I would rather be alone."

"Good-night," said Mattie, not particularly liking the rebuff.

Then Doris went to her, and clasped her arms round her sister's neck.

"Good-night, little Mattie—good, simple Mattie. Kiss me."

The brown eyes were raised slowly to her face.

"You have never asked me to kiss you before, Doris."

"Have I not? Perhaps I never may ask you again. Perhaps if I asked you for a kiss this time next year, you would refuse to give it to me."

"No, I should never do that, Doris."

And the two faces—one so brilliantly beautiful, the other so good in its intelligent kindness—touched each other.

Long afterward Mattie remembered that the warm arms had seemed to tighten their clasp round her neck; then Doris drew away, with a little mocking laugh.

"What a sentimental scene!" she said; "the world must be coming to an end."

Mattie wondered a little at her sister's manner, then remembered that she never ought to be surprised, let Doris do what she might.

"Good-night," she repeated as she quitted the room, so little dreaming of all that would pass before she saw that face again.

Then Doris re-read her letters.

"Kindness in this case would only be cruelty," she said to herself. "Better for Earle to know at once. I should prefer sudden death to lingering torture." The beautiful lips curved in a smile that had in it much of pity. "Poor Earle!" she murmured, as she placed the letter written to him on the table. It ran as follows:

> "Dear Earle,—I have thought it all over—my promise to marry you, and your great wish that I should become your wife. I have thought it all over, and feel convinced that it will not do—we should not be happy. What I want, in order to be happy, you cannot give me. You will have to work hard for money, then you will have but little of it. We are better apart. I love you, and it will be a sorrow to leave you; but it is all for the best. I have gone away where it will be useless to follow me. I am going abroad as governess to some little children, and that will give me a chance to see the world I am longing to behold.
>
> "You will try to forget me, will you not, Earle? Is it any use suggesting to you that Mattie would be a far more sensible wife for you than I could ever make? Do not try to find me; I am going abroad under another name, and it would not please me to see you. I say good-bye to you with sorrow. As far as I can love any one, I love you. *Doris.*"

It was a cold, heartless, decided letter; but it was twenty times better, she thought, in its decisive cruelty, than if she had lingered over soft farewell phrases. There was a second letter, even more cruel and more curt. It was addressed "To Father, Mother, and Mattie," and ran thus:

> "I write to you all together as I have not time for three separate letters. You will be surprised in the morning not to see me. I have borne this kind of life as long as it was possible for me to do so, and now I am going away. I hope you will not make any effort to find me; I do not want to return to Brackenside—I do not want to marry Earle. I am going to teach some little children; and though it may not be quite the life I should like, it will be better than this."

It was not a kind letter. She placed them both together and pinned them to the cushion of the toilet-table.

"Mattie will see them the first thing in the morning," she said, "and ah, me, what a sensation they will make!"

Then she looked at her little watch; it was but just ten; she had to go to the railway station at Quainton, and catch the mail train for Liverpool—it would pass there at midnight. She had to walk some distance through the fields and on the high-road.

"I am sorry the moon shines so clearly, it will be light as day."

The moon had looked down on many cruel deeds, perhaps on none more cruel than the flight of this young girl from the roof that had so long sheltered her, the home that had been hers. Her path lay over a broken heart, and as she set her fair feet on it no remorse or regret came to her as the crimson life-blood flowed.

When she had crossed the meadows that led from the farm, she stood still and looked back at the pretty homestead; the moonbeams glistened in the windows, the great roses looked silvery, the ivy and jasmine clung to the walls, the flowers lay sleeping in the moonlight; there was the garden where she had spent the long, sunny days with Earle, there was the path which lead to the woods, the spreading tree underneath whose shades Earle had told of his great love. She looked at it all with a smile on her lips; no thought of regret in her heart.

"It is a dull, dreary place," she said to herself; "I never wish to see it again." Then she added: "I have killed Earle."

Good-bye, sweet, soft moonlight; good-bye, white-robed purity, girlish innocence—all left behind with the sleeping roses and the silent trees!

She turned away impatiently: perhaps the moonbeams had, after all, a language of their own that stirred some unknown depths in the vain, foolish heart.

Then she hastened down the high-road, thinking how fortunate it was that the country side was so deserted. The town of Quainton rose before her, the church, the market hall, and last of all the railway station. It wanted a quarter of an hour yet to midnight, and she remembered her lover's injunction that her face was not to be seen. She was careful enough never to raise the veil.

"I wonder," she thought to herself, "why he disliked the idea of my being seen?"

Then she laughed a little mocking laugh.

"It would be inconsistent," she said, "for the model of 'innocence' to be seen at a railway station at midnight."

There were few passengers for the mail train; she managed to get her ticket first-class for Liverpool without attracting much attention, or exciting any comment or surprise. During the few moments she stood there, she told the porter that she was going to meet her husband, whose ship had just reached the shore. Her face had flushed as she took out Lord Vivianne's purse and Lord Vivianne's money to pay for her ticket; then the mail train came thundering into the station: there was a minute or two of great confusion. She took her seat in a first-class carriage, then left Earle and Brackenside far behind.

"That is all done with," said Doris. "Those quiet pastoral days are ended, thank Heaven!"

No warning came to her of how she should return to the home she was in such haste to quit.

The journey was a long one. A flush of dawn reddened the sky, and the dew was shining, the birds beginning to sing, as she reached the great bustling city of Liverpool. She was half bewildered by the noise and confusion. A porter found a cab for her, and she gave the address of the hotel Lord Vivianne had given her. There was a long drive through the wilderness of streets, then she reached the hotel.

She felt, in spite of all her courage, some little timidity, when she found herself in those rooms alone. Her thoughts turned involuntarily to Earle—Earle, always tender and true, considerate of her comfort. What if this new lover, this rich young lord, should fail her, after all?

She looked in a large mirror. Ah, no! he would not fail her; though she had been traveling all night, the dainty coloring of her exquisite face was unfaded. The light flashed in her eyes, in her golden hair; the smooth satin skin was fair as ever. There was not the faintest trace of fatigue on that radiant beauty, and then she started from her reverie.

One of the servants brought her a card, she read on it the name of "Mr. Conyers," and she knew that Lord Vivianne was there.

CHAPTER XXX.
A THORN IN THE GARDEN OF ROSES.

"I do not think anything could have been more cleverly managed," said Lord Vivianne. "You have brought nothing with you?"

"No," she replied; and the thought rose in her mind, "I have left all I ought to value most behind;" but prudently enough refrained from speaking.

"I do not see how it can be possible to trace us," he continued, "even should any one try."

"Earle will try," she said, with a slight shudder. "He will look the world through, but he will find me in the end."

Her face grew slightly pale as she spoke, and Lord Vivianne drew near to her.

"You are not frightened at Earle, nor any one else, while you are with me, Dora?" He preferred this name to Doris, and the fanciful change pleased her greatly. "You need not be frightened, Dora," He continued. "You do not surely imagine that I am unable to take care of you?"

"I was not thinking of you, but of Earle," she said, simply. "I am always rather frightened when I think of him: he loved me so very much, and losing me will drive him mad."

An expression of impatience came over Lord Vivianne's face; he was passionately in love with the beautiful girl before him, but he had no intention to play the comforter in this the moment of his triumph.

"Say no more of Earle, Dora; if he annoys you, so much the worse for him. Now we will order breakfast, then take the ten o'clock express for London. I had even thought of crossing over to Calais to-day, if you are not too tired."

Her face brightened at the thought—Earle was already forgotten.

"That will be charming," she replied, all graver thoughts forgotten in the one great fact that she was going where she would be admired beyond all words.

Then, for the first time in her life, Doris sat down to a dainty and sumptuous breakfast. It was all novel to her, even this third-rate splendor of a Liverpool hotel. The noiseless, attentive servants—the respect and deference shown to them delighted her.

"After all," she thought to herself, "this is better than Brackenside."

Then Lord Vivianne turned to her with a smile.

"You are so sensible Dora," he said, "that I can talk to you quite at my ease; and that is a great treat after listening to the whims and caprices of the women of the fashionable world."

With artful sophistry he stated that for family reasons it would be inadvisable, if not really rash, to have a marriage ceremony—that at the present time it would utterly blight his prospects. When two loving hearts were joined by their own free consent, and vowed to live for each other, the union was just as binding, he argued, as though a clergyman had united them. To prevent recognition and gossip, it would be necessary for him to change his name; "and for the future," he added, "we shall travel and be known as Mr. and Mrs. Conyers."

This plan did not please Doris. It was not what she had anticipated.

"Being a farmer's daughter," she thought, "he thinks me unfit to associate with his titled friends. But, for all that, I shall show him that I am their equal. Yes, he shall change his mind. I shall so fascinate him that he will yet be glad to proclaim me his wife, the Lady Vivianne."

She now began to realize that she had made the first false steps in deceiving the trusting poet, Earle Moray, and in consenting to a secret departure from her humble home and loving parents. Yet the die was cast; ambition and a determination to accomplish her wishes forced her forward. She had great confidence, as we have seen, in the influence of her beauty. Therefore, after some half-hearted objections, which he adroitly overcame by his specious arguments, she consented to all his plans.

"Trust me, dear Dora," he said, delightedly, "and you shall have everything your heart can desire."

By this time breakfast was over, and it was time to leave the hotel, if they wished to catch the morning train for London. With no fuss or excitement, just as if he was paying for a cigar; Lord Vivianne settled his bill, gave a liberal fee to the waiter—a golden guinea—and half an hour later "Mr. and Mrs. Conyers" were in a first-class compartment, on the train for the great metropolis.

When they reached London, Lord Vivianne said, looking with a smile at his companion's plain dress:

"You cannot go to Paris in that fashion, Dora. You must have some suitable dresses. It will not be too late for Madame Delame's; you had better go there at once."

She desired nothing better. She held out her white hand to him with a charming gesture.

"You must advise me," she said; "I shall not know what to buy. This was the most extensive purchase of my life," and she pointed to a plain, dark silk dress which Mrs. Brace thought much too good for a farmer's daughter.

"I know what will suit your fair style of beauty," he said; "a rich costume of purple velvet."

Her eyes shone with delight—purple velvet! her ambition was realized. For a few moments she was speechless with joy. She forgot altogether, in that, the first realization of her dream, the price she had paid for it.

In the next hour Doris was standing, flushed and beautiful, in Madame Delame's room. If madame had any idea who her aristocratic customer was she made no sign. When he said that Mrs. Conyers was going abroad, and that she wanted to begin with an elegant traveling costume, the lady blandly acquiesced. Even Madame Delame, accustomed as she was to aristocratic beauty, marveled at the high-bred loveliness of the girl before her. Very young to be Mrs. Conyers—very young to be married.

She looked involuntarily at the small white hand; a gold ring shone there—was it a wedding-ring? Madame Delame knew the world pretty well, but she sighed as she gazed.

Her artistic talents were called into play; she had not often so lovely a patron to dress, nor *carte blanche* as to the number and price of the dresses. She took a positive pleasure in enhancing the girl's beauty, in finding rich, delicate lace for the white neck and rounded arms, in finding shining silks and rich velvets; and when Doris stood arrayed in marvelous costume, the graceful, slender figure shown to the greatest advantage by the dress—the dainty coloring of the face made more beautiful by contrast with the rich purple, then madame raised her hands in silent admiration, then trusted she should again have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Conyers.

Lord Vivianne said to Doris in a low voice:

"I think you have all that you require here; you can get more in Paris, when you have a maid."

Madame Delame said to herself, as they left the place, that no matter how long she lived, she should never forget the face of Mrs. Conyers.

Once more they were driving through London streets, and this time Doris was too happy to think of anything except her dresses. Lord Vivianne could not take his eyes off that beautiful face. He congratulated himself, over and over again on his wonderful good fortune.

"Who could have thought," he said to himself, "that so fair a flower blossomed in that obscure place."

And while he looked at her, it seemed to him, as it had done to Gregory Leslie, that there was something familiar in the face; that he had either seen that or one very like it before.

A few more days, and they were settled in one of the most luxurious mansions near the Tuileries. Then, indeed, was every wish of Doris' heart fulfilled. Well-trained servants waited upon her; the magnificent rooms were carpeted with velvet pile, the hangings were of the richest silks and lace; wherever she went large mirrors showed the beautiful figure from head to foot; she had a carriage and a pair of horses that were the admiration of all Paris; she had jewels without number, and more dresses than she could wear; she had a maid whose business it seemed to be to anticipate every wish. What more could she desire?

Lord Vivianne was kind, but he did not treat her with any great amount of deference. There was, however, one very good characteristic, as she thought it—he was unboundedly generous; if she expressed a wish he never hesitated about gratifying it; he never counted either trouble or expense.

Enhanced by the aid of dress, of perfume, by the skill of a Parisian maid, her beauty became dazzling. He was very proud of her; he liked to drive out with her, and see all the looks of admiration cast upon her; he liked to feel himself envied. She was, without exception, the fairest woman in Paris; and his pride in her was proportionately great.

The opera was then in full tide of success, and Doris never wearied of going there. It was not that she was particularly fond of music, but she enjoyed the triumph of her own bright presence; she was the observed of all observers. The sensation that her fair loveliness created was not to be surpassed.

One asked another, "Who is it?"

"The beautiful Englishwoman, Mrs. Conyers."

"Who is Mrs. Conyers?"

No one knew, and there lay the sting; there was the one thorn in her garden of roses; she drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs; she missed no *fete,* no opera; she was introduced to gentlemen, but never to ladies; she had pleasant little dinners, where some of the wittiest conversation took place, but no ladies came near; and she would fain have seen herself envied by women as well as admired by men; that was the one thing she desired above all others. But there was no one to envy her.

She asked Lord Vivianne one day why it was. He looked at her and laughed a most peculiar laugh.

"I am afraid, Dora, that you must learn to be content with the society of gentlemen."

She understood, then, it was one of the penalties of her sin.

Another thing annoyed her and made the gayeties of Paris unpleasing to her. She was walking with Lord Vivianne in the Champs Elysees, and suddenly she saw him start, and looking at him, his face flushed hotly.

"How unfortunate!" he muttered to himself.

Then she saw in the distance a little group of English people; a young gentleman, who was talking to an elderly lady, with a mild, sad face, and a tall, dark girl with proud, bright eyes. The gentleman saw Lord Vivianne first, but instead of stopping to speak his lordship turned quickly away, much to Doris' disappointment.

"I would not have missed seeing these people on any account," he said impatiently.

"Why did you not speak to them?" she asked wonderingly.

"How could I," he retorted, "while you were here?"

She made no reply, but the words struck her with a terrible pain.

She, the fairest woman in Paris, she whom Earle called his queen—it was not to be borne.

She went home, resolved if possible, to alter this state of things, and if she could not, to go away from Paris.

"We will go to Italy," she thought, "where he will not meet English people whom he knows."

Her desire was granted. Five days after that little scene she was with Lord Vivianne in one of the prettiest villas near Naples.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I COULD SOONER PLUNGE A DAGGER IN HIS HEART."

Such a beautiful morning! The golden sunbeams falling like blessings on the earth; the birds singing in a delirium of happiness. The sweet, warm air brooding over the fragrant flowers; all nature seemed awake, happy and smiling; the sky gave its fairest colors; earth yielded its richest fragrance.

Earle woke with the earliest singing of the birds. He smiled at his own impatience. He had not seen Doris since yesterday morning, and it seemed to him a whole week. She had asked him to go to Quainton under the pretext of fulfilling some little commission, and he had not caught one glimpse of her afterward. He was impatient to behold her. The glory of the morning sun, the rapturous music of the birds, was nothing to him, who longed for one look at her face—for one sound of her voice.

It was so early, he hardly dared venture on going to Brackenside, yet he could not rest away. He walked across the fields, little dreaming whose light footsteps had passed over there last. He lingered by the stiles and in the lanes until it struck eight, then he felt sure that Doris would be down-stairs.

At the farm all was activity; the men were at work; the rosy-faced dairy-maid was tripping along with her well-filled cans. He saw Mark Brace in the distance, deeply intent on driving a very comfortable pig where it sternly refused to go. The air was filled with pleasant sounds—the busy hum of work, the song of birds, the ripple of the stream, the murmur of the wind. Earle, the poet, heard it all. He laughed aloud when he saw Mark wiping his brow, and nodding at him as though he would fain say that all conversation would be useless until the struggle was ended. Comedy and tragedy always go hand in hand. Earle's hearty, genial laugh rang out clear on the morning air, and while he lived he never so laughed again.

"Thank Heaven!" he said to himself, "that I am not to be a farmer."

Then when he came through the garden, one of the prettiest scenes in the world met his eye.

There was a large porch before the house, cool, roomy, and shady, overhung with jasmine and roses. The morning was very warm, and the day gave promise of being intensely hot. A white table had been placed in the porch, and on it stood a quantity of ripe, delicious fruit. Mrs. Brace and Mattie were busily engaged in preparing it for preserving; their fingers were stained crimson with the juice. Both faces looked up as Earle entered, and smiled, while Earle thought he had never seen a prettier picture than the sunlit garden with its gay flowers. The shady porch, the luxurious fruit, the kindly faces, yet he looked anxiously around. Without Doris it was like the world without the sun. The bright, beautiful face was sure to be smiling at him from the flower-wreathed windows, or from beneath the trees.

"You are looking for your love, Earle," said Mrs. Brace, in her kindly way. "She is a lazy love this morning. She is not down yet."

"I am glad she is resting," said Earle, too loyal to allow even the faintest suspicion of idleness.

Mrs. Brace laughed.

"Doris leads a life very much like the lilies in the field," she said. "She neither toils nor spins. Mattie shall call her if you like."

"No," said Earle. "I will wait until she comes."

Then Mattie joined in the conversation.

"Doris is tired this morning, Earle," she said, quietly. "She sat up quite late last night writing letters."

"Letters!" repeated Earle, with a touch of pardonable jealousy. "To whom was she writing, Mattie?"

And the girl who loved him so deeply and so silently detected the pain in his voice. She looked up at him with a smile.

"To some schoolmates. She liked some of the girls very much."

Then Earle was quite at ease. He sat for some time watching the sunlit scene, and the busy fingers among the scarlet fruit. At last, while the bees hummed drowsily, they heard the clock strike nine; and the sound seemed to die away over the flowers.

"Nine," said Mrs. Brace, laughingly. "Mattie, you may be sure that Doris does not want to stain her fingers with the fruit. Go and tell her she need not touch it."

Earle felt deeply grateful toward the woman. It was all very well, but even he did not like the idea of those sweet white hands all crimsoned with ripe fruit.

"Tell her from me, Mattie," he added, "that the whole world will be dark and cold until I see her."

Mattie hastened away with a low laugh on her lips at the extravagant words. She was absent some little time, and kindly Mrs. Brace, seeing that Earle looked anxious, entertained him in her simple fashion with many little anecdotes about Doris, her beauty and wit as a child, her pretty, imperious fashion of managing Mark.

When Mattie returned she did not look anxious but surprised.

"See how we have all misjudged Doris," she said; "she must have been up and out for some time."

"Out!" repeated Earle.

"Yes; she is not in her room, nor in the house. The morning is so fine, and so sweet, it has very probably tempted her."

"But where can she have gone?" asked Earle. "I did not see her."

"No; you came from Lindenholm, while she is most probably gone to post the letters she wrote last night; gone to Quainton."

"Then I will go and meet her," said Earle. "But what a strange idea of her to go to Quainton alone. Why did she not wait for me?" He looked at Mattie as he spoke.

She answered him with a smile.

"When I can tell you what the birds are singing about," she said, "I shall be able to explain the caprices of Doris. Go and meet her; then you will understand."

Once more Earle hurried off in the sunshine, leaving mother and daughter busy with the fruit.

Mrs. Brace looked after him with a sigh.

"Poor Earle," she said. "Doris might be a little more civil to him. Although they are going to be married, Mattie, I do not think she cares for him a bit."

Mattie made no answer. She had long since arrived at the same conclusion. Whatever Doris might be going to marry Earle for, it certainly was not for love.

An hour passed. The sunshine grew warmer, the bees hummed, the butterflies with bright wings hovered round the roses; but neither Earle nor Doris returned.

Earle hurried on the road to Quainton. As he crossed the high-road he saw a man breaking stones. He went up to him and asked him if he had seen a young lady pass by.

"No; he had been to work there since five in the morning, but no one had passed by."

"Strange," thought Earle; "but he is old and half blind—most probably he did not see her; yet, with her bright, lovely face, and hair like threads of gold, how could he miss her?"

He walked on until he came to the toll-bar. Outside the pretty, white-gabled cottage a woman sat knitting in the sunshine. To her Earle went, with the same question—"Had she seen a young lady pass by?"

"No." She had been there since seven, knitting and keeping the gate. There had been gentlemen on horseback, farmers' wagons, but no young lady had passed by that gate since seven.

He did not understand it, and a vague uneasiness came over him. Still he walked on to Quainton. The post-office was in the principal street, and if she were there at all, he should be sure to see her. But at the post-office he found men busily repairing the outer wall—they had been at work some hours. From them he asked the same question—"Had they seen a young lady who had come to post letters?"

"No." They had been to work since six, but they had not seen any young lady.

"Then Mattie must have been mistaken," thought Earle; "my darling has not been near Quainton at all; perhaps she is waiting for me now at home."

He returned by the woods, and when he came to any favorite nook of hers, he stopped and cried aloud: "Doris."

The only answer that came to him was the rustling of the sweet western wind in the leaves, and the song of the birds.

The church clock struck eleven as he came in sight of Brackenside. He raised his eager eyes—Heaven help him!—expecting to see Doris in the garden or in the porch; but she was not there.

The sun was slanting over the flowers, the busy murmur of the farm grew louder. Mattie and Mrs. Brace still sat at their work, but of Doris there was no sign.

"My darling!" he said to himself, "where is she?"

"You have not met her, Earle?" said the loud, cheery voice of Mark Brace.

"No, she has not been to Quainton," he replied, "and I do not know where to look for her."

"Do not look anywhere," said Mark; "the longer you look for her the less likely you are to find her. Girls are so uncertain in their ways. Sit down and drink a glass of cider, she will come soon

enough then. It seems to me," continued the honest farmer, "that she is having a game of hide-and-seek with you."

Earle thought that very probable. He drank the foaming cider, but he would not sit down.

"I must find her," he said. "If it be her sweet will and pleasure that I should look for her, I will do so."

The farmer laughed, Mrs. Brace felt sorry for him, Mattie was indignant, and Earle went through the pretty garden and all the little nooks she loved best.

He never glanced under the shade of a spreading tree, or turned aside the dense green foliage, without expecting that the bright face would turn to him with a smile; he never looked where the ferns grew most thickly, and the tall grass waved in the wind, without expecting the laughing eyes to meet him, and the gay, clear voice to ring out in sunshiny laughter. No fear, no doubt, no suspicion came to him. It was a bright morning, fair and sweet enough in itself to inspire any desire of frolic, and she liked to tease him. She had hidden away—hidden among the flowers; but he would find her, and when he did find her, he would imprison the sweet, white hands in his—he would kiss the laughing lips and beautiful face—he would take a lover's revenge for the jest she had played him.

He looked until he was tired; he called aloud, over and over again, "Doris!" until it seemed to him that the birds took up the refrain and chanted "Doris!"

He gave it up; he could not find her; he must own himself conquered; and, tired with the sultry heat and his hard morning's work, he walked back to the farm.

It seemed to him, as he drew near, that there was a strange stillness over the place. He looked in vain for Mark's honest face. The porch, too, was empty, although the fruit still stood upon the table.

"Where are they all?" thought Earle. "What a strange morning this has been!"

He looked through the rose-wreathed window of the little sitting-room, and there he saw a group that filled his very heart with dismay. Mark, Mrs. Brace, and Mattie, all standing close together, and bending over an open letter.

He watched them in silence, fighting, with a terrible courage, with this first foreboding—a chill, stern presentiment of coming evil that, man as he was, robbed him of his strength and clutched at his heart with an iron hand.

Then he heard a sob from Mrs. Brace. He saw the farmer clinch his strong hand, while he cried out:

"In Heaven's name, who is to tell Earle? I cannot."

"You must!" said Mrs. Brace.

But Mark drew back pale and trembling.

"I tell you, wife," he said, "I love the boy so well that I could sooner take him out in the sunshine and plunge a dagger in his heart than tell him this."

A great calm seemed to come over Earle as he heard.

"My darling is dead," he said to himself, "she is dead, and they are afraid to tell me. I can die too!" and opening the door he went in.

At the sight of him Mark turned away, but Mattie went up to him with outstretched hands.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I AM A MAN, AND I WILL HAVE JUSTICE."

"I know," said Earle, gently. "I know; you are afraid to tell me; Doris is dead."

"It would be better, perhaps," said Mrs. Brace; "death is not always the greatest trouble that can happen to us."

Then Earle drew nearer, and a more terrible fear came over him. There were troubles worse than death! Surely not for him. Great drops stood on his brow, the veins in his hands swelled like huge cords, his lips grew white as the lips of the dead.

"Tell me what it is," cried he, in a hoarse voice. "You are killing me by inches. What is it?"

"She has gone away from us," said Mrs. Brace. "She has gone and left us."

He started back as though the words had stabbed his heart.

Mattie laid her hand on his arm. By the might of her own love she understood his fears.

"Not with any one else, Earle," she said. "Do listen to me, dear. She has not gone away with anyone else; but life here was dull for her; she did not like it; she has gone abroad to teach little children. It is not so dreadful, Earle, after all."

But he looked at her with vague, dull eyes.

"Not like the life!" he repeated. "But I am here! Dull! How could it be dull? I am here!"

"Tell him the truth, Mattie," said Mrs. Brace; "there is no use in deceiving him any more; he has been deceived long enough; tell him the truth."

He looked from one to the other with haggard eyes.

"Yes, tell me," he said; "tell me the worst."

"She did not love you, Earle," said Mattie, with a deep sob; "she has gone away because she did not want to marry you."

"I do not believe it!" he gasped. "I will not believe it! Oh, Heaven! How do you dare to slander her so? She did love me. Why should she pretend? She promised to be my wife; why should she if she did not love me?"

"My poor Earle," said Mattie; and in his hand she placed the letter. "I never thought there was anything wrong," she continued; "but when neither of you returned, I went back into her room to look for something, and found these letters. They were pinned to the toilet cushion. One is for us, one for you. Oh, Earle, if I could but bear your sorrow for you."

He turned away, without one word, and opened the letter. They could never tell how he had read it, how long he was in mastering its contents, what he thought of them, or how he bore the pain. He made no comment as he read, his white lips never moved, no murmur escaped him; but, after a time—it seemed to them endless time—he fell with his face to the ground, as a brave man falls when he receives a death-wound.

"It has killed him," said Mrs. Brace. "Oh! that false, wicked girl! He is dead, Mattie?"

But Mattie, quick as thought, had raised his head and held it in her arms.

"He is not dead, mother," she said. "Run for my father." For one short minute she was left with him alone, then she raised her troubled face, repeated her well-known prayer: "God save Earle! If I could but have borne it for him!" she thought.

Then the farmer came in, utterly useless and incompetent, as men are in the presence of great trouble which they cannot understand. He commenced his assistance by talking loudly against the perfidy of women; and when his daughter sensibly reminded him that that was no longer any use, he began to lament the folly of men in loving women so madly; reminded again that this was still more useless, Mark raised the helpless figure in his strong arms, tears running down his face. He laid Earle on a couch, and then looked helplessly at him.

"I do not know what is to be done for him," he said. "His mother will go distracted. Ah! wife, she would have done a kinder deed, that golden-haired lassie of ours, if she had killed him at once."

Then Mark Brace went away.

"The women must manage it," he said to himself. His tender heart was wrung by the sight of that anguish.

It was Mattie who ministered to him, until Earle opened his eyes, and looked at her with a glance that frightened her.

"I remember it all," he said, hoarsely; "she has gone away because she did not love me—did not want to marry me. Will you leave me alone, Mattie?"

"If you will promise me not to do anything to hurt yourself," she said.

"I shall not do that. Do you know why? She promised to marry me, and she shall do it. To find her I will search the wide world through. I will follow her, even to the valley of the shadow of death, but she shall be my wife as she has promised to be—I swear it to the just high God!"

"Hush, my dear; your great sorrow drives you mad. You will think differently after a time."

"I shall not," he replied; "she shall be my wife. Listen, Mattie; bend down to me while I whisper. She shall be my wife, or I will kill her!"

"Hush! You do not mean it. Your sorrow has made you mad."

"No, I am not mad, Mattie." He held both her hands tightly in his own. "I am not mad, but I will have my just rights, or my just revenge." His breath flamed hotly upon her face. "You will remember that, on the day she fled from me, I swore never to rest until I found her; never to rest until she was my wife, and if she refused to be that, I swore to murder her!"

Mattie shrank from him, trembling and frightened.

"No wonder," he said, "that men go mad; women make devils of them. No wonder they slay that which they love best; women madden them. What have I done?—oh, Heaven! what have I done

that I should suffer this? Listen to me before you go. I gave her my love—she has mocked it, laughed at it. I gave her my genius—she has blighted it, she has crushed it. I gave her my heart—it has been her toy and her plaything for a few short months, she has broken it with her white hands, she has danced over it with her light feet. I gave her my life, and she has destroyed it. I am a man, and I will have justice; she shall give back to me what I have given her, or I will kill her."

She saw that he was growing more wild with every word: his face flushed hotly, his lips burned like fire, his eyes were filled with flame. She was afraid of him; and yet in this, the darkest hour of his need, she could not leave him. Again and again from her lips, as she knelt there trying to console him, came the prayer of which she never tired—"God save Earle."

At last the wild raving—she could only think it raving—ceased; she saw his eyes darken and droop.

"He will sleep now," thought Mattie, "and sleep will save him."

She drew down the blinds, and shut out the bright sunshine; then, with a long, lingering look at the changed, haggard face, she left him.

Mrs. Brace saw her come from the little parlor, looking so white and wan that her mother's heart ached for her. She kissed the pale face.

"That wicked girl is not going to kill you as well as Earle," she said. "I will not have you distressed in this way."

"Oh, mother!" cried Mattie, "never mind my distress, think of Earle. Earle will go mad or die."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear. He was sure to feel very keenly. He loved Doris very much, but he will not die. It takes a great deal to kill. He has too much sense to go mad. He will get over it in time, and be just as fond of some one else."

Mattie had a truer insight into his nature than had Mrs. Brace.

They went in several times that day to look at him; he lay always in the same position, his face shaded with his hand and turned from the light, sleeping heavily they thought, but sleep and Earle were strangers. He lay there—only Heaven knew what he suffered during these hours of silence and solitude—going over and over again in his own mind all that he had ever said or done to Doris. She had been difficult to win; she had been coy, and he thought proud, sensitive; but he did really believe, from the depths of his heart, that she loved him. What motive could she have had in deceiving him if she had not really loved him? It would have been just as easy to have said so as not. There was no need for the deception. She could have rejected him just as easily as she accepted him.

He alternated between hope and despair. At one time he felt quite sure that she loved him, and that this was only a caprice, nothing more; she was determined not to be easily won. Then his mood changed, and he despaired. She had never loved him, and preferred leaving home and every one rather than marry him.

Still, in one thing, he was inflexible; let it be how it might, he was determined to find her. He would search the whole world through, but find her he would.

He was spared, in that hour of anguish, one trial; no pang of jealousy came to him; he felt certain of one thing, at least, if Doris did not love him, she loved no one else. If she would not marry him, she was not going to marry another. He knew quite well that here at Brackenside she had seen no one; thank Heaven at least for that.

Then a deep, heavy, dreamless sleep came over him. When he woke again it was night and honest Mark, with a face full of bewildered pain, was standing over him.

"Come, Earle," he said, "this will never do; you have been here all day without food. You must not give way after this fashion."

But the troubled eyes raised to his had no understanding in them.

"Remember," continued Mark, with his simple eloquence, "you are the only son of your mother, and she is a widow."

The words, in their simple pathos, struck Earle. He rose from his couch, and Mark saw, as he did so, that he shuddered and trembled like one seized with mortal cold.

"What do you wish me to do, Mark?" he said.

"Take something to eat, then go home to your mother. The world is not all ended because a golden-haired lassie has chosen to run away from you. Women are all very well," continued Mark, with an air of oracular wisdom, "but the man who trusted his whole heart in them would not be a wise man."

"Then I have been foolish," said Earle, "for I trusted my life and my love together."

He was standing up then, looking around him with vague, bewildered eyes.

"I am to go home, Mark?" he said at last.

And the farmer, believing that air and exercise would be best for him, said "Yes."

But Earle turned away with a sick shudder from the food that was offered to him.

"I could sooner eat ashes," he said.

And they forebore to press him.

"You will feel better to-morrow," said Mark. "A night's sleep makes a wonderful difference in our way of looking at matters."

But Mattie and her mother followed him with wistful eyes.

"She has spoiled his life," said Mrs. Brace.

"She has broken his heart," said Mattie.

Then they seemed to remember that all their sympathy was given to Earle, and they had not thought of being sorry for themselves.

Mattie had lost, as she believed, her sister, yet her thoughts were all for Earle.

The three sat in silence. It was Mark who broke it first:

"So, after all, it was to Earle and to us she was writing," he said, "and not to her school-fellows. I wish I had gone in the room and looked over her shoulder; I should have known, then, what she was doing."

"It would not have prevented it," said Mrs. Brace. "Doris has always had her own way, no matter who suffered by it; if she had not gone now, she would have gone another time."

Then Mark looked up with a puzzled face.

"She has seen no one, to my knowledge," he said, "since she left school. How did she manage, I wonder, to get this situation?"

The solution of that problem occupied the remainder of the evening. They could not imagine how she had contrived it. To them it was another proof of her indomitable will, proving that she would accomplish her ends, no matter what they were, or at what cost.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE IS NO TRUE LOVE EXCEPT THE LOVE OF A MOTHER.

Out once more under the pale light of the stars, repassing the same road that he had trodden a few hours since, so full of hope and love.

Earle walked like one dizzy from a great blow; the silent, pitiful stars, with their great golden eyes, shone down from the depths of the blue sky; the night wind seemed to hush, the birds were silent, the birds were asleep.

"Doris!" he cried, in a loud, passionate voice, "have you really gone from me, Doris?"

It seemed to him that the force of his love, the might of his affection, must call her back—she could not resist him. Surely the most pitiful cry that rose to the clear heavens that night was the cry of this broken heart.

"Doris!" sounded so distinctly that it startled the birds from their sleep; but no answer came to his call.

How he reached home he never knew. The stars were shining when he left Brackenside—they were shining when he reached Lindenholm; but he never knew how long he had been coming.

His mother, looking pale and tired, was waiting for him. She had felt impatient with him before, thinking that as he saw Doris every day, it was surely not needful to prolong his wooing until late at night, knowing that she must sit up for him; but one look at his face took away all thought of self. Wonder and alarm shone in her eyes as she gazed at his drawn, haggard features.

Then, as he had often done when he was a boy, he knelt at her feet and laid his head on her knee.

"Doris has gone away, mother," he said.

When she heard that she knew all. They sat talking, mother and son, far into the night; and then Mrs. Moray learned something of the passionate love of her son for the girl who had promised to be his wife. In that hour his whole heart was opened to her, and she listened in wondering fear. To love anything created, any human being after this wild fashion, seemed to her most wonderful and most sinful. It was a volcano, this poet's love. She laid her hand on the fair, bowed head of her son.

"It is the old story, Earle," she said, "of worshiping an idol, then finding it clay. You think your pain intolerable, impossible to bear; yet it is but the same as every man, and woman, too, who

sets his or her heart upon a creature has to endure. There is no true love in this world, Earle—none," she continued, with passionate bitterness, "except the love of a mother for her child."

"I cannot believe it, mother. You loved my father, did you not—and he loved you?"

"Yes," she replied, "we had a deep, true, loyal affection for each other, but, Earle, listen, my son. My first love was a young soldier, who died in India; and before he knew me, your father had been deceived just as you have been. Oh! believe me, turn where you will, on which side you may, there is no reliance to be placed on human love."

He bent his head with a moan that went to his mother's heart.

"Then why," he said, "have I youth, and strength, and life, if I may not have love? I cannot believe it, mother, I love my love, and I will have her—I will search this wide world over, but I will find her. She is mine—my promised wife; her hands have been in mine, I have kissed her lips, and I would rather kill her and slay myself than that any one else should take her from me."

And his mother, with all her severity, knew that it was useless to argue with him then, nor did there come to her for long an opportunity for saying any more. That night she knelt by her son's bedside, as she had done many hundreds of times when he was a child; she bathed his hot brow, she made him repeat, after her, the simple prayers he had said as a child; and when, at last, the deep yet troubled sleep fell over him, she prayed as Mattie did—"God save my Earle."

Hard, bitter thoughts arose in her mind against the vain girl whose falsity had destroyed him; but the hardest thought, the darkest imagination she had of her, did not equal the reality, which—Heaven be thanked!—she never lived to see.

On the next day, Earle was so ill that she would not allow him to get up. Whenever she went near him he was muttering to himself about Doris; and when he spoke aloud, it was always on one subject—going in search of her. It did not surprise Mrs. Moray, on the third day of his illness, to find him in a high fever, and to hear the doctor say, when he was sent for, that he had but little hope of his life. They, for the time, almost forgot Doris in their fear for Earle. As the long days and longer nights passed on, and the danger increased, Mrs. Moray aged terribly—the upright figure grew bent and stooping; the gray hair turned white; deep furrows came in the pale forehead—her whole, sole prayer was for the life of her son.

By her father's desire, Mattie went to Lindenholm, and remained there, so as to be a comfort to the widow. Mattie never forgot those days, the breathless suspense, the fear, the earnestness with which the unhappy mother would follow her about from room to room, saying always the same thing:

"Never mind talking to me, Mattie; pray for my son."

There came a day when the doctor said he feared no human means could save him—when the white-haired mother flung herself on her knees, crying loudly to Heaven to spare her son. She had preached, in her stern, cold way of resignation, to others, but in this, the hour of her terrible trial, she forgot all; she besieged Heaven, as it were, for her son. Even Mattie shrank from those wild words.

"Let me suffer, my God!" she cried; "send me torture and death, but spare him! let me suffer, let him live! I would give my body to be burned, my heart to be riven—but spare my only son!"

Faint with the fervor of her own words, she fell on her face, and there lay till Mattie touched her gently.

"He is asleep," she said; "Earle has fallen into a deep sleep, and the doctor says he has taken a turn for the better."

She could not thank God, for her rapture of gratitude found no words.

Who is it that says that "a prayer granted is sometimes a curse?"

The time was coming when those who loved him best said it was the greatest pity that he had not died in this illness; he would then have died with his mother's hope of heaven infolding him.

Earle grew better so slowly that the improvement could hardly be seen, and during the whole of his convalescence, his mind was busy upon the subject. He would go in search of Doris; nothing should keep him from that; neither remonstrance nor tears. The idea grew with his strength, until it became part of his life. He had some little money—money that he had saved for his marriage; he would spend it in searching for her.

One day, when the doctor came, he raised his wistful eyes to the kindly face.

"How soon shall I be able to travel?" he asked.

"Not for six weeks," was the reply, "and not even then unless you are careful."

Careful he resolved to be, and his mother wondered at his sudden submission and attention to the doctor's orders; but much that was wonderful had to happen before those six weeks were

ended.

There had been great anxiety at the farm; one reason of it was, that very soon after Doris went, the money came as usual, and Mark Brace was deeply puzzled to know what to do with it. He would have returned it, but he did not know where to return it to. He took long and wise counsel with his wife, but Mrs. Brace saw no way out of the difficulty.

"If we could but write to the person who sent it, and tell her what Doris has done, it would be some comfort," she said; "but we cannot do that even."

It was settled at last, that the money should be placed in the bank, to await the return of Doris.

"She will come back," said Mark, "some day, when she has seen enough of the world she so longed for—to find out how false it is; she will come back when she wants true friends and true love; though it may be a long time first."

After long discussions, they agreed it would be better to sanction Doris' flight than to call public attention to it.

"There was nothing so injurious to a girl as to have it known that she ran away from home," Mrs. Brace said. "We must shield her all we can. We must shield her even more than if she were our own."

So, when friends and neighbors asked about her, the farmer and his wife had but one answer to make, and that was, that she had grown tired of the quiet of Brackenside, and had gone out as a governess.

Monsieur D'Anvers was the only one who persisted in his inquiries, and he asked where she had gone. Mark, who loved truth, and hated falsehood, looked uncomfortable, then replied that she had gone abroad: but for himself he did not know the names of foreign places; so it passed over. The few who knew the family told each other, as a piece of news, that the pretty Miss Brace had gone abroad as a governess. Some said, with her beautiful face she would be sure to marry well; and then the matter died away.

One day Mark returned home in a state of great excitement and happiness.

"What do you think has happened," he asked of his wife.

"You have heard from Doris," she replied.

Then for one moment his face darkened.

"No," he replied, "I have not heard from Doris. I wish you did not think so much of her; it makes you dull. I heard this morning that all the family were at the Castle again."

Mrs. Brace, seeing that he really wished her to be surprised, was surprised.

"I am very glad they are back," she said. "A great noble like the duke should live upon his own land."

"That is not all," said Mark, with irrepressible triumph. "I was walking through the market-place at Quainton this morning, and I saw the carriage with out-riders and footmen. Now, what do you think, Patty? before all the town the duke stopped the carriage and sent for me."

Then indeed Mrs. Brace felt deeply interested. How could she think too much of a duke who stopped his carriage in a public market-place and spoke to her husband?

"What did he say, Mark?" she asked.

"He said that he had been away some months, and he hoped we were all well. That proud, beautiful daughter of his was in the carriage, Lady Estelle; her voice is like a clear, soft flute. 'How do you do, Mr. Brace?' she said, and I told her that I enjoyed the best of health, hoping that she did the same."

"That was rather free spoken, Mark," said his wife, doubtfully.

"Not at all," was the sturdy reply. "She looked pleased enough; then she said: 'How is the young girl you brought to see the Castle?' I told her that Doris had gone abroad, to be a governess; she leaned back in her carriage, and held up her parasol.

"'Was she tired of Brackenside?' she asked, and I said, 'Yes—I thought she was.'

"'Is she married?' asked my lady. I said, 'No.'

"She looked at me strangely, and then the carriage drove on. It was strange altogether."

And again Mrs. Brace turned from her husband with a sigh. There was evil at hand, she was sure.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF DREAD HAS IT COME AT LAST?"

There was no part of the day that the Duke of Downsbury enjoyed so much as the breakfast hour, when his beautiful daughter and his aristocratic wife amused themselves by the discussion of letters and papers that had come by post; then Lady Estelle seemed more lively, and the very sunshine of the duke's life was the happiness of his only child. As the day passed on she grew more listless, and the expression of *ennui* on her face grew deeper, but with the morning light she had something of the brightness that had distinguished her as a girl.

On this morning the sun shone so fairly, the roses were blooming, the birds were singing, the whole world was bright and gay. The breakfast-room was, in itself, the very picture of comfort and luxury; the sunbeams sparkled on the costly silver, the flowers filled the air with fragrance. The duke, a fine, handsome man, the very type of an English nobleman, sat with a most contented smile on his face. The cup of tea by his plate was odorous as a bouquet of flowers. The duchess, proud and stately, was deeply engaged in the perusal of a closely-written letter. Lady Estelle, looking more beautiful than ever in the morning light, was busily engaged in doing nothing; neither book nor paper interested her; but to one who knew that fair face well, there was a cloud upon it, an expression of unusual languor and thought.

Suddenly the duke addressed his wife:

"Did I tell you, my dear, that I met my model farmer yesterday, the honest man who amused you so much by his uncertainty over his hands and feet?"

"I remember Mark Brace," said the duchess; "how could I ever forget him? He seemed to me the most honest and sensible man I ever met."

"You remember, perhaps, the pretty child, and the romantic story?"

"Yes; and I never prophesied good for that child," rejoined the duchess.

Lady Estelle raised her fair, proud face.

"Do not say that, mamma; it seems so hard upon the child."

"It will be true, my dear," said her grace, calmly. "What has become of her, I wonder? I have not heard anything of her lately."

The duke smiled.

"One part of your prophecy has come true; she was tired of Brackenside, and has gone abroad."

"Gone abroad?" repeated her grace.

It was the calm, sweet voice of Lady Estelle that replied:

"She has gone as governess to some little children, mamma; surely that was a sensible thing to do."

The duchess looked up in surprise at the unwonted interest in Lady Estelle's voice.

"It is so sensible, Estelle, that I am disposed to alter my opinion of her; she has more sense and less vanity than I gave her credit for. I am much pleased to hear it. But surely you or some one else told me she was going to be married."

"She told me so herself," replied Lady Estelle, "on the day she came here; she was going to marry a gentleman and a poet."

"Very improbable," said her grace; "gentlemen do not marry beneath them, as a rule."

She did not see the quick, hot flush that for one moment burned her daughter's face.

Then Lady Estelle leaned back in her chair, as though the subject had no further interest for her.

Suddenly the duke looked up from his paper.

"Of all the strange pieces of news I have ever read, this is the strangest," he said.

Both ladies glanced at him; the flush dying from the face of Lady Estelle left it unusually pale.

"You remember Ulric Studleigh," continued his grace, "that handsome 'ne'er-do-well?'"

This question produced a singular result. The duchess looked quickly at her daughter, then dropped her eyes. Lady Estelle started as though she had been touched to the heart by some keen, sharp sword.

"What of Ulric Studleigh?" asked her grace, in a curt voice.

"You will never believe it, my dear; he is the last man in the world to whom such luck seemed likely to fall. When he was in London, at the time we knew him so well, there were seven lives between himself and the earldom of Linleigh. By a strange chapter of accidents they are all gone. The young Earl of Linleigh died only last week, and now Ulric Studleigh has succeeded; he is Earl of Linleigh, and is expected in England next week. Only think what a change for him!"

Lady Estelle had left her seat; she stood against the window, and the face that looked through the glass was so white and wild no one could have recognized it.

"It is a great change," said the duchess; "but unless he himself has changed, fortune will not benefit him much."

"The greatest fault in him was his poverty," said the duke. "I must confess I knew little else."

The proud face of the duchess lighted with scorn.

"Did you not? I never liked the Studleigh race myself; 'faithless and debonair'—every one of them, men and women, too, 'faithless and debonair'—fair of face, light of heart, light of word, light of truth. When was a Studleigh either true to a friend or loyal to a love?"

Still no word from the silent figure at the window.

"I wonder," continued the duke, "if he is married yet?"

"It is hardly probable; the Studleighs are proud enough. He would not meet in Indian society any one whom he would care to marry."

Then the duke looked thoughtfully at his daughter. Not one line of her white face could be seen.

"He will succeed to an enormous fortune," he continued. "I should say the earldom of Linleigh is one of the richest in England. He will be a great match for one of our fair friends."

The duchess relaxed some little of her severity.

"He was certainly a very handsome man," she said; "he always made me think of one line in the quaint, old song of 'Allan Water:'

"'And a winning tongue had he.'

"It was impossible to resist him when with him, his daring was so frank, his compliments so graceful and well turned, yet one felt, instinctively, that the truth was not in him. Faithless and debonair. I should not like any one for whom I felt any great esteem to marry Ulric Studleigh, were he thrice an earl."

"Well, I cannot help feeling rather pleased," said the duke. "Perhaps it was a little for his handsome face, but certainly I liked him."

"When is he coming home?" asked the duchess.

"He had sailed for England long before this news could reach him, but it will greet him as soon as he lands. He is expected next week."

There was the sound of the quiet closing of a door. When the duke and duchess looked round Lady Estelle had gone. Then they glanced wistfully at each other.

"She liked him," said the duke.

"I am afraid so," said the duchess. "I half believe that it is for his sake she has remained single. Poor Estelle! Who would have thought it? We shall see how events turn out when he returns to England. They are sure to meet; then we shall see."

While Lady Estelle walked slowly through the hall, she took her garden hat and wrapped a lace shawl round her shoulders. Quietly, with her usual languid, graceful step, she passed out through the hall into the flower-garden beyond. No sound escaped her lips, and her fair, proud face was unruffled; but when she was there quite alone, the self-control and self-restraint fell from her. She raised her face with a despairing cry to the shining heavens.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned; "after so many years of dread—after so many years of unutterable fear and misery—has it come at last!"

Then she, who had never been seen to shed a tear, laid her face on the green grass and wept aloud—wept as only calm, proud people can weep when the depths of the heart are touched. She lay there a long time, while the sun shone on her, then she roused herself. Tears relieved her for the time; but in this sudden and cruel emergency they did her no enduring good.

"What am I to do?" she cried to herself. "How can I best atone for this folly and sin of my youth? What will they say to me? Oh, Heaven! if I could but die!"

So through the summer hours she wept and moaned. What should she do? The future looked dark as the past. For so long she had been putting off this evil day—fighting hard with her conscience and every impulse of honesty and goodness—hoping against hope that the evil day might, perhaps, never come at all. Yet here it was, and she was helpless.

"If she were here," she thought to herself, "it would not be so bad. I cannot see my way out of this labyrinth." And though she spent hour after hour thinking and planning, she could decide upon nothing.

That evening there was a grand dinner party at Downsbury Castle, and the principal guest was a writer from London, whose name was a power in the government. During the course of the long, stately dinner the great writer, turning to the duke, said:

"You have a famous poet in your neighborhood, or rather you have one who in time will be a famous poet."

His grace, who had forgotten what he had heard of the "gentleman and poet," asked eagerly who it was.

"The author of 'English Lyrics,'" replied the writer. "He lives, unless I mistake, at a place called Lindenholm, on your estate. Unless I make the greatest mistake, that young man has a grand career before him. I should like to meet him."

Lady Estelle, pale and stately, listened intently. This was the poet who was to marry Doris. She listened again. They spoke of the poet's sterling worth, his wonderful honesty, his noble character, and there came to her a gleam of hope in her distress.

She would go to him. In all the wide world there was no one to help her but him. She would risk all, and try him. If he proved untrue—if he refused to help her—why, even then, matters could be no worse; whereas, if he did not refuse, and was willing to come to her aid, her troubles would at least be lessened, and she could meet Ulric Studleigh with a calmer face.

CHAPTER XXXV.
"I MUST TELL YOU MY SECRET."

Earle Moray was dreadfully puzzled. Into the threads of his life a mighty, passionate, wonderful love had been woven, but there had been nothing of mystery. It had been a beautiful life, full of love, and dreams, and poetry, but it had all been open to the eye and pleasant to read.

He held something in his hands now that puzzled him—a letter written on thick satin wove paper—a letter asking him if he would be at the gate leading to Quainton woods at noon to-morrow, there to meet some one who wanted his aid.

It was a strange request. If any one wanted his aid, why did the person not seek him in his own home? Why desire to meet him in Quainton woods? Then, what could he do to help any one? Of what avail was he? He was not wise enough to give advice. If money were needed, he would do his best, certainly, but he could do little.

Then another thing puzzled him. The letter was evidently written by a lady. Certainly, the hand was disguised, but it was clear and elegant. What lady could wish to see him? Not Mattie for he had spent the whole of yesterday at the farm; he knew no one else, save Doris. His face grew hot, then cold, as he thought of her. Could it concern Doris in any way, this strange letter? Had she grown weary of being without him? Had she sent him a letter or token? Did she wish to see him? He tormented himself with doubts, hopes, and fears, but resolved to go. He was getting quite strong now; he was able to travel; he had taken care of himself; and those who did not know his motive wondered that he recovered so quickly. He had never swerved from his resolution to go in search of his lost love. Perhaps the saddest sight of all to him was the quantity of manuscript lying unfinished in his room—copies of the poems he had been engaged upon when his life was so suddenly taken from him—the great work that was to have secured for him immortality. He sighed when he looked at it, but he had never once attempted to continue it. If in the time to come he found Doris, and won her for his own again, then the golden dreams of fame and immortality would return to him; until then they were like his hopes—dead!

He had to control his impatience as best he could until noon of the day following; then he went quickly to the appointed place. An idea occurred to him that the letter might be a hoax, although on looking round on his circle of friends, he knew no one who would be likely to play any jest with him.

As he drew near the gate that led to Quainton woods, he saw that it was no jest, for walking down the woodland glade, pausing occasionally to look from right to left, was the figure of a tall, stately lady, whose face was closely veiled.

His heart beat so quickly he could hardly endure the rapid pulsation; but it was not Doris. This lady was taller, of a more stately presence than his golden-haired love; still, it might be some one whom she had sent to him.

He raised his hat and walked bare-headed to where the lady stood. The wind lifted the fair hair from his noble brow, and freshened the spiritual handsome face. As he bent before her, the lady stood quite still and looked at him long.

"You are Earle Moray, gentleman and poet," she said, in a voice of marvelous sweetness. "I recognize you from a description I once heard given of you."

"I am Earle Moray," he said; and still the lady looked as though she would fain read every thought; then, with a deep sigh, she held out her hand to him.

"I can trust you," she said. "I have but little skill, perhaps, in reading faces. I made a great mistake once when I tried, yet I can read yours. Truth, honor, loyalty, are all there. Nature never yet wrote falsely on such a face as yours. I will trust you with that which is dearer to me than my life."

Then they walked side by side in silence, until they reached a broad, shady walk which was

darkened by the large, spreading boughs of the trees, Earle wondering who she was—marveling at the rich silk and velvet she wore, at the dainty grace of the gloved hand, at the proud, yet graceful beauty, at the sweet voice. Who was she? Some one who trusted him, and who should find that he was to be trusted even to the very depths.

Then the lady turned to him.

"I know it is an idle question," she paid, "but I ask it for form's sake. Will you keep true and sacred the trust I am going to place in you?"

"Until death!" he replied. "I promise it."

"Now tell me," she said—"I have a right to ask the question, as you will learn—you were betrothed to Doris, who was known as Doris Brace."

"Yes," he replied in a low voice, "I was."

"Would you mind telling me whether that engagement still exists?"

His face quivered with pain as he turned it to her.

"I cannot answer you," he said; "I do not know. To me it exists solemnly and sacredly. I do not know what Doris thinks."

Her voice was wonderfully soft and gentle as she continued:

"I know that I am paining you; I am sorry for it. Was there any quarrel between you when you parted?"

"No," he replied, "there was no quarrel."

"How was it?" she asked, gently. "Do not fear to tell me."

"I do not know; I was not good enough for her, perhaps—not bright and eloquent enough. Perhaps I loved her too dearly. She was the life of my life. She may have got tired of my mad, passionate love—only God knows. She left me."

"How did she leave you?" persisted the sweet, pitiless voice.

"I left her one day, believing she loved me, that in a very short time she would be my wife. I returned the next, and she had gone away, leaving a letter for me."

"What did that letter say?"

"It said that she could never marry me; that the quiet life and quiet ways would not suit her; that she had resolved to leave them. She was going abroad to teach some little children, and she prayed me never to find her, for she would never return."

He drew his breath with a hard, painful gasp as he finished the words.

"I shall find her," he added, with quiet force. "She promised to be my wife, and in the sight of the just God she is mine. I will never rest until I have found her, life of my life, the very heart of me. She shall not escape me."

"Then she left you and broke her promise without any sensible reason whatever?"

"If you will have the truth," he replied, "yes, she did so."

"Faithless and debonair," murmured the lady, "like all of her race."

"She is young," said Earle, in quick excuse, "and very beautiful. Perhaps in the years to come she may have more sense, and will be sorry for what she has done."

"All the sorrow in the world could not undo the wrong she has done you," said the lady.

"I would forgive her," said Earle. "She could do no wrong so great but that I could pardon her."

"You are true and noble; you are of the kind whom women torture and kill. Tell me, have you no idea where she is?"

"I have not the faintest," he replied, "I cannot tell even in what quarter of the world she is; but I have confidence in my own will—I shall find her."

"Suppose," said the lady, "that you succeed, that you find her, and that she is unwilling to marry you—what shall you do then?"

His face darkened—a new expression such as she had never seen came over it.

"That is between Heaven and myself," he replied. "Until I am tried and tempted I cannot tell you what I should do."

"You would not harm her!" she cried, laying her hand on his arm.

"Harm her! hurt Doris! Oh, no! how could I harm her? She is life of my life, heart of my heart! How could I harm her?"

"That is well. I am weak and easily frightened; I have lived for nearly twenty years in one long

dream of terror. I was a girl of eighteen when my fear began—I am a woman of thirty-eight now, and I have never known one moment's cessation of fear. Do you pity me?"

"With all my heart," said Earle.

"After twenty years," she continued, "I stand face to face with the realization of my fear; the dream that has haunted me has come true; the sword has fallen; I have to answer for my girlish folly and sin—a thousand times greater than Doris'!"

Then between them for some minutes there fell perfect, unbroken silence. Again the lady broke it.

"I am in sore need," she said, "and I want a friend. I have sought you because you love Doris."

Wondering more and more, he answered that he would do anything on earth to help her.

"I feel sure you would," she said; then throwing back her veil, she asked: "Do you know me?"

He looked at her. No, he did not know her. He thought to himself that he could never have forgotten such a face if he had seen it before.

"I am Lady Estelle Hereford," she continued, "the only daughter of the Duke of Downsbury."

He was not surprised; he would not have felt surprised if she had told him she was Queen of England.

"Lady Estelle Hereford," he murmured; "but what is it possible that I can do to help you?"

"You wonder that I, the daughter of a mighty duke, should be driven to seek aid," she said. "Oh! believe me, there is no one in all England who needs it more than I do. Tell me, Earle Moray —'gentleman and poet'—I like the title—tell me, have you ever heard me discussed—spoken of?"

"Yes," he replied, frankly, "many times."

"Tell me how people speak of me!" she asked. "I know what your answer will be. It will not pain me."

"I have always heard your beauty praised," said Earle, honestly—"that you were accomplished and beautiful, but that you were one of the proudest ladies in the land."

"It is true," she said; "the time was when no girl in England was prouder than I."

He looked at the pale, high-bred face.

"It was natural," he said, simply; "you had everything to make you so."

"And now," she continued, "the proudest woman in England, Lady Estelle Hereford, is here by stealth, asking that aid from a stranger which no one else can give to her."

"Life is full of strange phases," said Earle. "But, Lady Hereford, what is it that you think I can do for you?"

"I must tell you my secret first," she said, "before you can understand——"

"Nay," he interrupted, generously, "I need not understand. If there is anything in the world that I can do for you, you have but to command me. I will be blind, deaf, mute, in your service. There is no need for me to understand."

"You are very good—I feel your delicacy," she said. "You are loyal and noble; but I must tell you my secret, and my story is not a short one. I am tired; can I rest while I tell it to you?"

In less time than it took her to ask the question, he had cleared away the creeping moss and trailing leaves from the fallen trunk of a tree.

"It is a rude resting-place," he said.

But Lady Estelle seemed grateful enough for it. She drew aside the rich silk and velvet.

"Sit down by my side," she said, gently.

He would have remained at a distance; but, with a little, graceful gesture, as of one used to command, she called him to her.

"Sit down here," she said, and he had no resource but to obey her.

Then again she was silent for some minutes; her face wore a dreamy, musing expression.

"What a strange fate!" she said. "After keeping my secret for all these years—after guarding it jealously as my life—after sacrificing only Heaven knows what to it—I tell it to you, to you, young, loyal, true-hearted—you who love Doris! There is a terrible irony, after all, in fate!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LADY ESTELLE'S STORY.

Looking at Lady Estelle, Earle saw that her face had grown very pale, and her hands trembled. It was so strange for him, on this beautiful, sunlit morning, to find himself seated by this pale, high-bred lady. The sun shone through the thick, green branches, and the light fell in slanting rays on the greensward; the birds sang gaily in the trees—the sweet, pitiless birds, who sing whether we are in sorrow or joy; the wild-flowers raised their beautiful heads, so fair and delicate, so fragile and sweet; there was no distress in nature.

"Dear Lady Hereford," he said, "spare yourself. You do not like to tell me this story—why do it?"

"I must," she said. "Never mind the pain for me; the pain has been greater in bearing it for twenty years than it is now in the telling of it. Looking at me, Earle Moray, can you imagine what I was twenty years ago?"

"Yes," he said, gently, "I can imagine it. Time does not dim and line a face like yours. I can see you now as you were then."

"The lightest heart—ah, me! the happiest girl—there was not one so happy! Proud, because every one told me how much I had to be proud of. I was beautiful, and the Duke of Downsbury's only daughter. What people call high prizes in this world ought to have been mine. Listen to what I have won. At eighteen I made my *debut* in the great world, and before I had even time to look round me, I had a number of lovers and admirers, thanks to the prestige of my father's name. I had more offers during the first season than falls to the lot of most young ladies. There was not one among the crowd of admirers for whom I cared; none interested me, none touched me. Young as I was, I longed for something that I did not find. I had great ideas of the happiness and sanctity of love. In this new world I heard but little of it. People talked of diamonds, opera-boxes, country-houses, pin-money, settlements; but I heard little of love. I had firmly resolved in my own mind that when I married it should be for love alone. I had everything else—rank, title, wealth, position. I wanted love. One great man after another—great according to the world's estimation—laid title and wealth before me, the Duke of Downsbury's heiress. I had flattery, homage, compliments, praise, but not what I thought to be love. In discussing different offers my mother would say: 'This one belongs to the oldest family in England;' of another, 'He has the fairest estates in the country;' of another, 'He is a great favorite at court;' of another, 'He can give his wife jewels fit for an empress;' but she never urged as a recommendation that any one loved me. As a rule, one values least that which one has, and longs most for that which one has not. I was born and reared in the very heart of luxury—I knew nothing else—so that I valued splendor and magnificence, luxury and wealth far less than I valued love; and while wiser heads than mine were occupied in discussing which would be the most advisable suitor for me, I was occupied in looking for some one who would love me. Is it natural, Earle Moray, that one should long to be loved?"

He looked at the pale, sad face.

"Just as natural, Lady Hereford, as that the thirsty flowers should long for dew," he replied.

"So I think. I made a terrible mistake. I wrecked my whole life; yet I think that if I had to live over again I should look first for love.

"One evening there was a ball at the palace, and I went with the duchess, my mother. On our way she began to talk to me about a certain Lord Alverton, whose proposal of marriage had delighted her.

"'I should certainly advise you, my dear child,' she said, 'to accept him. He will be at the palace this evening, and I shall be pleased to hear that you have accepted him.'

"'But I do not love him, mamma,' I said.

"She looked surprised.

"'Never be vehement, Estelle,' she said, in a tone of reproof; 'it is not lady-like. And, my dear child, remember, rank has its penalty. In ours we do not marry for love.'

"She meant it all kindly. She loved me then, and loves me now, better than half the mothers in this world love their children. She spoke as she herself had been taught; but I was resolved never to learn the same lesson. I would marry for love, and nothing else. I entered the palace gates, resolved to dismiss his lordship, and to wait until some one loved me.

"As I was promenading with one of my partners, my eyes fell suddenly upon one of the handsomest men I had ever seen—a face that irresistibly drew my attention, it was so handsome, high-bred and debonair. I looked at him again and again in wonder. I watched him as he spoke to different people. I saw that he left everyone whom he addressed laughing. I wondered who he could be. A royal duchess spoke to him, and seemed to enjoy his conversation; so that he must be 'one of us,' I thought to myself. Suddenly I asked my companion, 'Who is the gentleman to whom the Duchess of K—— is talking?'

"He laughed a little, low laugh.

"'That is Captain Ulric Studleigh,' he replied, 'the handsomest, the most popular, and the most good-for-nothing man in London.'

"'Good-for-nothing,' I repeated; 'how is that? What do you mean?'

"'Perhaps I should apologize for the expression,' said my companion, 'but really I know of none other so suitable. He is a Studleigh, and you know the character of the race.'

"'Indeed I do not,' was my earnest reply.

"'The Studleighs are all faithless and debonair,' he continued: 'they have made more love and broken more hearts than any other race even of twice their number.'

"'But every one seems to like Captain Studleigh. See how people listen to him, talk to him, laugh at him.'

"'I tell you, Lady Hereford, that he is really the most popular man in London.'

"'But how can he be popular,' I persisted, 'if he is what you say?'

"'Faithless and debonair,' he repeated. 'But I do not know that the world will like him any the less for that. He has a handsome face. Look at his smile; it is like a gleam of sunshine. And, to tell you the truth, Lady Hereford, I know of no one else who can talk as he does.'

"Then my partner left me, and I became engrossed in watching Captain Studleigh. Surely no one could be more popular; no one passed him without a word or a jest. I watched him as he bent over the white hands of fair ladies, and I was mad enough to feel something like jealousy when he seemed to like one. Then, by some accident, I can never remember how it happened, our eyes met. I saw him start, and I hoped he admired me.

"Ah, dear Heaven! what a foolish child I was! Then he went away hurriedly, and in a few minutes afterward he was bowing before me, while some one introduced him to me. The extreme bitterness of the pain has long since left me, and I can remember that when he asked me to dance with him, and my hand touched his arm, it was as though the happiness of my life had suddenly grown complete. Thinking of myself as I was then, tears of pity fill my eyes.

"It was a long dance, and when it ended Captain Studleigh did not seem more anxious to part from me than I was to part from him. The spell was beginning to work on me as it worked on others. His bright, laughing eyes, handsome face, rich, clear voice, the inexhaustible fund of wit and mirth, the tender, chivalrous deference that he knew so well how to pay, delighted me. He asked me if I should like to see a famous picture that had been recently sent to the palace. I said 'Yes,' glad of any pretext for being longer with him. I do not know how time passed. I was happier than I had ever been in my life before. Suddenly Captain Studleigh asked me, with a smile, where was my mother, the duchess. I told him she had been invited to join the royal circle, and was there now, I believed.

"'Fortune is kind to me to-night,' he said, with a smile.

"Simply enough I asked him why he should call my mother's preoccupation fortunate to him.

"He laughed outright.

"'My dear Lady Hereford,' he said, 'if her grace were at hand, do you suppose I should be allowed this delightful half hour here with you?'

"'Why not?' I asked, wonderingly.

"'Because I am what is called a detrimental. I am a poor younger son, whose presumption, as the dowagers say, is frightful. Have I any right, possessing under ten thousand a year and no title, to monopolize, even for five minutes, the smiles of Lady Estelle Hereford?'

"I knew that he was speaking satirically, but it struck me, at the same time, that his views and mine would upon many points agree.

"'What nonsense about being a poor younger son,' I said. 'What difference does it make?'

"He laughed again.

"'That is the most sensible question I ever heard, Lady Hereford, and as a younger son I thank you for it. It makes a wonderful difference in the opinion of most people.'

"'It makes none in mine,' I said, decidedly; and then I saw him look steadfastly at me. I never even gave a thought to the significance of my words. Suddenly I remembered the conversation I had had about him. I looked up into his face.

"'Captain Studleigh,' I asked, 'why do people call you faithless and debonair?'

"'Do they?' he asked. 'I do not think that such a bad character, Lady Estelle.'

"'Is it true that all the Studleighs are faithless?' I repeated.

"'I wish I dared say, try one of them, Lady Estelle. That may be the tradition of the family, but it would be cruel to judge every member by it. After all, it is something to be debonair, so I must be content.'

"Looking at him and listening to him, I did not believe one word of it. There was a charm about him that no words of mine could possibly describe—a charm that I believe, even now, belongs to

no one else on earth. I soon found that what he said was perfectly true. As I returned to the ball-room I saw my mother looking for us. Her eyes did not fall with a very pleased expression on Captain Studleigh. She came up to us and made some little observation to him; the tone of it was barely civil, and he was quick enough to notice it. He gave me one laughing glance, as though he would say, 'You see, I told you I was a detrimental,' then he bowed and went away.

"'My dear Estelle,' she said, 'have you been long with Captain Studleigh?'

"I told her how long, and she looked displeased.

"'Who introduced you to him?'" she asked.

"Ah! how ashamed I was. I could not remember; I had never even noticed. She turned to me.

"'It was a mistake,' she said, gently. 'He is a handsome man, but the Studleighs are all alike. I should not wish you to fall into the habit of wasting your time with him.'

"'Wasting my time.' I repeated that phrase over and over again. The only gleam of happiness I had found in this great world was looked coldly upon by my mother, and called 'wasting my time.'

"I went home with my head and heart full of him, longing only for the hour to come when I should meet him again. Looking back, I pity myself, Earle Moray—I pity myself!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"HE MADE ME BELIEVE THAT I WAS THE WHOLE WORLD TO HIM!"

"Do I weary you, Earle Moray, with these details?" Lady Estelle asked, looking with wistful eyes into his face. "Out of my thirty-eight years, that was my only gleam of light—does it weary you that I like to dwell upon it?"

"No," he replied, "every word interests me; you cannot tell one too much."

"I used to wonder," she continued, "when I heard people say that love made or marred a woman's life. In my own mind I thought such words an exaggeration. I found that they were most fatally true—my love marred my life.

"That night I left the palace, with my heart and mind full of Ulric Studleigh, and the idea possessed a double charm for me because I was, as it were, forbidden to entertain it. The duchess, my mother spoke to me once more on the subject. We were going to a *fete* at Kensington Gardens. Before we started she called me to her.

"'Estelle,' she said, gravely, 'I hope you will not forget what is due to your position as daughter of the Duke of Downsbury. I hope you will not forget what is required and expected of you.'

"I told her that I hoped always to please her, and I intended then to do so.

"'If Captain Studleigh should have the bad taste to intrude his society on you,' she continued, 'without being the least unladylike, you must let him see that it is displeasing to you.'

"'But, mamma,' I remonstrated, 'it is *not* displeasing; it is most amusing.'

"'The expression of my least wish ought to suffice, Estelle,' said my mother, haughtily. 'I tell you to avoid Captain Studleigh whenever you possibly can; and if you are compelled for a few minutes, by unavoidable circumstances, to talk to him, I insist upon it that you show no interest whatever—that you treat him with studied coolness and reserve.'

"'Will you tell me why, mamma?' I asked gently.

"'Yes, I will tell you. The love of a Studleigh never yet brought anything with it save sorrow. Secondly, were it even otherwise, Ulric Studleigh, a younger son, is no match for my daughter, Lady Estelle Hereford. You hear this?'

"I had heard, and at first my only emotion was one of sorrow that a pleasant intercourse must be ended. It was very evident that I must not look again at the laughing face and tender eyes. I hardly understood the cloud that came over me, or why the thought that he was so soon to be taken out of my life darkened it.

"He was at the *fete*, strange to say, with my only and dearest friend, Lady Agnes Delapain. We had been schoolmates, and the year previous she had married Lord Delapain. I felt pleased when I saw him with her. My mother did not see either of them. After a time Lady Agnes left her companion and came to me. My mother, who knew our great affection for each other, had no scruple in leaving us together while she joined some friends of her own.

"'Estelle,' said Lady Agnes, as we wandered through a beautiful grove of trees—'Estelle, you have accomplished a miracle.'

"'What have I done?' I asked.

"'You have written your name where no one ever inscribed a woman's name before,' she replied.

"I had not the least idea what she meant.

"'Where is that?' I asked.

"Lady Agnes laughed aloud.

"'On the hitherto invincible heart of Ulric Studleigh,' she said. 'I should imagine that he has admired more pretty girls than any one ever did before, but you are the first who has made a real impression on him.'

"'Who says I have done so, Agnes?'

"'I say so. He has been sitting by me for half an hour, and all his conversation has been of you. I assure you, Estelle, he is hopelessly in love.'

"'The love of the Studleighs always brings sorrow, my mother says.'

"Lady Agnes laughed again.

"'I am sure your mother will not like him—no mothers do. Mine used to torture me about him before I was married. You would not find a dowager in London who approves of him.'

"'But why?' I persisted.

"'A handsome, graceless, penniless younger son? What dowager in her senses would approve of such a man?'

"'He cannot help being a younger son and having no money,' I said.

"'No; he cannot help it. A man cannot help being born blind or lame, I suppose; but then he does not expect to fare the same as a man who can walk and see.'

"'It is not a just world,' I said gravely; and again Lady Agnes laughed.

"'Yes, Ulric ought at least to have been a prince,' she said; 'there is now only one resource for him.'

"'What is that?' I asked.

"'He has no money, and he cannot make money. Military fame is very empty; but he could, at least, marry some one who has money.'

"And Lady Agnes, who, I believe, had a decided liking for him, looked sharply at me.

"'Why can he never make money?' I asked.

"'It is not the habit of the Studleighs: they have a reckless fashion of spending, but I do not know that they are capable of making money. Captain Ulric is a soldier, and we all know how empty is fame.'

"At that very moment he joined us. Lady Agnes turned to me.

"'I leave you in safe hands,' she said. 'I promised to look after little Nellie Plumpton, and I have not seen her yet.'

"Then she went away. It was kind of her in one sense, but wrong in another. I was terribly frightened. What should I do if my mother found me here in this grove of trees with Captain Studleigh? I remembered, too, that I had promised to be very distant and reserved with him: yet there I was, looking at him, blushing and smiling, utterly unable either to look or feel anything save happy.

"He saw, and was quick enough to detect the anxiety on my face.

"'Ah! Lady Hereford,' he said. 'I was a true prophet—I see it.'

"Then, without waiting for any answer, he began to talk to me about the *fete*. I forgot everything else in the wide, world except that I was happy and was with him.

"Earle Moray, the sun will never shine for me again as it did that day; the sky will never be so blue, the flowers so sweet and fair.

"When he saw Lady Agnes returning to us in the distance, he said, quickly:

"'You will not be unjust to me, Lady Estelle—you will not visit the sins of my race on me?'

"'No,' I said, 'I will never do that.'

"'Sometimes you will let me forget graver anxieties, graver cares, the troubles of my life, in talking to you?'

"Then I saw my difficulty.

"'I will do all that I possibly can,' I said; 'but——'

"'But what?' he asked. 'Tell me the difficulty.'

"How could I? I could not look into his face, and tell him my mother disliked and disapproved of

him.

"'I think I understand,' he said, with a low laugh. 'If I were a duke, with two or three fine estates, there would be no objection to me; as it is, perhaps her grace has told you the Studleighs are unfortunate?'

"'Yes, she has told me so, but I do not believe it,' I hastened to reply.

"'Thank you; you are generous. I shall trust in your generosity, Lady Hereford.'

"Then he went away, and the brightness of the sun, the sky, the flowers, went with him. Yet I was strangely happy, with a new, strange, shy happiness. When other people, whom I had neither liked nor cared for, talked to me, I found that I had a fresh stock of patience—that I had such a fountain of happiness in my own heart I had abundance to shower upon others. The whole world changed to me from that day. I lived only in the hope of seeing Captain Studleigh. I counted the hours when I was away from him. Unfortunately for me, I found an aider and abettor in Lady Agnes Delapain. My mother did not even know that she was acquainted with him, and I—alas!—never told her.

"Lady Agnes had a beautiful villa at Twickenham, and it was no unusual thing for me to spend two or three days with her. It was cruel to betray my mother's trust; there is no excuse for it, nor was there any for my friend. We never made any positive appointment. I never told him when I was going to Twickenham, yet he always seemed to know by instinct. Lord Delapain held some important office under the government, so that he was seldom at home. We three, Lady Delapain, Captain Studleigh, and myself, spent whole days together, sometimes in the grounds that surrounded her home, or on the river which ran close by.

"The end of it was—see, I offer no excuse—that we both believed it impossible to live any longer without each other. Oh! folly and blindness and madness of love! I, who had never disobeyed my parents, who had always been a docile, obedient child, whose highest ambition had been to please them. I suffered him, my lover, to talk to me about a private marriage! He said that if we were once married, my parents would be very angry for a short time, that was certain: but when they saw there was no help for it, they would forgive us and all would be well again. I asked, timidly enough, for I dreaded to displease him, if it would not be better for him to try to win my parents' consent.

"'I will try, if you like,' he said. 'I will do anything to please you: but I am quite sure it is useless. The moment they hear that I care for you they will take you away, and I shall see you no more.'

"'Do you really think so, Ulric?' I asked, sadly.

"'I am quite certain of it: still it shall be as you wish. I cannot live without you, Estelle. You are the whole world to me; and you love me, unless the story told by those sweet eyes is untrue.'

"Lady Agnes knew nothing of these longing entreaties of his for a secret marriage. If I had told her I might have been saved. She, with all her imprudence, would never have permitted that. I dared not tell her, lest she should disapprove.

"Looking back, I cannot tell what possessed me—what mad infatuation, what wild folly had taken hold of me. Is it the same, I wonder, with all those who love—with all girls who surrender heart and judgment as I did? Yet I did not reply all at once. The step was such a grave and serious one, even to my inexperienced eyes, that I hesitated long before taking it. I must do him justice; I think that in those days Ulric Studleigh did love me very dearly indeed, better, perhaps, than he loved any one else; and that, for a Studleigh, is certainly saying great deal. He told me, over and over again, in most passionate words, that he loved me. He made me believe that I was the whole world to him. Then, when he still found that I was unwilling—oh! so unwilling—for this private marriage, he pretended to be hurt, to think that I did not care for him; and for ten long days he never came near me—ten long, dreary, terrible days. I can remember even now the misery of each of them—the hours that seemed to have no end—the nights without sleep. If we met in public, he passed me with a cold bow, and devoted himself to some one else. I went through all the tortures of jealousy, my face grew pale and thin. Ah! what I suffered! Then one evening he came to me and said:

"'Estelle, have we had enough of this? I feel I can bear it no longer.'

"'It is your fault,' I replied; 'you have kept away from me.'

"'Is a man's heart made of wax, do you think? Kept away from you! If I had not done so I should have gone mad. Your love must be child's play, judging from the way in which you treat me. How could I bear to be near you, when you so coldly refused my prayer?'

"We were standing behind a great cluster of trees, and the next moment he had clasped me in his arms, crying that I must be his.

"'I shall be at Twickenham to-morrow,' he said; 'Estelle, I pray you to meet me there.'

"And I, weak and miserable, promised him."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.
THE PUNISHMENT OF FOLLY.

"'I cannot bear it,' said my lover to me," continued Lady Estelle, "when we met the next day on the green lawn at Twickenham. 'We Studleighs are just as mad in jealousy as we are in love. When I see you surrounded by the wealthiest and noblest in the land—men each of whom is more worthy of you a thousand times than I am—but no one else loves you one-half so well, I can bear it no longer, Estelle. I will stand by no longer to see you loved, admired, and sought by other men. I will go away, and never return to this hateful land again.'

"'What can I do, Ulric?' I asked. 'I cannot help it—I do not ask people to admire me.'

"'You can do one thing, if you will,' he said; 'you can set my heart at rest; you can consent to what I ask—a private marriage; that will make you mine, and it will not be in the power of any human being to take you from me. It will set my heart at rest, and I shall know, no matter who admires you, that you are mine. If you will not consent to this, I must go.'

"I was sorely afraid to lose him, Earle Moray.

"'But what will become of me when my parents find it out?' I asked.

"'They need never find it out. When they seem to like me a little better, we will tell them. No one knows what an excellent thing it is to make one's self master of the situation. Once done, we cannot be expected to undo it, and after a few days they will say that we were naughty; but they will forgive us when they are quite sure that being angry is of no use.'

"Those were weak arguments, Earle Moray, to lead a girl away from her duty. They seem to me so now, though then I fancied them full of wisest sense. I destroyed myself when I looked up into his face, and said;

"'But even if I were willing, how could it be managed, Ulric?'

"He clasped me in his arms.

"'Only say that you are willing, that is enough. I shall go mad with joy! Estelle, say that you are willing, and leave the preliminaries to me.'

"He looked so eager, so handsome; I was so weak and young. I loved him so dearly, all higher and better considerations faded away—I promised."

She buried her face in her hands, and Earle saw the tears fall through her slender, jeweled fingers. He saw the fragile figure torn with deep, convulsive sobs, yet he did not dare comfort her. He fell that, for such a wrong as she had committed, there could be no pardon from those she had deceived. Yet his feeling of compassion for her was so strong that he could not refrain from showing her some sympathy. He laid his hand gently on her arm.

"Dear Lady Hereford," he said, "I wish that I knew how to comfort you."

"You cannot," she replied; "there can be no consolation for sins like mine. Oh! Earle Moray, you see that I am speaking to you as though I had known you for years. It is because you love Doris. Can you think, can you imagine how I came to be so foolish?—so mad, it seems to me, looking back on my past. Incredible! Young, gifted, with everything to make life desirable, that I should wreck myself, turn every blessing into a curse! It is incredible to me, I cannot believe it; yet I have done it. I need not tire you with details. I have dwelt longer than I need have done on my temptations, because I want you, who love Doris so dearly, to think the best which is possible of me. Do you agree to that? Will you try?"

"Most certainly I will, dear Lady Hereford. Who am I, that I should sit in judgment over you?"

"I am ashamed to tell you the rest," she said, in a wailing tone. "It is a story that would disgrace the humblest beggar—think how it humiliates me, the sole daughter of one of the proudest houses in the land. No Studleigh ever failed for want of determination. The more and the greater the obstacles that rose in my lover's way, the more valiantly he overcame them. I am too ignorant even to explain *how* he arranged it—everything gives way to money, I suppose—the obstacles he encountered did. I only know two things for certain—we were married, and our marriage was legal."

"It seems almost incredible," said Earle, "for one so highly placed, so constantly guarded as you must have been, Lady Hereford."

"It was difficult; but I will confess my own duplicity. I told my mother that I was going to spend two days with Lady Agnes, and I went accompanied by my maid. It was a very easy matter, on the morning of the second day, to escape from Lady Agnes, under some slight pretext, and meet Captain Studleigh. We were married in some old gray church by the river; and when I returned to Twickenham I did not even dare to tell my best friend. Yet I remember so well the almost delicious happiness—perhaps all the sweeter that it was kept so silent—the happiness of knowing that I had proved to my husband how dearly I loved him; the happiness of knowing how great were the sacrifices I made for him. Ah, surely he would be content now, when for his sake I made myself a living lie—I wore a mask that hid me from the parents who loved me—surely he would be satisfied now! I dared not tell Lady Delapain what I had done. Imprudent as she was, she

would never have countenanced that.

"For some weeks we were happy. My whole life became one intrigue, arranging how to meet my husband, and how much time it was possible to spend with him without being found out. Security made me reckless. Whenever I met him I used to deceive my mother by telling her I had been with Lady Agnes. One evening, when we were going to some great state entertainment, I remained with him later than I should have done—time had flown so quickly I had not measured its flight—and I was late for dressing. The duchess was not well pleased, although she did not say much; but a few days afterward Lady Agnes called and wanted me to go out with her. My mother said 'Yes,' but added, that I must be more careful, as I had been too late on Tuesday.'

"'But Lady Estelle was not with me on Tuesday,' said Lady Agnes, quickly. And my mother looked at her in deepest wonder.

"'Not with *you*!' she cried. 'Where was she, then?'

"I turned to my friend, and she alone saw the hot flush on my face.

"'You forget,' I said.

"Some inkling of the truth came to her, and she murmured confusedly that she had forgotten. The duchess looked perfectly satisfied; but when she had quitted the room, Lady Agnes said to me:

"'Estelle, I do not quite understand; I never saw you on Tuesday.'

"'I know that,' was my curt reply.

"'Then why did you tell your mother you had been with me?'

"'Because I did not wish her to know where I had been,' I replied.

"She kissed me, and said, sadly:

"'You have secrets even from me, then?'

"And I answered:

"'Yes.'

"She looked very unhappy.

"'Estelle,' she said, 'I hope I have not been foolish, and aided you in folly?'

"But I would not listen to her—I only laughed. After that Lady Agnes became more cautious. I do not know whether she had any suspicion or not—she never expressed any to me.

"After that I found more difficulty in meeting my husband. Oh! wretched story! How I loathe the telling of it! He grew impatient and angry, while, as the days passed on, I shrank with greater dread from letting my parents know what I had done.

"Then jealousy, anger, quarrels, and impatience took the place of love. I cannot tell you the history of that wretched time—I dare not. I had to find out then that a Studleigh could indulge in rage as well as love. It was not long before I learned many bitter lessons.

"At length one day we had a more than usually angry quarrel, and then my husband vowed that he would leave me. A regiment was ordered to India next week; he would exchange into it, and I should never see him again. In vain I wept, pleaded, prayed. He was in one of his terrible furies, and nothing could move him. Still, I never believed that he would do it. Had I even fancied so, I should have instantly, at any cost, have told my mother all; but I thought it merely a threat, a cruel and unmanly threat, but an empty one. I resolved that for some days I would not write to him.

"Oh, Earle Moray! can you imagine my distress when, one short week afterward, I heard it carelessly told that Captain Ulric Studleigh had taken a sudden whim, and had exchanged into another regiment, which had sailed for India that week, and would not in all probability return for years. The lady told the news laughingly, as though it were only a piece of amusing gossip. The comments made were of an indifferent character. Some said India was the best place for younger sons without fortune. Others said it was a thousand pities that there was no chance of the earldom of Linleigh for the gay captain.

"No one looked at me; no one thought of me; yet I was the wife of the man they were all discussing. It was many minutes before my senses returned to me; then I found myself grasping the back of a chair to keep myself from falling. Unseen and unnoticed, I contrived to quit the room. Oh, Heaven! when I recall the intolerable anguish of that hour, I wonder that I lived through it.

"I had trusted a Studleigh, and had met with the usual reward of those who place confidence in a perfidious race. I think that on the face of the earth there was none so truly desolate and lonely, so frightened, as I was during that time. Married in secret to a man whom my parents disliked, whom the world mentioned with a sneer—a man whose name was a proverb for light-heartedness, inconstancy—married and deserted!

"It would have been bad enough had he been here; it would have been a terrible ordeal even had

he been by my side, to help me with love and sympathy; but now, alone, unaided—he himself thousands of miles away—what could I do?

"I did that which seemed easiest at the time—I kept silence. He had sailed away, saying nothing of the marriage, neither would I. I would take the just punishment of my folly, live single all my life, and keep my dreadful secret. There seemed to me no other plan. To tell the truth, I stood too much in awe of my father and mother to dare even to tell them. I dreaded their anger. I dreaded the cool, calm contempt in my mother's face. I dreaded the disappointment that would, I knew, be my father's greatest grief. What else could I do but keep my sad secret all to myself?

"Yes, I declare to you that the struggle in my own mind was so dreadful, the pain and sorrow so great, that I almost died of it. No one ever said anything to me about Captain Studleigh. Even those who seemed to fancy there had been a slight flirtation between us, considered his going away as a proof that there was none. I saw that my parents were greatly relieved by his absence; and after a few weeks the shock began to get less. Lady Agnes asked me once if I were unhappy over him. I made some evasive reply. Then, after a time, I began to look my life in the face, to think that the evil done was not without remedy. I could bear the penalty of my folly, if the secret of my ill-starred marriage could be kept."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A MOTHER'S CONFESSION.

"I come now to a part of my story," resumed Lady Estelle, "that I would fain pass over in silence; but as it touches the matter that brought me here, I am obliged to tell you."

The proud, fair woman buried her face in her hands as she spoke, and Earle understood how terrible was the struggle between her need of help and her pride. When she raised her face again, it was ghastly white.

"Captain Studleigh had been gone four months," she gasped, "when I knew that the most terrible of all my trials had come to me—that I should be the mother of a child. For a long time—for days and weeks—I was in the most terrible despair. I often wonder," she said, musingly, "how it was that the agony of my shame did not kill me—I cannot understand it even now. I did think in those days of killing myself, but I was not brave enough—I lacked the courage. Yet I do not think any one in the wide world ever suffered so greatly. There was I—sole daughter of that ancient house; flattered, beloved, courted, *feted*, the envy of all who knew me—with a secret bitter as death, black as sin. At last, when I found myself obliged to seek assistance, I went to Lady Agnes Delapain, and told her all.

"Her amazement and dread of the consequences were at first appalling to me. After the first expressions of surprise and regret, she said:

"'So you were married to him—married to him all the time? I never suspected it.'

"She was very kind to me—kinder, a thousand times, than I deserved. She did not reproach me; but when she had recovered, she said:

"'Estelle, I feel that it is more than half my fault—I should never have allowed you to meet him here. I should not have dared if I had foreseen the end. I felt sorry, because you seemed to like each other; but I have done wrong.'

"I laid my head on her shoulder.

"'What am I to do?' I moaned.

"'I see no help for it now, Estelle; however averse you may be, you must tell the duchess.'

"Then I clung to her, weeping and saying:

"'I dare not—I would rather die.'

"'But, my dear Estelle,' she interrupted, 'you must—indeed, you must. I see no help for it.'

"I remember standing up with a white, haggard face and beating heart.

"'If you will not help me, Agnes, I must tell her, but I shall do it in my own fashion. I shall write a letter to her, and kill myself before she receives it. I will never look my mother in the face again after she knows.'

"'Then what is to be done, Estelle?'

"'Be my friend, as you have always been. You have had more experience than I have had: you know the world better than I know it. You are older than I am; help me, Agnes.'

"'You mean, help you to keep the secret of your marriage?' she asked.

"'I do; and in asking you that, I ask for my life itself—the one depends upon the other.'

"Lady Agnes sat quite silent for some minutes, then she said:

"'I will do it, Estelle. Perhaps, in making this promise, I am wrong, as I am in everything else; but I will help you for the sake of the love that was between us when we were happy young girls.'

"I had no words in which to thank her; it really seemed to me as though the burden of my trouble were for the time removed from me to her.

"'How will it be?' I asked her.

"'Give me time to think, Estelle; I must arrange it all in my own mind first. Do not come near me for three days.'

"At the end of that time my mother received a letter from Lady Agnes, urging her to allow me to go with her to Switzerland; she was not strong, and required change of air. My mother had implicit faith and confidence in Lady Delapain.

"'You have not been looking well lately, Estelle,' she said to me; 'it will do you good to go.'

"Ah, me! what a weight those few words took from my mind. Then Lady Agnes called upon us, and spoke to my mother about our little tour.

"'We shall enjoy ourselves after our own fashion,' she said. 'Lord Delapain goes with us as far as Interlachen; there he will leave us for a time. You may safely trust Lady Estelle with me.'

"My mother had not the slightest idea that anything was unusual. The only thing that embarrassed me was that she insisted upon my taking my maid Leeson with me. When I told this to Lady Agnes, she was, like myself, dismayed for a few minutes, then she said, calmly;

"'It will not matter; we should have been obliged to take some one into our confidence; as well Leeson as another. We must tell her of the marriage.'

"So it was all settled; and I, taking my terrible secret with me, went abroad. There is no need to linger over the details. No suspicion of the truth was ever whispered. We took Leeson into our confidence, and my baby was born in Switzerland. Ah! you look astonished. Now you know why I am here—Doris is my child!"

Earle was too bewildered for one moment to speak. Then a low cry of wonder and dismay came from his lips.

"Doris your daughter!" he repeated. "Lady Hereford, this must be a dream!"

"Would to Heaven it were!" she cried. "It is all most fatally true. Ah! me, if I could but wake up and find it a long, dark dream! When my little daughter was some weeks old, we had a letter which caused us some agitation; my father and mother were on the road to join us, and would be with us in two days. They were then at Berne.

"What shall we do?" I asked again of my clear-headed, trustworthy friend.

"As usual, she was quite ready for the emergency.

"'We must do something decisive at once,' she replied; 'send away the child to England without an hour's delay. I will telegraph to Berne to say that we have already left Interlachen, and shall be at Berne to-morrow.'

"There could be no delay. I sat down to think where it would be possible to send the little one. It seems strange to own such a thing, but I assure you that I did not feel any overwhelming affection for the child. She was lovely as a poet's dream, the fairest little cherub that was ever seen; but already in that infantile face there was a gleam of the Studleigh beauty. 'She will be like her race,' I thought, 'faithless and debonair.' Perhaps the keen anger that I felt against her father, the sorrow and the shame that he had caused me, prevented me from loving her; therefore I did not feel any sorrow at parting with her. I might have been a better woman, Earle Moray, if I had been a happier one.

"I could think of no one. Leeson suggested that if the child be taken by some farmer's wife on the estate, it would be the best thing, as in that case I would see it sometimes, and should, at least, know its whereabouts.

"Then I bethought myself how often I had heard my father speak of honest Mark Brace. The next moment the whole plan came to me. I told Leeson, and she approved of it. You have probably heard the story of the finding of Doris; there is no need for me to repeat it. It was Leeson who left the child at the farmer's gate, and waited under the shadow of the trees until it was taken indoors; it is I who send the money; and I have seen the child twice—once when she was young, and the Studleigh look in her face frightened me, although my heart yearned to her.

"Then the sense of my unhappiness, of my false position, of my terrible secret, made me so wretched that I became seriously ill. My father took me away from England, and I was away many years. I saw her again, not so very long since, and she was one of the loveliest girls that could be imagined, yet still with the Studleigh face—'faithless and debonair.' But this time my heart warmed to her, she was so beautiful, so graceful. I was proud of her, and she told me of *you*; she said she was going to marry Earle Moray, gentleman and poet."

"Heaven bless her!" interrupted Earle, with quivering lips.

"Still," continued Lady Estelle, "I was not quite satisfied: I saw in her her father's faults repeated.

My heart found no rest in her, or it would have been misery to lose sight of her again. I did think that when you were married—you and she—I might see more of her. She would be the wife of a poet whom we should all be proud to know.

"Now listen to what I want from you, Earle Moray. In all the wide world; you love Doris best; I want you to find her. Yesterday I heard that her father—my husband—is no longer a penniless younger son; that he has succeeded to the earldom of Linleigh, and will return home. I should have told you that Lady Agnes Delapain died two years after our return from Switzerland, so that no person living knows our secret except Leeson and yourself. Before she died she wrote to my husband to tell him all about Doris. He seems to have extended his indifference even to her, for beyond acknowledging the letter and saying that he really sympathized in my fears, he has never taken the least notice of her. Now, all is different. He will be Earl of Linleigh, she will be Lady Doris Studleigh, and I dare not stand between my child and her rights. Do you understand?"

"No," he replied, quietly, "you could not do that; it would not be honorable."

"So that I must have her here. I will not see him until she is with me. I shall write to him, and beg of him not to come and see me until I send for him. He will do me that small grace, and I shall not send for him until you bring her to me."

"Then you will keep your secret no longer?" said Earle.

"I cannot. If my husband had remained Captain Studleigh, I might have kept it until my death; but, as Earl of Linleigh, he is sure to claim me, either as his wife to live with him, or that he may sue me for a divorce."

"Pardon the question," said Earle, "but would you live with him?"

A dull red flush covered her face.

"If ever I loved anything on earth," she cried, passionately, "it was my husband—I have known no other love."

"What is that you want me to do?" asked Earle.

"I want you to go and find her. No one loves her as you do. Love has keen instincts; you will find her because you love her. Find her—tell her she is the Earl of Linleigh's daughter—that she must come to take her proper position in the great world; but do not tell her who is her mother."

"I will obey you implicitly," he replied.

Then she raised her fair, proud face to his.

"Mine is a strange story, is it not?" she asked.

"Yes—truth is stranger than fiction," he replied.

"And it is a shameful story, is it not?" she continued.

"It is not a good one," he said, frankly.

She smiled at the honest reply.

"You do not know," she said, "how my heart has turned to you since Doris spoke of the 'gentleman and poet.' Aristocrat as I am, I do not think any man could have a grander title. To your honor, as a gentleman, I trust my secret—you will never betray it."

He bowed low.

"I would rather die," he said.

"I believe you implicitly. This time, at least, my instinct has not failed me—I am safe in trusting you. Now, tell me, have you the faintest clew as to where Doris has gone?"

"Not the smallest; she has gone abroad—that is all I know."

"Then do you also go abroad. Remember that no money, no trouble, no toil must be spared—she must be found. Go first to France—to the cities most frequented by the English—then to Italy. For Heaven's sake, find her, and bring her back to Brackenside. When she is once here I can bear the rest. You will not fail me. Write as often as you can; and Heaven speed you."

He felt his own hand clasped in hers; then she placed a roll of bank-notes in it. The next moment she was gone, and Earle sat there alone, breathless with surprise.

CHAPTER XL.
A CLEW AT LAST.

"I feel very much," thought Earle, "as though I had been dreaming in one of the fairy circles. That proud, fair woman with such a story; and she Doris' mother. Doris, my golden-haired love, whom I have been loving, believing her to be some helpless waif or stray. Doris, belonging to the

Studleighs and the proud Duke of Downsbury—what will she say? Great heavens! what will she say when she learns this?"

Then the task before him might well have dismayed a braver man. He had to find her. The whole world lay before him, and he had to search all over it. Was she in Italy, Spain, or France? or had she even gone further away? He thought of the proud lady's words—"love has keen instincts; you will find her because you love her." He would certainly do his best, nor would he delay—that day should see the commencement of his labor. Then he began to think. Surely an ignorant, inexperienced girl could not have left home—have found herself a situation as governess without some one to help her. Who would that some one be? One of her old school-fellows? She had made no more recent acquaintances. He bethought himself of Mattie, always so quick, so bright, so intelligent, so ready to solve all difficulties. He would go to her.

He went, and Mattie wondered at the unusual gravity of his face.

"I have been thinking of Doris," he said, in answer to her mute, reproachful glance.

"I wonder, Earle," she said, "when you will think of anything else?"

"I want to ask you something, Mattie. Sit down here; spare me two or three minutes. Tell me, has it ever seemed to you that some one must have helped Doris, or she could not have found a situation as she did?"

For one moment the kindly brown eyes rested with a troubled glance on his face.

"It has occurred to me often," she replied, "but I cannot imagine who would do it."

"Did she ever talk to you about any of her school-fellows?" he asked.

"No, none in particular. Why, Earle, tell me what you are thinking about?"

"I should have some clew to her whereabouts, I am convinced, if I could but discover that."

She looked steadily at him.

"Earle," she asked, in a low pained voice, "are you still thinking of going in search of her?"

He remembered the morning's interview, and would have felt some little relief if he could have shared the secret with Mattie; but he said:

"Yes, I am still determined, and, to tell you a secret that I do not intend telling any one else. I intend to go this very day."

He saw her lips whiten and quiver as though from some sudden, sharp pain, but it never struck him that this quiet, kindly girl had enshrined him in her heart of hearts. She was quicker of instinct when any wish of his was in question than at any other time. Suddenly she raised her eyes to his face, and he saw in them the dawn of a new idea.

"There is one person," she said, "whom we have quite overlooked, and who is very likely to have helped Doris."

"Who is that?" he asked quickly.

"The artist, Gregory Leslie."

And they looked at each other in silence, each feeling sure that the right chord had been struck. Then Earle said, gravely:

"Strange! but I never once thought of him."

"Doris talked so much to him while he was here," said Mattie, "and from his half-bantering remarks, I think he understood thoroughly how much she disliked the monotony of home. He has very probably found the situation for her."

"I should think so too, but for one thing—he was an honorable man, and he would not have helped her run away from me."

"Perhaps she deceived him. In any case, I think it worth trying," she replied.

"Heaven bless you, Mattie," said Earle. "You are always right. Do not tell any one where I have gone. I shall go to London at once. I will send a note to my mother by one of the men. Good-bye! Heaven bless you, my dear sister who was to have been——"

"Who will be," cried Mattie, "whether you marry Doris or not!"

He wrote a few simple words to his mother, saying merely:

"Do not be alarmed at my absence. I cannot rest—I have gone to find Doris. I shall write often, and return when I have found her."

"Poor mother," he said to himself with a sigh, "I have given her nothing but sorrow of late."

Then he went quietly to Quainton railway station, and was just in time to catch the train for London.

Gregory Leslie was astonished that evening at seeing Earle suddenly enter his studio, and held

out his hand to him in warmest welcome.

Earle looked first at the artist, then at his hand.

"Can I take it?" he asked. "Is it a loyal hand?"

Gregory Leslie laughed aloud.

"Bless the boy—the poet, I ought to say; what does he mean?"

"I mean, in all simplicity, just what I say," said Earle. "Is it the hand of a loyal man?"

"I have never been anything save loyal to you," replied the artist, wondering more and more at Earle's strange manner. "I shall understand you better in a short time," he said. "How ill you look—your face is quite changed."

"I have been ill for some weeks," said Earle. "I am well now."

"And how are they all at Brackenside—the honest farmer and his kindly wife; bright, intelligent Miss Mattie; and last, though by no means least, my lovely model, Miss Innocence?"

"They are all well at Brackenside," said Earle, evasively.

But the artist looked keenly at him, and from the tone of his voice he felt sure that all was not well.

Then Earle sat down, and there was a few minutes silence. At length he roused himself with a sigh.

"Mr. Leslie," he said, "when you were leaving Brackenside you called me friend, and said that you would do anything to help me. I have come to prove if your words are true."

"I am sure they are," replied Mr. Leslie, as he looked pityingly on the worn, haggard face. "You may prove them in any way you will." Then he smiled. "Has Miss Innocence been unkind to you, that you look so dull?"

"That does not sound as though he knew anything about her going," thought Earle; "and if he does not, I am indeed at sea."

Then he looked at the artist. It was an honest face, although the lips curled satirically, and there was a gleam of mischief in the keen eyes.

"Is it a lover's quarrel, Earle?" he asked.

"No, it is more than that," replied Earle. "Tell me, Mr. Leslie, has Doris written to you since you left Brackenside?"

An expression of blank wonder came into the artist's face.

"Yes," he replied, "she wrote to me twice; each time it was to thank me for papers and critics that I had sent her."

"That is all?" said Earle.

"That is all, indeed. I did not preserve the letters. I have a fatal habit of making pipe-lights of them."

"Did she tell you, in those letters, that she was tired of Brackenside, Mr. Leslie?"

"No, they were both written in excellent spirits, I thought. I do not remember that there was any mention of home or any one; in fact, I am sure there was not."

"Did she ask you to help her to find a situation?" said Earle.

"No, indeed, she never did. At Brackenside she pretended often enough to be tired of the place, and to want to go elsewhere, but I never paid any serious attention to it. You see, Earle, if you will love a woman who has all the beauty of the rainbow, you must be content to abide by all her caprices. I am sure she has done something to pain you, Earle—tell me what it is?"

"I will tell you," said Earle. "At first I thought that you had helped her, but now I believe I am mistaken. She has left home unknown to any of us. She has gone abroad as governess."

Gregory Leslie gave a little start of incredulity and surprise.

"Gone abroad," he repeated; "I can believe that easily; but as governess, I can never imagine that."

"She says so. She left two letters, and they both tell the same story."

"If I should believe it," said Gregory Leslie, "I should most certainly say, Heaven help the children taught by the fair Doris. Candidly speaking, I should not like to be one of them."

"You do not believe it then, Mr. Leslie?"

"If you will have me speak frankly, I do not. Of all the young ladies I have ever met, I think her the least likely to become a governess—by choice, that is."

Earle looked at him blankly. It had never entered his mind to disbelieve what she had written. That threw a fresh light upon the matter.

"Tell me all about it," the artist said, after a few minutes.

And Earle did as he was requested. Gregory Leslie listened in silence.

"I know nothing about it," he said, after a time. "It is quite natural that you should imagine that I did, but I do not. She has never mentioned it to me. I understand now what you meant by being loyal. Let me say that, for your sake, if she had asked me to help her in any such scheme, I should have refused."

"I believe it. There is one thing," said Earle, "I have sworn to find her, and find her I will. Can you suggest to me any feasible or sensible plan of search?"

Then he uttered a little cry of amaze, for Gregory Leslie was looking at him with a startled expression in his face.

"Strange!" he said. "I have only just thought of it. You remember my picture of 'Innocence?'"

"Yes," said Earle.

"Well, there was a great deal of jealousy among my comrades over that face. They all wanted to know where I had found it, who was my model, where she lived. One wanted just such a face for his grand picture of Juliet, another thought it the very thing for his Marie Antoinette, in the zenith of her glory and beauty. Another declared that if he could but paint it as Cleopatra, his fortune would be made. Of course I would not, and did not dream for one moment of gratifying their curiosity. Perhaps the most curious among them was Ross Glynlyn. He prayed me to tell him, and was offended when I refused. Now I remember that a few days ago he called upon me in a state of great triumph; he had just returned from Italy.

"'I have found your model,' he said. 'You need not have been so precise. I thought no good would come of such secrecy.'

"'What model do you mean?' I asked.

"'Your model of "Innocence." I have seen the very face you copied,' he replied.

"'Indeed, where did you see it?'

"'In Italy, in a picture-gallery at Florence. She is incomparably beautiful. But how on earth you managed to induce her to sit for her portrait, I cannot imagine. They say she is the most exclusive lady in Florence.'

"'Indeed,' I said, gravely.

"'It is true. I saw her twice, once in the gallery, and once in the carriage with her husband.'

"Then I laughed aloud.

"'My dear Ross,' I said, 'I have let you wander on because you have told me such a strange story; it really seemed quite sad to interrupt you. You are perfectly wrong. To begin with, the young lady whose face I copied is young and unmarried; in the second place, I can answer for it, she has never been near Italy. She is, I know for certain, preparing to marry a gentleman with whom I am well acquainted.'

"He looked sullen and unconvinced.

"'You may say what you will,' he retorted, 'I swear it was the same face.'

"'And I swear that it was not,' I replied.

"So the matter ended. But, Earle, could it be that Ross Glynlyn spoke the truth—that she is in Florence?"

"But he said that lady was married," said Earle.

"That might be a mistake. It seems to me a clew worth following up."

And Earle thought the same.

CHAPTER XLI.

"I CLAIM YOU AS MY OWN; I WILL NEVER RELEASE YOU!"

"I call this a coincidence," said Gregory Leslie, as the studio door opened and a gentleman entered—"a strange coincidence. If I had read it in a novel I should not have believed it."

Earle looked up inquiringly as a handsome young man, with a clever, artistic face, entered the room.

"Am I a coincidence?" inquired the new-comer.

"I did not say that; but, decidedly, your coming is one, Mr. Glynlyn. Allow me to introduce you—Mr. Moray."

The two gentlemen saluted each other with a smile, each feeling attracted by the other's face.

Then Mr. Leslie turned to his brother artist.

"It is strange that you should come in just at this minute, Ross, I was telling Mr. Moray how certain you were that you had seen the original of 'Innocence' in Florence."

"So I did," replied Ross. "You may contradict me as much as you like. It is not probable that I should make any mistake. The lady I saw had precisely the same face as the picture. It was the original herself or her twin sister."

"She has no twin sister," said Earle, incautiously.

"Ah! you know her, then," continued Mr. Glynlyn. "I assure you that I made no mistake. Our friend here may make as much mystery as he will. I am amazed that he should give me such little credit. Why should I say it if it were not true? And how could I possibly mistake that face for any other? If you know the young lady, you can in all probability corroborate what I say—namely, that she is in Florence."

"I cannot do so," said Earle, "for I am perfectly ignorant of her whereabouts."

Then he shook hands with the artist, for it seemed to him every moment spent there was lessening his chance of finding Doris. He would start at once for Florence. It was a frail clew, after all, feeble and weak, yet well worth following. Of course, it was all a mistake about her being married—she was a governess, not a married lady; yet that mistake seemed to him of very little consequence. The only doubt was that having made one mistake, was it likely the artist had made another?

"Good-bye," said Gregory Leslie, in answer to the farewell words of Earle. "Good-bye: you will let me hear how you get on."

Then he went. He never rested day or night until he was in Florence. Then, exhausted by the long journey, he was compelled to seek repose. He did what was wisest and best in going at once to the best hotel, the one most frequented by the English. There he made many inquiries. There were many English in Florence, but he did not hear of any young lady who was particularly beautiful. The people at the hotel spoke freely enough; they discussed every one and everything, but he heard no allusion to any one who in the least degree resembled Doris.

When he had rested himself he began his search in Florence. At first it seemed quite hopeless. He went through the churches, though he owned to himself that he need not hope to find her there. He went almost daily to the principal places of public resort; no evening passed without his going to the opera, but he never caught sight of a face like hers. Once he followed a girl with golden hair all through the principal streets of Florence; when he came nearer to her, he saw that the hair was neither so bright, so silky, or so abundant as that of Doris. The girl turned her face—it was not the fair, lovely face of the girl he worshiped.

He spent many hours each day in the picture-galleries. Some of the fairest pictures hung before his eyes, yet he, whose love for art and beauty was so passionate, never even saw them. He feared to look at the pictures on the wall, lest he should miss one of the living faces. He saw many, but among them he never saw her.

He spent a week in this fashion, and then his heart began to fail him; it was impossible that she should be in Florence, or surely before this he must have seen her. He wrote to Gregory Leslie and told him of his failure.

"I am afraid either your friend is mistaken or that she has gone away," he said. And if she had gone, where was he to look next?

Then he bethought himself if he could get an introduction to some of the principal houses in Florence; then if any party or *fete* were given, he should be sure to see her. Even in this he succeeded. With the help of Gregory Leslie he was introduced to some of the best houses in Florence. He met many English—he heard nothing of Doris. People thought he had a wonderful fancy; whenever he heard of any English children, he never rested until he had seen them. Some one told him that Lady Cloamell had three nice little girls; his heart beat high and fast; perhaps Doris was the governess—Doris lived, Doris lived. He armed himself with some pretty sketches, and then asked permission to see the little ladies.

Lady Cloamell was much gratified.

"Tell the governess to come with them," she said to the servant who went in search of them.

And Earle sat down with a white face and beating heart. It was all a waste of emotion.

When the governess did come in, she was ugly and gray-haired.

Poor Earle! he had to endure many such disappointments.

"She is not in Florence," he said to himself at last. "I must go elsewhere."

It was not until the hope was destroyed that he knew how strong it had been—the

disappointment was bitter in the extreme.

He woke one morning resolved upon leaving Florence the next day. The sun was shining, the birds singing; his thoughts flew to England and the sweet summer mornings when he had wandered through the green lanes and fields with his love. His heart was heavy. He raised his despairing eyes to the bright heavens, and wondered how long it was to last.

The morning was fair and balmy; he thought that the air would refresh him, and perhaps when he felt less jaded and tired, some inspiration might come to him where to search next; so he walked through the gay streets of sunny Florence until he came to the lovely banks of the Arno. The scene was so fair—the pretty villas shining through the trees.

He walked along till he came to a green patch shaded by trees whose huge branches touched the water; there he sat down to rest. Oh! thank Heaven for that few minutes' rest. He laid his head against the trunk of a tree, and bared his brow to the fresh sweet breeze.

He had been there some little time when the sound of a woman's voice aroused him—the sweet laughing tones of a woman's voice.

"You may leave me," it said. "I shall not run away. I shall enjoy a rest by the river."

Dear Heaven! what voice was it? It touched the very depths of his heart, and sent a crimson flush to his brow. For one short moment he thought he was back again in the woods of Quainton. Then his heart seemed to stop beating; then he leaned, white, almost senseless, against the trees; then he heard it again.

"Do not forget my flowers; and remember the box for 'Satanella.' It is one of my favorite operas. *Au revoir*."

Then there was a sound of some one walking down the river-bank, the rustle of a silken dress, the half-song, half-murmur of a laughing voice. He saw a shadow fall between himself and the sunshine. Oh, Heaven! could it be she?

He drew aside the sheltering branches and looked out. There, on the bank below him, sat a young girl. At first he could only distinguish the rich dress of violet silk and black lace; then, when the mist cleared before his eyes, and he saw a profusion of golden hair shining like the sun, then he went toward her.

Oh, blessed sky above! Oh, shining sun! Oh, flowing river! Oh, great and merciful Heaven! was it she?

Nearer, and more like the shadow of a coming fate, he crept. Still she never moved. She sang of love that was never to die. Nearer and nearer he could see the white, arched neck, whose graceful turn he would have recognized anywhere. Nearer still, and he laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Doris," he said.

She turned quickly round. It was she.

He will never forget the ghastly pallor that came over her face. She started up with a dreadful cry.

"Earle! Earle! have you come to kill me?"

It was some moments before he could reply. Earth and sky seemed to meet; the ripple of the river was as a roar of water in his ears. His first impulse had been a fierce one. He, worn, haggard, heartbroken; she, brighter, fairer than ever, singing on the banks of the sunny Arno. Then he looked steadily at her.

"No," he said slowly; "I have not come to kill you; I do not wish to kill you. Death could not deal out such torture as your hands have dealt out to me."

"Poor Earle," she said pityingly; but the pity was more than he could bear.

"I am sent here," he continued, "by those who have a right to send. I do not need pity."

But she looked into his changed face.

"Poor Earle," she repeated; and the tone of her voice was so kind that for one moment he shuddered with dread.

"I must speak to you, Doris. I have been long in finding you——"

"Earle," she interrupted, "what has brought you here? I am not surprised. I have always felt that, sooner or later, I should see you. What has brought you here?"

"I have something to tell you," he replied. "I would have traveled the wide world over, but I would never have returned without seeing you."

"But why, of all other places, did you think of Florence?" she asked.

Then it seemed to him that she was simply trying to gain time, and to avoid what he had to say.

"Doris, I have come expressly to talk to you. Why I chose Florence matters but little; nothing

matters between us except what I have to say."

"Oh, Earle," she cried, "I was so tired of Brackenside. I could not stay."

"Never mind Brackenside. We will not discuss it now. Will you sit down here, Doris, while I tell you my message?"

She seemed to have no thought of disobeying him. Silently enough she sat down, while he leaned against the tree. She was rather hurt to find that so much of her old influence over him seemed to be lost. She would have liked him to tremble and blush, yet he had not even sought to take her white hand in his own. He had not kissed her face, nor touched the long, golden hair that he had so warmly praised. He stood looking gravely at her; then he spoke.

"Doris," he said, "in the presence of Heaven you promised to be my wife. I do not absolve you from that promise, and until I do so, I claim you as my own."

A hot flush crimsoned his face, sudden passion gleamed in his eyes and quivered on his lips.

"I will never release you," he cried. "Death may take you from me; but of my own free will you shall never, so help me Heaven, be freed from your promise! You hear me?"

"Yes," she replied, in a low voice, "I hear."

"As the man you have promised to marry, as the man who alone on earth has the right to question you, tell me how you are living here now?"

"How am I living?" she replied, raising innocent eyes to his face. "I do not quite understand what you mean."

"I mean precisely what I say. With whom are you living, and what are you doing for a livelihood?"

"What a strange question, Earle. I told you; I am governess to some little children."

"You swear that before Heaven?"

"Before anything or any one you like," she replied, indifferently, smiling the while to herself.

CHAPTER XLII.

"THIS IS YOUR REVENGE—TO HUMILIATE ME."

"I am bound to believe you," he said, "although my faith in you has been terribly shaken. I ask you because I heard that you passed here as a married lady. Is that true?"

A keen observer might have noticed that her face grew pale—that she trembled and seemed for one moment uncertain.

"Is it true?" repeated Earle.

In the eyes raised to his face there was such blank innocence of expression that, in spite of his doubts, he felt ashamed of himself and his words.

"You heard such a thing of me!" she said. "Why, who could have told you?"

"That matters little; I heard it. Is it true?"

"You puzzle me," she said, with the same startled expression. "Why should I do such a thing—why pass myself off as married? I do not understand—you puzzle me, Earle."

"Is it true, or not?" he repeated.

"No," she replied.

"You swear that, likewise, before Heaven?"

"Certainly," she said, promptly. "I do not understand."

Then he blamed himself for being hard upon her.

"We will not discuss it any more," he said, "I have other things to say to you."

She looked slightly embarrassed, the fact being that she had quite lost her fear of him, and was only pondering now upon what she should do to get him away. It would never do for Lord Vivianne to return and find him there; there would be a quarrel, to say the least of it. Besides, Lord Charles was not the most patient of men. What would he do if he heard this nonsense about Earle claiming her? She had no idea of going back with Earle—sooner or later she would tell him so. It was very awkward for her, and she heartily wished she had never seen him. She had no idea, even ever so faint, of going back to Brackenside. She resolved that while he was talking she would settle her future plan of action. At first she hardly listened to him, then by degrees his words began to have a strong, weird interest for her.

"Doris," he said, "I think I have brought the strangest message that one human being ever

brought to another. Give me your full attention."

She turned her beautiful face to his, thinking that he was going to say something about love or marriage. Far different were the next words that fell upon her ear.

"Doris," he said, "you have always believed yourself to be the daughter of Mark and Patty Brace, have you not?"

"Yes," she replied, wonderingly, "what else could I believe? You are the son of Mrs. Moray, of Lindenholm, are you not?"

"Certainly; but that is beside the question. You never, even in your own mind, doubted the truth of what you say?"

She laughed the little, careless, sweet laugh that he remembered so well.

"To tell the plain truth, Earle, I never felt myself quite a Brace—the manners and tastes of those good people were so different to my own."

"Then what I have to say will not shock you. You had no great love for the simple farmer and his kindly wife?"

"If you wish for the truth, again I say no. I had no great love for them. They were good in their way—that way was not mine."

"So it seems," he retorted. "Then you will not suffer any great amount of pain if I tell you that Mark Brace is not your father, nor his kindly wife your mother?"

"Now, Earle, you are inventing a romance to please yourself."

"Does it please you, Doris? I leave inventions to yourself; I tell you the plain, honest truth—you are no relation of theirs."

"Who am I, then? If you take my old identity from me, you must, at least, give me a new one," she said, laughingly.

Her utter want of feeling and absence of all emotions annoyed him greatly.

"I will tell you a story," he said.

And with a grace and pathos all his own, he told the history of that night so long ago, when the little child was found at the door of the farm-house.

She looked incredulous.

"Do you mean to tell me that I was that child? A wretched little foundling! I do not believe one word of it. This is your revenge—to humiliate me."

"You will know better soon," he replied, quietly. "Yes, you were that little child. Patty Brace took you to her arms, and honest Mark Brace treated you like his own."

Her face flushed crimson, her lips curled with scorn, her eyes flashed light.

"I look very much like a foundling, do I not? Earle Moray, take your absurd stories elsewhere." She held up one white hand. "That looks like the hand of a foundling, does it not? Shame on you for trying to humiliate me! It is a pure invention. I do not believe one word of it, and I never shall."

"You have only heard the commencement," he replied, coolly. "Remember, I never used the word 'foundling' to you—you used it to yourself. It is not probable that I should do so *when I know whose daughter you are*."

"Ah! Do you know? May I ask what honorable parentage you have assigned to me? This grows amusing. Remember, before you say another word, that I distinctly refuse to believe you."

"You will change your mind," he said, quietly. "I have not the least doubt that I am here to tell you the simple truth, and to take you back to your father."

The impulse was strong upon her to say that she could not go, but she refrained, thinking it quite as wise and politic to hear first to what she was to return.

"You must not ask me how I know your history," said Earle, "but it suffices that I know it. Let me tell you also, it did not surprise me so very much. I always thought, myself, that you were, as you say, 'of a different kind.'"

He saw the color creep slowly over her face and a new light dawn in her eyes.

"You will, henceforward, occupy a very different position, Doris," he said, gravely; "your place will be henceforth among the nobility."

"Ah! that's better," she said in a low voice.

But he could see that she trembled with impatience. She had clasped her hands so tightly that the rings she wore made great dents in the tender flesh; still she would not betray her impatience.

"Your father is a nobleman, a wealthy British peer—Earl Linleigh—and you are his only child."

She grew white, even to the lips, and her breath came in quick gasps.

"Earl of Linleigh?" she repeated. "Are you quite sure you are not mistaken, Earle?"

"There is no mistake, Doris; your name and title is now Lady Doris Studleigh. Do you like it? Does it sound well?"

She drew her breath with a deep, heavy sigh.

"I cannot believe it, Earle," she said, "it seems quite impossible that it should be true. It is what I used to dream when a child, but I never thought the dream would be realized. I cannot believe it, Earle."

It was significant enough that she refused to believe him when she fancied that he wished to lower her in the social scale; but she never expressed the slightest doubt of his truth now, nor did even the faintest doubt occur to her. After the first emotion of surprise had passed, she looked at him again.

"My mother?" she said—"you have told me nothing about her. Who is she?"

"I have nothing to tell," he said; "I have nothing to say about her. I was commissioned simply to tell you this. I may add that your father's marriage was a private one, that he was for many years in India, and is now returning home to take possession of his estates."

"A private marriage!" she said, slowly. "I hope he has not married beneath him."

"There is no doubt but that the whole story of his marriage will be told to you," said Earle. "And now, Doris, listen to me—you must return with me; I cannot go without you. I promised that you should go back with me, and it is imperative. The marriage will not be declared until you reach home."

"It is so sudden," she said.

"Yes, but you surely cannot hesitate, Doris. Remember not only what awaits you—your golden future—but remember, also, it is your own parents who summon you."

"You do not quite understand, Earle. I have no hesitation in going. Of course I shall go, but I want time to think."

"If you fear the people you are staying with will not be willing for you to go, it is a great mistake; they could not possibly make any objection. I will see them for you, if you like."

She raised her head in quick alarm.

"No, I would rather not, it is not needful. Give me just ten minutes to decide. You are just; give me ten minutes in silence to think."

He remained mute and motionless by her side.

The Arno rippled musically at her feet; birds sang above her head.

"Tell me again;" she said, "what will my rank and title be?"

"You will be the Lady Doris Studleigh, only daughter of the Earl of Linleigh——"

"And my fortune?" she interrupted.

"Of that I know nothing; but I should say it must be large. You will probably be a wealthy heiress."

"And there is a place waiting for me in the grand world?"

"Most certainly," he replied.

"Now, then, let me think, Earle; I am all bewilderment and confusion. Let me arrange my ideas, then I will explain them to you."

He did not know why she sat so silent, while quiver after quiver of pain passed over her face—why her hands were so tightly clasped; but she in that hour was reaping the reward of her folly.

What had she done? Had she, by her wicked sin, by her intense self-love, her eagerness for pleasure and luxury, her little esteem for virtue, her frivolous views of vice—had she by all these forfeited that glorious birth-right which was hers? Had she lost all chance of this grand position which would fill the greatest desire of her heart? It was this most terrible fear that blanched her face and made her hands tremble, that caused her to sit like one over whom a terrible blight had fallen. In her passionate desire for change and luxury, for pleasure and gayety, she had never even thought of her own degradation; it was a view of the subject that she had not yet taken; she had only thought of the lighter side. Now it seemed to look her in the face with all its natural deformity. She shrunk abashed and frightened—horror-stricken—now that she saw her enormity in its full colors.

Still, it was not the sin that distressed her; that was nothing to her. It was the idea that through it she might lose the glorious future awaiting her; if this had not happened, she would never have

regretted her fault. If it were known—if this proud nobleman knew that she had passed as the wife of a man to whom she was not married, would he ever receive her as his daughter? No; she knew enough of the world to be quite sure of that. Even Mark Brace would not do it. If he had the faintest possible idea of what her life had been since they parted, would he receive her, and think her a suitable companion for Mattie? No; she knew that he would not; he would have forgiven any sin save that. A disgraceful sin like hers he considered beyond pardon.

If Mark Brace, with his kindly, simple heart, could not pardon her, was it probable that Earl Linleigh would? No! The only hope that remained to her was to keep her past life, with its terrible blunder, a dead secret—there was no other resource. Could she do that? It was just possible.

Only yesterday she had been railing against her life, declaring that it was all a disappointment, that she saw no one, and was getting tired of it; now she felt thankful that it was so, that she had seen but few strange faces, and most of these had been Italian ones. So that if she could keep her secret, she trusted no one would recognize in Lady Doris Studleigh the person who had been known as Mrs. Conyers.

CHAPTER XLIII.
THE COQUETTE'S BLANDISHMENTS.

"Have you finished thinking yet, Doris?" asked Earle, gently.

"No," she replied. "I am getting a little clearer in my ideas, but I have by no means finished yet."

She had two plans before her. One was to wait for Lord Charles and tell him all—to trust to his generosity to keep their secret. Then she laughed bitterly as she repeated the word "generosity"—he had none. He was reckless, extravagant over money, but as for generosity, honor, or principle, she knew he had none. In trusting to that she would indeed trust to a broken reed.

Besides, if she were once established in this new sphere of life, it would be highly disagreeable and offensive to have any one near her who knew of this episode. If Lord Vivianne know, he would always have her in his power; he would hold the secret like a drawn sword over her head. No; better for her own safety to steal away from him without saying one word. Even if, in the after years, they should meet again, it was hardly possible that he would recognize her, surrounded by all the luxuries of her position, the honored daughter of noble parents. It was not likely that he would recognize in her the girl who had left Brackenside for his sake. As for leaving him—far from feeling the least regret, far from seeing that she was treating him dishonorably, she smiled to herself at his consternation when he should return to the river-side and not find her.

"He will think that I have run away with some one else," she thought; and the idea amused her so intensely that she laughed aloud.

"You are well content," said Earle, bitterly.

"Why should not I be? You have brought me wealth and fortune, title and honor—all that my soul loves best. Why should I not be content?"

She had finished her musing now, and it had brought her to two conclusions: she must leave Lord Vivianne at once, and in silence, while she must at the same time, at any price, keep her secret from Earle.

Another and very probable idea occurred to her. It was this: by Earle being sent to fetch her, it was very evident that her parents approved of him, and that she would have to marry him. Looking at him, she thought it was not such a bad alternative, after all. He was handsomer, younger, stronger than Lord Vivianne; besides, what little affection she had had to give had always been his. Then she arose from her seat with a smile.

"I have finished thinking, Earle. To make matters square, I promise myself that I will not think again for ever so many months."

"What is the result of your deliberation?" he said.

"I wish you would be a little kinder to me, Earle. You speak so gravely, you look so coldly, that you make me quite unhappy."

His face flushed slightly and his lips trembled.

"I do not wish to seem unkind, Doris, but let me ask you—what else besides coldness and gravity can you expect from me?"

"You know I always liked you, Earle."

"I know you betrayed and deceived me about as basely as it is possible to deceive any one. But we need not discuss that now."

She looked at him with a smile few men could resist, and held out her hands.

"Be friends, Earle; I like you too well, after all, to travel with you while you look so cold and stern. Give me one smile—only one—then I shall feel more at my ease."

"I do not think my smiles cheer, or the loss of them depresses you. Neither can I smile to order; still you need have no fear of traveling with me."

It was in her nature to respect him more, the more difficult he seemed to please.

"I shall manage him in time," she thought.

"I shall return with you, Earle," she said. "I have been thinking it all over, and I will go at once. I will not wait to say good-bye to the people here."

"But that seems strange—not quite right. Why not go and bid them farewell? Tell them the good fortune that has happened to you."

"No; they are very fond of me—the children especially. You do not know; they would not let me come away."

"But it does not seem right," persisted Earle.

"It is right enough; if I go back to them I shall not go with you. I can write to them as soon as I reach England, and tell them all about it."

"I know you will have your own way, Doris. It is useless for me to interfere; do as you please."

"That is like my old lover, Earle; now I begin to feel at home with you. I did use you very wickedly, but all the time I liked you."

"I know exactly the value of your liking," said Earle, who had determined to be cool and guarded.

She talked to him in the old sweet tones; she gave him the sweetest glances from her lovely eyes; she remembered all the pretty arts and graces which had attracted him most; and Earle, despite his caution, despite his resolve, knew that his heart was on fire again with the glamour and magic of her beauty; knew that every pulse was throbbing with passion; and she knew, as well as though he had put it into words, that the old charm was returning, only a thousand times stronger.

She laid her white hand on his arm, and he shrank shuddering from the touch. She only smiled—her time would come.

"I shall not return to the house where I have been living. The reason is that I wish them to forget me. I shall not like, when I am Lady Doris Studleigh, to be recognized by them."

That pride was so exactly like her, he understood it well.

"You can return to Florence, if you like," she continued, with the air of a queen; "but if you wish to please me, you will walk on with me to the nearest railway station, and let us go at once to Genoa. We can travel from Genoa to London."

"But I have left my things at the hotel," he said.

"Is there anything particular among them, Earle?"

"No," he replied.

"Then you can send for them on your arrival. Please yourself. If you do not go on my terms, I shall go alone."

Then he looked at the rippling, golden hair, that fell in such shining profusion over her shoulders, at the dress of rich velvet, silk and delicate lace.

"You are not dressed for traveling. Why be so hasty?" he said.

"I can purchase anything I want at Genoa," she replied.

Then he noticed for the first time what costly jewels she wore, and how her hands were covered with shining gems. For the first time a thrill of uneasiness, of doubt, of fear, shot through him.

"You have some beautiful jewels, Doris," he said, slowly.

Her face flushed, then she laughed carelessly.

"How easy it is to deceive a man," she said; "a lady would have known at one glance that they were not real."

He felt greatly relieved.

"They are pretty, but not very valuable," she continued—"given to me by the children I have been teaching. If you do not like them, Earle, I will throw them into the Arno one by one."

"Why do that, if the little children gave them to you? I am no judge of precious stones, but looking at the light in those, I should have thought them real."

"Do you know that if they were real they would be worth hundreds and hundreds of pounds? You must think an English governess in Italy coins money."

He looked admiringly at her handsome dress, although too inexperienced to know its real value.

"This is my best dress, too," she said. "And do you know, Earle, that as I put it on I said to myself, I do not look amiss in this; I wish Earle could see me."

"Did you really?" he asked, a flush of delight rising to his brow. It is so very easy to deceive a generous and trusting man, that one might almost be ashamed to do it. "Did you, Doris? Then, although you ran away from me so cruelly, you did like me, after all?"

"Oh, Earle, what a question! Like you? Did you not feel sure that when I had seen something of the world—had allayed the fever of excitement—that I should return to you? Did you not feel sure of it?"

No such thought or intention had ever been in her mind, still she wished to make the best of matters. It was no use for her to return to England unless she was the best of friends with him. A few untruths, more or less, did not trouble her in the least, only provided that he believed them.

"I never thought so," was his simply reply. "I believed you had left me forever, Doris."

"You must never judge me by the same rule you would apply to others, Earle. I told you so from the beginning of our acquaintance, I tell you so now."

"I believe it," he replied.

Yet, although he saw that she wished to make friends, and was flattered by the belief, he could not all at once forget the anguish and sorrow she had caused him.

Then she took out a little jeweled watch that she wore. Time was flying. In one short half-hour Lord Charles would be back with her flowers and news of the opera-box.

"How angry he will be," she said to herself, "to think that any one should thwart his sovereign will and pleasure. He will look in every pretty nook by the river-bank, then he will go into the house and ask, 'Have you seen Mrs. Conyers?' And no one will be able to answer him. I should like to be here to see the sensation. Then he will be sulky, and finally come to the conclusion that I have given him up, and have run away from him."

She was so accustomed to think of him as selfish, loving nothing but himself, that she never imagined that he had grown to love her with a madness of passion to which he would have sacrificed everything on earth. She had been so entirely wrapped up in her own pursuits, in the acquisition of numberless dresses and jewels, that she had not observed the signs of his increasing devotion. Blind to his mad passion for her, she decided upon leaving him; and of all the mistakes that she ever made in her life, none was so great as this.

Ten minutes later they were walking rapidly toward the little town of Seipia: there they could go by train to Genoa. As they walked along the high-road Doris laughed and talked gayly, as though nothing had happened since they were first betrothed.

"This reminds me of old times, Earle," she said. "How goes the poetry, dear? I expect to hear that you have performed miracles by this time."

"You destroyed my poetry, Doris, when you marred my genius and blighted my life!"

She laid her hand caressingly on his.

"Did I? Then I must make amends for it now," she said.

And he was almost vexed to find how the words thrilled him with a keen, passionate delight. Suddenly she raised a laughing face to his.

"Was there a very dreadful sensation, Earle, when they found out I was gone?"

The smiling face, the laughing voice, smote him like a sharp sword. He remembered the pain and the anguish, the torture he had suffered, the long hours when he had lain between life and death; he remembered the fame he had lost, the sweet gift of genius, all destroyed; his heart broken, his life rendered stale and profitless, while she could smile and ask with laughing eyes if there had been much sensation.

"I believe," he cried, with a sudden flame of passion, "women are nerved with heartlessness!"

She was scared by his manner. Deep feeling and earnestness were quite out of her line; her bright, shallow nature did not understand it, but she saw that for the future it would be better to say nothing to him about such matters as her running away from home.

CHAPTER XLIV.
THE NOBLEMAN'S OATH.

It was a strange journey home, and during its course Earle often wondered why, at intervals, Doris laughed, as though she found the keenest enjoyment in her own thoughts.

He little imagined that she was reveling in the disappointment Lord Vivianne would feel; and she had enough of the woman in her to rejoice in his pain, and to feel pleased that she could deal him some little blow in return for the blow he had dealt her. In her heart she had never forgiven him that he had not found her beauty and her grace inducement sufficient to make him marry her. She could not pardon him that, and she liked to think that he would be annoyed and vexed by her absence.

She little dreamed of the storm of passion in that heart of his. If she had had any inkling of it, she would most assuredly have done the wisest and most straightforward thing—told him her story, trusted him, and confided in what he called his honor—it would have been by far the safest.

As it was, his love became a fury of rage. He had gone into the city of Florence, thinking of her, anxious to gratify every whim, desirous of pleasing her. It had been her whim to sit by the river-side and read, while he went to purchase flowers and to engage an opera-box. She had plenty of flowers in the luxurious house where he had placed her—she was surrounded by them—but they did not please her; she wanted some from a celebrated florist who supplied—so she had been told—the most fashionable ladies in Florence. Then, too, she had a great desire to hear "Satanella," and knowing that it would be really impossible, unless Lord Vivianne went himself, to secure a box, she had taken the pretty caprice of sitting by the river until his return.

He returned in the highest spirits, having succeeded in all that she most desired. He brought with him some magnificent flowers, beautiful in color, rich in perfume; and he hastened back to the pretty nook where he had left her. The river ran rippling by, the branches waved in the wind, the birds sang on the boughs, but there was no Doris. Thinking that she had gone some few steps further down, he called her by her name, "Dora! Dora!" It seemed as though the wavelets ran away laughing at the sound, and the birds repeated it with mocking charms. Then he saw upon the ground the book she had taken out with her, and smiled to himself as he picked it up. It was a prurient French romance, and a cynical laugh came from his lips.

"I consider myself, to say the least of it, no saint; but it would never have occurred to me to bring such a book as that out into the sunshine to read."

From the river-bank he could see the pretty villa, with its terrace and balconies. He thought it possible that Doris had gone home in search of something, and he sat down under the trees where that most momentous interview had taken place, and sang to himself an opera song. Still, though the time passed pleasantly, she was long in coming. He occupied himself in thinking of her—of the wondrous grace and beauty of her face, of the smile that dazzled him, of the glory of her golden hair, of her wit, her repartee, her piquant words. He owned to himself that she made the charm of his life—that without her it would have neither salt nor savor. Indeed, he had only been absent from her an hour or two, and he felt dull and wearied. Life without Doris—why it would not be worth having!

Then he wished that she had belonged to some station of life so refined that he could have married her; but he checked the thought with a sigh. She was beautiful with a rare loveliness, but hardly the one that any man would choose to be the mother of his children.

Then the sunbeams fell slanting, and his lordship remembered that lunch would be waiting. He felt sure that she must be at home. He walked quickly toward the villa, still carrying the magnificent flowers, but Mrs. Conyers was not there. He went into her room; it was just as she had left it—a scene of elegant confusion—dresses, jewels, laces, all in the most picturesque disorder. The dress she was to have worn at the opera lay there ready, the jewels with it. Evidently she had not gone far. He learned from her maid and other servants that she had not returned to the house since she left with him in the morning. Then Lord Charles became angry; he was not accustomed to this kind of treatment.

"She is hiding, I suppose," he said to himself, sullenly; "but if she expects me to make any fuss about finding her, she is mistaken. She can do as she likes."

He slept away the sunshiny afternoon, and awoke to the fact that dinner was ready, but that Doris had not returned; yet it was not until the shades of night had fallen that he began to feel any fear; then, slowly enough, it dawned upon him that she had left him. At first he was incredulous, and feared some accident had happened: he dreaded lest she should have fallen into the river, and made an active search for her. When he felt sure that she was gone, that she had in real truth abandoned him, his rage was terrible; he could not imagine how or why it was.

"She had everything here," he said to himself, "that any woman's heart could desire. Can she have met any one whom she liked better than me?"

He judged her quite correctly in thinking that nothing but superior wealth would have tempted her from him; but no one was missing from Florence, neither Italian nor English. As for suspecting that Earle had followed and claimed her, such an idea never entered his mind; he would have laughed at it.

When there was no longer any doubt—when long days and longer nights had passed, and there was no sign of her return—when she never wrote to him or gave him the least sign of her existence, he was in a fury of rage and passion. He paid the servants and sent them away. He flung her dresses and pretty ornaments into the river; he would have none of them. Then he swore to himself an oath that, let him find her again, as he would—wherever he would—he would take his revenge.

It would have been a thousand times better for her had she told him the truth and trusted him. Then he went away from Florence, but he swore to himself that he would find her, and when she was found she should suffer.

But of this, Doris, triumphant and happy, knew nothing. That journey home was delightful to her. She gloried in seeing Earle lose the dignity, the stern self-control, the coldness that had been so distasteful to her; she delighted in making his face flush, in saying words to him that made his strong hands tremble and his lips quiver; she delighted in these evidences of her power. Gradually he became the warm, impassioned lover that he had been once, and Doris was happy. While Earle was her friend all was safe.

"I hope," she said to him one day, "that they will not tease me at home with tiresome questions; I am so impatient, I should never answer or hear them."

"If by home you mean Brackenside," said Earle, "it is not very probable; you will not be there long."

"You had better give them a caution, Earle. I know my own failings so well. Tell them that you met me in Florence. Mind, if you use the word *found* I shall never forgive you. You met me in Florence, and hearing that they were in trouble over me, I returned; that is what you have to say, Earle, neither more nor less."

He smiled at her vehemence.

"I will do all I can to please you, Doris," he said.

"That is well; if you do so, Earle, we shall be all right together. I like to be obeyed."

"It suits you," said Earle; "you were born to be a queen."

"Do they know anything at Brackenside of this wonderful story, Earle?" she asked, after a time.

"No, not yet—not one word; no one knows it but myself and you."

Yet he could see that, as they drew nearer home, she was nervous and ill at ease. Once he asked her why it was, and she half laughed as she said:

"Mattie is so tiresome; I shall have no peace with her."

And again he repeated his formula of comfort, "It is not for long."

On the evening they reached Brackenside it was cold and windy.

Rain had fallen during the day, but the rain-clouds had all disappeared; the sky was clear and blue, the moon shone, but the cold was great. The scene in England was quite wintry; there was no Italian sun to warm it; the flowers and leaves were all dead; the fields looked gray, not green, and the wind wailed with a sound so mournful that it made one shudder to listen to it.

As they walked up the fields together, Earle said to his beautiful companion:

"According to Mark Brace's story, it was on such a night as this that you were brought to Brackenside."

She laughed.

"Do you know, Earle," she said, "I am quite ashamed of it, but I have a very uncomfortable sensation that I am returning home very much after the style of the prodigal son."

"Nothing of the kind," said generous Earle. He would not allow her to depreciate herself.

The wind was fearful; it bent the tall trees, and swayed them to and fro as though they were reeds. It moaned and wailed round the house with long-drawn, terrible cries.

"One would think the wind had a voice, and was foretelling evil," said Doris, with a shudder. "Listen, Earle!"

But the attention of the young poet was drawn to a pretty scene. Through the window of the farm-house a ruddy light came like a beam of welcome.

"They are sitting there," said Earle—"the farmer and his wife, with Mattie. Let us go to the window, Doris; we shall see them, but they will not see us."

They drew near to the window. It was the prettiest home scene that was ever imagined. The ruddy light of the fire was reflected in the shining cupboard, in Mark's honest face—it played over the bent head of his wife, and on Mattie's brown hair.

Tears came into the young poet's eyes as he stood and watched; for Mark had taken the great Bible down from the shelf, and was reading aloud to his wife and child. They could not distinguish what he was reading, but they heard the deep reverence of his voice, and how it faltered when he came to any words that touched him. They could see the look of reverence on Mattie's face, and the picture was a pleasing one—it touched all that was most noble in the heart of the young poet.

"I have seen just such a look as Mattie wears on the pictured faces of the saints," he said; and although Doris affected to laugh at his enthusiasm, she was half jealous of the girl who excited it.

Suddenly an idea seemed to occur to Earle; he turned quickly to her.

"Doris," he said, "raise your face to the quiet skies; let me look into the depths of your eyes. Tell me, before Heaven, are you worthy to return and take your place as sister by the side of that girl, whose every thought is pure, and every word devout?"

"I understand you," she said, coldly. "Yes, I am quite worthy to stand by her side."

"Swear it, before Heaven!" he cried.

And the unhappy girl swore it!

CHAPTER XLV.
AN APPEAL FOR FORGIVENESS.

The same wind that wailed so mournfully round the farm made sad music round the Castle walls. Lady Estelle shuddered as she listened to it; it seemed so full of prophecy, and the prophecy was so full of evil. It moaned and sobbed, then went off into wild cries, then into fitful wails.

A scene was passing just then in the drawing-room of the Castle, such as the dead and gone Herefords had never seen. A group of four people were assembled there, the duke looking older by twenty years than when we saw him last, his head bent, his stately figure drooping, as a man droops who has just met the most terrible blow of his lifetime. All the pride and the dignity seemed to have died away from the face of the duchess, his wife; her eyes were swollen with weeping.

"I shall never feel myself again," she said to her husband; "it is my death-blow."

Two others were in that group—Lady Estelle, whose face was ghastly pale; and standing near her, a tall, handsome man, fair of face, frank, careless and debonair. He was evidently trying to look sorry for something, but had not been able to succeed.

"It is so long since," he was saying, in a tone of apology; "but really I fear there can be no excuse offered."

"No," replied the duke, in a stern voice, "that is certain—none."

Two days before this two events had happened at the Castle. One was that Lady Estelle received a note from Earle, brief enough in itself, but full of import to her. It simply said:

"I have found her. She is now at home, awaiting your summons. I am thankful not to have failed."

Lady Estelle grew white to the lips as she read those lines. Then she wrote a second letter. It was just as brief, and was addressed to the Earl of Linleigh. It said:

"There is no use in further delay; come to the Castle whenever you like, only give me twelve hour's notice."

Then came a letter which sorely puzzled the duke. It was from the Earl of Linleigh, saying that he should be happy to pay the duke a visit if it were quite convenient, and that he would be at the Castle on Wednesday, when he would have something particular to say to him. The duke read the letter, then passed it over to his wife with a very anxious look.

"He follows his letter, you see; he gives me no time to refuse him. I suppose we can both guess what he wants to see me about."

"I am afraid so," said the duchess, with a sigh. "I am afraid she likes him. If she does, we must look upon the brightest side. Perhaps time has steadied him. Certainly, to be Countess of Linleigh is a great thing, after all."

"The title is right enough," said the duke; "it is the bearer of it whom I neither like nor trust."

Neither of them were prepared to hear the story that Ulric, Earl of Linleigh, had to tell them. Even to the duchess, who honestly believed her daughter was in love with the earl, her conduct seemed strange. She was nervous, she talked but little, yet it was the look of happy, dreamy content that sat on her face.

It struck the duchess at last—there was no mistake about it—Lady Estelle looked exceedingly ill. She had expected to see her daughter manifest some little sign of delight at the coming of her lover; she had expected some little attention to dress, some of the many hundred pretty ways of showing delight, but she saw none.

Then the day dawned which was to bring the earl, and the duchess felt sure, from her daughter's face, that she had spent the greater part of the night in tears.

Through some mistake in the time of his arrival, Lady Estelle was alone; the duke had not returned from his drive, and the duchess had driven over to the neighboring presbytery. The earl was not expected until six, but he arrived at four. It was perhaps well for Lady Estelle that she had not more time for anticipation; it was a terrible time for her—a trying ordeal.

She was alone in the library when she heard the sound of carriage-wheels; she never dreamed it was he till the sudden opening of the library door, and the footman announced:

"The Earl of Linleigh!"

She often wondered in after years that she had not died in that moment. But the pride and self-control of long years came to her aid; she rose, pale as marble, cold, dignified, ready to die rather than yield to emotion; and without one word, she held out her hand in greeting to her husband. He was looking at her with eyes that seemed to devour her.

"Estelle," he murmured; then, ready, eloquent, debonair as he was, he could say no more. Was it possible—gracious Heaven!—was it possible that this pale, proud, beautiful woman, so haughty that she looked as though nothing could touch her—was it possible that she was the fair young Estelle who had sacrificed everything for him, and been so cruelly rewarded? Was this magnificent woman really his wife?

"Estelle," he repeated. He drew nearer, as though he would caress her.

She shrunk from him.

"No," she said, "do not touch me."

But the earl, so handsome and debonair, was not to be daunted.

"Why, Estelle, my darling, my wife, surely you are going to forgive me—I shall never forgive myself. No man ever did behave so vilely, I believe; but, my darling, you will forgive me, and let us be happy now."

"After twenty years!" she answered—"after twenty long, sad years."

"Better late than never, my love. You must forgive me, Estelle. I did you a most cruel wrong, but the most cruel of all was to quarrel with you and leave you."

"No," she said, firmly, "the most cruel wrong you did was to marry me; and the next, to leave me all these years without one word. No woman could ever forgive such a wrong."

"But you are not a woman, you are an angel, Estelle—so it has always seemed to me. Will you believe me in this one instance—I am full of faults; I have behaved shamefully; my conduct to you disgraces the name I bear, the name of a gentleman—but will you believe this, Estelle, my wife, my silence during all those years has not been because I would not write, but because I dare not? I never dreamed that you could forgive me; I held myself unworthy of all pardon. I knew that I had wronged you so greatly, I deserved no compassion."

"If you felt so sure that I could never forgive you, why do you come here now?" she asked, haughtily.

The least possible gleam of amusement came into his eyes, the least possible curl to his lip.

"You see, my darling Estelle, it is in this way: As Ulric Studleigh it mattered little what became of me—whether I went to the bad altogether or not, whether I was married or not; but as Earl of Linleigh it is quite another thing. I must have a wife to reign in my ancestral home; I must have children to succeed me; therefore, from the depth of my heart, I say forgive the fault of erring, passionate youth, and be my wife in reality as you are in name. I promise you, Estelle, I will atone to you for the evil I have done; that I will make you happy beyond the power of words to tell; that I will spend my life in your service. Do you believe me?"

She looked at him. His face was earnest and agitated, the eloquent eyes seemed to rain love into her own. It was hard to resist him, and yet he had been so cruel.

"Why have you never written to me all these years, Ulric?" she asked, and he knew that the faltering voice meant good for him.

"My darling, I tell you I dared not. No man ever so sinned against a woman as I sinned against you. I took advantage of your youth, your simplicity, your love for me, to induce you to contract a private marriage with me. Then my horrible pride got ahead of me, I quarreled with you and left you for twenty—may Heaven forgive me—twenty years. I can hardly expect that you will pardon me. How can you?"

She drew a little nearer to him when she saw how unhappy he looked.

"Ah, Ulric," she said, "your race are all alike faithless and debonair; even the little one is the same."

The words seemed to cost her violent effort; her face grew crimson.

He looked at her with brightening eyes.

"The little one—our child? Oh, Estelle, you have never told me anything of our child."

"You have never asked," she retorted.

"No, I am to blame. What dull, stupid apathy has come over me? What have I been doing or thinking about? My wife and child to drift through all these years. Well, from the depths of my heart I say Heaven pardon me, for I am a great sinner. Estelle, tell me something about our

child."

The expression of his face was so pitiful that she could not help replying.

"I cannot tell you much," she said. "I have been, like yourself, careless over the child. I could not keep my secret and keep her, so she went."

"Yes, Lady Delapain told me; but have you never seen her? Do you know nothing of her?"

"I have seen her twice."

And then Lady Estelle gave him the whole history of Doris.

"She is very beautiful," she said, in conclusion, "but she resembles you more than me. She is a Studleigh in face and in character. She is faithless and debonair, Ulric, as you are."

"Perhaps you judge her rather harshly," he said, with great tenderness in his voice. "Why do you call her faithless, Estelle?"

"Because she was engaged to marry some one who loved her with a true and tender love. She ran away from him, and almost broke his heart."

"Who was the some one?" asked the earl.

"Earle Moray, a poet and a gentleman—one whom a princess might marry, if she loved him."

"Why did the little one run away from him? What was her reason?"

"She wanted to see something of the world, so she went abroad as governess to some little children."

"That was not so very bad," he said. "She might have done much worse than that. It is quite natural for a girl to want to see something of life. Where did she go to, dear?"

"To Florence, with some English people, I believe."

"Well, I cannot really be very angry with her for it; of course her position will be changed now. We shall have to think twice before she fulfills this engagement."

"I shall never be willing for her to marry any one but Earle," said Lady Estelle.

"We have plenty of time to think of that," he said. "I feel rather inclined to be jealous of this Earle Moray. Estelle, my darling, you have not said that you forgive me." He drew nearer to her, he clasped her in his arms, and kissed the pale, beautiful face. He might be faithless, he had been cruel, but in all the wide world he was the only love for her. She did not avert her face from the passionate kisses that he showered upon it. "You forgive me, Estelle, my wife?"

"Yes," she replied, "I forgive you; I cannot help it; but I know quite well that I ought not."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A THUNDERBOLT IN A DUCAL PALACE.

The Earl of Linleigh seemed to be indifferent as to the terms on which he obtained his pardon, provided only that he did obtain it. His thanks and gratitude were pleasing to hear. Her pale face relaxed as she listened. After all she had suffered, the long, silent agony of years—there was something very delightful in being loved.

"And you will be good to me, my darling?" whispered the earl. "You will not do what you might do—take vengeance on me for my many sins?"

"No," said Lady Estelle, "I will not do that."

"And you will come with me to my home, Linleigh Towers, and reign there as its mistress and queen?"

"I will do whatever makes you happiest," she said, with that sweet gentleness that seemed to sit so strangely upon her.

"Estelle," said the earl, "of course the duke and duchess have not an inkling of our secret?"

"No, they have not the faintest idea of it."

"How foolish we were, my darling. It seems like a dream now that we ever did that wild, foolish deed. It is far more like a dream than a reality."

"Yes," she sighed, "it was a sad thing for both of us."

"I will tell them. You have had quite enough to bear. I will take the onus on myself. Give me—let me see—ten kisses; they will make me strong enough to fight any battle in your cause."

He bent over her, and was busily engaged in taking the accurate number of kisses, when the door

suddenly opened, and the duke and duchess entered the room, having returned from their drive together.

The scene is better imagined than described. They were all well-bred people; but just at that moment the circumstances seemed to bewilder them.

Lady Estelle sank pale and trembling into a chair—the moment she had dreaded for years had come at last. The earl was the first to recover himself.

Coolly, as though nothing particular had occurred, the earl went up to the duke and duchess with outstretched hands. They greeted him kindly, but he was quick enough to detect something of restraint in their voices. They spoke of indifferent matters for some few moments, and then the duke asked if his guest had partaken of any refreshment.

"We do not dine till eight," he said; "take some wine, at least."

"No," said the earl; "the truth is, before I can accept your hospitality, I have something to tell you—something that will cause you just and righteous anger—to that I submit; but I pray you, as the fault was all mine, so let the blame be all mine. Spare every one else."

He looked so handsome, so earnest, so agitated, that the duke felt touched. What could he have done to offend him? Nothing but love his daughter; and that was surely no such terrible crime. He merely smiled as he heard the words; the duchess, with a sudden nervous movement of the hands, drew nearer to her daughter.

"I have no excuse," said the earl, "to offer for this story which I have to tell—no excuse. It was the passionate, mad folly of a boy—the trusting simplicity and innocence of a young girl."

Then, for the first time, an expression of fear came into the duke's face, and the duchess looked as though she were turned to stone.

"Listen to me, your grace. Twenty years ago, when I was Ulric Studleigh, a captain in the army, without even the prospect of advancement, I fell in love with Lady Estelle."

He was still looking in the duke's grave face, and his words seemed to fail him, his lips grew dry and hot, his hands trembled.

"I am ashamed of my folly," he said, in a low, agitated voice, "and I find it hard to tell."

"You will remember, Lord Linleigh, that you are keeping us in suspense, and Lady Estelle is our only child. Be brief, for her mother's sake, if not for my own."

The earl continued:

"Do not think me a coward, your grace; I have faced the enemy in open fight as often as any soldier. I never fled from a foe, but I would sooner face a regiment of foes, each with a drawn sword in his hand, than stand before you to tell what I have to tell."

"Be brief, my lord," was the impatient comment. "Be brief."

"In a few words, then, your grace, I loved your daughter. I won her love, and privately, unknown to any person, save one, we were married twenty years ago."

The duchess uttered a low cry of sorrow and dismay. The duke suddenly dropped into his chair like a man who had been shot. A painful silence fell over the room, broken only by the sobs of Lady Estelle.

"Married!" said the duke, at last. "Oh, Heaven! has my daughter so cruelly deceived me?"

"The fault was all mine, your grace; shooting would be far too good for me. I persuaded her, I followed her, I made her wretched, I gave her no peace until she consented."

"Oh! Estelle, my daughter, is it true?" cried the duke. "Is it—can it be true?"

Estelle's only answer was a series of heartbreaking sobs.

"It is true, your grace," said the earl. "If any suffering could undo it, I would suffer the extremity of torture. I repent with my whole heart; let me pray your grace not to turn a deaf ear to my repentance."

The duke made no answer, but laid his head on his clasped hands.

"I had better tell you all," continued the earl, in a low voice. "We were married. I call Heaven to witness that the fault was all mine, and that I intended to act loyally, honorably, and truthfully to my dear wife; but we were unfortunate. I was proud and jealous, she was proud and impatient; she taunted me always by saying the Studleighs were all faithless. We quarreled at last, and both of us were too proud to be the first to seek forgiveness. Then, in a fit of desperate rage, I exchanged into a regiment ordered to India, and, with the exception of one letter, no word has been exchanged between us since."

The duke did not raise his head.

The duchess gave a long, shuddering moan.

"There is one thing more—oh, Heaven! how could I be so cruel?—when I had been gone some five

months, my poor wife, my unhappy wife, became a mother."

"I do not believe it!" cried the duke. "I will not believe it! It is an infamous lie."

"It is the solemn truth, your grace."

"Stephanie, my wife," cried the duke, despairingly, "do you believe this? Do you believe the child we have loved and cherished has deceived us so cruelly?"

The duchess left her daughter's side and went over to him. She laid her hand on his.

"We must bear it together," she said. "It is the first great trial of our lives—we must make the best of it."

"To be deceived—to smile on us, to kiss us, to sit by us, to share the same roof, to kneel at the same altar, and yet to keep such a secret from us! Why, Stephanie, it cannot be true."

The duchess was not one of the demonstrative kind, but she was so deeply touched by the pain in his voice, that she clasped her arms round his neck.

"I can only say one thing to comfort you, my husband. We have spent the greater part of our lives together, and in no single thing have I deceived you yet. Let the remembrance of your wife's loyalty soften the thought of your daughter's treachery."

The next moment the daughter whom he had loved as the very pride and joy of his life, was kneeling and sobbing at his feet.

"It was not treachery, papa; do not give it so bad a name. I was very young, and I loved him very much; except you and mamma, I loved no one else. Ah! papa, do not turn from me; I have suffered so terribly—I have never been happy for one moment since. I loved you so dearly I never could bear to look at your face and remember how I had deceived you. I have been so unhappy, so wretched, so miserable, I cannot tell you. Pity me—do not be angry with me. I loved you both, and my heart was torn in two. Kiss me, dear, and forgive me."

But he turned away from the pitiful, pleading voice and beseeching face.

"I cannot forgive you, Estelle," he said; "the pain is too great."

"Then I will kneel here until I die," she cried, passionately; "I will never leave you until you say that you pardon me!"

The duke raised his face, and when the Earl of Linleigh saw it he started back. It was as though a blight had fallen over it—it was changed, haggard, gray—twenty years older than when he had entered the room. The earl felt more remorse when he caught sight of that pale face than he had ever before known.

"Lord Linleigh," said the duke, "I want you to give me details—the details of your marriage; how and where it took place; who were the witnesses. I shall want to see the copy of the register; I shall want the certificate of the child's birth and death."

"It is not dead!" cried Lord Linleigh, in astonishment.

"Not dead!" repeated the duke. "Do you mean to tell me, my lord, I have had a grandchild living all these years, and have known nothing about it. Do you mean to tell me that a descendant of the Herefords has been born, and I have never even seen it? Great Heaven! what have I done, that I should have this to endure?"

"I was ashamed of the story of my marriage," said the earl, "but, if possible, I am still more ashamed of the history of my child. My poor wife was ill-advised when she acted as she did."

A certain nervous tremor came over the duchess. She remembered many things that the duke had forgotten, and a presentiment of the truth came over her.

"Estelle," she said, "tell us where your child was born, and who helped you to deceive us?"

Obediently enough, she told the whole story.

"We must not blame poor Lady Delapain," said the duke, kindly; "of the dead no ill should be spoken. Rely upon it, she did it for the kindest and best. Now, tell us, Estelle, what you did with this unhappy child."

But Lady Estelle hid her face.

"Ulric," she said to her husband, "will you tell for me?"

They listened with a shock of horror and surprise. So this little foundling, over whose story they had wondered and pondered, of whose future the duchess had prophesied such evil, was of their own race, a Hereford. It seemed to the duke and duchess that they could never forget that humiliation, never recover from it.

The duke rose from his chair; he held out one trembling hand to his wife.

"Come away, Stephanie," he said; "this has been too much for me. I thought I was stronger. Come away! We can talk it over better alone—we shall get over it better alone. We have no daughter now, dear—we are quite alone. Our daughter has been some one else's wife for twenty years.

Come away!"

The duchess, since Lord Linleigh had told Doris' story, had never once looked at her daughter. She seemed the stronger of the two as they turned to quit the room together. The duke, never speaking to his daughter, said to his guest:

"I will talk this over with my wife, and we will tell you after dinner what is our decision."

"Oh, Ulric!" cried Lady Estelle, "they will never forgive me. What shall I do?"

But he kissed her face and consoled her.

"It will all come right," he said. "Of course it was a terrible shock to them both, that Brackenside business especially. I am very sorry over that; but they will forgive you. By this time to-morrow we shall all be laughing over it, trust me, darling."

But Lord Linleigh, before this time to-morrow, had to hear something which startled even him, and he could boast of tolerably strong nerves.

CHAPTER XLVII.
THE DUKE'S PLAN.

That was surely the most silent and somber dinner-party ever held at the Castle. The four who sat down to the table owned to themselves that it was a terrible mistake—they ought to have had some stranger present, if only to break the ice. Even the servants wondered, as they looked from one grave face to another, what unusual cloud had fallen over their superiors. The duke looked as though years had passed over his head since morning, when he went riding away, the picture of a prosperous, genial, happy-hearted nobleman. His hair seemed to have grown grayer, the lines on his face deeper; the stately figure stooped as it had never done before; the star on his breast shone in mockery, and contrasted cruelly with the worn, haggard face above.

The duchess, in her superb dress of black velvet, with its point-lace and diamonds, looked unhappy. She had lost none of her dignity—women reserve that under the most trying circumstances—but there was a hesitation and faltering in her clear voice no one had ever heard before.

Lord Linleigh did his best to restore something like cheerfulness. The worst was over for him now; the story was told, and it was not given to men of his race to feel dull for long. They had the happy faculty of recovering from any blow, no matter how severe, in a marvelously short space of time. His confession was made, the story told, the worst known, and what had he to fear? Things would soon come right. He should take his beautiful wife to Linleigh, and their daughter would soon join them; the whole story would soon blow over, then who so happy as he? He was not troubled with any extra amount of conscience, with any keen sense of regret, so he told stories of his Indian life, and as far as possible tried to improve the general aspect of things.

Lady Estelle had, perhaps in all her life, never looked more beautiful. Her usual gentle languor had left her; there was a rich color on her fair face, a light in her eyes—she, too, was relieved. The ordeal she had dreaded for so many years was over at last—the punishment would follow. She read her father's face too accurately to doubt that; still, the worst was over.

Dinner was ended at last. The well-trained servants had quitted the dining-room, the door was closed, and then the duke, looking very grave, said:

"Her grace and myself have been talking over matters, and have decided upon a certain course of conduct. I shall be happy if it suits your views, if it does not, however deeply I may feel it, you must henceforth both be strangers to me."

Lady Estelle looked wistfully at him; but his face was stern, and she knew that just then all pleading would be vain.

"You owe me something, Estelle," he said. "You have dealt me a blow I never thought to suffer, and you ought to sacrifice something to atone to me for it."

"I will sacrifice almost anything," she said; "that is, anything except my husband."

"I need not tell you," continued the duke, "that I feel the disgrace and shame of the story I have just heard far more than you do who have told it. I feel it so keenly, that if it were known, I should never again show my face. I should never hold up my head again among my peers; in fact, I could not endure to live and to know that such a history could be told of my daughter. My wife feels it as keenly as myself, therefore we have come to a fixed resolution."

"May I ask what it is?" said the earl.

"It is this—that the shameful secret be kept a secret still. I do not question the validity of the marriage. I own that, as far as I can see and understand, it was a perfectly legal ceremony; but with my consent it shall never be known. I would rather—far rather, Heaven knows—see the daughter whom I have loved so tenderly and so proudly, dead, than have this known."

The Earl and Countess of Linleigh looked at each other. This was very different to what they had expected to hear.

"I do not see," murmured the earl, "how it can possibly be avoided—it must be known."

"I have thought of a plan which will obviate the necessity," said the duke, in his most stately manner. "Permit me to explain it. I grant that the existence of this unfortunate girl renders it doubly difficult. Still, I protest, by the spotless name the Herefords have ever borne, by my pride of race, by the nobility of my ancestry, by the honor of my house—I protest against letting the world know how my daughter has deceived me. But for the existence of this girl, I would propose that the marriage be annulled. Respect must be paid to her rights; she is at present your sole heiress, and the heiress of my daughter. In all conscience, honor and loyalty, we are bound to recognize her rights."

"We cannot do otherwise," said the duchess, with a stately bend of her head.

Lady Estelle looked up with an expression of relief.

"I must ask you," continued the duke, "to follow me attentively. I am anxious to do two things—I wish to preserve the unsullied honor of my house, and I wish to do justice to her whom I must, in spite of my objection, call my grandchild. I propose to do it in this way: Let the secret of this private marriage ever remain unknown and unsuspected. It was known that Captain Studleigh admired Lady Estelle before he went abroad; it will not seem strange to any one that, having succeeded to the earldom, and finding her still with us, he seeks to marry her. Visit Downsbury Castle when you will, my lord; you can speak of Lady Estelle with all the rapture of a Studleigh. It will soon be rumored about that you have renewed the old love. At the end of six weeks I will take my daughter to Paris, you can follow us. I will not ask you to go again through the religious ceremony—I have too much respect for religion to suggest it; but you can go through the civil forms, with all the pomp and splendor due to your own rank and ours. Every paper in England will then have an account of the marriage of Lady Estelle Hereford with the Earl of Linleigh, and I shall be saved the greatest disgrace—the greatest shame that could have befallen me. Do you agree to my proposal, Lord Linleigh? In making it there is nothing against your interest or my daughter's—nothing against justice, loyalty, or honor; it is simply a subterfuge to save the honor of a noble house. Do you agree?"

"I see no objection," said the earl, cautiously.

"I shall dower my daughter right royally," said the duke—"as munificently as though she were marrying the man whom I should have chosen for her."

"It would save an immense deal of scandal, and rumor, and remarks," said the duchess, gravely; "it would save us from a thousand taunts and jeers. We have been so proud of you, Estelle!"

"But the child," said the earl—"she cannot be ignored after that fashion."

"Certainly not. My plan you will find best for her as well as for you. I have told you before that I cannot and will not submit to the degradation of hearing this story laughed at by half London. This is what I propose for the child: You, my Lord Linleigh, were in your youth famed for eccentricity. Tell the world openly, as you please, that you were married before you went abroad, and lost your wife. That is perfectly true, and you will not find many questions asked. Add that, unable to burden yourself with the care of a child in India, you were compelled to leave her with friends of your wife—every word of which is literally, strictly, and perfectly true. The only secret that I charge you to guard as you would guard your life, is this—the name of your wife. You will not find people curious to know it. They will conclude that you married some poor, pretty girl, and not tease you with questions. You can claim your daughter at once, and take her home with you."

The earl looked quite content, but there was a pitiful expression on the face of Lady Estelle that was painful to see.

"I understand," she said; "but, papa, if we do this she will never know who is her mother. She will never know that she is my child."

"It is not needful," was the stern reply. "I should think that any mother would shrink from letting her child know such a history as yours. She will be with you—under your charge—you can do all a mother's part toward her, and yet save the honor of our name."

The face of Lady Estelle grew crimson as she listened.

"My marriage was a legal one, papa," she said.

"Certainly, but not an honorable one. I do not, however, insist upon it; you can please yourself. You know the alternative—if you make the true story of her birth known, I shall leave England, and never look on the faces of my old friends again."

"I do not see, Estelle," said the duchess, in a grave, cold voice, "what difference it can possibly make to you. If you acknowledge her as your daughter twenty times over, you could not do more than let her live in your house, and take charge of her. You can do that now."

"Oh, mamma, it will be so hard!"

"I do not think you will find it so. You must remember that, with the unfortunate training the

child has had, it is quite impossible that she can be any credit to you. You should have looked better after her education, had you ever intended to acknowledge her. Spare me this disgrace; do not let the world know that a girl brought up in the kitchen at Brackenside is my grandchild. I must confess that, even under the circumstances, bad, painful, as they were, I cannot imagine why you acted so with the child."

"I wanted her to be good and happy in a simple fashion. I never dreamed that these events would happen."

"I think," said the duchess, "that you should be willing to adopt your father's suggestion. It is by far the most sensible one."

"I quite agree with it," said Lord Linleigh. "Then the chief burden falls upon me—I have but to own to a private marriage, as your grace suggests. It is doubtful whether any one cares to inquire the name of my wife. I was but Captain Studleigh, and a Mrs. Studleigh is of no note. Even if the girl herself should question me, I should merely say that I prefer not to mention her mother's name."

"It will be far the best plan. The girl has a Studleigh face; claim her at once, and let her take her station as your daughter and mistress of your house until you take Estelle home."

"I think it will be the best plan," said the earl.

"If I were in your place," continued the duke, "I should not go to the farm; I should at once return to Linleigh Court; and when you reach there, send for the farmer, his wife, and your child—it will make far less sensation. They are honest people, too, and if you ask for silence they will keep it. It is not probable that any one will ever see her again who knew her here. The farmer and his wife have shown good tact and good sense in keeping friends and acquaintances at a distance."

"I am sure you are right," said Lord Linleigh. "Estelle, do you consent?"

She was silent for some few minutes; they saw her face quiver with pain. Then she left her seat and went round to her father, and knelt down by his side.

"Dearest," she said to him, "I owe you this reparation. The dearest wish of my heart was to hear my child call me mother. I renounce that wish for your sake—I promise to do as you suggest. Will you, in turn, forgive me?"

Perhaps he was glad of the opportunity; for, bending over, he kissed her face, and she saw tears in his eyes. The duchess came round and joined the little group, but even in that moment Lady Estelle felt that the full pardon of her stately mother would indeed be difficult to win.

CHAPTER XLVIII.
AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

A few days after the events described in the previous chapter, a paragraph went round the principal English newspapers which created some little sensation. It was headed "Romance in High Life," and ran as follows:

> "It is not generally known that the Earl of Linleigh has been married and lost his wife. The marriage—which took place when the young and gallant captain had little expectation of the earldom of Linleigh—was in itself, we believe, a romance. Whether the sudden departure of the young officer for India was caused by the death of his young wife, we are not aware. As it was impossible to take his infant daughter with him, the child was left in charge of his wife's friends. We learn, on the highest authority, that the young lady, who will henceforth take her title as the Lady Doris Studleigh, is a most beautiful and accomplished girl, who will be a great addition to the shining lights of society. The earl is about to take up his residence, with his beautiful daughter, at Linleigh Court."

Considerable sensation was caused by this, but no one was in the least surprised. Captain Studleigh had been known as a great flirt: those who remembered him as the handsome young man of his day, smiled and said, "There, *that* is why the gay gallant never married. I thought there was some reason."

How many rich widows smiled on him, and smiled in vain. They wondered a little when he had married, and all agreed that it was most probably a nobody—a girl with a pretty face; he never cared for any other—neither birth nor money, that was certain. The announcement caused no other remark, and was very soon forgotten. If Lady Doris Studleigh was anything like the Studleighs, she would be sure to be beautiful—they had always been, without exception, the handsomest family in England. She would be a great heiress, no doubt, and her *debut* was most anxiously looked for.

It was, perhaps, a fortnight after that paragraph had been well discussed, that another appeared. It was as follows:

> "MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.—We are informed that a noble earl, whose recent accession to a magnificent estate and ancient title caused some little sensation in the fashionable world, will soon lead to the hymeneal altar the lovely and accomplished daughter of one of our most respected peers."

Every one knew at once that the Earl of Linleigh was meant; but who was the lady? First a rumor—a whisper; then a certainty—it was Lady Estelle Hereford. People remembered that he had liked her, and had tried hard to get up a flirtation before he went abroad. Gossip gradually wore itself out. In the meantime strange events had occurred at the farm.

There came a cold, snowy morning when Doris had been home some few days. She was growing impatient. The change was so great from gay, sunny Florence to cold foggy England; from that luxurious villa, where flowers and light abounded, to the homely farm-house; from the honeyed words of her lover to the somewhat cold disapproval of Mattie and Mrs. Brace. Mark had said but little to her.

"You tired your wings, my bonny bird," he said; "I am glad they brought you back here."

He did not seem quite so much at home with her as he had been. More than once Earle saw him look in wonder at the lovely face and white hands; then he would shake his honest head gravely, and Earle knew that he was thinking to himself she was out of place at the farm. Mrs. Brace had said but little to her; she knew it was useless. Earle had begged her to be silent, while Mattie looked on in sorrowful dismay. Would Earle never see that Doris was unworthy of him?

Of her adventures but little has been said. Earle told them that he had met her in Florence, where she was staying as governess to some little children, and had induced her to come home with him—that was all they knew. Of the story told to Earle they were in perfect ignorance.

Doris had shown some little sense; she had taken the costly gems from her fingers. In any case it would never be safe to wear them again; they would attract too much attention. She told Earle, laughingly, that she had thrown her pretty false stones away, when, in reality, she had safely packed them where no one but herself could find them. Then, after the novelty of receiving Earle's homage again had worn off, she began to grow impatient.

"I cannot stay here long, Earle," she said; "it is too terrible. When shall I hear any news?"

"Soon, I am certain," was the reply. "Do not—pray, do not precipitate matters by any imprudence, Doris. Wait a few days longer."

But the news came at last. On a cold, snowy morning, while the farmer and his wife sat at breakfast, they heard the postman's horn outside the gate.

"News ought to keep this weather," said Mark, laughingly; "it is cold enough."

Mrs. Brace hastened to the door. There was a steaming cup of coffee to be carried to the frozen postman, who took it gratefully, and gave her a large, thick letter.

"It is registered, Mrs. Brace," he said, "and your husband must sign the receipt."

Now, if there was anything in this world of which Mark Brace really stood in awe, it was of pen and ink. He could plow, sow, reap with any man; place a pen in his hand and an inkstand before him, and he was reduced to a state of utter imbecility.

"Sign a receipt!" he said to his wife. "The man knows he has brought the letter; that ought to be enough."

When he found it must be done, he submitted to it. Then it was discovered that the only inkstand in the house was in Doris' room, and that young lady asked wonderingly what they wanted ink at that early hour of the morning for.

"Surely my father is not taking to literature, Mattie!" she cried.

"My dear sister, when will you learn that it is in bad taste to be always sneering at our father?" was Mattie's answer.

"What does he want the ink for? Tell me?"

"There's a letter—a thick, registered letter—seemingly a very important one, and the receipt had to be signed."

She wondered why the mocking smile died so suddenly from Doris' face—why she grew pale, and agitated, and unlike herself.

"I shall be down in one moment, Mattie," she said.

When she was left alone she clasped her hands together.

"It has come at last!" she said—"at last!"

It was ten minutes before she went down; then Mark had almost recovered from the effort he had made in signing the receipt—the postman had departed—and, like all simple-minded people, Mark and his wife were wondering from whom the letter had come, and what it was about. Doris listened quietly for a minute. Mattie was engaged in preparing tea for her sister. Then Doris said:

"Do you not think it would save all trouble and discussion if you opened the letter?"

Mark laughed sheepishly, and said:

"She is right, you know."

Then he opened the letter. It was not very long, and they saw a slip of pink paper fall from it. Mrs. Brace picked it up and saw that it was a check for fifty pounds.

Meanwhile Mark read on slowly and laboriously; then he looked around him with a bewildered face, and read it again.

"What is it, Mark?" asked his wife, anxiously.

"Stop!" said Mark, waving his hand. "Steady. I have had many a hard puzzle in my life, but this is the hardest—I *cannot* understand it. Either the man who wrote it is mad, or I am—I cannot tell which. Patty, read that letter aloud; let me see if it sounds as it reads."

Mrs. Brace took the letter obediently from her husband's hands. No one saw the torture of suspense in Doris' face. Mrs. Brace read aloud:

> "The Earl of Linleigh presents his compliments to Mr. Mark Brace, and begs that he will grant him a favor. The earl desires most particularly to see Mr. Brace at once, on very important business, and as the earl cannot go to Brackenside, he will be glad if Mr. Brace will start without delay for Linleigh Court. It is also absolutely necessary that Mr. Brace should bring with him his wife and the young lady known as Doris. The earl incloses a check for fifty pounds to cover traveling expenses, and he earnestly entreats Mr. Brace not to delay one hour in coming."

"Send for Earle," gasped Mark, "before there is another word said about it—send for Earle."

Then he was struck by the peculiar expression of his wife's face. She bent down and whispered to him.

"That is it!" he said, with sudden conviction; "that is it! Heaven bless me! I never thought of it; send for Earle."

"Is it anything of any harm to you, father?" asked Mattie, anxiously.

"No, my child. Doris, you say nothing."

"What can I say? You are a great man to be sent for by a mighty earl. What can he want us for?"

"It has come at last!" said Mark. "Well, thank Heaven, we have done our duty. I shall not be afraid to face him or any one else."

Then Mark sat in silence till Earle came, when he dismissed the two girls from the room, little dreaming that Doris knew far more of her own story than he did.

"Read this," he said, placing the letter in Earle's hand, "then tell me what you think."

Earle read the letter attentively.

"I think," he said, "that this concerns Doris, and that you will most probably find the earl is either her father, or that he knows something of her parentage."

"I expected it," said Mark, with a deep sigh; "and Heaven knows, Earle, I shall be thankful to get the girl off my hands without any more trouble. She frightens me, my dear boy—she does, indeed; she is so unlike the rest of us. I am always wondering what she will do or say next; she is out of place here altogether. It will be a relief to me." And honest Mark wiped his brow with the air of one who was glad to get rid of a great burden. "My wife has more sense and better judgment than any woman in England," he continued, "and she thinks he will turn out to be Doris' father. Where is the mother, I wonder? What do you advise, Earle?"

"I advise you to do exactly what Lord Linleigh says. Start at once, and take the ladies with you. The matter is evidently pressing, or he would not write so urgently."

"I must go, then; but it is really a trouble, Earle. I can get on with an honest plowman or a sensible farmer, but with lords and ladies I am quite at sea. My dear boy, I dread them. I shall never forget what I went through with the duchess. Of course I know about all mankind being sons of Adam to begin with, but I like my own sort of people best, Earle."

"I do not know that you are wrong," was the reply.

"Earle," said Mark, suddenly, "will you tell Mattie about this affair when we are gone? I know she will feel it terribly; she is very fond of Doris, and neither her mother nor I have ever hinted it to her."

"I will tell her," said Earle, gravely. "Now let me do what I can toward helping you. I will drive you to Quainton Station; you must go to London first, and from London to Linleigh. It is in the south of Kent."

"I believe that you know every place in the wide world, Earle," said the farmer, admiringly.

In a short time they were all on the road to London, while Earle, left alone with Mattie, told her the whole story, and had the satisfaction, for once in his life, of seeing genuine surprise.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"WELCOME, MY DAUGHTER, TO YOUR FATHER'S HEART."

Linleigh Court stands on the southern coast, where the southern sea kisses the shores, and the fertile lands yield sweetest fruits and flowers. It has not the stamp of antiquity which makes some of the fair homes of England so celebrated. The architecture is not of the grand old Norman type; it is of modern build, with large, cheerful, airy, sunlit rooms, each having a balcony filled with fairest flowers.

The chief recommendation of Linleigh Court is that the whole place does not contain one dull room; they are all filled with warmth, light, and fragrance. The grounds are large, extensive, and magnificently laid out, and slope to the very edge of the sea. They are sweet, old-fashioned gardens, where grow all the flowers poets have ever loved.

On a bright summer's day, when the sun was shining on countless flowers, when the white doves and birds of bright plumage fluttered among the trees, it would have been impossible to have found a fairer home than Linleigh Court. On this bright, cold winter's day it looked warm and cheerful; the evergreens were all in perfection.

The journey had been a comfortable one, thanks to Earle. He had seen that the travelers went first-class, which, notwithstanding the fifty pounds, would never have occurred to Mark. He had attended to every detail of comfort, liberally fed the guards and porters, in spite of the printed regulations looking him in the face and forbidding any such enormity.

When they reached Anderley station, there was a carriage with a coronet on the panels, a smart coachman and footman awaiting them. Mark looked aghast; the grandeur of the whole affair dismayed him; while Doris stepped into the carriage with the dainty air and grace of one who had always been accustomed to such luxuries. Then they drove through the rich Kentish scenery until they came to the park. Mark first caught sight of the tall towers of the Court from between the trees, and he cried out in surprise:

"This is a magnificent place, Doris. I think it is even better than Downsbury Castle."

"If you had seen the grand old Florentine, palaces, you would not think much of either," said Doris, indifferently.

Whatever happened, she had made up her mind not to admire; they should not find her easily surprised. Yet as the magnificent terraces, the fountains, the superb building itself, came into sight, her heart swelled higher and higher with vanity and gratified pride. No sweet compunction or humility such as sometimes visits a monarch about to ascend a throne came to her. No gratitude to Heaven that she was to share in such glorious gifts; no resolve to make others the happier for her happiness; nothing but a sudden elation, a vain, self-glorious sensation, and contempt for the life she had left behind.

"So this is my father's house," she mused. "I have yet to see why he has lived in this affluence, while I have been brought up as a farmer's daughter?"

The two who were watching her wondered what brought that rapt expression to that beautiful face. They little guessed the nature of her musings.

"I wish this was all over," said Mark, as the carriage drew up at the stately entrance. "Only Heaven knows what we have to do now."

Doris laughed, a low, rippling laugh of perfect content; then the great hall door was flung open, and they saw the magnificent interior, the liveried servants, the shining armor, and Mark's heart sank within him. Then he recovered himself a little, and when he looked around him, they were all three standing in one of the most magnificent halls in England. A servant was bowing before them, and Mark heard him say:

"My lord is anxiously expecting you; will you come this way?"

They passed through two or three rooms which, by their splendor, completely awed the farmer and his wife. Mark's shoes had never seemed to be so large and so thick as when they trod on that velvet pile. The wondrous mirrors, pictures and statues dazzled him, the quantity of ornaments puzzled him; he wondered how one could possibly move freely in such over-crowded rooms.

"We cannot all be earls," thought Mark, "and I am not sorry for it. I am more comfortable in my kitchen than I could be here."

Mrs. Brace followed with a pale face. She wondered less about the externals, and more what they were about to see. When they reached the library, chairs were placed for them.

"My lord will be with you in a few minutes," said the servant, and they were left alone.

"I cannot help trembling," said Mrs. Brace. "What have we to hear?"

The words had hardly left her lips, when the door opened, and a tall, handsome man entered the room. They saw that his face was pale and agitated, and his lips trembled. He looked at the farmer and Mrs. Brace, but not at the young girl who stood near them. As yet his eyes never met hers or rested on her. He went up to Mark with outstretched hands.

"You are Mr. Brace," he said. "Let me introduce myself—I am the Earl of Linleigh."

"I thought as much," replied Mark, anxious to do his best. "I have done what you wished, my lord—brought Mrs. Brace and Doris with me."

The earl held out his hand in silent greeting to the farmer's wife, but never once looked at the young girl. Then he drew a chair near to them.

"I must thank you for coming," he said. "You have been very prompt and attentive. I hoped you would come to-day, but I hardly dared expect it."

"We thought it better to lose no time," said Mark.

"You did well, and I thank you for it. I have something of great importance to say to both of you—something which ought to have been told years ago. You, perhaps, can almost guess it."

Mark nodded, while his wife sighed deeply.

"Twenty years ago," continued the earl, "I was a young man, gay, popular, fond of life, an officer in the army, and the younger son of a noble family, but poor. You do not know how poor a man of fashion can be. I was very popular—every house in London was open to me—but I knew that I was sought for my good spirits and genial ways. As for marriage—well, it was useless to think of it, unless I could marry some wealthy heiress."

He paused for a few minutes, and Mark shook his head sadly, as though he would say it was indeed a wretched state of things.

"I speak to you quite frankly," said the earl. "It might be possible to gloss over my follies, and give them kindly names—to say they were but youthful follies, no worse than those of other young men: I might say that I sowed my wild oats; but I come of a truthful race, and I say I was no better—not one-half as good, in fact, as I ought to have been. Then, as a climax to my other follies, I fell in love, and persuaded the young girl I loved to marry me privately. That was bad enough, but I did worse. When we had been a short time married, we quarreled. Neither would give in, and we parted. It matters little to my story who my wife was, whether above or below me in station, whether poor or rich—suffice it to say that we parted.

"Some time after I left England a little daughter was born to her. She still kept her secret. This little child she confided to the care of a servant. The servant must have known you or heard of you, for she left the little one, as you both know, at your door, and you took her in. They wrote to me and told me what they had done, far away in India. I was helpless to interfere. Then I lost my wife; but the child continued with you. I made no effort to reclaim her. I do not seek to gloss over my fault, believe me. The truth is, to a soldier in India a baby is not a very desirable object. The existence of this child was a source of embarrassment and confusion to me. I had not the means of supporting it as a daughter of the house of Studleigh should be supported, so I did what seems so fatally easy, yet always leads to bad consequences—I let circumstances drift along as they would. The end of it was that as years went on I almost forgot the child's existence."

"But the money," said Mark, wonderingly, "always came the same."

The earl looked up quickly.

"Yes—oh—of course that was attended to," he said; but his face flushed and his eyes fell.

"To my great surprise," he continued, "I found myself, by a chapter of accidents, suddenly raised to an earldom. I am Earl of Linleigh, now, and that is a very different matter from being simply Captain Studleigh. The daughter of Captain Studleigh might always remain unknown; the daughter of the Earl of Linleigh has a title and wealth of her own. You understand the difference, I am sure, Mr. Brace?"

"Yes," said Mark, "I understand."

"One of the first things I turned my attention to, after my accession to the estates, was the daughter my wife sent to you."

He looked nervously at the farmer and his wife, still never looking at Doris.

"Well, my lord," said Mark, "we have done our best by her; she has had a good education, and she is clever. The money sent has always been spent upon her. We love her very much, but she is not one of us, and never could be. So that it is something of a relief to us to give her back into your own hands. Doris, my dear," he continued, turning to the beautiful girl by his side, "it is of you we are speaking. You are not my daughter, my dear; my good wife here is not your mother; but we have been very fond of you since you were left a little helpless baby at our door, in the cold darkness and pouring rain."

The girl's face turned deadly pale. It was no news to her—this secret which poor Mark never

dreamed she knew; it had long been no secret to her. She caught her breath with a low, gasping sigh.

"You have been very kind to me," she said—"very kind."

"Poor child," said Mrs. Brace, gently. "You see she loves us after all, Mark."

Then, for the first time, the earl turned slowly to look at his daughter. They could all see fear as well as anxiety in his eyes. At first his lips quivered, and his face grew deadly pale; then gradually every other emotion became absorbed in admiration. He came up to her and raised her face to the light; then, as the two faces looked at each other, the wonderful likeness between them became apparent.

"Nay, daughter," said the earl, gently, "no need to ask Mark Brace if this be indeed my daughter. Her face tells the story—she is a Studleigh. She seems like one of the family pictures come down from its frame. Welcome, my daughter, to your father's heart and home!"

And as he spoke, the earl kissed most tenderly the lovely, blushing face.

CHAPTER L.
"ONLY ONE OTHER PERSON KNOWS MY SECRET."

Then, with the gallantry that was always natural to him, the earl placed his daughter in a chair. He turned with a smile to Mark.

"I was a coward," he said, "for the second time in my life. I was afraid to look at her; now I do not see how I can look anywhere else. How am I to thank you? You have brought me the fairest and most graceful daughter in England!"

"Well," said Mark, with an air of great consideration, "you see, my lord, we had nothing to do with her grace and beauty; but my wife has certainly done her best to teach the young lady little tidy ways, and such like."

"I hope she has learned them," said the earl, kindly. "Mrs. Brace looks as though she could teach all goodness. And this is my daughter! Child, how like you are to me."

"I am very glad, papa; am I not like mother, too?"

"No," he replied, gravely, "not in the least. Thank Heaven for it!"

When they heard those words they thought that he had certainly married beneath him—that his marriage had not turned out happily.

"There are some necessary legal forms to be gone through," said the earl, "and as business is always disagreeable, it will be well, perhaps, if we settle that at once. My lawyer is in attendance. It will be necessary for you and Mrs. Brace to make an affidavit stating that this is indeed my daughter, the infant placed under your charge."

"That will be easy enough," said Mark. "If some one does the writing, I will sign."

Lord Linleigh laughed; Mrs. Brace looked a little scandalized at the very free-and-easy speech. The earl said, laying his hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder:

"This becomes a very important lady now; we must be careful what we do about her. She is Lady Doris Studleigh, and that is one of the oldest titles in England."

"Who could have thought it?" said kindly Mrs. Brace. "Lady Doris Studleigh, let me be the first, your ladyship—my dear—to wish you health and strength to enjoy your good fortune."

The earl was pleased when he saw his daughter clasp her arms round her foster-mother's neck.

"She has a loving, grateful heart," he said to himself, "and that is rare enough in a Studleigh."

He little dreamed that in those few minutes Doris had read his character accurately, and that the action was performed entirely to please him.

The bell was rung, and the lawyer appeared. The affidavits were soon drawn out. Mark and his wife each swore solemnly that the young lady they brought to the earl was the child who had been left under their charge. Mark was greatly relieved when he found that he had nothing more to do than to sign his own name.

"Affidavits were certainly never less necessary," said the lawyer—"the Lady Doris has a true Studleigh face."

How the girl's heart beat with high pride and gratified vanity as she heard her title from strange lips!

Then the lawyer was dismissed, and the earl led the way to the hall. To the surprise of the three strangers, all the servants of the household were assembled, evidently by the earl's desire. He

stopped one moment, looked at them, then taking his daughter by the hand, led her before them.

"My good friends," said the earl, "I have a few words to say to you, and those few words are better said in public. You are, most of you, aware, I suppose, that years ago I was a captain in the army, without any expectation of ever being an earl. I married before I went to India—some of you know it, some do not. One daughter was born to me, and I lost my wife. My daughter has lived under the charge of her worthy foster-parents, and I trust you will pay all obedience, all respect, all honor to Lady Doris Studleigh."

There was not a heart present which was not touched by emotion. All eyes were fixed on that beautiful face turned half-wistfully toward them.

"Long live Lady Doris Studleigh!" said some of the more enthusiastic.

"Long life and happiness!" said the others.

The earl looked pleased, then he led the way to the dining-room, where a grand banquet was prepared.

Mark never forgot that dinner—the plate, the wines, the fruit, the exquisite dishes, the number of well-trained servants. His embarrassment was at times something dreadful, but the earl was so kind, so considerate; he helped him at such critical periods, keeping during the whole time an observant eye on his daughter. He was charmed with her grace, her dignity; and her perfectly easy manner delighted him even more than her marvelous beauty. He saw that she was quite familiar with all the little details of table etiquette; and while he inwardly thanked Heaven that it was so, he secretly wondered how she had acquired it; evidently the good farmer and his wife had not taught her.

When dinner was over, the earl would not hear of their return, as Mark wished. He declared that they must remain and see all the sights of Linleigh, to the secret annoyance of Doris.

"The sooner she had finished with these vulgar people," she said to herself, "the sooner she should be able to take her own place."

But she was quick enough to take her cue from the earl's kindly behavior to them. Lord Linleigh had indeed quite sense enough to appreciate a noble, sterling character like Mark's. He made them happy as possible all the evening, and when they had retired he drew his daughter to his side.

"I have made no arrangements for you, my darling; shall we discuss them now?"

"No," she replied, quickly, "not until Mr. and Mrs. Brace are gone away. I want to think of nothing but them while they are here."

He was so delighted that he drew her closer to him, saying:

"You are a treasure—you are, indeed, my darling. The housekeeper has a niece who will act as your maid until you choose one. The blue-room has been prepared for you; to-morrow you shall choose a suit for yourself."

She thanked him, and then bade him good-night.

He watched the graceful figure and beautiful face until the door closed, then he sank back in his chair in unutterable relief.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, "that is all over. I must write to Estelle and tell her how well it has all passed off." He sat musing for a short time with a smile on his face. "I ought, most certainly, to think myself a very happy man," he said. "In all my life I have seen nothing to compare with that girl's face. Estelle will be very proud of her."

Meanwhile his daughter was rehearsing her first lesson in the dignified retirement of her own room. She had found in the pretty chamber, known as the blue-room, a pretty, rosy maid waiting for her; a bright fire was burning, the lamps were lighted on the toilet-table: the room looked the very picture of luxury and comfort. The maid greeted her with a most respectful courtesy.

"If you please, my lady, the housekeeper desired me to remain here at your service."

"Draw that easy-chair to the toilet-table," said Lady Doris; "find me a footstool, and give me from my box there a book bound in yellow paper."

Her orders were obeyed with a quickness and dexterity that amazed her, imperious as she was.

"Now," said Lady Doris, leaning back in her chair so as to enjoy the fire and bright pearly light, "you can brush my hair; but be very careful—I am very particular over it."

It was certainly a sight to be seen, that long, rippling golden hair, bright as the sunbeams, soft as silk, fine, abundant, full of natural waves. The girl looked at it admiringly as it hung over her arms in a great shower.

"It really does seem a pity to sleep in it," she thought. "If it were my hair I should like to take it off at night."

When sufficient of that ceremony had been gone through, Lady Doris turned round:

"Will you go to the housekeeper and say I should like some wine and a bunch of grapes, if she has any?"

The maid complied. The housekeeper, all anxiety to please my lady, sent a bottle of finest Burgundy, with a bunch of rich grapes that were tempting enough.

"My mistress is as beautiful as an angel," said the maid, "but she knows how to look after her own comforts."

"So do all ladies," was the housekeeper's reply; "what else have they to do? But when you have lived as long as I have, Emily, you will know how to wait upon people without making comments upon them."

The maid returned to the room; her lovely young mistress still sat reading by the fire.

"What shall I do for you in the morning, my lady?" she asked.

"See that I am not called too early; let me have some chocolate just after I awake, and see that the water of my bath is both warmed and perfumed."

Emily opened her eyes in wonder, but thought it better to say no more. She contented herself by thinking again that Lady Studleigh knew how to study her own comforts.

"Is there anything more I can do to-night, my lady?"

"Nothing more," was the reply, given with a smile that won the maid's heart forever and ever.

She hastened to the housekeeper's room to make her report.

"So beautiful, kind, and gracious; but so thorough lady—no nonsense, no freedom—a lady who looked as though she would keep the whole world in its place." And the servants crowded round her to listen and admire.

Lady Doris was impatient to be alone—impatient to lock the door between herself and all human kind, in order that she might give some little freedom to the emotions pent up in her heart.

She had controlled herself so well; she had won surprise, admiration, and wonder by simply refraining from expressing any of the three. Now no curious eyes were gazing at her, no curious ears were listening to what words in her triumph escaped her. She locked the door, then stood before the large mirror and steadfastly looked at herself.

"All this is mine!" she said. "I have every wish of my heart at last! I have luxury such as I never dreamed of—magnificence suited for a queen! I have a title that makes music in my ears! I have one of the noblest earls in England for my father! Ah, how near I have been to losing all this; even now I might lose it if that terrible secret of mine became known—it would be taken from me. My father would forgive me many things, but never that."

She stood quite still; the color faded from her beautiful face; a cold chill seized her.

"How foolish I am," she said. "What need have I to fear? Only one other person knows my secret, and he would be the last, I know, to make it known. If ever he attempts it, he shall die!"

Then she laughed; but there was something dreary in the laugh.

"I shall never see him again," she said to herself; "and if I did—if he declared that he knew me—I should look quite steadily in his face and say—swear, if necessary—that in all my life I had never met him before. I am Studleigh enough to have nerve for that. Who was my mother, I wonder? Some one of whom the earl is evidently ashamed; therefore she can have little interest for me."

CHAPTER LI.

A NOBLEMAN'S GENEROSITY.

Notwithstanding all the kindness and hospitality that the earl had shown to Mark, it was some relief to the farmer to know that when morning dawned he was that day to return home. The grandeur of Linleigh Court oppressed him; he longed to be with his laborers and his cattle, at work.

The earl took breakfast with them; Lady Doris was not down—"she was tired," the maid said.

"I was afraid it would be too much for her," said Mrs. Brace. "I am sure, my lord, the more I think of it, the more wonderful it seems."

"Yes, it is quite a romance," laughed the earl. But neither he nor those with whom he spoke dreamed how that romance was to end in a tragedy.

The morning being fine, though cold, the earl asked them to visit the conservatories. By this time Doris had come down, and was ready to join them. While they were going through one of the large conservatories, Lady Doris suddenly caught sight of the Indian plant she had admired so much at Downsbury Castle—the plant with scarlet bells and sweet, subtle perfume. She hastened

to it, and clasped a spray in her white hands.

"That is like the face of an old friend," she said.

"Why?" asked the earl, amused by the action.

"I saw some flowers like them at Downsbury Castle," she replied.

The earl looked keenly at her.

"Downsbury Castle!" he said. "I know the Duke of Downsbury. What took you there, Doris?"

"What takes half the world everywhere?" she replied. "Curiosity. I wanted so very much to see the interior of a castle, and to see if the people living there really led fairy lives."

"And what did you think?" he asked, still in the same voice.

"I liked it very much; but, papa, I like Linleigh Court better—it is more Italian, with sunshine and flowers everywhere."

"So you saw all the flowers at Downsbury Castle?" he continued, in the tone of one who asks a question.

"Yes, and beautiful enough they were; but I saw something even fairer than the flowers, papa."

"What was that, Doris?"

"I saw—listen gravely—I remember the whole of the name—I saw the Lady Estelle Hereford, only daughter of his serene and mighty highness, the Duke of Downsbury."

He laughed, but there was something forced and unnatural in the sound.

"I know her," he said, trying to speak calmly; "they are very dear friends of mine. What did you think of her, Doris?"

It was wonderful how he learned to appeal to and rely on the judgment of this fair young daughter.

"I thought her perfectly beautiful, perfectly graceful, perfectly gentle, but tame, papa."

"Tame, child! What do you mean?" he asked.

It was such a novel and not over-pleasant sensation for him to hear a mother called "tame" by her daughter, although it was done in supreme ignorance.

"I cannot explain the word, papa, if you cannot understand it by instinct. Earle would if he were here. I liked her very much; but she puzzled me; her face kept changing color: she was proud, yet familiar; haughty, yet gentle. She talked to me about love and marriage, just as Mattie would have talked."

"Poor Estelle!" murmured the earl; then he said aloud: "How would Mattie have talked? Give me an example."

"My lord!" cried Mrs. Brace, in alarm, "I am quite sure that Mattie never said a wrong thing in her life."

"I am equally sure of it," said the earl, kindly.

"Mattie, like Lady Estelle, has great notions, papa—duty and all those disagreeable things were first."

"That is right," said the earl. Even to himself he did not own how the introduction of Lady Estelle's name had startled him.

Doris hastened on among the flowers. Lord Linleigh lingered behind, while he said to Mark and his wife:

"You are tenants of the Duke of Downsbury, are you not?"

"Yes," replied Mark.

"Then I do not mind telling you, in all confidence, that you will probably hear or read something about Lady Hereford and myself which will please you."

Mrs. Brace understood him at once.

"My lord," she said, "I am so sorry that Lady Doris called her tame."

He laughed good-naturedly.

"She speaks her mind frankly," he said, "and that, at least, is a recommendation. Lady Estelle would only be amused if she heard it."

"He means to marry her," said Mark to his wife, as the earl hurried after his daughter; but Mrs. Brace had the strangest expression on her face.

"What is it?" Mark asked. "Surely you are not ill?"

"No, I am not ill; but I will say this, Mark, it is a most awful world—no one can understand it."

"Do as I do, my dear; the world never troubles me, because I take no notice of it."

But that philosophy was not in the way of Mark's wife.

"Doris," said the earl, when he overtook his daughter, "I wish to consult you."

"I am not a very wise person to consult," she replied, with a charming little smile, "but what little wit I have is quite at your service, papa."

"My dear child," he said, "between ourselves, the Studleighs have never been deficient in wit, but there has hardly been one steady head in the whole race."

"That is deplorable enough. We must try to alter it," she said, laughingly. "To begin with, I will steady my own. What do you wish to consult me about, papa?"

"I want to do something substantial and handsome for your foster-parents," he said. "What shall it be?"

"A steam-plow for Mark, and a black satin dress for his wife—that is the highest ambition of both."

"Then you shall present them those gifts. But I mean something substantial. What do you think of a thousand pounds as a dowry for his daughter, and a thousand to be spent in improvements on the farm?"

"I think you are very fortunate to have thousands to spare; and I think also that it is very charming of you to give them so much," she replied.

Lord Linleigh looked wistfully at her.

"Money could never repay such a benefit as Mark Brace and his wife have conferred upon me, Doris," he said. "I am an aristocrat, it is true; but I shall be more proud of reckoning that honest farmer among my friends than I should of calling a king brother."

"That is a very grand sentiment, papa," laughed Doris. "It is almost worth printing in a book. I must confess I would rather have a king for my brother than any man for a friend. I think Mark will be delighted with the steam-plow. After all, what you are pleased to call the benefit they conferred on you was not without its reward. Mark Brace was very fond of me—he always said I made the sunshine of Brackenside."

The earl looked amused at this fashion of making matters straight; but before they went away, he gladdened the hearts of the farmer and his wife.

"A thousand pounds!" said Mark, looking in the most bewildered fashion at the check he held in his hand—"a thousand pounds, my lord, to spend as I like! It is impossible—it cannot be true. I must not take it—I have done nothing to deserve it."

But Lord Linleigh greeted his scruples with:

"You have done for me and my daughter that which few would have done so well," he said.

"I did my duty, my lord—no less, no more; and a thousand pounds for doing my duty is an enormous reward."

But his surprise was redoubled when, added to this, the earl insisted that he should take a thousand pounds for Mattie's dowry, and would not hear of any refusal. Then, indeed, the tears stood, warm and bright, in Mark's eyes, and Mrs. Brace wept like a child. "A dowry for Mattie!"—the brightest hope, the maddest dream they had ever entertained. Mattie to have a fortune! Not that it would make her a wealthy heiress, but it would at least secure her from all want. Let them die now, whensoever Heaven pleased—their daughter would never want.

Lord Linleigh could never forget the thanks that were lavished on him—the gratitude, the warmth of emotion.

"And now," said the earl, "there is one thing more that I wish you to do for me. It relates to my daughter's engagement with Earle Moray."

Mark looked at him with anxious eyes.

"We have been speaking of that, my lord—my wife and I. It may not perhaps seem much of a match for her, now that she is my lady; but if you were to search the wide world over, you would never find any one who loved her so dearly as Earle—no one so honest, so good and true. It will be but a poor chance for her, my lord, if she finds a fortune and loses Earle."

"So I believe," said the earl. "It is about that I wish to speak to you. You will see Earle on your return; tell him from me that the change in my daughter's position need make none in her engagement to him; tell him, from me, that as far as my consent can ratify and approve it, I most freely give that consent. Tell him also that I will do my best to push his fortune."

Mrs. Brace looked at him with grateful approval.

"My lord," she said, in her simple fashion, "they speak truthfully when they call you a noble man."

Lady Doris, proud of her name, her fortune, her position, did not feel quite so pleased when she heard this. It had been all very well when she was Doris Brace—it had been all very well in Florence, when Earle had become tiresome, she had been compelled to repeat her promise of marriage, and pledge herself to him over and over again; but there had been a faint hope in her mind that when she was once with her father, under the shelter of his roof, he would never allow her to fulfill the engagement. She never dreamed that he would chivalrously exact its fulfillment. Still, she was wise enough to be silent, and not say what was in her mind. She had learned that great lesson women so often fail in—when to be silent and when to speak.

When they were once more alone, Mrs. Brace expressed her great sense of the earl's kindness and real goodness. She thought it so noble of him that he should wish the engagement to continue.

"It would break Earle's heart to lose you," she said. "When you went away—abroad, I mean—I thought he would have died."

Lady Doris raised her head with the lofty air natural to her.

"You do not understand," she said. "The earl could not break his word, or persuade another person to break a promise. *Noblesse oblige!*"

"Ah, my dear," said the kindly woman, "you are far ahead of me—I never did quite understand you—you are clever and learned; you have speech of your own that I cannot follow: but however great or grand you may be, you will never find any one to love you so truly as Earle does."

"I am sure of that," she replied, then turned hastily away. She was growing tired of hearing of nothing but Earle. Surely they were all in a conspiracy, all plotting for Earle. Yet, despite her impatience, she owned to herself that all the love she had to give away was given to him.

CHAPTER LII.

"BE KIND TO HER, AS THOUGH YOU WERE HER OWN CHILD."

The atmosphere seemed clearer to Lady Doris Studleigh when the kindly farmer and his wife were gone; she wanted nothing to remind her of what she chose to call that miserable period of her life. She was always vexed that the earl had spoken so frankly of them as her foster-parents. There was no need, surely, for all the house to know that she had been brought up at a farm. She would have been surprised if she could have known the amount of respect that the servants, one and all, felt for Mark Brace. No person could know him without feeling for him the greatest possible liking; his honesty, the simple, rugged grandeur of his character, attracted all. She, who measured men by the length of their pedigree and purses, was quite unable, even in her own mind, to do justice to Mark Brace. He might be as chivalrous as Bayard, self-denying as Sir Philip Sydney, brave as the Black Prince, but, for all that, he was only a farmer. Therefore it was a relief to her when he was gone. She felt more at ease in her father's house when they were gone.

When Lord Linleigh, after seeing them off from the station, had returned to the Court, he sent for his daughter to the library.

"Now, my darling," he said, "it is quite time we had a little serious talk together. How strange it seems to me to have a grown-up daughter like you. Sit down; I have so much to say to you. To begin with, do you find yourself at home?"

"I have never felt more at home in my life," she replied, calmly; "and I think it is because I am in my right place at last."

"Most probably so. Now, Doris, there are several things that you want, and must have at once—a Parisian waiting-maid, and a wardrobe suited to your position. Do you ride?"

"Yes; it is one of my favorite amusements."

"That is right; you must have a horse and groom; there will be a carriage also at your disposal. But over your wardrobe we must have some advice. You will require everything, just as though you were being married."

"That is certain," she replied, with a quiet smile; "but I do not think I shall need advice. I am quite competent myself to select what I want."

"But, my dear child, how can you be?"

"You forget that I went out as governess, and so had the opportunity of studying those things. Trust me and see. I shall go at once to Madame Francois, the head court milliner, and you will be satisfied, I am sure, with the result."

"I shall be delighted, I am sure, if that be the case," said the earl. "Then you will want jewels. Studleigh jewels are very fine ones—I suppose we have the finest jewels in the world."

"Why will they not do for me, then?" she asked.

"Because they must go to my wife. The family jewels are always the property of the reigning

Countess of Linleigh."

"But, papa, there is no reigning Countess of Linleigh," she said, with a little laugh.

"No, my dear—not just at present; but I hope that there soon will be."

His face flushed slightly, and he looked confused for a few moments. Then he said:

"That is another of the things I want to speak to you about. I ought, perhaps, to tell you that I think of marrying again."

There was a few minutes of dead silence. She did not quite like it; it was not what she had expected. She had anticipated being mistress of Linleigh Court. The earl continued:

"It will be much happier for me, Doris, and decidedly better for you. You labor under great disadvantages at present, although I acknowledge your beauty, your grace, and your tact to be perfect; still, you require, before you make your *debut* in the great world, to spend some little time in the society of a well-trained woman of the world."

She was quick enough to know that this was perfectly true.

"You are right, papa," she said, and the admission pleased him.

"It will also be greatly to your advantage, Doris," he continued. "When you make your *debut* in the great world, you will find the *chaperonage* of a lady essential to you. Still, my child, although there are many advantages for you, do not let me mislead you. It is not for your sake I am going to marry; it is for my own, because I really love the lady who will soon, I hope, be Countess of Linleigh."

She made a violent effort to conquer herself. There was nothing to be gained, she knew, by opposition—everything by cheerful acquiescence. She went to him and clasped her arms around his neck, and kissed his face.

"I hope you will be happy, papa," she said—"I hope you will be very happy."

"Thank you," he replied, cheerfully; "I do not doubt it, darling. I think we shall all be happy together. Guess, Doris, who it is that I hope soon to bring here."

"I can't guess, papa. I do not know the ladies of your world."

"You know this one," he said, laughingly, while she, half-frightened, said:

"How can I?"

"You have been to Downsbury Castle, have you not?"

A sudden light came over her face, then she laughed.

"Can it be Lady Estelle Hereford?" she cried. "Oh, papa, you will never forgive me for calling her tame."

"I have forgiven you. Do you not think you will be very happy with her?"

"I am sure I shall like her very much; she is so fair, so well-bred, so gentle. How little I dreamed, papa, on that day I was sitting so near to her, that she would be my step-mother—that I should ever live with her. I am so glad!"

She did not understand why his face quivered, as with pain. He drew the bright golden head down to his breast.

"My darling," he said, gently, "you shall have all the love, the care, the affection that a father can show his child—you shall have everything your heart desires and wishes for, if you will do one thing in return."

"I will do anything in return," she said.

And for once there was something like deep feeling in her voice.

"I want you to be kind to this wife of mine, Doris. She is not very strong: she has been petted and spoiled all her life. Be kind to her as though—as though you were her own child, or her own younger sister. Will you, Doris? Promise me that, and you will give me the greatest happiness that it is in your power to confer upon me."

"I do promise," cried Doris. "I cannot say that I will love her as my mother, but I will be everything that is gentle and obedient."

"Thank you, my darling! Only do that, and you will see what return I will make to you. There is another thing, Doris, I wish to speak to you about. You heard and agreed with what I said to Mrs. Brace, that I wish your lover, Earle Moray, to understand that I shall consider the engagement between you as binding as though you had always remained at the farm."

"You are very kind, papa," she said; but this time there was no ring of truth and tenderness in her voice.

"It is but just, Doris. I shall make his advancement in the world my chief study. Money can be no

object in your marriage—you will in all probability have a large fortune—still I should like the man you marry to hold some position in the world. From what you tell me of Earle Moray, I should imagine that he is a man of great talent. If so, there can be little difficulty."

"He has something more than talent," said Doris, proudly; "he has genius."

"My dear child, you will know, when you are as old as I am, that talent and industry are worth any amount of genius."

"I am sure that he has industry, papa," she said.

"Then, if he has industry and genius, his fortune is sure," said the earl. "As soon as we have a Countess of Linleigh to do the honors, we must ask Earle Moray to come and see us."

Of all things, that was what she desired most, that he should see her in her true place, surrounded by all the luxury and magnificence that belonged to her station. It was the strongest wish of her heart.

"Can we not ask him before then, papa?"

"No; there, you see, Doris, the laws of etiquette and ceremony step in. Until you have some lady to *chaperone* you, we cannot receive any young gentlemen visitors. That will be one convenience of a step-mother."

"Yes," she replied: "but the traditional step-mother generally interferes in the love affairs of the household. However, I feel quite sure Lady Estelle will never interfere with mine."

"The Duke of Downsbury goes to Paris this week," continued the earl, "with the duchess and Lady Estelle. I thought of following them."

"That will be very nice for you, papa," she said.

"It is really some comfort to have a daughter whom one can consult about such matters. I want to marry as soon as I can; but marrying a duke's daughter in England is a tremendous undertaking, Doris. The amount of ceremony and form to be gone through with is something dreadful. I should not mind about that; but, you see, the great embarrassment is this—the duke is very particular, and he would naturally think it too soon after the late earl's death for me to make any great public sensation—that is the difficulty."

"Yes, that is a difficulty," said Doris.

"All that would be obviated entirely if I went to Paris, and could obtain their consent to a quiet ceremony at the embassy, or something of that kind."

"It would be a very wise course, papa."

"So I think, my dear, and I shall start for Paris next week. I may be a month absent. Now comes the great difficulty of all, Doris—what is to be done with you?"

"I can remain here," she said.

"Not alone, my dear, not alone—it would not do. I thought if I were to ask that nice daughter of Mark Brace's she would stay with you; then I should feel quite at my ease."

"I should be much pleased," said Doris.

It would indeed be a triumph to show Mattie, upon whom she had always looked down, the difference that really existed between them.

"Then all our difficulties are silenced," said the earl. "I have often heard people say how difficult their daughters are to manage; but if they are like you, Doris, there cannot be such great difficulty."

She laughed, wondering to herself if he would say the same in a year's time.

"You understand, Doris, that it will not do for you to go into society at all just yet. You must neither receive or pay visits. No young lady does anything of that kind until she has been presented at court."

"When does my presentation take place, papa?"

"If all goes well, I think next May. Lady Estelle or the duchess will present you; then you may consider yourself fairly afloat—until then, solitude. You can spend the intermediate time in the acquisition of all kinds of little accomplishments; not that you are deficient, for you are a perfect wonder to me. The next thing to be done, Doris, is that you must choose a suit of rooms for yourself. I give you permission to choose which you will; and when we go to London, you shall go to Mantall & Briard's, the famous decorators and house-furnishers, and choose anything you like. It will amuse you during my absence to superintend the fitting-up of four rooms—it will give me a fair idea of your taste."

They went together through Linleigh Court. Until then Doris had no just idea of the immense extent of the place—she was amazed at it. And the rooms were all so light, so sunny, so bright, she was quite at a loss which to choose. One suit delighted her very much—four large, lofty rooms, with ceilings superbly painted, looking south, so that the warmth and brightness of the

sun was always on them. The windows were built after the French fashion—long, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and opening on to balconies filled with flowers. The great charm to Doris of these rooms was, that the boudoir opened on to a balcony, and a small flight of steps led from the balcony to the ground, so that she could go from her own rooms to the gardens without passing through the house.

"That is very nice," said the earl, "for young ladies who love the early dew and the flowers. Do you think it safe, Doris? Suppose you forgot to fasten the door leading on to the balcony?"

It was an evil fate that led Lady Doris to choose that suit of rooms.

CHAPTER LIII.

A YOUNG LADY PLEASANTLY OCCUPIED.

A few days afterward the Earl of Linleigh, with his daughter, went to London. He had decided not to go to his own house, which was one of the most beautiful mansions in Hyde Park—Hyde House. They were going simply on business, and would spend the greater part of their time driving from one store to another. The first visit, of course, was to Madame Francoise, to whom the earl explained that his daughter required, in one word, everything needful for a young lady of rank and position.

"It will take many hours, Doris," said the earl; "such things cannot be hurried. I can leave you here while I drive on to my lawyer's, to transact some business with him. Remember, my darling, you have *carte blanche*—every whim to be gratified."

Then he drove away, leaving her with Madame Francoise. How forcibly it recalled to her the time when Lord Vivianne had done the self-same thing.

"Truly," she laughed to herself, "history repeats itself. How little then did I foresee this."

So little that if even in a dream she could have been warned of it, she would never have spoken to Lord Vivianne.

"Never mind," she said to herself, with the light-hearted *insouciance* of her race. "Never mind, no one knows—nothing will come of it; but it would certainly be a relief to me to hear that Lord Charles Vivianne was dead."

The pity of it was that Lord Charles could not hear the remark; it would have given him a lesson that he would not have forgotten.

Madame wondered what had brought so grave an air of preoccupation over the beautiful young face. Surely, if any human being was to be envied, it was the young girl who had *carte blanche* in her elegant establishment.

"She must know what she is about, though," thought madame. "Dreaming is useless here."

She little knew Lady Doris. Going up to her with a book of patterns in her hand, she was almost startled by the clear, keen gaze that met her own—by the perfect judgment and cool, clear, calm sense of the earl's daughter.

"There will be some few things, madame," said the clear, haughty voice, "that you will understand far better than I do, others in which I shall prefer to please myself."

And madame found that Lady Studleigh had a taste and artistic sense of what is beautiful far superior to her own. The next few hours were delightful to Doris. The rarest and most costly laces, the most beautiful embroidery, the finest silk, the richest velvet—there never were such purchases made. She did not limit herself either as to quality or quantity, and nothing was forgotten—tiny slippers fit for Cinderella, dancing shoes, fans, gloves. She might have been a practiced old dowager, selecting a *trousseau* for her youngest daughter. The sum total was something enormous. Even madame, accustomed as she was to large accounts, looked slightly frightened.

"My Lord Linleigh placed no limit," she said to Doris.

"No, I must have all I require; I shall not return to town until the season begins," was the perfectly self-possessed reply.

Then Lord Linleigh returned, and madame watched his face intently as that wonderful account was placed before him.

"It takes four figures," he said, with a smile; "that is quite right, my darling. I hope that you have everything you want. To-morrow we will pay a visit to Storr & Mortimer's, the jewelers. These packages, madame, are all to be sent to Linleigh Court."

Doris was in the highest spirits. She said to herself—and it was probably true—that no girl in England, not even a royal princess, had such a *trousseau*; but she had too much good taste to show any undue elation over it. When they had dined she said to her father:

"Papa, you will not care to spend the evening here; it will be dull for you, and I cannot go out. Should you not like to go to your club?"

"Yes; but what of you, my dear?"

"I am tired, and shall be very glad to take a book and go to my own room with it."

"My dear Doris," said the earl, who had slightly dreaded the long, lonely evening, "you are a most sensible girl. If you treat Earle as you treat me, he ought to be the happiest husband in the world."

"I hope he will be, papa," was the quiet reply. And she wondered what her father, the Earl of Linleigh, would say if he knew from whom she had taken her early lessons in the art of managing men.

"If you want a man to be really fond of you, Doris," he used to say, "to feel at home with you, and never to be bored in your society, let him have his own way—offer him his liberty, even when he does not seem inclined to take it; suggest to him a game at billiards, a few hours at his club—you have no idea how he will appreciate you for it."

She had found the charm work perfectly in the case of Lord Charles, and now her father, too, seemed to admire the plan. What would he say if he knew who had instructed her?

She went to her room. Lady Doris never traveled without a pleasant little selection of light French literature—"it prevented her from forgetting the language," she said.

The earl, inwardly hoping his wife would be as sensible as his daughter, went off to spend a quiet evening at his club.

The day following was one of genuine delight to Lady Doris. The first visit the earl paid was to the establishment of Messrs. Storr & Mortimer; there she was to select for herself what jewels she would. She had glanced once wistfully at the earl.

"Jewels are not like dress, papa. It is a dangerous thing to leave me unlimited powers here."

"Lady Doris Studleigh must have jewels fitting her position," he said. "Dress wears out, but jewels last forever."

So Lady Doris stood in that most tempting place, almost bewildered, while sets of pearls, of diamonds, of rare emeralds, of pale pink coral, then case after case of superb rings, were placed before her. She thought of those so securely packed in her box, and wondered what would be thought if their history could be known.

She chose some magnificent pearls; there were none fairer, even in that place where the finest stones abound. Then she chose a set of emerald, golden-green in their beautiful light; a set of pearls and rubies mixed; rings until she had more than enough to cover the fingers of both hands; golden chains of rare workmanship and beauty; watches of great value; and when she could think of nothing else she could desire, she looked up in the earl's face with a smile.

"That is not bad, my dear, for a beginning," he said, laughingly—"not bad at all."

"You do not think I have purchased too much, papa?"

"No, my dear, you have not enough yet. I merely said it was very well for a beginning."

What the amount of the bill was, or how many figures it took, she never knew. The earl had said good-naturedly to himself that it did not matter—he had many thousands to spare.

"There is yet another place," he said; "we must go to Parkins & Gotto's. You require many things from there. You must have a dressing-case, a lady's writing-table, and all kinds of knickknacks for your rooms."

The day following was spent at Mantall & Briard's, where Lady Doris gave such orders for the fitting up of her four rooms as made even those gentlemen open their eyes in undisguised wonder. Nothing was spared—no luxury, no comfort; and that evening, when they sat together, Lady Doris said to her father:

"I wonder if, in all the wide world, there is another girl in my position."

"What position?" he asked.

"Why, it is a positive fact that I have not one single wish left ungratified. If a fairy were to come and ask me to try and find one out, I could not—I have not one."

He stooped down to kiss the beautiful face.

"I am glad to hear it," he replied. "I certainly do not think any one else could say quite as much. I could not."

It was not of herself alone that Doris had thought that day. She had been with the earl to give orders respecting the steam-plow; she had chosen such a dress, such a shawl and cap for Mrs. Brace, that she knew would bring tears of delight into that lady's eyes; she had chosen a box full of millinery, with pretty ornaments, for Mattie; she had chosen for Earle a box full of books such as she had often heard him long for. And Lord Linleigh, while he admired her goodness of heart,

her affectionate memory, never for one moment thought that her quick study of him had led her to do these different things. She longed for the hour in which she should return to Linleigh; she wanted to see all the magnificent purchases she had made placed at her own disposal. The Parisian waiting-maid was found and one bright, clear, frosty morning they returned to the Court.

"It looks like home," said Lady Doris. Her heart warmed to it, and beat faster with a thrill of pride. It was her own home, from which nothing could dislodge her!

She had had one fright in London; and though her nerves were strong, her courage high, it had been a fright.

She was driving with the earl through New Bond Street, when on the pavement she saw Gregory Leslie. There was no avoiding him—their eyes met. His were filled with recognition and surprise—hers rested on him with calm nonchalance, although her heart beat high. Then he smiled, bowed, and half stood still; but the calm expression of her face never wavered.

"Is it some one who knows you?" asked the earl.

"It is some one who has made a great mistake," she replied.

And then they passed out of sight—not, however, before Gregory Leslie had seen the coronet on the panel.

"What a mistake I have made," he said to himself. "I certainly thought that was my beautiful 'Innocence.' How like her! It cannot be such an uncommon type of face, after all, when there are three now that different people have seen—all so much alike. What would my 'Innocent' do in an earl's carriage?—that is, if all be well with her; and Earle said all was well."

She would not recognize him, for the simple reason that she feared to do so. He was a man of the world, always in London, familiar with all the little rumors at the clubs, and she dreaded what he might say afterward. If by chance she should meet him when she was with the earl and countess, she would recognize him, but not just then.

"It was an unfortunate thing for me," she said to herself, "having that picture painted. If I had known then what I know now, it never would have happened. Mark Brace and his wife were foolish to allow it."

But she had forgotten the whole matter when they reached Linleigh Court. All the packages were there, and she was as happy as a queen superintending the arrangements, the unpacking, the stowing away in beautiful old wardrobes made of cedar.

Even the Parisian waiting-maid, who rejoiced in the name of Eugenie, owned to herself that not one of the great ladies with whom she had lived had a wardrobe like Lady Doris Studleigh's!

Then came the day for the earl's departure—he would not go until Mattie had arrived.

"You cannot be left alone, my dear," he said, so decidedly that Doris had not dared to urge the matter.

Mattie came, and was delighted. She cried a little at first, for, despite all her faults, she had most dearly loved the young girl she believed to be her sister. The story of Doris had been a great trouble to her, and she had felt it bitterly; but after a time she forgot her grief in the wonder excited by the magnificence of Linleigh Court. Lady Doris was very kind to her; nothing of patronage or triumph was to be detected in her manner.

The first time they were left alone together in what was to Mattie the bewildering glories of the drawing-room, the brown eyes were raised timidly to the fair face.

"Doris," said Mattie, "who could have believed that you were such a great lady after all?"

"I had faith in myself, my dear," was the superb reply, "and that is a great thing!"

CHAPTER LIV.

"I MUST BEAR IT FOR HIS SAKE."

The great world did own itself to be surprised—not angry, nor shocked, nor even vexed or offended, but surprised. It had not taken newspaper rumors for gospel truth. It had prided itself on superior knowledge, and had seen nothing of the kind; but this fine spring morning it was taken by surprise.

The fashionable morning papers all told the same startling story—the Earl of Linleigh was married, and married to Lady Estelle Hereford, the Duke of Downsbury's only daughter. They had defrauded the fashionable world of a grand spectacle. The marriage of a duke's daughter with an earl would naturally have been a grand sight—such a grand duke, too, as his Grace of Downsbury. Then private rumor came to the rescue, and told how it would have been impossible for the marriage to have been celebrated with any degree of ceremony in England, owing to the fact that the late earl had not so very long been dead. Rumor added also, how, long years ago, when he was a penniless captain, Lord Linleigh had been hopelessly attached to the duke's fair,

proud daughter, and how, on his accession to the estates, he had instantly renewed his suit; how he had followed them to Paris, would take no nay, and had married Lady Estelle in spite of all obstacles. There was one singular omission, though it was not of the least consequence—none of the papers said where the marriage had been performed, or by whom. Those who noticed the omission thought it would be supplied next day, then forgot all about it.

The earl had been absent six weeks, and Lady Doris had spent them very comfortably, with the help of Mattie. There was nothing in Mattie to be ashamed of. True, she was only a farmer's daughter; but for all that she was a well-bred girl. Her politeness and natural grace of manner came from that best and sweetest of all sources, a good heart. She might be deficient in some little matters of etiquette, but she was always true, sincere, kind and good. Not even in outward appearance could the fastidious Lady Doris find the least fault with her foster-sister, while her thoughtful consideration made her liked and esteemed by every one in the house. Indeed, there were some who compared the two unfavorably, and wished that the haughty Lady Doris had some of her foster-sister's gentleness.

The suit of rooms were finished, and Doris had taken possession of them before the earl returned.

The fair spring was coming; already the cuckoo had been heard in the woods; the first sweet odors of spring seemed to fill the air; the green buds were on the hedges—such a fair, sweet, odorous spring. It seemed to have touched the heart of Earle, the poet, and have turned his poetry into words of fire. He wrote such letters to Lady Doris that, if it had been in the power of words to have touched her heart, his would have done so; but it was not; and one morning, when the sun was shining more brightly than usual, when the first faint song of the birds was heard, Lady Doris received a letter to say that day the earl and countess would be at home.

The earl gave many directions how his beautiful and stately wife was to be received; how the Anderley church bells were to ring, the servants be ready; how a grand dinner was to be prepared an hour later than usual, so as to make allowance for any little delay in traveling.

"I trust everything to you, Doris," said the earl, "and I know that I may safely do so; you will keep your promise."

He trusted well. Her energy and quickness were not to be surpassed. Every arrangement was made, every trifling detail attended to, and the astonished servants, looking at each other in wonder, owned that their young lady was a "regular locomotive" when she liked. Great fires were burning in the dressing-rooms, the bedrooms—every place where she thought a fire would be pleasant.

"The Countess of Linleigh shall have the three things that I like best to welcome her home," she said, laughingly.

"What are those?" asked Mattie.

"Warmth, light, and flowers. Those are three grand luxuries, Mattie, and if people either appreciated them better, or cared more about them, the world would be a much more comfortable dwelling-place than it is now."

Lady Doris took especial pains over her own toilet that evening. The Countess of Linleigh was a duke's daughter, and her good opinion was worth having. She wished to impress her favorably, and she knew that she must choose the happy medium. She must not be too plain—that would seem like rusticity: nor too magnificent—that would be ostentation.

"I wish now," she said to herself, "that I had never gone near Downsbury Castle: it was one of the most unfortunate things I ever did in my life. I wonder what she thought of me that day?"

She did look exceedingly beautiful when she was dressed. She had chosen a costume of pale lilac silk, with golden ornaments. The silk was shaded by fine white lace—nothing could have suited her better. The ripples of golden hair were drawn loosely together, and fastened with a diamond arrow; the lovely face, with its dainty flush and bright, deep eyes; the lovely mouth, so like the soft petals of a rose; the white, graceful neck, the polished, pearly shoulders, the rounded arms—all made up a picture not often seen. Mattie looked at her in honest amaze.

"You are very beautiful; you dazzle my eyes, dear," she said. "What shall you do with your beauty, Doris?"

"Enjoy it," was the laughing reply.

But Mattie looked grave.

"It seems to me," she said, "that beauty such as yours is full of peril."

"I do not see it," was the laughing answer. "Now, Mattie, it is time we went to the drawing-room; in one half hour from this my lord and my lady will be at home."

Faster and faster they seemed to drive; and with every minute that brought them nearer, Lady Linleigh grew paler.

"It is an ordeal, Ulric," she said, in her clear, sweet voice; "it seems to me that all I have gone

through is as nothing compared to this. It was very hard of papa—very hard."

"He meant it for the best, Estelle, and we must bear it, love; it might have been much worse."

"Yes; but to hear her speak, to be with her every moment of the day, yet never once to call her child, or hear her say 'mother'—it will be very hard, Ulric—you do not know how hard."

"I can guess, my dear; but why dwell on this, the darkest side? Think of the happiness in store! Your father and mother both friends with us, having quite forgiven us, and, I venture to think, growing quite fond of me; they will come to see us, and we shall visit them; and you will always have Doris with you. Think of all those things!"

"Do you think I shall betray myself, Ulric?" she asked, simply.

"No, my wife, I do not. You kept your secret when you saw her at Downsbury Castle, and you will keep it now. As for loving her, indulging her, saying all kind and gentle words to her, that will be quite natural in your position. Try to be happy, my darling wife; there are happy days in store for us."

"I will try," she said.

At that moment they heard the chiming bells of Anderley Church, filling the air with rich, jubilant music.

"Listen, Estelle," said Lord Linleigh; "that is our welcome home."

Listening to the joyous bells, watching the last golden gleam die out in the western sky, no dream of tragedy to come disturbed them.

"Home at last," said the earl, as the carriage stopped. "I really think, Estelle, I am the happiest man in the world."

He looked wistfully at his wife's face—it was white as death.

"My darling," he whispered, as he led her into the house, "for my sake try to cheer up. Do not sadden the happiest hour of my life."

She made a violent effort to arouse herself. She returned with her usual high and gentle courtesy the greetings of the domestics, and walked with graceful steps to the library; then she hardly knew what took place. She saw a face and a figure before her lovelier than the loveliest dream of an artist. She saw two white arms around her husband's neck, while a voice that made her heart thrill said:

"Welcome home, dear papa—welcome home!"

"I must bear it," she thought, "for his sake."

Then the beautiful face was looking in her own.

Oh, Heaven! that she should bear such pain, such joy, yet live.

A soft voice said:

"Welcome home, dear Lady Linleigh. I hope you will let me love you very much."

She felt as though she held her heart in her own hands when she kissed the white brow, saying:

"I am sure to love you very much."

The earl, who was watching her closely, saw that she had just as much as she could bear—it was time to interfere; so he took Mattie by the hand and led her to the countess. He introduced her in a few kindly words, and then Lady Linleigh replied:

"I remember you, my dear, though you have probably forgotten me. I saw you when you were quite a little child."

"I do remember you," said Mattie, gratefully.

Then Lord Linleigh interfered again.

"Estelle," he said, "we are just ten minutes behind our time. You would like to change your traveling dress."

She looked at him like one roused from a dream, hardly seeming at first to understand him; then she walked slowly from the room. Lord Linleigh followed her, leaving the two girls alone.

"I think she will like me," said Lady Doris, "and it will be really a boon to me to have such a graceful, high-bred lady in the house. I shall study her, imitate her. Now, Mattie, does she not, as I said before, seem to move to the hidden rhythm of some sweet music?"

"Yes, she gives me exactly that impression. But how pale she is, Doris, and her hands trembled. She looked as though she was going to faint."

"She is not strong—papa told me so—and traveling has perhaps tired her. Do you think she will like me, Mattie?"

The tone of voice was very anxious. Mattie looked up quickly.

"You will say I am full of foolish fancies, Doris, but do you know I could not help thinking that she loved you; she looked as though she did. Her eyes had quite a strange light in them as they rested on your face, and the expression on hers was wonderful."

"That is certainly all fancy," replied Doris. "I have only seen her twice in my life; it is not possible she can love me. Perhaps she thought I was not so bad-looking—she admires beauty in everything, I know; she told me so herself. She married papa, I suppose, for his handsome face."

"Hush!" cried Mattie, "you must not say such things—it is wrong."

She could say no more; the earl and countess returned, and the dinner-bell rang. During dinner it seemed to Mattie that, so far from being mistaken, she was quite right—the countess certainly loved Doris; her voice took quite another tone when she addressed her. She fancied the earl noticed it too, and was pleased.

When Mattie was near, and Lady Linleigh was arranging some presents she had brought home for the girls, he said.

"The countess will be quite happy now; she is so fond of young girls, and she has two to spoil."

"I don't think I shall spoil either of them," said his wife, with a happy light in her eyes; "they are both too good to be spoiled."

CHAPTER LV.

"MY QUEEN ROSE OF THE ROSEBUDS."

The Countess of Linleigh sat anxiously watching the fair face of Lady Doris. All was going on well at Linleigh. The gentle, stately countess was already half worshiped there. The earl considered himself the happiest of men. One conversation had both pleased and touched Lady Linleigh. When she had been at home some days she fancied Mattie looked grave and almost sad. She had been thinking seriously about the girl—whether it was advisable to ask her to remain with Lady Doris as friend and companion, or whether it would be better to permit her to return to Brackenside. The earl had spoken of their going to London in May, if they did so, could Mattie go with them? Would it not be rather cruel than kind to give her notions, or accustom her to a life which it would be impossible for her to lead?

The countess saw Mattie walking one morning in the early spring alone, with a most thoughtful look on her face, and she went to her.

"I have been looking for early violets," said Mattie, glancing with a smile at Lady Linleigh, "in that pretty little dell—Thorny Dell, Doris calls it. The air is filled with their fragrance, yet I cannot see them. At Brackenside, at this time, the woods are full of them."

The countess laughed.

"There is no place like Brackenside, is there, Mattie?"

"No," replied the girl, earnestly, "none—at least it seems so to me, because I love my home so very dearly."

Then Lady Linleigh placed her hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder.

"Mattie," she said, gently, "you were looking very sad and thoughtful a few minutes since. What were you thinking of?"

"Home—and Earle," was the frank reply.

Lady Linleigh was half startled.

"What about Earle?" she asked.

The brown eyes were raised wistfully to hers.

"Earle will be so unhappy, Lady Linleigh, without Doris. No one knows—no one can imagine how he loves her. I cannot think what his life is without her."

"But he will not be without her long," said the countess. "Did you not know that he was coming here in February?"

She saw a rose-colored flush underneath the brown skin; she saw a sudden warm light in the brown eye; and without a word, almost by instinct, the Countess of Linleigh guessed the girl's secret, and how dearly she loved Earle.

"Coming here!" repeated Mattie. "I am so glad!"

"So am I," added Lady Linleigh. "I have the highest opinion of your friend Earle."

She did not know how grateful those words were to the girl, who never heard Earle spoken of

save as Doris' own peculiar property. "Her friend!" She could have blessed Lady Linleigh for it. The words seemed to have made that sweet spring sunshine brighter in some strange, vague way—the odor of the hidden violets and the sound of Earle's voice seemed to harmonize.

"And you yourself, Mattie," said the countess, more touched than she cared to own by that unconscious revelation—"would you be happier to remain here, or to go home? You shall decide for yourself, and do which you will."

"My place is home," was the simple reply. "I have seen my dear Doris happy. I shall always be able to picture to myself what her manner of life is like. I shall know that Earle is content, being with her; so that it seems to me now my place and my duty alike are at home."

"I think you are right, dear child," said the countess.

She had read the girl's secret rightly, and knew that, from henceforward, for Mattie Brace, there would be but one consolation, and that she would find in doing her duty.

"You would like, perhaps," she added, "to wait and welcome Earle?"

But Mattie remembered how many things he would require, what preparations would be necessary for a visit to Linleigh Court; and she divined, with the rapidity of thought natural to her, that she must go home and help Earle. Lady Linleigh was infinitely touched by the young girl's simplicity, her loving heart, her complete sacrifice. Even the earl wondered how it was that his wife showed such sincere affection for Mattie.

Mattie went away, and on this morning, some few days after her departure, Lady Linleigh sat anxiously watching the face of the beautiful Doris. Had she any heart, or was she a true Studleigh? The countess had been thinking of her all the morning, for at breakfast-time the earl, with a smile of happiness, had given her a letter, saying:

"This is from Earle; how he loves Doris. He is coming to-day."

Lady Linleigh's thoughts had flown back to the time when she sat with Doris in the conservatory at the Castle, and had argued so strongly with her on the point of love. She was disappointed, for the beautiful face did not brighten, no warmth came into the lovely eyes, when she heard the announcement of her lover's coming.

"Coming to-day, is he, papa?"

And Lady Linleigh, quick to judge, felt a sure conviction that the tie which bound Lady Doris to Earle Moray, gentleman and poet, was burdensome to her.

"Perhaps she is ambitious," thought the countess; "it may be that with her wealth and title she thinks a marriage with Earle beneath her." Again she felt somewhat reassured when she saw that Lady Doris took some pains to please her lover. He was to reach Linleigh in the evening.

When the dressing-bell rung, Lady Estelle hastened her toilet, in order that she might do what she was very fond of doing—spend a short time in Lady Doris' dressing-room. She loved to see the shining ripples of golden hair loose and unbound, she liked to watch the glorious face, and to see the graceful figure arrayed in dress of fitting splendor.

There were times when Lady Doris herself wondered at the great tenderness of the duke's daughter.

"As fate ordained me a step-mother," she would say to herself with a smile, "I cannot be sufficiently thankful that she likes me so well."

On this evening Lady Linleigh started with surprise. Accustomed as she was to the girl's beauty, it had never seemed to her so striking or so graceful. Lady Doris had indeed arrayed herself so as to charm the eyes of her lover.

A little cry of admiration came from Lady Estelle; it escaped her without her knowledge.

Lady Doris looked round with a blush and a smile, and nodded her graceful head.

"I am being poetical, Lady Linleigh," she said, laughingly. "Earle is a poet, and I am dressing in character, as a poet's bride, you see."

There was the least possible suspicion of mockery in her words and laughter, but looking at her, the countess could find no fault. The tall, graceful figure seemed to rise from clouds of rich white lace; the white, rounded arms were bare to the shoulder; the graceful neck was clasped by neither diamond nor pearl; on the white breast a diamond glittered like flame; the golden hair, with its shining waves, was beautifully arranged; the little ears were like pink sea-shells; a few green leaves were carelessly entwined in the golden hair—she looked like the very spirit of love, beauty and song.

"Then you *do* care to please Earle?" said Lady Linleigh, as she kissed the fair face.

"Certainly," was the coquettish reply. "I have no thought of failing, either."

Even the earl stood and gazed for a few moments in mute admiration of his daughter's loveliness; then he shook his head, and said, gravely:

"There was no need for it, Doris—no need."

It was characteristic of this father and daughter that they understood each other perfectly; they were so much alike that the medium of words was not always required; they seemed to read each other's thoughts by instinct. While Lady Linleigh stood by, quite ignorant of her husband's meaning, Lady Doris understood it perfectly. It meant that Earle loved her already so dearly, there was no need for her to try to win more love from him.

The earl did not profess to be a man of sentiment. As a rule, he considered love a kind of weakness to which one was especially liable in youth, but this wondrous love of Earle Moray's impressed him greatly. He had decided to drive himself to the station to meet his young guest, to whom he desired to show all honor; then Lady Linleigh had said it would be less embarrassing for them to meet alone.

"What a fund of sentiment you have, Estelle," laughed the earl. "By all means, arrange a *tete-a-tete* for them. My honest belief is that women never tire of love-stories."

He did not know how such speeches as these jarred upon the tender, sensitive heart of his wife. But Lady Linleigh was considerate.

"Doris," she said to the proud young beauty, "it is some time since you have seen Earle, and he will perhaps feel some restraint in my presence, and not talk to you as freely as he would in my absence; I will leave you to receive him."

And Doris laughed with some of the earl's half-contempt for sentiment.

Yet she owned to herself that she was really glad there was no one to see poor Earle's extravagant delight and wild worship of her.

In the burning intensity of his desire to see her, all other things were entirely lost. It never occurred to him that the Earl of Linleigh had purposely put himself to inconvenience to meet him at the railway station; he never gave even a passing thought to the grand carriage, the liveried servants, the magnificent mansion; he thought only of Doris—the birds sang of her, the wind whispered her name. Lord Linleigh smiled more than once as his remarks were unheard, his questions unanswered.

After all, there was something very beautiful, half-divine, in such love. He envied the young poet who felt it and the girl who was its object. He understood that all the glories of Linleigh were for the present quite lost on Earle.

When they reached the Court, the earl looked at the poet with a smile.

"If you were an ordinary visitor," he said, "I should suggest the dining-room and instant refreshment; but knowing you to be far away from all such earthly matters, I merely mention them. My daughter, the Lady Doris, is in the drawing-room there—will you join her?"

Earle had longed with the intensity of longing to see her again. His life had been one long fever, one fire of desire, one constant thought of her; yet, when he stood once more in her beautiful presence, he was mute, dumb. She smiled at him, and held out her white, jeweled hands to him.

"Earle," she said, and at the sound of her voice his whole soul seemed to wake up. "Earle," she repeated; and the next moment he held those white hands in his, he drew her to him, he kissed her face, her brow. It was pitiful to see a strong man's soul so bound down with a mighty love.

"Earle," she repeated a third time, "it is certainly an excellent thing that I do not wear chignons. How do young ladies manage, I wonder, with chignons and such a rapturous lover as you. Look at my flowers and dress; it is not, really, etiquette to kiss any young lady *en grande toilette*."

He only laughed at the mocking words. What cared he, when his arm was round her, and he looked into her face again.

"My darling," he said; "my queen rose of the rosebuds."

She laid her hand on his lips.

"That is Tennyson's poetry," she said, "not your own. Are you so very pleased to see me, Earle?"

"So pleased that I cannot find words—so pleased that the wonder to me is that I can bear so much happiness."

"If you think you are too happy, Earle, I can soon alter that state of things," she said, laughingly.

"You cannot alter yourself," he replied. "While you are what you are, and as you are, I must be the happiest of men—I cannot help it. Mattie told me that I should find you changed. Why, my darling, you are beautiful, graceful, noble as a queen. In all the wide world I am quite sure there is no one like you—none."

CHAPTER LVI.

"WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG, PERHAPS SHE LOVED SOME ONE LIKE

Dinner was over, and Earle had recovered some little sense and reason. He had hardly looked at Lady Estelle. They had met as perfect strangers, and the earl introduced them.

It struck the earl that his wife looked pale and strange; but whenever there was anything about Lady Linleigh that he did not understand, he always attributed it to sentiment.

Then in her calm, high-bred fashion she bade Earle welcome to Linleigh; she spoke to him several times during dinner. That dinner seemed to Earle more like a dream than a reality. Whenever he looked at her he thought of Quainton woods and the strange story she had told him there, the truth of which seemed only known to herself and him. He wondered if she would speak to him about it—if she would allude to it in any way. He had never seen her since, although he had so well carried out her commands. After dinner all wonder on that point was at an end.

"Doris," said the countess, "sing some of your pretty French *chansons* for us. Mr. Moray, will you look over these sketches by Dore?"

While Doris' rich voice filled the room, and Earle sat with the sketches in his hand, she, feigning to be interested in them, said:

"I have never had a chance to thank you, but I thank you now, with all my heart, with gratitude that words cannot express. Can you understand how grateful I am to you, Earle Moray?"

There was a pretty, musical lingering on his name which charmed him. He looked into the proud, fair face, and said, simply:

"A man might be proud to give his life for you, Lady Linleigh. I am happy to think that it was in my power to be of service to you."

"You will keep my secret always, Earle?"

"Always, Lady Linleigh, as I would guard my life or my honor."

"Even after you are married, when it will be most difficult to keep a secret from Doris, you will keep this—you will never let her know that I am her mother?"

"No; you may trust me until death," he said.

Then for some minutes there was silence. Lady Linleigh was the first to break it.

"Do you know how I shall try to reward you, Earle?" she asked.

"I think less of the reward than of the kindness that prompts it," he replied, gratefully.

"I shall do my best to further your interests in life—to help you to reach such a position as shall please Doris. I will hasten your marriage by every means in my power, and I will love you as though you were my own son. Do not look so grateful; they will wonder what I am saying to you. You understand, once and for all, I shall never allude to this again."

The next moment Lady Doris was laughingly accusing the countess of having asked her to sing, in order that she might talk at her ease.

"We are quite a family party," said Lord Linleigh. "Earle, do you play billiards?"

"No," he replied, "I do not."

"Then come at once, and let me give you your first lesson. No man can hope to succeed in this world who cannot play billiards."

Doris went into the billiard-room to see the first lesson given and received, while Lady Estelle pondered over the same problem—did Doris love Earle, or did she not?

On the morning following the earl and the poet had a long conversation. It was a fine spring day, with the odor of early violets and the song of the birds in the air.

"Come out with me, Mr. Moray," said the earl; "we can talk more at ease under the broad blue sky."

Then, as they walked through the stately domain, the earl talked more seriously than he had ever done before.

"Some men," he said, "might object to seeing an engagement of the kind fulfilled. I do not. When Doris, as you knew, had no name, no home, you would have been proud to make her your wife; she, in her turn, should be, and is, I do not doubt, proud to reward your love. Now, it would be very easy for me, Earle, to imitate one of the fathers in heavy comedy, and say: 'Take her—be happy; here are fifty thousand pounds and my blessing.' I repeat, that would be easy, but it would be an injustice to you. I prefer that you shall make a position for yourself, and win her; you will be happier."

"Yes," replied Earle, "a thousand times happier. I love her so dearly—pardon me, my lord—so dearly, that I would work, as Jacob did, seven years to win her, and, because of my great love, they would seem as one day."

"I will take your fortunes in hand," said the earl, "as I told you before. It would be easy to give you one; but I will give you what is far better—the means of making one. I will place you in such a position that it shall not be in the power of any person to say, when he hears of my daughter's marriage, that she had made a *mesalliance*."

"I thank you, my lord; my deeds, my life shall thank you," said Earle, earnestly.

"You have already," continued the earl, "made for yourself some reputation as a poet; now tell me, have you ever turned your attention to politics?"

The young poet's face glowed again; it was so sweet to him, for her dear sake, this high hope of fame.

"I have studied the leading topics of the day," he replied, modestly.

"I know you have the gift of eloquence, and my first effort on your behalf shall be that you be returned a member for Anderley. The late member died a few weeks since, and I am repeatedly asked to put forward a candidate. You shall be that candidate, Earle Moray, and you shall succeed. When you are M. P. for Anderley, we will talk of the next step."

"I cannot thank you," said Earle, breathlessly; "it would be quite useless for me to try."

"In the meantime there is an appointment in London, in the civil service, vacant, and I think my influence can procure it for you. It will bring you in an income of seven or eight hundred pounds per annum. The expenses of the election will, of course, be mine."

Earle raised his hand to his head with a bewildered expression.

"I think," he said, "I must have had a fairy godmother."

"Genius is a fairy godmother," said the earl, laughingly. "We shall all be very happy, Earle. Doris is young—too young to marry yet; a year or two in the great world will not hurt her. I do not think anything will ever take her from you, Earle."

"I am sure of it, my lord. I have full faith in my love."

That very evening Lord Linleigh wrote to London, to secure the appointment of which he had spoken. It was characteristic of him that more than once during the course of that letter-writing he laughed to himself for being sentimental.

"I should have done better," he thought, "to have given the young man something handsome, and have let Doris marry as my daughter ought to marry."

Then, again, he would reproach himself with the thought, and his heart would warm with the consciousness of doing a good and generous action.

It would have been impossible, even had he desired it, to have kept the household in ignorance over Earle.

He had not been there twenty-four hours before the whole body of domestics were interested in his wooing. He was universally admired; the susceptible portion of the establishment declared that he was as handsome as Apollo, with a voice like real music, while languid footmen and knowing grooms declared him to be the "right kind of gentleman."

The Lady Doris had said little, but she had watched him with jealous eyes. If he had failed in any little observance of form or etiquette, she would never have pardoned him; if she had heard even the least hint that he was not perfectly well-bred, that he was not accustomed to the manners of good society, her angry resentment would have known no bounds. As it was, she was flattered by the universal praise and admiration. Earle might have lived with dukes and earls all his life. It never occurred to him, this terrible distance in rank; he did not think of it. As he once said to Doris, "He was a gentleman—a king was no more." She had half anticipated feeling ashamed of him; she found, on the contrary, that she had ample reason to be proud of him.

The earl told his wife and daughter what he hoped and intended to do for Earle. He almost wondered that the countess should be so pleased; her face flushed and her eyes filled with tears.

"You are very good, Ulric," she said, very gently.

He fancied that it was for her daughter's sake that she felt pleased. But there were no tears in his daughter's beautiful eyes.

"I am a deal of trouble to you, papa," she said. "It is not enough that you must have a grown-up daughter, but you must also provide her with a husband! It is rather too hard on you."

"But, Doris, you—you love Earle?" he said, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I love Earle. It is a thousand pities, though, that he has not a ready-made fortune and position—it would save you so much trouble."

"My dear Doris, there can be no trouble for me where you are concerned; you know how anxious I am that you should be happy. You will be happy with Earle?"

"I am one of those singularly fortunate people, papa, who are happy anywhere," she replied. Then, seeing a very discontented expression on his face, she hastened to add: "Remember how

often you have called me a true Studleigh, papa. I find it more in my nature to laugh than to sentimentalize; indeed, under pain of instant execution, I fear that I should not, could not grow sentimental. At the same time believe me no one could be more grateful than I am to you about Earle."

And with that the earl was forced to be content. She sat down to the piano shortly afterward, and he heard the gay voice singing of love and flowers. He looked at her—the same puzzle came to him.

"Has she any heart?" he asked himself.

That was a question which no one yet had been able to answer.

"Earle," said Lady Doris, as they sat together in the morning-room, "do not read any more to me. I always tell you that reading poetry aloud to me is a waste of time and of talent. I want you to talk."

The next moment he had closed the book, and was sitting on the little ottoman at her feet.

"I am only too delighted," he said. "It is not often that my beautiful queen wishes to talk to me."

"Your beautiful queen wishes to know, Earle, what you think of my lady?"

"My lady!" he repeated wonderingly.

"Yes! try and not be dull of understanding—nothing tries me so severely as that. My lady! I mean, of course, the Countess of Linleigh. What do you think of her, Earle?"

"I think she is very kind, very beautiful, very stately, and very charming."

"I agree with you; but do you not think that she is rather sentimental?"

"I hardly know. Why, Doris?"

"She has a fashion of dropping into my dressing-room at all hours, of taking this long hair of mine into her hands, and looking as though she would fain kiss it, of kissing my face, and talking about you."

"That seems very natural, Doris, and very kind," he said.

"When she talks about you, Earle, the tears come into her eyes, and she is so eloquent about love. Do you know what I fancy sometimes?"

"No," he replied, "I do not."

"You need not look so strangely at me; but I do fancy at times that when she was young, perhaps she loved some one like me, who is dead. What do you think, Earle?"

"It is very possible, darling. I should be so kind to her, Doris, were I in your place."

"I am kind, I never interfere; I let her do just as she likes with me. I am sure, Earle, it is not possible to be any kinder than that."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE YEARNINGS OF A MOTHER'S HEART.

The appointment was secured. It was hardly probable that the Earl of Linleigh should ask anything from the government and be refused. He was the rising man of the day, and the government was anxious for his support. He had great influence, and it was all needed. When, therefore, he made a special application for this choice bit of patronage, it was agreed on all sides that it would be most unwise to refuse it.

Earle was made perfectly happy. The income of eight hundred pounds a year did not seem such a great or wonderful thing to him as the fact that he was a public man, that his footing was firmly established, and that every day brought him nearer to Doris.

In his simplicity, he often wondered how it was that little paragraphs continually appeared in the leading papers of the day about him. One time it was to the effect that it was not generally known that Earle Moray, Esq., recently appointed to the royal commission service, was the poet with whose last work all England was delighted. Again, that Earle Moray, Esq., the poet, intended to contest the borough of Anderley. He found himself continually mentioned as one of the leading men of the day, one to whom the eyes of the country turned with hope. Earle could not imagine how it was, and in his perplexity he spoke of it to Lord Linleigh.

"If I did not know that it was impossible," he said, "I should imagine some one was always sending little paragraphs to the newspapers about me."

"It is the price of celebrity," said the earl. "A man who wishes to advance with the public must always keep himself before the public eye. You would be surprised how famous these little

paragraphs, as you call them, have made you already. People often ask me about Earle Moray. You will have a greater name than this some day, and you will wonder how you have acquired it."

In the meantime he was wonderfully happy. He was not to commence his engagement until the middle of April, and the earl insisted upon it that he should continue at Linleigh Court.

"Lessons in social life are as needful as any others," said Lord Linleigh. "You cannot do better for the next few weeks than spend as much time as possible with Lady Estelle. I will introduce you to the chief magnates of the county; and so you will be acquiring knowledge of one kind, if not of another."

The next great event was a visit from the Duke and Duchess of Downsbury to Linleigh Court. The duke had long desired to go, but the duchess, prouder than himself, constantly refused. At last curiosity prevailed. Lord Linleigh wrote such glowing accounts of his happiness, and such descriptions of the beauty of his daughter and the happiness of his wife, that it was not in human nature to keep away any longer.

Then, indeed, was Lady Doris puzzled. The countess seemed to have but one anxiety: it was not for herself at all, but for Lord Linleigh's daughter—that she should look beautiful, that they should admire her, that she should make the most favorable impression on them, seemed to be her sole desire. The young beauty was highly amused at it. They were talking one morning, and Lady Estelle held a long, shining tress of Doris' hair in her hand.

"I hope," she said, suddenly, "the duchess will admire your hair, Doris."

"Do you, Lady Linleigh?" was the reply, with a little raising of the eyebrows. "I am not very anxious about it myself."

"My darling," said the countess, impulsively, "do not say that. I want my mother to admire and to like, even to love you."

"It is very kind of you, Lady Linleigh, but it is very improbable. I fancy that I remember her grace. She is very tall and stately, is she not? with a proud, high-bred face—not handsome at all, but very aristocratic?"

"Yes," said Lady Estelle, faintly, "that is she."

"Then I am quite sure, dear Lady Linleigh, she will not like me. I must have been quite a child when you paid that memorable visit to Brackenside, but I remember her much better than I remember you, and I am quite sure that she looked as though she would like to shake me."

"But, Doris," said the countess, earnestly, "you must try to make the duchess like you. You will try, will you not, my dear?"

"Will you tell me why, Lady Linleigh?" asked the young girl.

The countess grew pale and agitated.

"Do it to please me, my darling, because I want her to like you—do it for my sake. Will you, Doris?"

The girl laughed—a low, rippling laugh, that had no music in it.

"I will do anything, Lady Linleigh—anything to please her, but if my own mother were living, provided that I loved her myself, I should not be very anxious for any one else to love her."

Lady Estelle drew back with something like repulsion in her face.

"You are mistaken; you cannot judge. It is only natural that we wish every one to love and admire what we love ourselves."

Doris looked at her with laughing eyes.

"I cannot see it. I should like every one, for instance, to admire Earle, but I do not care about any one loving him."

Lady Linleigh sat in silence for some minutes, then looking up, she said:

"We will not argue over it, my dear child; but you will promise to be very nice to the duchess, and try to win her liking?"

"Certainly, I promise, Lady Linleigh. Tell me, is the duchess a lady of great importance?"

"Yes, she is, indeed, she has much influence at court and in society."

"Then I will do all I can, not only to make her like me, but to make her speak favorably of me. Shall you be pleased, then, dear Lady Linleigh?"

Yes, she would be pleased; but she owned to herself, with a deep sigh, that it was impossible to arouse any deep or true feeling, any noble sentiment, any generous idea, in the girl's mind. Appeal to her vanity, her interest, her ambition, you were sure to find some answering chord. Appeal to anything else was utterly in vain.

Lady Doris laughed to herself as the countess, with something like disappointment in her face, quitted the room.

"I have heard the proverb, 'Love me, love my dog,'" she said to herself. "I never heard, 'Love me, love my mother.'"

Still, the fact that the coming visitor was a duchess, and a person of very great importance, the wife of one of the wealthiest dukes in England, was not without its influence on her; she resolved, therefore, to be most charming and gracious.

She was secretly amused at Lady Linleigh's anxiety over her dress. On the day when the visitors were expected, she said to her:

"Take great pains with your toilet this evening, Doris—wear that set of pearls and rubies."

"If the duke were a widower," laughed Lady Doris to herself, "I should feel sure that the countess wanted me to make a conquest."

She was awed and impressed, in spite of herself, when she stood before the Duchess of Downsbury. The duke she remembered well; she felt no especial awe of him; she could tell, from the expression of his face, that he thought her beautiful. She was accustomed by this time to see men fall prostrate, as it were, before her beauty, but there was something in the high-bred, stately duchess before which my Lady Doris owned herself vanquished. She did not understand the emotion in Lady Linleigh's face as she led her to the duchess.

"Mamma," she said in a voice that trembled, "this is Lady Doris Studleigh, my husband's daughter."

The jeweled hands of the duchess trembled as they lay for one half minute on the golden head.

"I am pleased to see you," she said. "You are very fair; I hope you are as good as you are fair."

Lady Doris wondered why, for one half minute, every one around her looked so solemn, why her father's debonair face had lost its color, why Lady Estelle turned so hastily away, why Earle stood looking on with a strange light in his eyes. It was droll. Then she dismissed the thought. They were all more or less sentimental, and there was no accounting for sentimental people at all.

She was destined the same evening to feel a little more surprised. There had always been the most perfect harmony and sympathy of taste between the earl and his daughter, they resembled each other so closely. Lady Doris felt half inclined to dislike the duchess; her exclusiveness, her hauteur, awed her after a fashion that was rather disagreeable than otherwise. As usual, she went to the earl for sympathy.

"Papa," she said, "the worst enemy her grace ever had could not call her lively."

"She is no longer young; liveliness is one of the attributes of youth, you know, Doris."

"Yes, but a little more of it would certainly not hurt her, papa."

The earl went to his daughter and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Doris," he said, "I want to speak to you most particularly, and I want you to pay the greatest attention to what I have to say."

She looked up in wonder at this preamble.

"Let me impress upon you," he said, "that it is my earnest wish that you should treat the duke and duchess with all the respect, attention, and affection that lies in your power. You cannot show them too much, and the more you show them the better shall I be pleased. They are my wife's parents."

"I suppose," thought Doris, "he expects they will leave him a fortune. However, I must trim my bark according to the sea I have to sail on."

So she promised to show all deference, all homage, all respect. She did so. The duke admired her beyond everything; he thought her one of the most beautiful, most graceful, one of the cleverest girls he had ever met. But the duchess did not like her; she had never forgotten her first impression, that the girl was both vain and wanting in goodness. She tried to like her, to make the most of her beauty, her talent, but there was no real warmth in her heart toward her daughter's child. Earle, on the contrary, won her honest liking. In her own mind, although she knew that Doris was the daughter of Lord Linleigh, and the descendant of the Herefords, she thought her inferior to Earle Moray. So this strangely assorted household remained until the time drew near when the earl thought of going to London.

The Duke of Downsbury had promised to do his best in helping to forward the fortunes of Earle Moray. He by this time had recovered from the shock his daughter's story had inflicted on him; still, he considered it best, for many reasons, that the secret should be kept. Lady Doris wondered often how it happened that she was so great a favorite with the duke. He made her costly and beautiful presents; he liked to ride out with her; he enjoyed watching her beautiful face.

"Your daughter is unique," he said one day to Lady Estelle, and her face grew white as she heard the words.

"My daughter!" she repeated. "It seems so strange, papa, to hear that; no one has ever called her

'my daughter' before."

How the gentle heart yearned over her, the proud young beauty, in the flush of her triumph, never knew. She looked upon Lady Linleigh's great love for her as rather tiresome than otherwise; it was annoying to her that she should be visited every evening, and that the countess should study so attentively her every look and word. More than once she spoke impatiently of it to Earle, and wondered that he looked so gravely at her.

"It seems to me," she cried, "that every one studies Lady Linleigh a great deal more than they study me."

She wondered why it was that the fair, proud face was always so tender for her; why the calm eyes always rested on her with a loving light; why the voice that never varied for others, faltered and grew so loving when speaking to her. Once or twice it occurred to her that if her own mother had been living, she could not have shown greater affection for her than did Lady Estelle Linleigh.

CHAPTER LVIII.
BEFORE THE QUEEN.

Such a May day! like one of those that the poets of old described when they wrote of mead and honey. A flash of heaven's own sunshine, a murmur of heaven's own music, a foretaste of the golden glories of summer which were soon to shine over the land. A May day, when, in the green heart of England, the hawthorn was budding, the perfume of violets filled the air, the cuckoo remained lord of the meadows, the wood pigeons began to coo, the butterflies to coquette with sweet spring flowers—a very carnival of nature.

London had never looked so bright or so gay. The queen had thrown off the black mantle of sorrow, and had come forth once more to gladden the hearts of her faithful people. She had opened Parliament, and a series of royal *fetes* had been announced that cheered the whole city with the hope of future prosperity. Trade, commerce, literature, and art were all encouraged; as all drooped in her absence, so they all revived in the gracious promise of her serene presence.

There was to be on the third of May a grand drawing-room. Great excitement was caused by the announcement that the Countess of Linleigh and the Lady Doris Studleigh were both on this eventful day to be presented, the countess on her marriage, the Lady Doris as a *debutante*.

Rumor was very busy. There was nothing to wonder about over the countess—she was well-known for many London seasons; she had been a belle and a reigning beauty, she was married at last to a popular nobleman, and would doubtless take her place as one of the queens of society; she would give brilliant *fetes*, head the gayeties of the season. Hyde House would doubtless become one of the most fashionable resorts of the day; but there all sensation about her ceased.

With Lady Doris it was different; more curiosity was felt to see Lord Linleigh's daughter than his wife. People heard that she was a regular Studleigh, and the memory of the handsome, debonair race was still living among them.

In the time of Charles the Second there had been ladies of the Studleigh family whose names were proverbs for beauty, wit, and recklessness. Strange stories were told of deeds of fun and daring that in people less noble would have been called crimes.

And now on the great world—always a little *blase*, a little tired of itself, always athirst for novelty—a new star was to shine—a Studleigh, with all the fatal, witching beauty of her race, and the inheritance of wit that was always pointed.

Rumor said she was the loveliest girl on whom the English sun had shone for many years. She would be wealthy, too, for Lord Linleigh was rich. Expectation was for once fairly aroused; then, too, there was something of romance about her story. The marriage of the handsome, popular earl had been a private one; the Lady Doris, it was said, had been educated in the strictest retirement. People were impatient to see her and pronounce their verdict. She was to be presented by the Duchess of Downsbury, whose name was a guaranty for every good quality.

The eventful day dawned at last. Lord Linleigh had been somewhat anxious over it. True, his daughter's fate in life was fixed—he would not have had her engagement with Earle Moray broken on any account—yet he desired that she should receive all the homage due to her rank and her beauty. No word of her engagement had been made public; that was by Lady Linleigh's advice.

"Give her all the time possible, all the liberty that her heart can desire, and then we shall see if she really prefers Earle to all the world," she said to her husband.

Though he laughed at the advice, he owned it was good.

On that May day surely Lady Doris' dressing-room was one of the prettiest scenes in all London. The sunbeams crept through the rose-colored blind, and fell on the shining jewels, the costly dresses, the flowers and laces. For the first time in her life Lady Doris was arrayed in full court

costume, and certainly nothing could have suited her better. The Duke of Downsbury had insisted on presenting her with a magnificent set of diamonds for the occasion, and she wore them now for the first time. She stood in all the splendor of her marvelous beauty and rich costume, smiling at herself in the mirror.

"I do not look much like Doris Brace, the farmer's daughter, now," she said to herself.

Then Lady Linleigh entered the room.

"I could not rest, Doris," she said, "until I had seen you, and knew whether you felt nervous or not."

Something like a smile of contempt wreathed the beautiful lips.

"Nervous, Lady Linleigh! not one whit," she replied. "Now, if I were about being presented to a handsome young monarch, who wanted a queen to reign by his side, I might feel nervous."

"When I was presented," said Lady Linleigh, "I did feel very nervous. I thought of it for days and weeks beforehand."

"You and I, dear Lady Linleigh, differ considerably," said Doris. "I often think myself it is strange, but I am really wanting in that respect—I have no organ of reverence; I do not believe that I stand in awe of any human being."

"It is strange; and I am not sure that such total independence is altogether good for you, my dear. I should like you to bear more on others, less on yourself."

"I am as I was made," laughed the girl; then she blushed slightly, for the earl stood at the door of her dressing-room, looking at her with such admiration in his eyes as they had seldom expressed before. She could not help feeling embarrassed by it. Then she went up to him, saying:

"Now, papa, imagine yourself the queen; let me make you my grand presentation courtesy."

He never forgot her as she stood there, the light flaming in her jewels and falling on the golden hair, the face softened into unusual beauty by the slight flush.

"My darling," said Lord Linleigh, us he laid his hand on her head, "my darling, I am proud of you."

The words were few, but they expressed a whole volume.

"There will not be a fairer girl at the drawing-room to-day," he continued, "Yet you must look out for your laurels, Doris. Lady Blanche Trevor is presented to-day, and the Trevors have always been considered the handsomest family in England."

"I am not afraid, papa," was the calm reply. "We should be going now; it is some time since the carriage was announced."

"Doris," said the countess, "stop one minute, dear."

Doris turned, wonderingly. She detected a faint tremor in the voice; Lady Linleigh's face, too, was very pale.

"Come here one moment," she continued, and Lady Doris went up to her.

The pale, lovely face looked into hers, the gentle hands touched her, the sweet lips caressed her. The countess took one long tress of the golden hair in her hands.

"I could not let you go out into the world, my dear," she said, slowly, "without first wishing you all happiness."

All her heart was on her lips, and her voice trembled with emotion. Lady Doris looked at her in a perfect bewilderment of surprise.

"You are very kind to me, Lady Linleigh," she said; and there was something of haughty surprise in her voice which fell like cold snow on the gentle heart. "You are very kind," she repeated, "but I have no fear."

"It is such a brilliant world, Doris, but so full of pitfalls—oh! my dear, so full of pitfalls for the beautiful and young."

"I will steer clear of them, dear Lady Linleigh," said the impatient voice. "While the May sun is shining and the carriage is at the door, there is hardly time to talk about the dangers of the world. I am quite willing to take them for granted."

Lady Linleigh said to herself that she could not alter her nature—that she was brilliant, polished, cold, beautiful, without warmth of heart, and that she could not help it. Yet she felt most bitterly disappointed; her heart had yearned for one kind word, for one token of affection from her, but it was not to be.

The earl looked in surprise from his wife to his daughter, but he made up his mind never to interfere between them, or to appear to notice anything that passed. Then they entered the carriage and drove to St. James'.

Those present will not soon forget the beauty of the women or the splendor of the whole scene. Never since the days when her royal consort stood by her side had the queen looked better or

happier than on this day, when she woke to the sense that the great voice of a mighty nation was calling her. Noble sons and fair daughters stood around her; the noblest of the realm had hastened to do her homage. The sun that shone upon the palace walls and streamed through the windows, fell on no more calm or royal face than hers.

There was some little excitement when the name of the Countess of Linleigh was announced. Many there remembered her years ago, when she had made her *debut*, and smiled to think that for love of the gallant earl she had remained unmarried all these years. With the entrance of Lady Doris Studleigh into the royal presence, there was a sensation such as had not been made at the court for many long years. The girl's glorious beauty, her imperial grace, the proud carriage, the splendor of her jewels, the fascination that seemed to clothe her as a garment—even the royal face lighted up with admiration as the queen's eyes fell on her. Words more kind than usual came from the royal lady's lips, and her heart beating high with triumph, her position secure, the Lady Doris passed from that gracious presence. Even as she stood bending low before the queen, she said to herself that she should be a favorite at court, if looks promised anything.

The Duchess of Downsbury was well pleased with her young *protegee*.

"My dear," she, said to her, when the ordeal was over, "whatever else you may lack, you certainly have plenty of nerve."

Lady Doris raised her eyes unflinchingly to her grace's face.

"Different people," she said, "give other names to the quality I possess. Your grace calls it nerve—the Studleighs call it courage."

"Well," said the duchess, grimly, "I will call it courage, then; you have plenty of it, Lady Doris."

"I have no doubt," was the smiling reply, "that as I go through the world I shall need it all."

The duchess knew that in a passage at arms, even she, well versed as she was, had no chance with Lady Doris. In one way she was pleased at her granddaughter's success, although she disliked so much calm self-possession in one so young.

But the earl saw no drawback, he admitted none. Every one was enraptured with Lady Doris, every one praised her, spoke of her wonderful beauty, and complimented him on having so peerless a daughter. His heart beat high with pride, yet never once did he wish her engagement with Earle Moray broken. He saw Lady Estelle alone a few minutes before dinner, and then he wondered at the paleness of her face, the depression of her spirits.

"Estelle," he said, gently, "what is the matter?"

It seemed as though the question broke through the flood-gates of her sorrow. She raised her eyes to his—they were streaming with tears.

"I am ungrateful, Ulric," she said. "I am wicked and discontented. I see my darling so beautiful, yet I cannot go to her and clasp her in my arms. I cannot say, 'Child, how I rejoice in you, for you are my own.'"

"No, you cannot say that; but you may love her and be as kind to her as you will."

The countess shook her head sadly.

"You do not understand," she said. "Doris is not affectionate by nature, and I can see that my love annoys and teases her. I do not repine, for you love me, Ulric, do you not?"

Love her? Yes, assuredly he did; how could he help it? Yet, all the same, he did wish that Lady Doris would show greater affection for her unknown mother.

CHAPTER LIX.
THE NEW BEAUTY DISCUSSED.

A group of young aristocrats stood in the billiard-room of Bar's Club. Some one had played a game and won it, some one else had lost; there had been high betting, but, strange to say, for once money had lost its charm—billiards their attraction.

"I am told," said the Honorable Charlie Balsover, "that it is a treat to look at her. My sisters were both at the drawing-room, and they declare that they have seen nothing like it."

"Women cannot judge of women," said Major Maitland, contemptuously.

The Honorable Charlie looked up haughtily.

"My sisters are as good judges of beauty as any one in England," he said, hastily.

"There can be no question about it," interrupted Lord Piercy; "Lady Studleigh is, *par excellence*, the beauty of the season. I saw her myself, and—well, it takes a great deal to satisfy me, but she did it."

"We shall have the noble Piercy, spurred and booted, going in for a conquest," laughed another.

"No, my dear boy; I am, fortunately for me, in the full possession of all my senses. I took my own measure very accurately long ago, and I, for one, should never aspire to such a conquest as that of the Lady Studleigh."

"What rare and touching humility," laughed a fair-haired officer. "I should like to see this paragon."

At that moment they were joined by a tall, handsome man, who, until that moment, had been standing alone at the billiard-table, practicing a stroke he wished to master. He sauntered to the little group.

"I have not heard one word that you have been saying, but from the peculiar expression of Piercy's face, I would wager that you are talking of beauty in some shape or other," he said.

"We are talking of a new star which has suddenly arisen in the fashionable skies—the beautiful, golden-haired Lady Studleigh, Lord Linleigh's daughter."

"What of her?" asked Lord Charles Vivianne. "If anything interesting, tell me quickly. At this moment the click of the billiard-balls is sweeter to my ears than the praise of fair woman."

"It is my opinion," said Colonel Clifford, laughing, "that in Vivianne's case 'a burnt child dreads the fire.' A little bird whispered to me some romantic story about Florence and some lovely being to whom he was devoted there."

Lord Vivianne turned fiercely on him—so fiercely that those present looked grave.

"It would be as well for you, Clifford," he said, "to refrain from talking of that which does not concern you."

"My dear boy," replied the colonel, "I meant no harm. If I had known that Florence was a sore subject with you I would not have touched upon it."

"Who said it was a sore subject?" cried Lord Vivianne, passionately.

Then, seeing that in all probability a quarrel would ensue, Major Maitland interfered.

"We are forgetting the subject under discussion," he said. "You asked me what it was, Lord Vivianne. We were speaking of the wonderful beauty of Lady Studleigh, the handsome earl's daughter. Have you seen her yet?"

"No," he replied, "I have not."

"Then, by all means, contrive to do so. The Prince of B—— is almost wild about her. Every one ought to see her, just to know what a really beautiful woman is like."

Then Colonel Clifford, anxious to make up the quarrel, went off in a long and rapturous description of the fair lady's beauty and grace.

"I shall be sure to see her," said Lord Vivianne, briefly. "To tell the truth, I do not feel much interested. A beautiful face is a rarity, and the chances are ten to one the owner is either a simpleton or a flirt. I, for one, shall not offer my admiration at the new beauty's shrine. *Au revoir.*"

And with his usual proud, careless step, Lord Vivianne walked away. The others looked curiously after him.

"I never saw a man so completely changed in all my life," said Colonel Clifford. "He used to be so good-humored, fond of a jest, and able to bear any amount of teasing; and now, one word, and he is like a madman. I shall begin to think what I have heard of him is true."

"What is that?" asked the Honorable Charlie Balsover.

"I was told that he fell in love at Florence. I did not hear all the particulars, but I was told that he completely lost his heart there."

"He never had a heart to lose," said one.

"Who was the lady?" asked another.

"I do not know. Some one said she was a princess in disguise; others, that she was of low origin, but of marvelous beauty. The whole affair was a mystery. Some said she was English, others that she was Florentine; in any case, it is believed that she jilted him, and he has never been the same man since. He used to boast that no woman had ever resisted him. I believe that he fancied he was irresistible. Perhaps he does not like learning his lesson."

"The biter generally gets bitten," said the Honorable Charlie. "I should not wonder if some one has avenged the wrongs of the sex upon him. He has certainly gone to great lengths."

"Why not call a spade a spade?" said Major Maitland. "Give his follies the right name. He has broken more hearts, ruined more homes, dragged more fair faces through the dust, than any man of his age in England. Serves him right, I say, if he has something to suffer in his turn."

Which was all the sympathy Lord Vivianne received when he was supposed to have suffered at

the hands of a woman.

He thought but little over what had been said about Lady Studleigh.

"Men were always making idols of some woman or other," he said to himself. "If they choose to go mad in crowds over the handsome earl's daughter, let them; I, for one, shall not join them."

It had been a great blow to him, the loss of Doris. That one love was the master passion of his life. He had not intended it to be; he had only thought of her at first as one whose beauty was well worth the winning. Afterward, when her strange fascination, her wonderful grace, her marvelous talent and wit had bound him fast in her chains, he gave her the one great love of his life, none the less fierce and passionate because he had had many love affairs.

While they were still at Florence, he had made up his mind to one of two things, either to be true to her all his life, and spend all his life with her, or to marry her. As his love increased, his scruples died away; he would marry this beautiful girl, whose coldness had a charm for him that nothing else ever possessed. His love grew fiercer as she grew colder; he had made up his mind that she should never be parted from him—that he would slay any one who tried to separate them.

When he found that she had left him, many long months did he spend in searching for her. He had quite decided what to do when he did find her. If any one had bribed her to leave him, the crime should be most dearly avenged. He would tell her that he was willing to make her his wife, and then he would marry her.

"Marry her!" he repeated the words to himself, with a bitter laugh. He would have done anything, have slain her and killed himself, rather than leave her again, or let her go out of his life. She would, of course, be delighted to be Lady Vivianne; it was not likely that she would refuse such an offer. He sneered at himself for being willing to make it; he sneered at himself for his own great, overweening love. He hated himself because it had won such power over him—because it had humbled him even to the yoke of marriage.

"I shall be the first Vivianne who has ever done anything of this kind," he said to himself, yet all the same he resolved to do it. Having wrought himself up to this height of heroism, it was humiliating in the extreme to find it all in vain—he could find no trace of the girl he intended to marry. Whether she had left him in a fit of pique because he had not married her, whether she had gone away in a sudden access of sorrow and regret, he did not know. He was only sure of one thing—she was gone.

Had she left him for any one else, or in one of her sudden caprices? She was capricious enough for anything—it was just one of the things that she was likely to do. For all he knew, she had been near him all the time; she was quite capable of that. He knew that to her his long search, his fever of anxiety, his despair, would only be a comic entertainment; yet, knowing all this, judging her as he did, believing her to be capable of almost anything, still he could not help loving her with the whole force and power of his soul; it was the influence that a wicked woman does obtain at times over a wicked man, and it is stronger than any other.

He came to England at last, despairing to hear any news of her abroad. He argued to himself that if she were still in Italy he should certainly have heard of it; a face like hers could be remarked anywhere; he should have heard of this golden-haired beauty, whose style of loveliness was one so rarely seen in sunny Italy.

He had been in London now for some weeks, but he had heard nothing, and was puzzled what to do next. He never dreamed of looking for her there, in the upper world of fashion; he had no idea, not even the faintest, of ever seeing her. If she were the reigning star in any other world, he would have heard of her before this. With his mind so perplexed and agitated, his soul tossed on a tempest of love, he had no thought to spare for any one else. Let people rave about Lady Studleigh, let her be as beautiful as she would, she could not surpass Doris.

In the meantime Lady Studleigh was creating a sensation to which the fashionable world had long been a stranger. She was the queen of the season. Hyde House was the most popular resort in London; to be admitted there was to have the *entree* to the most exclusive circle; to be unknown there was to be unknown to fame.

It was not often that one house held two such women as the Countess of Linleigh and Lady Studleigh. The countess was all grace, and suavity, and high breeding; Lady Studleigh all brilliancy, beauty, and wit. Even old courtiers, who had seen some of the first beauties of both empires, declared there was nothing to equal her. Another great attraction to all clever people was the constant presence of the now famous poet, Earle Moray, at Hyde House. His conversation was a great charm, although some, wiser and more thoughtful than others, said it was hardly right to expose a young and talented man like Earle Moray to the constant fascinations of Lady Doris Studleigh.

She bore her triumph with a certain grand calm that impressed her parents wonderfully.

"Race does tell, after all," said the duchess, as she watched the young beauty. "Any other girl would have shown some elation at the great amount of admiration offered—Lady Studleigh shows none. After all, race will tell."

Invitations came for a royal ball, and it was remarked by all present that the whole of the royal

circle seemed to look upon the proud young beauty with great favor. Then came invitations to a royal concert. One of the young princesses, whose marriage was then on the *tapis*, declared that she would have the Lady Doris on the list of her bridesmaids. No *fete* was considered a success without her—a ball without Lady Studleigh was almost a failure.

"That girl has homage enough paid her to turn her head," said the earl, laughingly, to his wife.

The countess sighed.

"My dear Ulric," she said, "I think it would require a great deal to move either her heart or her head; both seem to me equally safe."

"You always sigh when you speak of Doris. Why is it, dear?" asked Lord Linleigh.

"I cannot help wishing that she had less beauty and more love," she replied. "There are many perils in this world—perils of soul and of body—but I think the greatest of all is certainly the perils of beauty."

"I think you are right," observed the earl; "but we must hope, having escaped so far, she will escape the rest."

CHAPTER LX.
DORIS AFFECTS A LITTLE CURIOSITY.

"You are not looking quite so well as usual this morning, Doris," said Lady Linleigh. "You are nervous, too; you start at every sound. What is wrong, dear?"

"Nothing," replied Lady Doris, "but that I did not sleep well. I had a most unpleasant dream."

"What was it?" asked the countess.

"About Italy—about some one I knew, I saw there. Only a foolish dream, and I am foolish to mention it."

"Of all people in the world, you are the last I ever should have imagined to know what being nervous meant."

"I am not nervous," replied Lady Doris, quickly. "It would annoy me very much to hear any one say so."

But though she indignantly denied the fact as being a very discreditable one, she looked pale, and the laughing eyes had lost something of their brightness. She started at every sound; and once, when a violent peal from the bell sounded through the house, Lady Linleigh saw that she dropped the book she was holding.

Much did the countess wonder what had affected her fair young daughter. Yet it was such a trifle, such a foolish dream that had caused her to stop for one moment in her career of triumph, and look at the possible dangers in store for her.

She dreamed that she was walking in a pretty wood near Florence, when suddenly the tall trees began to assume the most grotesque shapes; huge branches became long arms, all trying to grasp her, leaves became fingers trying to detain her. No sooner had she eluded the clutch of one giant arm than another was stretched out toward her. In vain she tried to elude them. Then she heard her own name called out in a voice which, with a strange thrill of fear, she recognized as Lord Vivianne's. Then she saw him standing underneath one of the giant arms, and he held a long, shining knife in his hands.

"I have been looking for you for some time," he said; "now that I have found you, I mean to kill you, because you were faithless to me."

She tried to escape, but the giant arms clutched her, the fingers clasped round her, the shining steel flashed before her eyes, and she awoke—awoke to feel such fear as she had never before known.

She took herself to task for it. Suppose that the worst should come, that she had to meet him again! Was it likely that in this altered position he would know her? It was most unlikely, most improbable. Suppose that she met him in a ball-room—where it was most probable they would meet—and they were introduced to each other as strangers! Well, even then, she had nerve enough, courage enough, to look at him and fail to recognize him. She would, at the worst, solemnly swear that he was mistaken, and he—well, for his own sake, it was most improbable that he would dare to mention the terms upon which they had lived. Nothing but shame and dislike of all good people could follow such an avowal on his part. It would do him ten thousand times more harm than good.

"So I need not fear," she said to herself. "I have no reason to be afraid, even if I should meet him face to face to-day!"

She did not feel the least regret or remorse for her sin. For her lost innocence, her fair fame, her

soul's welfare, she cared but little—yet she would have given much if she had avoided this wrong, not because it was wrong, but because the penalty of it might be unpleasant.

In the bright heaven of her full content it was the one dark cloud; to the full glory of her most brilliant triumph it was the one drawback.

Ah! if they knew—if the royal hearts that leaned so kindly toward her even dreamed of what she had been—farewell to her sweet dream of court favor. If the innocent young princess who had professed so much liking for her only ever so faintly suspected one half of the horrible truth, farewell to all kindly words! Why, if the handsome earl, her father, dreamed of it, he would send her adrift at once!

She shrugged her white shoulders and said to herself, over and over again, that she must keep her secret. When she was once married, her fortune assured—settled upon her beyond recall—then it would not matter so much. Besides, there were ways out of all difficulties. She held up her white, jeweled hands and looked steadfastly at them.

"Smaller, weaker fingers than these have robbed a man of his life," she said to herself. "If the worst comes, I have an example in history that I should know how to follow."

And indeed it would have fared badly with any one who stood in the path of Lady Doris Studleigh.

There was a great dinner that evening at Hyde House. A Russian grand duke, a German prince, and just the very *elite* of London were among those present. The Countess of Linleigh was a perfect hostess; and in Lady Doris Studleigh's bright presence there was never any want of brilliancy or wit.

It was Lord Charter who mentioned her lover's name. He turned to Lord Linleigh and asked him if he had seen Lord Charles Vivianne lately.

Lady Doris was sitting near him, so that she distinctly heard the question and answer.

"Lord Vivianne!" replied the earl. "I do not even know him."

"I had forgotten," said his questioner, "how long you have been absent from England; of course you would not know him."

"It seems to me," said the earl, laughing, "that a whole generation of young men have come into fashion since I left the country. I do not recollect having ever seen Lord Vivianne. Why do you ask me?"

"I heard him say how anxious he was to be introduced to you," replied Lord Charter.

"I shall be very happy," replied the earl, indifferently.

She had listened at the very first sound of that name which she had grown to hate so cordially; all her attention had been fully aroused.

"Now for the Studleigh courage," she said to herself, and she listened. The color did not fade from her beautiful face; her lips never lost their smile, nor her eyes their light.

When Lord Charter had finished his conversation with the earl, she turned to him in the most winning manner.

"Vivianne, did you say? What a pretty name! Is it English?"

"Yes," he replied. "Most ladies admire the name and the bearer of it."

"Is he a great hero?" she asked, her eyes bright with interest and innocence as she raised them to his face. "Is he a great statesman?"

"No," was the reply; "I am sorry to say he is a great flirt."

"A flirt!" she repeated, in a voice full of disappointment. "I thought you meant that he was some one to be admired."

"So he is admired, for his handsome face," replied Lord Charter.

She repeated the name again, as though she were saying it softly to herself.

"Is there a Lady Vivianne?" she asked, after a pause.

"Not yet," was the reply; "but from what I hear there is a prospect of one." Then he laughed a little. "You are a stranger among us, Lady Studleigh; you will hardly understand that, at one time or another, almost every prominent man in London has been jealous of Lord Vivianne."

"Indeed! He must be a paragon, then."

There was something of a sneer in her voice, but he did not perceive it.

"Not exactly a paragon, Lady Studleigh; but—I repeat it—a flirt."

"And he is to be married, you say? I should not imagine the lot to be a very bright one for the lady."

"You take things very literally, Lady Studleigh. I cannot vouch for the fact that he is going to be

married, but there is a rumor afloat that we all enjoy very much. It is that, after flirting half his lifetime, Lord Vivianne is caught at last."

She tried to look politely indifferent. Great heavens! how her heart was beating, how every nerve thrilled, how intense was the excitement! She had not known how frightened she had been at the idea of meeting him until now!

"I am afraid," said Lord Charter, "that you do not take any interest in my friend."

"Yes, I do. To whom has he surrendered his liberty at last?"

"No one knows," was the answer, given with an air of candor that would at any other time have greatly amused Lady Doris. "There is a mystery about it. Lord Vivianne has been spending some little time in Florence, and there it is supposed he fell in love with a princess in disguise."

Despite the Studleigh courage and her own strong nerve, she could not prevent herself from growing pale; her heart beat loud with a terrible fear; the lights seemed to swim in one confused mass before her eyes; then with a violent effort she controlled herself.

"Florence," she repeated; "he went far enough afield for his romance. Why was the princess disguised?"

"It may be all nonsense. I have heard many different stories; some say that his heroine was really a person of low birth and humble position. I cannot tell; I only know one thing."

How her heart beat as she repeated those two words.

"One thing! What is it?"

"Why, that love, or something else, has quite changed Lord Charles Vivianne. He used to be gay, good-humored, slightly cynical; now he is gloomy, sullen, and bad-tempered. I heard a friend of his say that he seemed to be always looking for some one."

The beautiful face, in spite of all her efforts, grew paler.

"Looking for some one! What a strange idea!" she said.

"Perhaps the lady refused him, and he wants to be revenged. Perhaps she jilted him, and he is looking for her," laughed Lord Charter, little dreaming how near he was to the truth.

If it had been to save her life, she could not have uttered another word. Lord Charter went on to relate some brilliant anecdotes of people he knew, and she affected to be engrossed in them, although she did not know one word that he was saying. Then, when he paused, she said:

"It is a strange world, this London; it seems to me full of hidden romances."

"You will say so when you have been here for a few years longer," he replied. "I have seen far stranger romances in the lives of my own friends and acquaintances than I have ever read in books."

She was mistress of herself now; the first deadly pain of fear had passed; her heart had ceased to beat so quickly; the color came back to her lips and face. She wished to make a good impression on this Lord Charter, so that if he spoke of her to her former lover, he could praise her simplicity, her innocence, her ignorance of the world and its evil ways. That would be altogether unlike the cynical, worldly Doris he had known.

Most admirably she assumed the character; indeed, her proper vocation would have been the stage—she could play any part at a moment's notice.

As he looked at her beautiful face, her bright, clear eyes, the sweet smiles that played around her perfect lips—as he listened to the low, musical voice, admired the high-bred simplicity, the innocence that was a charm, the utter want of all worldly knowledge—Lord Charter said to himself that he had never met such a wonderful creature before; while she congratulated herself on the impression she had made.

CHAPTER LXI.

"I MIGHT HAVE BEEN SO HAPPY, BUT FOR THIS!"

"Shall you go to the opera to-night, Doris?" asked the countess, as they lingered over a cup of chocolate. "I think—do not imagine I am over anxious—I think you require a little rest, dear. You are new to this life of excessive excitement and gayety."

"I find it very pleasant," said Doris, with a smile.

"So it is; I do not deny that. But, remember, I am a veteran compared to you. I have been through many seasons, and I know the fatigue of them. Take my advice, and rest a little if you feel tired."

"I do not think I could rest," said Lady Doris.

And there was something sad in the tone that the countess had never heard before. She looked anxiously at her.

"That is what has struck me," said Lady Linleigh. "Your face is flushed, your eyes are too bright; the very spirit of unrest is on you. You have done too much. Do you know that every time the door opens you look round with a half-startled glance, as though half-dreading what you will see."

"Do I? How absurd! It is simply a habit. I have nothing to dread."

"Of course not; but it seems to me rather a pity for you to get confirmed in nervous habits while you are so young."

Lady Doris laughed, but it seemed to the countess the ring of music was wanting in the sound.

"I shall correct myself, now that I know," she replied.

Then Lady Linleigh crossed the room, and laid her hands on the golden head. She bent down and kissed the beautiful face.

"Do not be annoyed that I am so uneasy over you, Doris; I love you almost as though I were your own mother."

The low voice trembled, and the calm eyes grew dim with tears.

"My own mother?" repeated Lady Doris, and for once something like the music of true feeling sounded in her exquisite voice. "You are too young, Lady Linleigh, to be quite like my own mother; you are like an elder sister to me. I wonder if things would have been very different for me if she had lived, and I had known her?"

"Different?" asked the countess, eagerly. "In what way could they be different?"

"I wonder if she would have been fond of me—if I could have told her all my girlish follies and troubles? I have an idea that no one can be like one's own mother."

The soft, white arms tightened their clasp round the fair neck.

"Doris," said the countess, gently, "could you not fancy that I am your mother, and talk to me as freely as you would have done to her?"

The lovely face was raised with an arch glance.

"Dear Lady Linleigh," was the reply, "I am only sentimentalizing. Did you think me serious? I have no secrets. I should not know what to say to my own mother were she here. Do not take any notice of my idle words." Then she laughed. "I could never, even in my dreams, put you in my mother's place. I have a shrewd idea that my handsome papa married some poor, pretty girl for her beauty's sake—you are the daughter of a mighty duke. A truce to sentiment! Why, Lady Linleigh, your eyes are wet with tears! We were talking of the opera—I must go to it. It is 'Ernani' this evening, and I have the music."

"Earle will go with us, of course," said the countess.

She had unclasped her arms from the girl's neck, and had gone over to the little writing-table, beating back her emotion with a strong hand.

"Yes," laughed Lady Doris, "Earle will go. Earle is rapidly becoming a popular man. I am not quite sure whether I ought not to be jealous of him. The Marchioness of Meriton positively introduced him to Lady Eleanor yesterday, and declared him to be a 'most promising young man!'"

Lady Linleigh laughed at the perfect mimicry of voice and accent.

"I see no one to compare with Earle," she said, at length, "and I think you are a very fortunate girl, Doris."

"To tell the truth, I am well satisfied with my good fortune, and with Earle," she said, quietly, as in good sooth she was. She even wondered at herself, but the truth was she was growing passionately fond of Earle.

The secret of it was that he was so completely master of her, that she had learned to have the highest respect for him—that hers, the weaker, had recognized his, the master soul. In his presence she was learning to conceal her thoughts. As time passed on, and a wiser, fuller, consciousness came to her, she grew more and more ashamed of that dark and terrible episode of her life. Rather than Earle should know it, she would die any death; rather than his eyes should look coldly upon her, his lips speak contemptuous words to her, she would suffer anything, so completely had his noble nature mastered her ignoble one. His grand soul obtained an ascendancy over her inferior one—she loved Earle. The time had been when she had simply amused herself with him, when she had accepted his love and homage because it was the only thing that made life endurable to her. That time had passed. She loved him because he had conquered her, and because he was supreme lord and master.

Lady Studleigh had never looked more beautiful, perhaps, than on this evening when she had decided upon going to the opera. She wore an exquisite costume of blue velvet and white lace, the color of which made her more than ever dazzlingly fair. The white arms, with their glorious curves, the white neck, with its graceful lines, were half shrouded, half disclosed by the veil of

white lace. The golden hair was studded with diamond stars; a diamond cross, which looked as though it were made of light, rose and fell on the white breast. She carried a beautiful bouquet, the fragrance of which seemed to float around her as she moved.

Was it a wonder that as she took a seat in the box, all eyes were directed to her? A beautiful woman is perhaps one of the greatest rarities in creation, but in the hands of a beautiful woman there rests a terrible power. As she sat there, the light gleaming in her jewels, the golden hair with its sheen, the blue velvet and the crimson of the opera box, she made a picture not easily forgotten. The countess, gracious, fair, and calm, was with her; Earle, his handsome face glowing with admiration and pride, stood by her side. The earl was to join them later on in the evening.

It was a brilliant scene. Some of the fairest women and noblest men in London were there. Lady Doris was, or seemed to be, engrossed by the stage; she affected the most sublime and complete, unconsciousness of the glories of admiration; she was thinking to herself, as she was always thinking lately:

"Now, if he, Lord Vivianne, should be here, should suddenly come and speak to me, I must affect the most complete unconcern and indifference."

While her eyes were fixed on the stage, while so many were looking at her, some with admiration, some with envy, that was the thought which occupied her. The dread, the expectation of meeting him had been strong upon her ever since she heard that he was in London—it could not possibly be otherwise. She knew herself to be the beauty of the season; he, of course, as an eligible man, would mix in the same circles, and they must meet. She was brave enough, but there were times when, at the bare idea of it, the color faded from her face, leaving it ghastly white; great drops would stand on her forehead; she would clasp her hands with a cry of agony.

If her attempts at evading him were all useless, if he recognized her and insisted on the recognition, what could she do? The question was, could she deny having been in Florence? No amount of prevarication could alter that. Suppose—only imagine if he should betray her. He might be a gentleman and keep his secret; it was certainly within the bounds of possibility he might keep her secret; but, remembering his character, she did not for one moment think he would. He called himself a gentleman and a man of honor, but he had not scrupled to take a mean advantage of her youth and ignorance, her vanity and folly. What a triumph it would be for him now to turn round and laugh at the lovely Lady Studleigh, and say that beautiful, admired, proud, and lofty as she was now, she had once been content to be his companion. What if he told all this as a secret at first, and the knowledge of it spread slowly, as a social leprosy always does. What should she do? Great heavens! what should she do?

"How mad I was!" she cried to herself over and over again; "how foolish, how blind! I might have been so happy but for this!"

It was the skeleton always by her side, and despite her nerve, her courage, her strength, there were times when it almost hopelessly beat her down. Then the thought of Earle was her shield.

"If he says one word against me, and I cannot kill him," she said to herself over and over again, "I will ask Earle to fight a duel with him, and he will slay him!"

But for this, how unboundedly happy she would have been—how victorious, how triumphant! Who, looking at that most lovely face, with its calm, high-bred air, would have thought that the heart beneath was torn with thoughts of regret, despair, and even revenge that should lead to murder?

"My darling!" said the voice she loved best in her ear. "Doris, I shall be jealous of that music. I have spoken to you so often, and you have not heard me."

The eyes she raised to him had no shadow in them of the terrible thoughts that filled her mind.

"The music is so beautiful, Earle," she said, gently.

"I wonder," he said, abruptly, "who that is—a gentleman in the center box there? He has never once taken his eyes, or rather his glass, from your face."

A cold thrill passed over her, as though a shower of ice had fallen over her—a cold, terrible chill, a shudder that she could not repress. Her own quick, subtle instinct told her that it was he.

The moment she had dreaded had come—the sword had fallen at last.

He was looking at her; the next step he would be speaking to her.

Now for the Studleigh nerve, the Studleigh courage; now for the recklessness that defied fate, the boldness that was to defy fortune! A minute to collect, to control that terrible shudder, then she held up her flowers with a smile.

"You are very negligent to-night, Earle," she said; "you have not told me that you admire my bouquet."

"There is but little need, darling. I always admire you and everything belonging to you. Your flowers are like yourself—always sweetest of the sweet, fairest of the fair!"

Have men ever paused one minute before swallowing deadly poison, before drawing the trigger of a pistol, before sending a long, gleaming knife into their hearts? Have they ever paused with

one foot upon a precipice, with one hand on the stake—paused, before taking the irrevocable step, to look around and enjoy one more moment of life? Even so she paused now; she closed her eyes with a lingering look at his face, she buried her own in the sweet, fragrant flowers.

"Do you love me so very dearly?" she asked.

"My darling, when you can collect the gleaming stars of heaven, or the shining drops of the sunny sea, you will be able to understand how much I love you—not until then!"

CHAPTER LXII.

"I HAVE SEEN SOME ONE LIKE HER."

One moment, only one, she kept her fair face in the fragrant blossoms—one moment, to taste, perhaps for the last time, the sweet draught of love—one moment, in which to curse the folly, the bitter, black sin of her girlhood, and to moan over the impending evil. Then she raised her face again. Surely some of the sweetness of the flowers had passed into it; it had never seemed to Earle so tender or so sweet.

"What were you saying just now, Earle, about a glass, or some one's eyes never being taken from my face? If my grammar is involved, it is your fault."

"I cannot imagine who he is!" cried Earle. "We have been here nearly an hour, and he has never looked at the stage—I do not think he has heard one note of the music; he has done nothing but look at you earnestly."

"Perhaps he admires my jewels or my flowers," she said, coquettishly.

"It is your face," said Earle, impatiently. "What do men care for jewels or for flowers?"

"Who is he, Earle? Where is he? Is it any one I know?"

"I should imagine that it is some one you know, who is waiting for some sign of recognition from you," said Earle. "You cannot fail to see him, Doris, in the center box on the second tier. He seems to be a tall, handsome man; he wears a white japonica. His glass is turned straight upon you."

"I cannot return the compliment and look fixedly at him," she said, "but I will take one glance at him, and see if I know him."

Calmly, slowly, deliberately, yet with the fire and hate of fury burning in her heart, she laid down her dainty bouquet; she took up the jeweled opera-glass, held it for a moment lightly balanced in her hand, then, with a calm, proud smile, raised it to her eyes.

Oh, heavens! that the first glimpse of those dark eyes, looking fire into her own, did not kill her. Her heart gave a terrible bound; she could have cried aloud in her agony, and have died; but the Studleigh nerve was uppermost, the Studleigh courage in full play; her hands did not tremble, nor her lips quiver. Quite calmly she looked, as though she saw a stranger for the first time, and even then a stranger who did not interest her. She laid down the glass, and turned to Earle, with a smile.

"I do not know the gentleman; I have not seen him before."

At that same moment he who had been watching her with such eager interest made her a low bow.

"He appears to recognize you," said Earle; "he is bowing to you."

She did not make even the least acknowledgment in return.

"He cannot know me," she said, calmly; "he is mistaken. I have never seen him before."

"He must be either very dull or foolish to mistake you, my darling, for anyone else," said Earle. "I defy the whole world to show another face like yours. It is some one whom you have met and forgotten. Be kind, and give him some little acknowledgment, Doris. See, he is bowing again."

She raised her eyes to his face.

"Lady Studleigh returns no bows from strangers," she said, haughtily, and Earle felt himself rebuked.

At that moment Sir Harry Durham entered the box to pay his respects to the belle of the evening. Earle asked him eagerly if he knew the gentleman in the center box, who wore the white japonica?

"Know him!" said Sir Harry, laughingly; "yes, of course I do—every one knows him. That is Lord Charles Vivianne."

The familiar name fell upon her ears like a death-knell. Earle repeated in surprise:

"Lord Vivianne! I have heard of him often enough, though I never saw him before. I have surely heard some romantic story about some love affair."

"Earle," interrupted Lady Doris, "do you think Lady Linleigh looks tired?"

She merely asked the question, the first that came into her mind, to divert his attention. She succeeded perfectly—Sir Harry went to ask the countess if she were fatigued. Earle bent over Lady Doris' chair.

"You have some strange deeds to answer for," he said, lightly.

For one moment she looked startled.

"What do you mean, Earle?" she asked.

"I believe," he replied, "that you have made a conquest of this famous Lord Vivianne."

"Heaven forbid!" she said; and she said it so earnestly that Earle looked at her in utter wonder.

"I am tired of conquests, Earle," she said, trying to smile. "I want nothing—no one but you, no love but yours."

"It is almost cruel, Doris, to make me such a beautiful speech in the presence of a crowded opera house, where it is impossible that I can thank you properly for it."

"How would you thank me properly for it, Earle?" she asked, coquettishly.

"I would count the number of letters in the words, and would give you as many kisses as there are letters."

"Kissing is not fashionable," she said; "it is very well for common people, but ladies of fashion do not indulge in such old-fashioned manners."

"Then I hope you will not be a lady of fashion much longer," said Earle.

The opera was over; Lady Studleigh looked across the house to see if her enemy was gone. No; he was still there, looking earnestly at her.

"Perhaps," she thought to herself, "he is waiting to go out when we do."

"Shall you wait for the ballet, Doris?" said Earle.

Wait! She would have waited until doomsday to have avoided him.

"Yes," she replied; "I should like to see the ballet."

Then she asked herself if she had not done a very stupid thing in trying to defer the evil day. He would speak to her, that was evident; perhaps it would have been better over and done with. He had still to wait during the brilliant scenes of the ballet. She sat, as it were, with her grim fate in her hands; she talked, she laughed, she played with her flowers, coquetted with her fan, she listened to love speeches from Earle, she exchanged smiling remarks with the countess, yet, all the time she was perfectly conscious that he sat silent, immovable, his burning glance fixed on her face, never for one moment releasing her.

Some friend joined him, of whom he asked a question. From the quick glance given to her, she knew that it was of her they spoke—asking her name in all probability. What would he think when he heard it? Surely, he would say to himself that he was mistaken; the Lady Studleigh and the girl who had been so dazzled with his gold could not be the same.

She was right in her conjecture. He had asked her name, and learning it, had been bewildered. When he first saw her—first caught a glimpse of her face—his heart had given one fierce bound of triumph. He had found her; there was not such another face. He had found her; he knew the graceful lines of the figure, the shapely neck, the sheen of the golden hair, the beautiful face. At first he thought of nothing but that he had found her.

Then doubt came to him. Could it be Doris?—this lovely, high-bred lady in the sheen of her jewels and splendor of her attire? Besides, how could Doris be in that box, evidently one of an august circle; the gentleman talking to her had a star on his breast. It could not be Doris; yet he knew—who so well?—the graceful bend of the proud neck, even the pretty gesture of the little white hands. It must be Doris. Who was the gentleman with the white star on his breast? Who the calm, graceful lady? Who the young man with the face of a poet? He could not solve the enigma, but he would find it out. If it were not Doris, then it was some one so much like her that he could not take his eyes from her face.

A friend joined him, no other than Colonel Clifford, who laughed to see him sitting with that intent look.

"So you are doing what you said you never would do," he said.

"What is that?" asked Lord Vivianne.

"Joining in popular devotion," was the laughing reply.

"Clifford," said Lord Vivianne, "do you know that girl—the one with diamonds in her golden hair, and white flowers in her hands?"

Colonel Clifford laughed to himself.

"Yes," he replied, "I know her. She is the Lady Studleigh, the handsome earl's only daughter, Lord Linleigh's heiress, the queen of the season, the belle, *par excellence*, of St. James'."

"Lady Studleigh!—that Lady Studleigh!" he repeated. "I do not believe you—I cannot believe you!" he gasped.

"It is a great pity, as it is most certainly true. Do you not know the Earl of Linleigh? The other lady with them is the countess. She was the Duke of Downsbury's daughter."

"That Lady Studleigh! I cannot believe it! It cannot be!"

"Perhaps," said the colonel, laughingly, "we should come to some surer conclusion if you would tell me whom you imagine it to be?"

Lord Vivianne looked impatiently at him.

"I did not say that I imagined her to be any one else," he replied, hastily. "So that is really the young beauty over whom just at present London is losing its head?"

"You are right. If you would like an introduction to the earl, my brother is here; he knows him well. What do you think of Lady Studleigh? Report has not exaggerated her beauty?"

"What do I think of her? I will tell you, Clifford, when I have spoken to her, not before."

"You are difficult to please if she does not please you."

"I—I cannot help thinking I have seen some one like her," he said, slowly. "I wonder if I am right?"

"Hardly; it is not a common type of face. You may have done so: I have not."

Colonel Clifford dearly loved gossip. If he had found Lord Vivianne in a better temper, he would have told him the romance of the earl's marriage, and how his daughter was brought up in a very different position of life to that she now occupied. As it was, he did not tell him, feeling that his lordship lacked civility; so it happened that not until long afterward did Lord Charles hear the story that would have solved many of his doubts.

He sat and watched her, sometimes so convinced of her identity that he could have called out "Doris:" again, wondering how he could be so foolish as to imagine he had found his lost love in Lord Linleigh's daughter. He could not take him eyes from the beautiful face. He longed to hear her speak, to see if the voice was that of Doris: he remembered its low, sweet music so well; if he could hear her speak, he would be a thousand times more sure.

He waited until he saw them leave the box, and he hastened so as to be in the dressing-room with them. Standing nearer to her, he would surely be able to judge.

"Are you cold, my darling?" asked Earle, as he saw her drawing the hood of her opera-cloak over her head.

"The house was warm," she replied, in a low voice.

No movement of her enemy was lost upon her. She knew that he was close to her, that the fragrance of her flowers reached him; she saw that he pushed his way even nearer, and stood where he could have touched her. He looked intently at her. Her face was shaded and softened by the crimson hood.

Once she looked around, as though curious to see who was near her; then her eyes met his—quietly, coldly, without the least light, or recognition, or shadow of fear in them. She looked at him for one half moment, indifferently, as she glanced at every one else, then looked away again, leaving him more puzzled than ever.

CHAPTER LXIII.
LORD VIVIANNE PERPLEXED.

It was no wonder that when she reached Hyde House again Lady Studleigh should look ill and exhausted; she had passed through a severe ordeal, and no one but herself knew what it had cost her.

"One more such victory," she said to herself, "and I should be undone."

She lay back in one of the lounging-chairs, while Earle hastened to pour out some wine for her.

"You look so tired, my darling," he murmured—"so tired. I wish we were away from this great London, out in the fresh, fair country again, Doris. Why, sweet, there are tears in your eyes!"

She looked so wistfully, so longingly at him—tears in the eyes he had always seen so proud and bright. She bent her beautiful head on his breast, longing with all her heart to tell him her

terrible secret, her dreadful trouble, yet not daring the least hint.

"They are tears of fatigue," she said—"real fatigue, Earle."

"I wish I were Earl of Linleigh for ten minutes," he said; "I would forbid you to go out again, though you are queen of the season and belle of St. James'."

"I should obey you," she replied; and then she bade him good-night, not daring to say more, lest she should say too much.

She wanted to be alone, to collect her thoughts, to look her danger in the face, to gather her forces together, and prepare to give the enemy brave battle. It was a wonderful relief to her to find herself alone.

The worst had happened—she had seen him, he had seen her; he had looked in her face, he had watched her intently, yet she felt quite sure he was not certain of her identity—he fancied that he knew her, yet could not for certain tell; so that the worst, she believed, was over. It might be that he would talk to her, that he would try every little ruse and every possible maneuver, but what would that matter? She would defeat him again with her calm and her nonchalance, just as she had done this time. Then he would assuredly give it up, and say no more about it—make up his mind that he had been mistaken.

So she comforted herself with vague ideas, never dreaming that each hour brought the somber face of tragedy nearer to her.

The next day was the Duchess of Eastham's ball, one of the best of the season—one to which she had looked forward as a crowning triumph. A night's rest, a natural facility for shaking off disagreeable thoughts, a fixed reliance on her own kindly fate, all contributed to make her throw off the dark cloud that oppressed her.

When she joined the earl and countess the following morning, her face had regained its lost color and brightness, her eyes shone like stars, her lips were wreathed with smiles.

"We shall have a large gathering to-night," said Lady Linleigh. "I hear the Eastham ball is considered the best of the season; all the *elite* of London will be there."

"Then Lord Vivianne is sure to be there," she thought. Her spirits rose with the emergency. "I will look my best," she said to herself; "I will dazzle him so completely in my splendor and magnificence that he shall not dare even in thought to associate me with the Doris he knew."

She spent some hours of the bright, sunny morning in the park, smiling to herself, as she thought what an old-fashioned recipe was fresh air and exercise for keeping a brilliant bloom. She rested after lunch, and spent some time in the evening combining jewels and flowers, so as to form a marvelous effect. To her maid she said:

"Eugenie, I want to be the belle of the belles to-night; you must exert all your skill."

The pretty Parisian stood with her head on one side, studying the face and figure she had to adorn.

"What kind of style does my lady wish? Shall it be gay, brilliant?"

"Magnificent!" said Lady Studleigh, laughing. "I wish to be magnificent as a queen—an empress!"

"It will not be difficult, my lady," was the smiling reply.

Nor did there appear to be any difficulty when she was dressed for the ball. She looked every inch a queen. She wore a superb dress of white brocade, embroidered with small golden flowers, the effect of which was gorgeous in the extreme. Sometimes, and in certain lights, she looked like a mass of gold, in others, like white creamy clouds. The firm white throat was clasped with a diamond necklace, the Duke of Downsbury's gift; large diamond ear rings hung from the pretty ears, a cross of diamonds and sapphires gleamed on her white breast, the fair arms were bound with diamonds, and she wore a circlet of diamonds in her hair. Even her flowers matched her costume. They were fragrant white blossoms of a rare plant, with tiny golden bells.

Eugenie wondered why the beautiful lady stood looking so long and earnestly in the mirror. She was not admiring herself—no light of gratified vanity came into her eyes, no flush of delight colored her cheeks. She was examining herself gravely, critically, severely, trying to estimate in her own mind the exact impression that she would produce on others. Her thoughts were evidently favorable to herself. No one looking at the beauty of that patrician face would dare to recognize her as anything less lofty than she seemed to be. As for believing what Lord Vivianne might say of her, who would do it?

Just as she had foreseen, she was the belle of the ball. The Duke of Eastham selected her for the opening of it, and the evening was one long ovation and triumph for her. Yet, though flattery and homage were all round her, she never for one moment forgot her chief object, which was looking for Lord Vivianne. She knew by instinct when he entered the room; she saw him look round, and knew, as well as though he had told her, that he was looking for her.

Now was the time! Her face flushed into rarest loveliness; her eyes grew radiant. She had the world at her feet to-night. Let him come and do his worst; she could defy him.

She saw him go up to the Duchess of Eastham, who listened to him with a smile, then they both looked in her direction, and in a few minutes were standing by her.

She never betrayed the least sign of fear. He looked curiously at her. The light flashed in her jewels, but the diamonds lay quite still on the white breast; the golden bells of the flowers never trembled.

In a few smiling words the duchess introduced Lord Vivianne to Lady Studleigh. She bent her graceful head and smiled. He begged to know if she had yet one dance to spare, and she answered "Yes." He listened attentively to the voice; it was certainly like that of Doris, but he fancied the accent was more silvery, more refined.

"It is very warm," she said, looking straight in his face; "I should like an ice."

"Quite a happy inspiration," he replied, and they went away together.

If she felt the least tremor of fear she did not show it; she laughed and talked quite gayly to him, with the simple innocence of a child, not shrinking even in the least, while his eyes looked deep down into hers, as though he would read every thought of her soul. If she had shrunk from him—if she had shown the least fear—if she had avoided his glance, refused to dance with him, he would have had more reason to suspect her; as it was, he was fairly bewildered, and more than once he called himself a simpleton for his suspicions. The bright, fearless glance, the child-like smile, the frank gayety, would have puzzled a wiser man than Lord Vivianne.

"I will try her," he thought. "If she be the girl who went to Italy with me, I shall find it out."

He offered her his arm, so that he could feel her hand tremble, if tremble it did. He began by admiring her bouquet.

"You have some very rare flowers there, Lady Studleigh," he said—"white blossoms with golden bells; it is an exotic. Is it Indian or Italian?"

She looked at him with a frank smile.

"I am very ignorant," she said. "I love flowers very dearly, but I never made them a study. Long Latin names frighten me."

"Yet it is a beautiful study," he said.

She laughed again.

"I believe, honestly," she said, "that if I knew, for instance, the Latin and Greek name of this lovely flower, with its whole history, I should not enjoy it half as much as I do now. That is a mystery to me."

"Do you like mysteries?" he asked, quickly.

"I can hardly tell; I think I should if I had one."

He looked into the very depths of her eyes—they were as clear and open as the day.

"You are too frank to care for mystery," he said.

"Yes, frankness is what Lord Linleigh calls one of my failings."

"Why is it a failing?" he asked.

"Because I carry it to excess. I have an unfortunate habit of saying whom I like, whom I dislike, what I care for, and what I do not care for."

That frank *abandon* was not much like the Doris he had known.

"That is very nice," he said; "I wish I dare ask if you are likely to like me?"

"I will tell you when I know more of you," was the reply. "I have a fashion of showing my liking, which I am quite sure is a little *outre*."

"Have you ever been in Italy?" he asked, watching her intently as he spoke.

If there had been the least change of color, if her eyes had drooped in the least from his, he would have said: "Doris, I have found you!"

As it was, the only expression on her face was one of innocent surprise.

"In Italy?" she repeated. "Oh, yes, I finished my education there!"

He made no reply, but began to think to himself that he must indeed have been mistaken. Then he talked to her about many things. Her answers gave him the impression that she was very quick, very clever, but innocent, almost with a child-like simplicity.

He had but one resource, one more question to ask, and if he were baffled in that, he should be at a loss what to think. He gazed earnestly into the beautiful face.

"Lady Studleigh," he said, "I cannot help fancying that I have seen you before—that we have met before, and have been good friends. Is it so?"

There was no trace of emotion in her face—nothing but girlish surprise.

"Met before? I do not remember it, Lord Vivianne. I have been introduced to so many strangers, it is possible I may have forgotten some. Still, I think I should have remembered your name."

"It was not in London we met," he said. "Carry your memory back to last year—only last year. Have you no place for me in it?"

"No," she replied, "I have not. Last year I spent at Linleigh Court. Have I really seen you before, Lord Vivianne? Indeed, I apologize most sincerely for not remembering you."

"It may be only a fancy," he said.

"But if you knew me, and knew that I ought to recognize you, why did you ask for an introduction to me?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Because I was not sure," he replied, gloomily. "I am not sure now—I am bewildered."

Then when he saw the surprise on her face deepen into annoyance, he said:

"I beg your pardon. I did know some one once who was like you—oh, so like you!—some one who made me very unhappy. That is our dance. Lady Studleigh, smile, that I may know you have forgiven me."

She smiled, and they went away to the ball-room together.

CHAPTER LXIV.
A TERRIBLE TRIAL.

"Earle," said Lady Doris, "it seems so long since you left me."

She was standing in the ball-room with the countess. Her late partner, Lord Vivianne, had gone to fulfill his engagement elsewhere.

"It seems so long," she repeated.

And Earle, who knew every tone of her voice, detected something unusually sad in it. His face grew bright with happiness that she had missed him.

"I saw you dancing with the gentleman who admired you so greatly the other evening," he replied. "You seemed so interested in his conversation that I never dreamed you would miss me."

"He has tried me so, Earle," she said, gently. "Before I can enjoy myself again, I must go somewhere and rest for a few minutes. Where shall we go?"

Earle silently placed the little white hand on his arm, and led the way to a brilliantly-lighted conservatory, where the rippling of the fountain mingled with the songs of tamed birds. There was no one else in that spacious fragrant place. He drew a chair to one of the fountains and placed her in it. She drew a deep breath of unutterable relief, as one who had passed through mortal peril and escaped it. Looking at her, Earle saw that her beautiful face was ghastly white; the eyes she raised to him were dim and shadowed with horror.

"Earle," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, "I do not look much like the belle of the ball now, do I?"

He was full of concern.

"Not much," he replied. "What is the matter, darling?—what has made you ill? I have thought so often lately that you looked ill and unlike yourself."

She tried to smile, but the expression on her face belied the smile.

"I never did faint in my life," she said—"it is an achievement quite beyond me—but I feel much inclined to do the deed now. Earle, fetch some brandy for me."

"Brandy!" he repeated. "Wine would be better, my darling; brandy is very strong."

"Wine tastes like water," she said. "I want something that is all fire—all fire! to make me strong. Be quick, Earle—be quick! I have to dance with Prince Poermal before supper. I would not be seen looking like this for all the wide world!"

"I do not like leaving you alone," said Earle.

"No one will come here," she said impatiently. "That is the 'Elisir d'Amor' waltz—no one will miss us. Go quickly, Earle."

He bent down and kissed the pale face, then he went quickly to the buffet, poured some brandy in a small glass and carried it to her. She sat just as he had left her—the white arms had fallen listlessly by her side, the white blossoms with the golden bells lay at her feet. Earle thought she looked like some one whose whole strength had been expended in a dire struggle.

"Doris," he said, gently, "drink this dear."

She raised her head and drank the brandy as though it had been so much water. He looked at her in wonder. Then the color slowly returned to her face.

"I understand, Earle," she said, "now, for the first time, why people take to drinking."

There was something so strange in her manner that Earle felt almost frightened.

"Do not talk in that fashion, my darling," he said. "I cannot endure to hear you. Sweet lips like yours should not utter such words."

She laughed; her lips were quite red now, and there was color in her face.

"I can understand it," she repeated, laughingly. "When you brought that to me I was almost dead—it seemed to me that all strength had left me, all the life in me was freezing; now I am warm, living, and well. The next time I feel ill I shall take brandy."

He did not know whether she were laughing or not, whether she meant the words seriously or not, but they impressed him most disagreeably.

"Doris," he said, gravely, "never do that. You are only jesting, I know, dear, and this unhealthy style of life will soon be over for you. You exhaust your strength by over-doses of gayety and excitement. Do not fly to stimulants to restore it; you could not do anything more fatal."

She laughed.

"Of course I am jesting. This is a rest to sit here with you. Lord Vivianne tired me so dreadfully." She shuddered as with cold, and laid her head back on the chair. "How is it, Earle, that some people are so disagreeable and others so nice?"

Earle laughed, so happy to think that she called him nice.

"Which is Lord Vivianne?" he asked.

"Oh, disagreeable, you may be sure of that. See how he has tired me."

"But the world in general considers him a very agreeable man," said Earle.

"I do not. We will not talk of him. Say something very loving and very pleasant to me, Earle, that will send all tiresome thoughts out of my mind."

"You have no right with tiresome thoughts. What are they? Tell me them," he said.

She laughed, but the laugh was a sigh.

"What tiresome thoughts can I have, Earle, except that I regret youth and pleasure are not immortal? I can have no other. Say something loving to me, Earle."

He bent over her and whispered words that brought a sweet, bright blush to her face; then she stood up.

"Now give me my flowers, Earle."

He did so, shaking the little golden bells.

"Do I look bright and brilliant again?" she asked—"like the belle of the ball?"

"Yes, bright as the morning star."

"Now for Prince Poermal and some sugared German compliments," she said.

And they returned to the ball-room.

The prince, all smiles, all gallantry, all devotion, came up to claim her hand. Earle watched her as she danced with him; she was all smiles, all brightness, all light. She talked gayly, she laughed, and the prince appeared to be charmed with her.

Earle wondered more and more. Was it possible this brilliant, beautiful girl was the one he had seen so short a time before, white, cold, and silent, as though some terrible trouble lay over her. He saw what universal admiration she excited; how many admiring glances followed her; he saw that in that brilliant assembly there was no one to compare with her, and he wondered at his own good fortune in winning so peerless a creature. Yet he felt that there was something strange about her, something that he could not understand. Her spirits were strangely unequal; one minute she was all fire, animation, and excitement, the next dull and absent. He tried to account for it all by saying to himself the life was new to her—new and very strange—and it was only natural that she should feel strange in it.

Later on in the evening, when the brilliant ball was almost over, Lord Vivianne sought Lady Studleigh again.

"I am going to ask a great favor," he said; "it is that I may be permitted to call. I have had the pleasure of an introduction to the Earl of Linleigh."

"I shall be much pleased," she replied, indifferently—so indifferently that he could not possibly tell whether she were pleased or otherwise.

"Shall you remain much longer in town?" he asked, determined to keep up a conversation with her.

"I hope so," she replied. "I think London is incomparable; I cannot imagine any other life half so delightful."

"You should see Paris," he said, looking earnestly at her.

"Yes, I should like to see court life in Paris. I was there as a child, but, as a matter of course, I have no knowledge of French society. I was too young to know much about it."

"You must try to spend some time there; there is a brilliancy about French society that we do not find in England."

She looked as politely indifferent as possible, not sufficiently so to offend him, but enough to show him that she felt no great interest in the conversation. He could not find any excuse for delaying any longer, but he left her with the determination to see her again as soon as possible.

"The ball has been a brilliant success," said the earl. "Have you enjoyed it, Doris?"

"Yes," she replied, "I liked Prince Poermal, and I liked the Duke of Eastham, but I did not like all my partners."

Lord Linleigh laughed.

"That is hardly to be supposed," he said. "If it be not a rude question, which of them did your ladyship dislike?"

"Dislike is too strong a word, papa. I did not care about Lord Vivianne; he tired me very much. How can people admire him?"

"You do not like him?" said the earl. "I suppose it does not much matter, but I am rather sorry. He seemed to take a great fancy to me, and pressed me to try shooting with him. If you do not like him, I shall not."

She laughed.

"There is no need for that, papa: it does not quite follow that because he is not to my taste, he is not to yours, does it?"

"No; but he spoke of calling on us, and did his best to make me understand that he wished to be on visiting terms with us."

"Why not?" she asked, indolently.

"If you do not like him, Doris, I should never care to see him inside our doors."

"I do not like him as a partner, papa; perhaps as a visitor to the house I might like him very well indeed. He tired me with his incessant questions and compliments."

"Perhaps he was very much charmed with you," said the earl, laughingly. "I must say, no one ever showed a greater desire to be on intimate terms with me than he did. I asked him to dine on Thursday—the Bishop of Lingham is coming—and we shall see if he improves upon acquaintance."

"He seemed to me very polite and pleasing," said the countess, quietly.

And then they spoke no more of Lord Vivianne, but Lady Studleigh thought of him incessantly. She had made the greatest effort, which was talking to him, parrying his questions, assuming a part, and carrying it on for some time. She had said to herself that the danger was averted, that she had no more to fear, but she found that she was wrong. In his eyes she read a fixed determination to know her—a doubt that all her skill had not been able to solve, all her talent had not prevented. She felt this; she understood that although he had seemed to acquiesce in all she said, in his own mind suspicion still lingered.

CHAPTER LXV.

"IF SHE REFUSES, LET HER BEWARE!"

Standing in the solitary splendor of her room, Doris looked round her with despairing eyes. Was it possible that this sin, of which she had thought so little, would be the means of dragging her down from the brilliant height on which she stood? What were those words haunting her? "Be sure your sin will find you out." Was it possible that her brilliant life, her triumphant career, her happiness, should all be ended by this secret coming to life? Would it be of any use throwing herself on his mercy, and asking him to keep the horrible story to himself? Bah! she hated him so that she would ask no favor from him—not to save twenty lives! The only thing for her to do was to go on baffling him—to treat him, not with unkindness, but with such calm indifference that he would find it impossible to break down the barrier—to avoid conversation with him, and to marry Earle as soon as possible. Once married, she could easily persuade her husband to take her

abroad. She would keep out of England a year or two, and then Lord Vivianne would have forgotten his fancy.

"There is one thing I must do the next time I see him," said the unhappy girl to herself. "I must tell him, in some way or other, that my name is Doris. He is sure to find it out. I had better tell him."

She went to rest in her luxurious chamber, perhaps one of the most luxurious in London, and in the whole of that vast city there was not a heart more restless or more sad than hers.

Lady Doris met Lord Vivianne next at a flower-show at Chiswick. It pleased the fair ladies of fashion to congregate there. The Duchess of Downsbury, the Countess of Linleigh, and Lady Doris, had driven together. It was a brilliant *fete*; the sky overhead was blue and cloudless, the golden sun was shining, the air was filled with the songs of countless birds, and each laden with the fragrant odor of a thousand flowers. The charm of sweetest music was not wanting; from under the shade of the trees came the clear, bright sounds. It was like fairyland.

The earl had ridden down: Earle was prevented from going.

It was there that, for the second time, she met the man who was fast becoming her mortal foe. There was a long, shady avenue of trees, with beautiful chestnuts in full bloom; the air seemed alive and warm with their fragrance. The duchess and her daughter had gone to look at some exquisite specimens of white heath; Lady Studleigh walked slowly down the chestnut grove. She heard footsteps behind her, and thinking it was the duchess, she did not turn. Then the voice that she hated most in the world sounded in her ears.

"Good-morning, Lady Studleigh; I esteem myself very fortunate in meeting you here."

Again he looked narrowly into her face, to see if there was the faintest trace of confusion or fear. It was calm and bright as the morning itself; her eyes shone like two stars, her lips were all smiles.

"Good-morning," she replied, laughingly; "I shall have my ideal of fairyland after this, Lord Vivianne."

"What will it be?" he asked.

"A flower-show. It is really very beautiful; I cannot tell you how much I enjoy it."

"Perhaps novelty adds to the charm," he said. "The most beautiful flowers I have ever seen are at Downsbury Castle. You have been to Downsbury Castle, Lady Studleigh?"

"Yes," she replied, with the frankest unconcern, "I was there last year. I thought the flowers very beautiful."

"I once saw a flower," he said, "that I would defy all creation to equal."

"Did you? For my part, I think them all beautiful alike. Have you seen the japonicas here?"

"No, I have only just arrived."

To himself he added, despairingly:

"I must be wrong. She could not be so frankly unconcerned. Besides, how could the girl I took to Florence with me be Lord Studleigh's daughter?"

"Did you like Downsbury Castle?" he asked, again.

"Yes, but I cannot say that I was ecstatically happy there."

"Why not?" he asked. "You ought to be happy everywhere."

She laughed a low, musical laugh.

"I do not think," she said, "that I was a great favorite with her grace."

"With the duchess—why not?"

"For many reasons. She did not like the color of my hair, because it is brighter than Lady Linleigh's. She did not like my name; she said it had the flavor of common poetry about it."

"Your name? If I am not presumptuous, what is it?"

"Doris," she replied, and she raised her eyes to his with a look of most angelic innocence. He was bewildered.

"Doris," he repeated. "I knew a Doris once—the one so like you."

"Doris—how strange." Again the low, sweet laugh that maddened him. "I assure you," she continued, "that I am like the duchess—I dislike the name exceedingly."

He was looking at her in a maze of perplexity. She was so like; it must be his Dora. The name,

too; it could not be a coincidence. Yet, if she were the girl he had betrayed, it was not natural that she could refrain from showing some little emotion, some fear, some surprise. She did not appear to notice that there was anything strange in his silence or his fixed regard.

"I have a theory of my own about names," she continued, "and I think it the most cruel thing in the world to give a child either an ungainly or an unusual one. If I had had a sensible name, I should not have been full of caprice, as I am now."

He laughed, still wondering. Could it be his Dora, the girl he had learned to love with such a fierce, mad love—the girl to recover whom he would have cheerfully laid down his wealth? He would not have believed it possible, if any other man had told him such a story; he would have said it could not be, that it must be clear at once whether she were the girl or not; yet he was puzzled. If a kingdom had been offered to him at that moment to say whether this was the girl he had loved or not, he could not have told. Still, he would try her, and try her until some incautious word, some half-uttered exclamation, some sudden look of fear would betray her. If none of these things happened, he would take further steps—go down to Brackenside, where he had first met her, and see what he could find out there.

Then, as he listened to her, his faith was shaken again. Surely, if she dreaded recognition, she would be less natural, she would seek in some measure to disguise her voice, her laugh; but no one could be more frank or natural. Then a new idea came to him. If she were really Dora, as sooner or later he must discover, then he would compel her to marry him by threats; if she were not, he would win her love and marry her.

Looking at the exquisite face, the proud eyes, all the mad, fierce love that he had felt for his lost Dora came over him. Then he was startled to find the laughing eyes looking at him with some curiosity.

"I have heard of day dreams, Lord Vivianne," she said, "now I have seen a day dreamer. We have been through this chestnut grove twice, and you have not spoken; you have been building castles in the air."

"I have been building castles of which I have dared to make you the queen," he replied.

"I should like to be the queen of something more substantial than an air castle," she replied laughingly.

"You do not know," he said, "that being with you, Lady Studleigh, is at once the highest happiness and the greatest misery."

"I ought to be flattered at producing such a variety of emotion," she replied, with a laugh.

"You would be serious—you would pity me if you knew all," he said.

"Shall I pity you without knowing anything?" she replied.

"No; but, Lady Studleigh, you are so pretty, so exactly like some one I—I loved and lost; you are the very counterpart of her—her true likeness. I have never seen anything so marvelous!"

"How did you lose her?" she asked. "Did she die?"

"No. To me it was almost worse than that. She, this lovely girl whom I so dearly loved, was beneath me in station, yet I worshiped her. She affected to love me—whether she did or not, Heaven only knows. But just as I had made up my mind to marry her, because I loved her so dearly I could not live without her, she disappeared—went away out of my life, and I have not seen her since."

"What a strange story," she replied, indifferently, "and how strange that you should tell it to me, Lord Vivianne."

"Because," he cried, with sudden passion, "you are so much like her—do you not see? You are so much like her that I could look in your face and cry out—'Dora, Dora, have you forgotten me?'"

She laughed again.

"Could you? How strange! I should feel very much surprised if you did."

"You are so like her. When I look at you my heart seems to leave me."

Her violet eyes, with their proud light, looked into his calmly.

"I did not think the men of the present day knew much about love," she said; "but you seem to have loved her."

"Loved her!—but I forget myself, Lady Studleigh; you might as well try to imagine what the heat and thunder of battle are like, from seeing them painted on canvas, as guess how I loved her from hearing me use the word love."

"You should find her and tell her all this," she said.

And from the half-tired expression that for one moment crossed the beautiful face, he knew she was growing politely wearied of the theme.

"I am searching for her," he said, his lips growing white and hot as he spoke. "I am looking for

her. There are times when I believe that I have found her."

"That is well," she replied.

"No, it is hardly well. When I am sure that I have discovered her, I shall ask her to marry me; and if she refuses, let her beware! let her beware!"

The words came from him with a hiss. Her sunny laughter smote him like the edge of a sharp sword.

"How dramatic, Lord Vivianne! I shall begin to think you are rehearsing for a tragedy."

He looked confused.

"If she be not Dora," he thought, "what will she think of me?"

Then he continued:

"I ought to apologize, Lady Studleigh. I cannot help it, you are so much like her. I loved her so dearly that, do you see, I would lose my life rather than my hope of winning her for my wife."

"But how can you make her your wife, Lord Vivianne?" she asked, wonderingly. "If she had loved you, and had been willing to marry you, she would not have run away, would she?"

"I have never understood it; there was a mystery in her disappearance that I never fathomed. But I *will* fathom it, I *will* find her, and make her my wife."

"Did she run away from all her friends, too?" she asked.

He turned to look at her, and they glanced for one half minute steadily at each other.

"If I have asked an intrusive question," she said, with a smile, "it was your fault for telling me. Remember, I did not ask your confidence—you gave it to me."

"As I would give you the whole world, if I had it," he replied, passionately.

"Because I am so much like some one else?" she replied smilingly. "I ought to be grateful to you."

"If ever harm or evil comes to me," said Lord Vivianne, "it will be through her. I am not master of myself; when I think of her it maddens me. I believe if I met her—found her, and she refused to be my wife, I should——"

"Should what?" she asked, as he hesitated.

"I should kill her!" he said, fiercely.

"How dreadful! You are quite a tragedy hero, Lord Vivianne." She laughed as she spoke, and shrugged her shoulders. "Suppose this lady of whom you speak should be like you, and say the same thing—that she would rather kill you than marry you. What then?"

"Why, then we should fight it out to the bitter end."

"Here is the duchess," said Lady Studleigh, calmly. "Mind, Lord Vivianne, I do not think you have done the wisest thing in trusting a stranger, like myself, with your secrets; however, your confidence in me shall not be misplaced, I will keep them."

Then the duchess and Lady Linleigh joined them. He remained with them, affecting to talk to them, but secretly engaged in watching Lady Doris. But it was all in vain. There was no trace of thought or care on her face. She talked and laughed gayly, as though he had not spoken a word; the only thing was, that in her manner to him he detected a gentle pity that she had not shown before.

"I must be mistaken," he said to himself. "Eyesight, hearing, memory, all must be wrong—all must have failed me; but—she could not possibly be playing a part—she cannot be my lost Dora. No woman could be so utterly indifferent. I must be mistaken, but I will find it out!"

CHAPTER LXVI.
A LITTLE ARTIFICE.

It did not occur to Lady Doris that in all probability Lord Vivianne would recognize Earle. He had seen him once, and once only—that was walking with her, near Brackenside. But his lordship had no eyes then to spare for the rustic lover. He had also known his name—Earle Moray—but he was proverbially careless, forgetful and indifferent. It was a question whether he had paid the least heed to it, not thinking it could even interest him.

On the day of the dinner party at Hyde House it had occurred to her that they would meet. They had both been at the Duchess of Eastham's ball, but in a crowded ball-room even friends often failed to recognize each other. How would it be when they met in the same room, dined at the same table? People would be sure to make some allusion to Earle's poems, some one would be sure to mention Downsbury Castle, then Earle would join in and she would be lost. She might, by

her indifference, make him believe that he was mistaken: but if he once found out who Earle was, and that Earle was still her lover, she could blind him no longer. Had she met him only at rare intervals, she might have continued to mislead him. Had she met him casually in society, she could have carried on her deception until it was too late for him to injure her. But now that he was coming, as it were, into the very heart of her home, she had less chance.

If he found out about Earle, he would find out about her, too. Then—well, suppose it came, this discovery that she dreaded so terribly, what would he do if she refused to marry him? "Kill her," he had said; but that was not so easily done. She might compromise and secure her own safety by refusing to marry Earle, and marrying Lord Vivianne. He would keep her secret then. People would only say that she had changed her mind, and say that she was like all the Studleighs—faithless. But she loved Earle with all her power of loving, and she hated Lord Vivianne with an untold hatred.

She said to herself that if she had to save herself from the most terrible death by marrying him, she would not do it. She loathed him; she would have been pleased to hear that he was dead, or anything else dreadful had happened to him, for he had spoiled her life. Of what use was all her wealth, her luxury, her magnificence? Her life through him was spoiled—completely spoiled.

"I wish he were dead," she said to herself, over and over again. "The toils are spreading around me; I shall be caught at last."

She flung her arms above her head with a terrible cry. What was she to do? She must, first of all, prevent them from meeting that night. They must not dine together at her father's house; that was the evil to be immediately dreaded. She flung the masses of golden hair back from her white face.

"If I dare but tell Earle, and let him avenge me," she thought.

Then she wrote to him a coaxing little note, telling him that she had a particular reason for desiring him not to dine at Hyde House that evening—a reason that she would explain afterward, but that she herself desired to see him alone. Would he come later on in the evening and ask for her? She would arrange to receive him in Lady Linleigh's boudoir. Then she rung for a footman in hot haste.

"Take this note to Mr. Moray," she said. "Never mind how long you have to wait. Give it into his own hands, then bring me the answer."

"Oh, these lovers," sighed the servant. "What there is to do to please them!"

Still, he did his best. He waited until he saw Earle, put the note in his hand, and waited for the answer.

Earle only smiled as he read it. He was so completely accustomed to these pretty little caprices, he had ceased to attach any importance to them. He merely wrote in reply that he was entirely at her command.

"You remember the old song, my darling:

> "'Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
> The very eyes of me;
> Thou hast command of every part,
> To live and die for thee.'

"I will come later on in the evening and see no one but you."

He laughed as he closed the note.

"I wonder what pretty caprice possesses my darling now," he said to himself.

The man who took the note back wondered at his young mistress, her face was quite white, her golden hair clung in rich disorder, the white hands, so eagerly extended to seize the letter, trembled and burned like fire.

"They must have had a quarrel," he said to himself, with a knowing nod, as he closed the door. "They have had a quarrel, and my lady wishes to make it all right again."

It was a reprieve. She kissed the little note with a passion of love that was real.

"My darling," she said, "if we could but go away together."

And as she sat there a sudden memory of the time when she had run away from him came to her. She saw the old-fashioned garden at Brackenside; she saw the great crimson roses, and the sheaves of white lilies; she saw the kindly face of Mattie, and heard Earle singing:

> "Thou art my soul, my life—the very eyes of me."

Ah, peaceful, innocent days! Blind, mad fool that she had been ever to listen to Vivianne—to let him tempt her—to let him take her from the innocent, happy home! What had she gained? And—ah, Heaven!—what had she lost? If she could but have foreseen, have known, how differently she would have behaved.

"I am strong," she said, pushing away the golden hair with her white hands. "I am strong, but I could not live this life—it would kill me."

She sat for half an hour, thinking steadily, then her resolve was taken. She would tide over the dinner as well as she could, throwing him more and more off his guard. She would see Earle that evening, and tell him that she wanted their marriage hastened; that she was tired of so many lovers, and wanted to go away with him; that she was wearied of London life.

She knew that Earle would be on the alert to serve her, he would manage it all. She had faith in his great love. Then she would tell the earl that her health and strength were failing her; ask him to take her to Linleigh Court. Lord Vivianne would not dare to follow her there. It was like a haven of rest to her. When the summer came, she would marry Earle quietly and go abroad. Then she would be out of her enemy's power; he could no longer hurl her from her high estate, or compel her to marry him. She would be another man's wife then, and it would be his place to protect and avenge her.

The plan, rapidly conceived, rapidly sketched, was her only resource, her only safety. True, it would spoil her life, the triumphs that she now enjoyed would be hers no longer. She would cease to be the belle of the season, the queen of beauty and fashion. She must lose that part of her life which she valued most—the homage, the adulation, the brightness, and all through him. How her whole soul raged in burning fury against him!

If he had been lying there on the ground, her foot on his neck, she would not have spared him. She would have seen him die with pleasure. It did not lessen her anger and her rage that she had to talk to him, to smile, and charm him.

"If a look could kill him," she said to herself, "he should die."

She longed to be in Italy, where a bravo, for a comparatively small sum, would soon have ended his life. She was obliged to soothe her anger, to still the fierce tempest of rage, to calm her fears, to take an interest in her dress, to smile, to look sweet and winning, with the most vindictive hate in her heart.

Then she went into the little drawing-room. Lord Linleigh went up to her.

"What a pretty toilet, Doris," he said. "White lace and roses. Your taste is simply superb. But, ah, me! ah, me!"

"What is it, papa?" she asked, as he laughed, gently.

"Earle is not coming, my dear. I am afraid you will be disappointed. He has sent a hurried little note to say that it is impossible. He is busy about his election, you know."

A few minutes afterward and Lord Vivianne, with a smile on his face, entered the room. Her fingers clutched the flowers she carried so tightly; the thought passed through her mind that if he could but have fallen dead over the threshold it would have been well for her.

"I shall see him if he comes in later on," she said.

A few minutes afterward he was seated by her side, and they were talking in the most friendly manner. The dinner passed over better than she had hoped. Earle was not mentioned nor did any one allude to Downsbury Castle. Lord Vivianne had contrived to secure a place by Lady Studleigh's side, and he did his best to please her. She could not help remarking how courteous and gallant was his manner in society. She contrasted it with what she had seen of him in Florence. When dinner was over, and they had gone into the drawing-room, he bent over the back of her chair.

"Lady Studleigh, have you forgotten my terrible outburst of the other day?"

"Yes," she replied; "I have seen much that is amusing since then."

"It was not very amusing to me," he said. "When a man lays bare the core of his heart, he does not do it for amusement."

"Not for his own, perhaps," she said; "but if he does it in your tragic style, he cannot help other people being amused."

"I could call you Doris," he said, "when you look at me with that piquant smile."

"I hope you will not, Lord Vivianne. I should always fancy papa was talking to me."

"Did you think I was mad that day in the chestnut grove?"

Lady Doris laughed.

"My experience of the world is not very large at present," she said. "Whenever I see or hear anything unusual, I think it is the fashion of the times."

"Ah, Lady Studleigh, I wish I could persuade you to be serious—you are always laughing at me."

"Tendency to laughter is hereditary with me," she said. "I cannot help it. I am afraid that I have no talent for sentiment. The only matter I find for surprise is why you should have selected such a very unsuitable character as myself for your confidante. I cannot say what may be in store for me,

but I do not remember that any love affair ever possessed the least interest for me yet."

"You should have a love affair, as you call it, Lady Studleigh, in Italy, where the air is poetry, and the wind music."

"Papa," said Lady Studleigh to the earl, who was just passing her chair, "do you hear Lord Vivianne's advice?"

"No, my dear; but I do not doubt that it is good."

"He tells me to go to Italy to learn a lesson in love. That is a sorry compliment to England and the English, is it not?"

CHAPTER LXVII.
A QUIET WEDDING ADVOCATED.

"What did that little note mean, Doris?" asked Earle, with a smile. "You see that I obeyed you implicitly."

Even as he spoke he stood still, lost in admiration of the beautiful picture before him.

Although it was summer there was a bright little fire in the silver grate, the lamps were lighted, but lowered, so that the room was filled with a soft light; the hangings of rich rose silk were drawn, the long mirrors reflected the light, the flowers filled the air with perfume, and in the very heart of the rich crimson light sat the Lady Doris. She was half-buried in a nest of crimson velvet, the firelight had caught the gleam of her jewels, the sheen of the golden hair, the light in her eyes, the white dress: it seemed to shine above all on the white jeweled hands, that lay carelessly clasped on her knee. She had told the countess Earle would call, and that she wished to speak to him, so that she knew her *tete-a-tete* would be quite undisturbed.

Earle looked at her, thinking that there had never been so fair a picture in all the world; then he repeated his question. She looked up at him, and he was struck by the unusual expression in her eyes; he knelt down before her, and took one white hand in his.

"That cruel note," he said, "depriving me of a pleasure I cannot enjoy too often. What did it mean?"

She did what was very unusual with her; she clasped her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Earle! Earle! it is strange what rest I feel when you are near me. I will tell you what the note meant, but you will laugh at me."

"I do not think so, darling; I have laughed with you, but not at you."

"I knew that tiresome Lord Vivianne was coming, and he tries my temper so; he will admire me, and I do not want his admiration."

"Then why keep me away, darling; I might have saved you from it."

"No; I knew you could not. I was obliged to go down to dinner with him, and it would have tried my temper too severely if I had been compelled to sit by him and could not have been with you. You may think it a stupid, childish reason, Earle, but it is a true one. I was determined if I could not talk to you, I would not be annoyed by seeing any one else do so."

He looked slightly puzzled, but, as he said to himself, it was one of her caprices—why not be content?

"If my staying away pleased you," he said, "I am doubly pleased."

Yet it struck him as he spoke, that she had lost some of her animation and brightness.

"How beautiful you look in this light, Dora," he said. "Why, my darling, a king might envy me."

One of the white, jeweled hands rested caressingly on the noble head of the young poet. He had never seen Dora so gentle before.

"My darling!" he cried, his face glowing with its rapture of happiness. "My darling, you are beginning to love me so well at last."

"I do love you, Earle," she said, and for some minutes there was silence between them.

She had a certain object to win, and she was debating within herself how it was to be won.

"It is like a fairy tale," he said. "Why, my darling, looking at you I cannot believe my own good fortune; you are the fairest woman in England; you are noble, you are high in station; you have the wit, the grace, the noble bearing of a queen. I have nothing but the two titles you have given me, of gentleman and poet—yet I shall win you for my wife. It is so wonderful—this love that breaks all barriers; money could not have brought you to my side—a millionaire might love you, but you would not care for him; title could not win you—it is love that has made you all mine! All

mine, until death!"

She listened to his impassioned words; she looked at the handsome, noble face, and a sensation of something like shame came to her that she should have to maneuver with a love so grand in its simplicity; still she must save herself. Her arms fell with a dreamy sigh; the firelight shining on her face showed it to be flushed and tremulous.

"Earle," she said, "do you remember how I used to long for a life like this? long for gayety, excitement, wealth, pleasure, and perpetual admiration?"

"I remember it well. I used to feel so puzzled to know how to get it for you."

"Now I have it—more than even my heart desired. You will not think me very fickle if I tell you something?"

"I shall never think you anything but most charming and lovable, Doris."

"Well, the truth is, I am rather tired of the life; but I do not like to say so. I cannot think why it is; sometimes I think it may only be fancy, that I am not strong as I used to be; perhaps the great change has been too much for me. Let it be what it may, I am tired of it, though I cannot say so to any one but you."

"The queen of the season tired of her honors?" said Earle, kissing the sweet lips and the white brow.

"I am really tired, Earle. Then, though admiration is always sweet to a woman, I have rather too much of it. That Prince Poermal is making love to me, the Marquis of Heather made me an offer yesterday, and Lord Vivianne teases me. Now, Earle, it is tiresome, it is indeed, dear. My mind, my heart—nay, I need not be ashamed to say it—are filled with you. I do not want the offers of other men—their love and admiration."

"Declaring our engagement would soon put an end to all that," he said, thoughtfully.

But that was not what the Lady Doris wanted; she wanted him to urge their marriage.

"Yes," she said, "we might make it known, but people would not believe it; it would not save me from the importunities of other men."

He looked wonderingly at her. After all, it was a new feature in her character—this dread of lovers.

"That is not all, Earle," she said, clasping her soft, warm fingers round his hands. "I tell you—no one but you—this life is a little too much for me. Before I had recovered from the great shock of the change, I was plunged into the very whirlpool of London life. Do not imagine I have joined the list of invalids, or that I have grown nervous, or any nonsense of that kind: it is not so; but at times I feel a great failure of strength, a deadly faintness or weakness that is hard to fight against—a horrible foreboding for which I cannot account."

Her face grew pale, and her eyes seemed to lose their light as she spoke.

"I am sure," she continued, "that it is from over-fatigue. Do you not think so, Earle?"

"Yes," he replied; "now, what is the remedy?"

"I know the remedy. It would be to give all up for a time, and take a long rest—a long rest," her voice seemed to die away like the softest murmur of a sighing wind.

Earle felt almost alarmed; this was so completely novel, this view of Doris, who had always been bright, piquant, and gay.

"You shall go away, darling," he said, tenderly.

"But, Earle," she said, "my father and Lady Linleigh are enjoying the season so much, they have so many engagements, I cannot bear to say anything about going."

"Then I will say it for you. I shall tell Lord Linleigh, to-morrow, that you have exhausted yourself, and that you must have a few weeks of quiet at Linleigh Court."

"What will he say, Earle?"

"If I judge him rightly, darling, he will say little, but he will act at once; before this time next week you will be at Linleigh."

"Do you really think so? I am so glad," yet she shivered again as she spoke. "I long to go to Linleigh, Earle, yet I have such a strange feeling about it, a strange presentiment, a foreboding; surely no evil, no danger awaits me at Linleigh. Do you know, I could fancy death standing at the threshold waiting with outstretched arms to catch me." Again her voice died away with a half-hysterical sob.

Earle bent over her and kissed her.

"My darling, you are fanciful, you are tired. I am so glad you have trusted me; it is high time you were attended to. These nervous fancies are enough to drive you mad; the evil has gone further than I thought. Doris, my love, my sweet, it is only the reaction from over-fatigue that gives you

these ideas, nothing else; what awaits you but a future bright as your own beauty? What shall I live for except to love and to serve and to shield you?"

"Earle," she cried suddenly, "do you know what I wish?"

A long shining tress of golden hair had fallen over her shoulders, and she sat twining it round her white fingers.

"Do you know what I wish?" she repeated.

"No; if I did I should do it, you may be quite sure, Doris."

"I wish that we—you and I—were married; that I was your wife, and that we had gone far away from here, away where no one knows us, where we could be quite happy, alone and together."

"Do you really wish that, Doris?" he asked.

Her face flushed slightly, but her voice did not tremble.

"I do really wish it," she replied. "If papa were willing we would be married this summer, and we could go away, Earle, to some far-off land; then—when we had been happy for some time—we could come home again. I should have grown quite strong by then, and I should have found health, strength, and peace, all with you."

There was a strange mingling of doubt and rapturous happiness on his face.

"Do you really mean this, Doris?" he asked. "Would you—the queen of the season, the fairest object of man's worship—would you give up all your triumphs, all your gayeties, and prefer to live in quiet and solitude with me?"

There was a slight hesitation for one half moment; he was so noble, so true. It was pitiful to use his great love for the obtaining of her own ends; but she must save herself—she must do that.

"You may believe me, Earle," she replied, gently; "if it could be, I would far rather it were so."

"Then, darling, it shall be—my head grows dizzy with the thought of it—you, my peerless, my beautiful Doris, will be my own wife when the summer comes. Why, Doris, listen! oh, listen, love! Do you know that I never fully realized that I was to make you my wife, though I have loved you so passionately and so well? You have always seemed of late far above me, like a bright shining star to be worshiped, hardly to be won. When I said to myself, that at some time or other you should be my wife, it has been like a dream—a bright, sweet, unreal dream. I do not know that I ever fancied you, sweet, with bridal veil and orange-blossoms; yet now, you say, you will marry me in the summer!"

"That I will, Earle," she replied.

"Heaven bless you, my own darling! Heaven speed the happy summer. Why, Doris, I can see the gold on the laburnums, I can hear the ring-doves cooing, I can see the smile of summer all over the land! Mine in the summer, dear; Heaven, make me worthy!"

"There is but one thing, Earle," she said; "I—you will think I have changed, but I cannot help that—I want a quiet marriage. It would please me best if nothing were said, even about our engagement, but if we could go quietly to Linleigh and keep the secret of our marriage to ourselves; that is what I should really like, Earle."

"Then it shall be so, my darling! Now, do not give yourself one moment's anxiety. Shut those beautiful eyes and sleep all night, dreaming only of summer roses and your lover, Earle. I shall see your father to-morrow, and I shall tell him; he will be quite willing, I am sure."

"You are very good to me, Earle," she said, gratefully. "How foolish I was ever to think that I did not care for you, and to run away from you, was I not?"

"That is all forgotten, love," he said, and she felt that she would have given the whole world if it had never happened.

CHAPTER LXVIII.
A CLEW AT LAST.

The morning that followed was beautiful. The Lady Doris felt more cheerful than she had done for many long days. Earle would manage it all for her; she should find a way out of all her difficulties. Lord Vivianne would not follow her to Linleigh; even if he did, she could foil him again and again. When once she was Earle's wife, she could defy him; it was not likely that she would fear him then.

Her heart and spirits rose alike, she smiled at her own fair image in the glass; early as it was, a fragrant bouquet of white hyacinths lay on the toilet table, sent by some adoring lover who evidently hoped that the flowers would say for him what he could not say for himself. She smiled over them, inhaling the rich odor with delight, thinking to herself the while, "What a poet Earle

is; what a rapture he went into last night about flowers and summer."

She felt better. The sun was shining in at her windows, the sweet breath of the hyacinths reached her. It seemed impossible that sorrow or death should come into such a bright world. She smiled to herself when she heard that Earle was with her father.

"He has most certainly lost no time," she said to herself.

Yet, nearly an hour passed before the earl left the library; then, owing to strangers being present, he could not speak to her of what had passed. He merely touched her hand.

"Doris," he said, "I have been having a long talk with Earle, and I must have one with you before dinner."

"I will remember, papa," she said.

Then as the day was so fine Earle prayed her to ride out with him.

"An hour in the park would be so pleasant," he said.

And Lady Linleigh thought the same. Doris was quite willing to go.

When they were under the shade of the trees, Earle went more slowly.

"My darling," he said, "I knew that you would be anxious to hear what has passed. I think," he continued, bringing his handsome face on a level with hers, "I think that I shall make an excellent diplomatist in time."

"I never doubted it," replied Doris.

"I was quite pleased with myself," Earle went on to say; "I made quite an impression on the earl."

Her lips grew pale, and parted with a long, quivering sigh; she looked at him anxiously.

"In one word, Earle, is it to be as I wished or not?"

"Yes," he replied, "in every particular."

Then she resigned herself to listen.

"I never mentioned you at all in the matter," he continued. "I told him that I had observed your health and strength failing, and that I felt quite convinced, unless you rested at once, you would suffer seriously from the effects of over-fatigue. He agreed with me, and said that Lady Linleigh had remarked the same thing, and was equally anxious over you; and said that the wisest thing to do was to leave town at once, and go to Linleigh."

"But would he and Lady Linleigh be willing to give up the remainder of the season?" she asked.

"They care more for you than for the season," he replied. "My opinion is, that Lady Linleigh secretly enjoys the idea of leaving town."

"And about—you know what I mean, Earle."

"About our wedding, darling? It is to be in the sweet summer-time, that is, if you are willing. I urged it; and the countess joined me. Lord Linleigh—Heaven bless him!—did not raise the least objection. He said he would speak to you, and was perfectly kind and good about it; it will be for you to tell him, dear, your wish to have it all managed very quietly, and to speak of going abroad. Now, is not that glorious news for a bright sunshiny day? How green the trees are, and how blue the sky! Was the world ever so fair, love—ever one-half so fair?"

Suddenly he saw her start, and looking at her, saw an angry flush on her face, a bright light in her eyes. She was looking intently at some one who returned the glance with interest.

Following the direction of her eyes, Earle saw Lord Vivianne watching her most intently. There was a smile that was yet half a sneer on his lips, he was talking to a gentleman whom Earle instantly recognized as Colonel Clifford.

"There is your *bete noir*, Doris—Lord Vivianne," he said.

"I see him," she replied, quietly.

He did not know the hot impulse that was on her, he did not understand why she clinched the little jeweled whip so tightly in her hand. She would have given the whole wide world if she dare have ridden up to him, and have given him one stroke across the face with her whip—one stroke that would have left a burning red brand across the handsome, insolent face! She would have gloried in it. She could fancy how he would start and cry out, the coward!—how he would do his best to hide the shameful mark given to him by a woman's hand.

In all her life Lady Doris Studleigh never had such difficulty in controlling an impulse as she had in controlling that.

Then she was recalled to herself by a bow from Lord Vivianne and a look of unqualified wonder on her lover's face.

"Doris," he said, "my dear child, what are you going to do to Lord Vivianne? You look inclined to

ride over him."

"So I am," she replied, with a smile.

But the beauty of the morning had gone for her—there was no more warmth in the sunshine, no more fragrance in the flowers and trees, no music in the birds' song; the sight of that handsome face, with its evil meaning, had destroyed it all, had made her heart sink. Oh! to be away from him, where she should never see him or hear of him again.

"I am tired, Earle," she said.

"Tired so soon!" he replied.

But one look at her told him the words were quite true.

"We will ride back again, Doris. Tell me why do you dislike Lord Vivianne so much?"

"I am not sure that I dislike him," she replied.

"You do, sweet; your face quite changed when you saw him."

"Did it? I do not like him because he teases me so with compliments. I dislike many people; he is no great exception."

Earle laughed.

"It is very unfortunate to admire you, Doris, if admiration brings dislike."

They rode home again, while Colonel Clifford turned with a smile to his companion.

"That looks like a settled case," he said.

"What do you mean by a settled case?" was the irritable reply. "I defy any man to understand his own language in these degenerate days."

"A settled case means that, to all appearances the queen of the season, the *feted*, flattered Lady Doris Studleigh is in love with our young poet, the latest London celebrity."

"A young poet?—who is he?" for suddenly there flashed into his mind the words Doris Brace had so poetically used to him:

"My lover is a gentleman and a poet."

At the time he had thought it idle bombast, intended only to heighten her value in his eyes—yet it might have been true. He looked up with unusual interest.

"Who is he, Clifford?" he repeated.

"I can hardly tell you, except that he is Earle Moray, a great *protege* and favorite of the Duke of Downsbury, of Lord Linleigh, and of the public in general, for he is a charming writer. He is also member for Anderley—he took his seat last week."

"Earle Moray! I am sure I know the name."

"Most English readers do," said Colonel Clifford.

A sudden flash of light seemed to illuminate his mind.

"Earle! Earle! Why that is the name Doris used to murmur in her sleep. She used to dream that Earle was coming—I remember it well. Great Heaven, *it is she*!"

"What is the matter?" asked Colonel Clifford; "you look as though you had seen a ghost."

"So I have, the ghost of my—— Oh, what nonsense I am talking. So that is the young poet; he is a very handsome man. Lady Studleigh is something like the earl. Is it known who her mother was?"

"No. People say that the earl contracted a low marriage before he went abroad, one that he was ashamed to own, therein consists the romance."

"What romance?" asked Lord Vivianne, hurriedly.

"About Lady Doris. The earl, when he was simply Captain Studleigh, married beneath him, went abroad, leaving his daughter to be brought up by some humble friends of his wife. The romance consists, I suppose, in the sudden change in the young lady's fortune, from comparative obscurity to splendor. It might have been an unfortunate thing for the earl, but that the girl turned out to be beautiful, graceful, intelligent, and well bred."

"I have it, by heavens!" cried Lord Vivianne, in a loud voice.

"You have *what*?"

"A—a fly that has been buzzing round me and teasing me half the morning," he replied, confusedly.

"Ah!" said the colonel. "My opinion of you, Lord Vivianne, is not a very complimentary one. I fancy, unless you take better care of your wits, they will leave you. I never saw any one grow so peculiar in all my life. I saw no flies about."

Lord Vivianne made no reply, but went away laughing—it seemed to him now that he held the clew in his hands.

"If I am right," he said to himself, with a bitter sneer, "I will humiliate her: I will lower that magnificent pride of hers; I will change places, and she shall be the wooer. But I must make quite sure first. I will go down to Brackenside this very day."

He kept his word. Much to honest Mark's surprise, when he entered the house that evening, he found a fashionably dressed stranger, bent upon being very agreeable to his wife and daughter.

"You will be surprised to see me," said his wily lordship, "but I was passing through Brackenside and could not help calling. I am quite a stranger. Allow me to introduce myself as Lord Vivianne. You," he continued, holding out his hand to Mark, "are Mr. Brace."

Mark replied in a suitable manner, then sat down, with a look of resignation that highly amused Mattie. If it would rain lords he could not help it. Such wonderful events had happened that Mark felt he should never be surprised again. Then he looked in his lordship's face as though he would fain ask what he wanted there.

"I had the pleasure once—it is some time since—of meeting your daughter, Miss Doris Brace. If she is at home, I should like to see her."

At the first sound of that name, Mark was on the alert. This was just what they had cautioned him about. The earl had bidden him beware of impertinence and curiosity. Mark had passed his word not to speak of Doris' history, and he meant to keep it. "Wild horses," as he expressed it, would not have torn it from him.

"Miss Doris Brace is not at home," he replied, grimly.

"Indeed!" said the stranger. "I am sorry for that; I had relied upon seeing her. Perhaps I may be more fortunate to-morrow."

"I do not think you will," was the reply; "she will not be at home."

"Perhaps, then, the day after?" was the insinuating comment.

"No, nor the day after," replied Mark; "she will not be at home—she is not in Brackenside."

Now my lord had laid all his plans most prudently; he did not intend to compromise himself at all. If the whole affair turned out to be a huge mistake, as it might do, he would not say anything that could prejudice his cause in the least. No harm could possibly arise if he said that he had met Miss Doris Brace; he had seen her at the Castle; and if hardly pushed he could quote that meeting. But the farmer was a very fortress—he returned none but the most simple, vague, and honest answers, saying that she was not at home, she would not be at home, but looking most amiably deaf when any allusion was made to change of fortune.

CHAPTER LXIX.

LORD VIVIANNE PROPOSES A LITTLE DISCUSSION.

"If I may take the liberty," said Lord Vivianne, turning with his most amiable smile to Mrs. Brace, "I should so much like to ask for a cup of tea. I was anxious to see your daughter, so did not wait to take any refreshments at the hotel. It is a great disappointment to me."

"Yes," said Mark, quietly, "it is wonderful how many disappointments we have to bear."

The tea was prepared, and Mrs. Brace's heart was won by praise of the excellent tea, the thick cream, the fresh golden butter, and ripe fruit. Woman-like, her heart secretly inclined to the handsome stranger whom Mark kept so sternly at bay, but where could he have possibly seen Doris? Mark saw symptoms of relenting in his wife's eyes; under pretext of speaking to her about the milking and cheese, he drew her into the larder.

"Now, look here, Patty," he said, "my word is passed, and I do not mean to break it. I told the earl that, no matter who came, who asked, or what was wanted, Doris' name and history should never be told, and it never shall."

"I am sure, Mark," said his obedient wife, "this is a gentleman; there can be no mistake about him."

"Gentleman—oh! There, now, my dear, do not look so frightened! I never swore in my life, not even in the hottest of weather. I am not going to begin now. He may be a gentleman—he is, I do not deny that; but it has nothing to do with the matter. Why does he come here to talk about Doris? What has it to do with him? It means mischief. He shall go away from here as wise as he came—no wiser."

"You are right, Mark," said his wife.

"That is a sensible woman. Yet," added Mark, with shrewd irony, "the sight of his handsome face and the smoothness of his tongue may cause you to betray a secret you have promised to keep, so

you had better keep out of the room."

"I will," said Mrs. Brace. "I have no more wish to talk than you have, Mark. Still he looks so wistful, I will stay away."

"That is the best woman in England," said Mark to himself, as Mrs. Brace closed the door after her. Then he returned to his guest. He apologized for his wife's absence, but Lord Vivianne knew just as well as though Mark had told him, that she was gone lest she should be tempted to talk to him. Mattie wisely imitated her mother's example, leaving her father alone with his guest.

"What a grand old farm this is of yours," said his lordship. "I never saw grounds in such fine condition."

Mark had made up his mind to be urbane and polite, but it was with some little difficulty he refrained from showing his contempt. What did this lord know of farming. Above all, why did he want to flatter Mark Brace?

"I am rather pleased," said the visitor, drawing his chair nearer to the farmer, "that I have a chance of talking quietly to you, without the ladies being present. I wanted that opportunity."

"You have it," said Mark, briefly.

"Yes. I have it, and will try to avail myself of it. I met, as I told you, Miss Doris Brace some time since, and I was deeply impressed by her—most deeply."

"Were you?"

"Yes; and I resolved, if possible, to see her again."

Mark sat silent.

"I quite believed at the time that she was your daughter, but I have heard a strange romance since—terribly strange. May I ask, Mr. Brace, if it be true?"

"No, my lord, you may not ask me—at least, I do not mean that—you may ask what you will, but you must excuse me if I do not reply. The fact is this—if you ask as to the state of my farm, my balance at the bank, my hopes of a crop, I will tell you; but when it comes to the ladies of my family, you must really excuse me if I distinctly and plainly refuse to answer one question concerning them. I am sorry to seem rude, my lord."

But, like every one else who saw him, Lord Vivianne admired Mark Brace. He held out his white, slim hand to touch the farmer's sunburnt one.

"There is no offense, Mr. Brace," he said. "You are an honest man, and I shall think better of all other men for having seen you. If you decline any conversation on the matter, it is, of course, useless for me to offer any explanations."

"Quite useless, my lord; a waste of time."

"Then, thanking you for your hospitality, I may as well go," said his lordship, with a smile.

To which remark the farmer, not knowing what politeness required him to answer, made no answer at all.

Although he was baffled, Lord Vivianne could not feel angry.

"It would be a straightforward world," he said to himself, laughingly, "if all the men in it were like Mark Brace." Still he felt that he had in some measure won a victory—he had found out that, in connection with Doris, there was something to conceal.

He went to Quainton and took up his abode for the night in the Castle Hotel. There he fancied he should be sure to hear something or other. Nor was he mistaken. In the billiard-room the conversation turned upon Earle Moray—they were very proud of him, they said that Lindenholm had given to England one of her finest poets—they boasted to each other of having known him, of having spoken to him; they talked of his election for Anderley; there had been no bribery—all had been open as the day. Yes, he had been returned almost without opposition. They spoke of Lord Linleigh's interest in him, and then one or two of the wisest among them told how he was to marry Lord Linleigh's daughter, the beautiful girl who, for some reason or other, had been brought up at Brackenside. It was impossible to keep such a secret quiet; some few in Quainton knew, and others guessed it.

Lord Vivianne listened without a comment, the veins in his forehead swelled, his face flushed a hot crimson flush, his hands trembled. It was a victory he had hardly expected to win.

Then he muttered to himself something that sounded like a fierce oath:

"She shall pay for it," he said to himself. "Madly as I love her, I will not spare her. When I have humbled her pride, I will worship her and marry her; not until then. So it was she, all the time; she looked into my eyes without recognition; she dared me, braved me, laughed at me. She shall suffer. She is the most magnificent and dauntless creature I ever beheld; she is grand enough for a Charlotte Corday, a Joan of Arc. By Heaven! how many girls would have come to me crying, praying that I would keep their secret; she laughs at me, defies me. I will repay her!"

His whole soul was torn between passionate love and passionate anger; at one time he felt inclined to weep at her feet, to pray and beseech her to love him, to be his wife; at another time to feel that he must upbraid her with her perfidy, her falsity, her deceit. Which spirit would master him when he stood in her presence he hardly knew; it would depend upon herself. If she were defiant, so should he be; if she were gentle, he would be the same. Of one thing he was quite determined—do, say what she might, she should be his wife. It would be a most dishonorable thing to threaten to hold her secret over her; but, if she compelled him, he would do it. No thought of pity came into his mind, but he wondered much. That news—the news of her father's succession to the earldom, and his return home—must have reached her while she was in Florence with him. No one even knew where he was; how, then, could she learn it.

It struck him that was the reason she had left him; he had not thought of that before; it was because this news came to her, and she would not be found with him. But who could have told her?—that was the puzzle. Some one must have gone straight from England to Florence. The more he thought of it the more he was puzzled.

He felt quite certain that on the morning he left her to secure her opera box, and to purchase flowers for her, she knew nothing of it. He had left her by the river-side; when he returned she was gone. During that interval, short as it was, some one must have found her, have told her, and brought her to England. Who could that some one be?

Not Earle, surely not Earle, her lover—surely not he! "He would have been more likely to kill her than to bring her home if he had found her with me," he said to himself.

He was keen enough, but it never occurred to him that she had the skill to deceive Earle as well.

He returned by the early train to London; he should be in time then, he said, to give her a morning call. He smiled to himself as he thought of her confusion. He reached Hyde House when the earl and countess had just driven to a fashionable *dejeuner*, and Lady Doris was left alone; she desired it should be so; she wanted time to arrange her thoughts, to recover herself; and they, believing in her plea of fatigue, had been quite willing to leave her. She had made up her mind, no matter what it cost her, not to see Lord Vivianne again. It would be easy to manage it; she would decline all invitations on the plea of ill health, and she would refuse to receive visitors at home. Strict orders had been given to that effect--the servants understood that their young lady was tired, and would see no one, except, as a matter of course, Mr. Moray.

She believed herself quite safe; that morning Earle had promised to spend with her, and they would arrange about their wedding and the honeymoon that was never to end.

She had dressed herself so prettily for Earle—she went to the conservatory intending, there, to spend the morning with him. She walked among the flowers, singing in a soft, low voice to herself; it would all soon be over, she should so soon be away from London, where her terrible secret seemed to have taken bodily shape. She should so soon be safe in her own home in Linleigh; above all, she should soon be Earle's wife.

"Earle's wife—how he loves me!" thought the girl, "how true and good and noble he is, my Earle!"

Then a shadow fell over the brightness of the flowers. She raised her eyes, believing it was he, and they fell on the smiling face of Lord Vivianne.

For one instant she looked at him spell-bound, fascinated, as one sees a fluttering bird charmed by a snake. Her heart gave one great bound.

"He knows me!" she thought, "and he is come to tell me so!"

How he gained admittance matters not; how he bribed a servant, who afterward lost his place for taking the bribe, matters not.

He was there, and in the contemptuous insolence of his smile, in the expression of his face, she read that no evasion would be of service to her. Still she did not lose her self-possession.

"How did you obtain admittance, my lord?" she asked, imperiously.

"Oh, Dora, Dora! I have found you. Did you really think you would deceive me for long? I have found you; and now, if you please, we will discuss matters in a proper business-like form."

CHAPTER LXX.

THE PRICE OF A SECRET.

He went one step nearer to her and looked at her with an evil smile; his heart was full of passion—half intense love, half furious anger.

"You thought to deceive me," he said, and the breath came like hot flame from his lips. "You thought to blind and dupe me, but I know you now—I have known you all along, though I could not believe the evidence of my own senses."

He never forgot the regal grace with which she drew her slight frame to its utmost height, the

anger, the haughty pride that flashed from her eyes.

"I do not understand you," she replied; "and I repeat my question; when I gave orders that I should be denied to all visitors, how dare you enter here?"

"It is late, Lady Doris," he said, "too late for that kind of thing now, I repeat that I know you—to the rest of the world you may be Lady Doris Studleigh, to me you are simply the girl who lived with me and ran away from me."

She looked at him; if a glance from those proud eyes could have slain him, he would have lain that instant dead at her feet. He continued:

"You may deny it, you may continue to carry on the same concealment, the same deceit, but it will be all in vain; I know you, and I know you for what you are. You can say anything you please, if you think it advisable to waste words; I repeat that it will be in vain." She grew white, even to the lips, as she listened to the insolent words. "I felt sure—convinced of your identity from the very moment I saw you at the opera," he continued. "I watched you then; I have watched you ever since."

Her white lips opened, but all sound died away from them—he heard nothing.

"I have admired your talent for acting," he continued; "it is a grand one. It is ten thousand pities that you are not upon the stage; you would be its brightest ornament. I was not wholly, but half deceived, by your superb nonchalance; then I determined to find out the truth for myself. I have done so."

He waited to see if she would utter one word of denial, one word of explanation. She stood before him—pale, beautiful, silent as a marble statue.

"I have tracked you," he said, triumphantly. "I can tell you the whole story of your life; how you lived as a child at Brackenside; how you carried on a pretty little love affair with your poet and gentleman, until I saw you; how you went to Florence with me, in total ignorance of your true origin; how on the morning I left you by the river side, some one came from England, told you the true story of your birth, and brought you back here. I have been to Brackenside; I am not speaking without proof."

If she could have spoken, she would have told him that no one at Brackenside would ever betray her; she would have liked to cast his words back in his teeth, but the strength to speak was no longer hers.

"You thought then of being very clever. If you had never heard the true story of your birth, you would have been content to abide with me all the days of your life—you would have thought your lot a brilliant one. But you were too clever, Dora; you thought to escape and to live as though you had never heard of me. It could not be done. Did you speak?"

He might as well ask the question, for a sound that resembled no ordinary, no human sound, came from her lips. He went on:

"Why were you not frank and honest with me, Dora?—why did you not await my return, and tell me?—why did you not trust me? Do you know what I should have done if you had so trusted me? I should have said that my proposition to you had been made under a great mistake, not knowing your true name; and I should have released you then and them from all ties that bound you to me."

She saw her mistake then; saw what short-sighted, miserable policy hers had been; but it was all too late.

"Surely," he continued, "you had lived with me long enough to know that I had some semblance of a gentleman, some faint notions of honor. There is no need to sneer, my lady; men do not reckon honor when they deal with what you were then."

"I know it," she cried, with sudden bitterness, in a voice that had no resemblance to her own.

"Why did you not trust me! I cannot—I shall never forgive you for the way in which you deserted me. Had you left me one line—only one line—telling me your true parents had claimed you, Doris, it would have saved all this."

"I had not time."

"Because you did not wish to make it. Even suppose that, to avoid detection, you had hurried from Florence, you might surely have sent me a line from England; even if you could not trust me with your name and address, you might have done that."

"I see it now. I might, nay, I should have done it. Will that admission satisfy you?"

"There is nothing in it to satisfy me," he said, angrily; "you had no right to desert me as you did, to treat me as you did—none in the world. Do you know what you cost me? Do you know that I went mad over losing you? that I searched for you day after day, month after month, hating my life itself because you no longer formed part of it! Do you know that the loss of you changed me from a good-tempered man into a fiend?—can you realize that, Lady Doris Studleigh?"

"No," she replied, "I cannot."

"It is true. Fair, bright, frivolous women like you cannot realize a man's love—they cannot even estimate it! And strange—oh! strange to say—women like you win strong, passionate love, for which the pure and noble of your sex seek in vain."

Alas! that she had given him the right to speak thus to her—that she had placed herself in the power of such a man! Oh! fatal, foolish, and wicked sin! Yet true to herself, true to her own light, frivolous nature, it was not the bitter sin she repented so much as its discovery.

He drew nearer to her, and placed one hand on her arm.

"Do you know, Doris," he said, "that when you left me I had begun, even then, to love you with such a passionate love that every pulse of my heart was wrapped up in it."

She shook his hand from her as though there were contamination in his touch.

"I did not know it. I do not believe it. You never loved me—you have loved nothing on earth one half so dearly as you have loved yourself!"

His face grew dark with anger.

"Remembering how entirely you are in my power," he said, "I ask you, is it wise to anger me?"

"You never loved me," she repeated; "Earle loved me, and would have died any day to save my fair name! You never loved me, you loved yourself!"

"I repeat it, I loved you with a passion so terrible, so fierce, so violent, it frightened me! I loved you so, that I would have lost wealth, fortune, position—ah! life itself—for you!"

Her white lips smiled scornfully; that calm, proud, scorn drove him beside himself.

"You have been some time in discovering it," she said.

"That is your mistake," he replied; "do you know, Doris, I swear what I am saying is true. Do you know why I was so gay, so happy, so light of heart on the day you left me? It was because my love had beaten down my pride, and on that very evening I had resolved upon asking you to be my wife."

"I do not believe it," she cried.

"It is true; I swear it on the faith and honor of a gentleman. I swear it on the word of a man."

"I should need a stronger oath than that," she said.

"I swear it then by your own falseness, and by your own deceit; can any oath be stronger than that? On that very evening I had resolved upon asking you to be my wife. I was determined to make our union legal. I loved you so that I could not live without you."

She made no reply for one minute, but looked steadily at him: then she said:

"I do thank Heaven that I have been spared the degradation of becoming your wife."

"Yet you were content to be my companion," he said.

Her face flushed hotly at the words.

"I have lost you, how long, Dora, how many months? Do you think my love has grown less in that time? Do you think it has faded or grown cold. If you imagine so, you do no justice to your own marvelous beauty; you do no justice to your own fascination; a thousand times no! It is a burning torrent now that carries all before it: it is a tempest that will know no abatement—Dora, you had lost your usual shrewdness when you thought that absence would cure such love as mine."

"My name is Lady Studleigh, not Dora," she said proudly. "Once for all, Lord Vivianne, your love does not in the least interest me."

"You will have to take an interest in it," he replied; "I swear, for the future, you shall know no other love."

"I will never know yours," she replied.

He laughed contemptuously.

"It is no use, Dora," he said; "you must really excuse me; I cannot help enjoying my triumph; I would not laugh if I could help it, but, my dear Dora, I *cannot* help it. Did you ever see a fly in a spider's web? Did you ever watch it struggle and fight and strive to escape, while the spider, one could fancy, was shaking his filmy sides with laughter? Have you ever seen that terrible phenomenon in natural history? You, my poor Dora, are the helpless little fly, I am the spider. It is not an elegant comparison, but it is perfectly true; you are in my power completely, thoroughly, and nothing can take you from me."

She looked at him quite calmly, her courage was rising, now that the first deadly shock had passed away.

"Perhaps," she said, "you will tell me what you want. Spare me any further conversation with you; it does not interest me. Tell me, briefly as you can, what you want."

"What do I want?" he repeated.

"Yes, just that—neither more nor less—what do you want? I own you have me in your power, I own that you hold a secret of mine. What is to be its price? I cannot buy your silence with money. You are a gentleman, a man of honor, having my fair name in your power—what shall you charge me for keeping it? I am anxious to know the price men exact for such secrets as those. You wooed me and won me, after your own honorable fashion—what are you going to exact now as the price of your love and my mad folly? I was vain, foolish, untruthful, but, after all, I was an innocent girl when you knew me first. What shall be the price of my innocence? Oh, noble descendant of noble men—oh, noble heritor of a noble race. Speak—let me hear!"

Her taunts stung him almost to fury; his face grew livid with rage; yet, the more insolent she, the more deeply he loved her; the more scornful she, the deeper and wilder grew his worship of her.

"I will tell you the price," he said; "I will make you my wife. Consent to marry me, and I will swear to you, by heaven itself, that I will keep your secret faithfully, loyally, until I die."

"I *cannot* marry you," she replied; "I do not love you. I cannot help it, if you are angry. I do not even like you. I should be most wretched and miserable with you, for I loathe you. I will never be your wife."

"All those," he replied, slowly, "are objections that you must try to overcome."

"What if I tell you I love some one else?" she said.

"I should pity him, really pity him, from the depths of my heart; but, all the same, I should say *you must be my wife*!"

She longed to tell him that she loved and meant to marry Earle, but she was afraid even to mention his name.

"I shall conquer all your objections in time," he said. "It is nothing to me that you say you dislike me; it is even less that you say you like another."

But he never even thought that she really liked Earle. Had she not run away from him?

CHAPTER LXXI.
THE COWARD'S THREAT.

"That is the first part of your declaration," said Lady Doris, with the calm of infinite contempt; "if I will promise to be your wife, you will promise to marry me. What if I refuse?"

"You are placing a very painful alternative before me," he replied.

"Never mind the pain, my lord; we will waive that. I wish to know the alternative."

"If you will marry me I will keep your secret, Lady Doris Studleigh, faithfully, until death."

"Then I clearly, distinctly, and firmly refuse to marry you. What then?"

"In that case I shall be compelled to take the most disagreeable measures—I shall be compelled to hold your secret as a threat over you, if you refuse to be my wife. I tell you, quite honestly, that I will make you the laughing-stock of all London. You—fair, beautiful, imperial—you shall be an object of scorn; men shall laugh at you, women turn aside as you pass by. Even the most careless and reckless shall refuse to receive you—shall consider you out of the pale. I will tell the whole world, if you compel me to do it, what you were to me in Florence; I will tell the handsome earl, your father, whose roof in that case will no longer shelter you. I will tell your proud, high-bred step-mother—the haughty duchess who presented you at court—nay, even the queen herself, she who values a woman's good name far above all worldly rank."

"You would do all that?" she said.

"Yes, just as soon as I would look at you."

"And you call that honor?"

"No; it is, on the contrary, most dishonorable. Do not imagine that I seek to deceive myself. It would be about the most dishonorable thing any person could do; in fact, nothing could be more base; I grant that. But, if you drive a man mad with love, what can he do? You compel me to take the step, or I would not take it."

She could not grow paler; her face was already ghastly white; but from her eyes there shot one glance that might, from its anger and its fire, have struck him blind.

"You would not spare me," she said, "because it was you yourself who led me to ruin."

"I love you so madly," he said, "that I cannot spare you at all."

"Have you thought," she asked, "what, if you do this deed, the world will say of you and to you?

Have you weighed this well?"

"I am indifferent," he said; "I care for nothing on earth but winning you."

"Do you realize that in destroying me you destroy yourself; that you will make yourself more hated and despised than any man ever was before? Do you not see that?"

"I repeat that nothing interests me save winning you, Dora; I am quite willing to be destroyed with you."

"What will the world say to a man who deliberately destroys and ruins a girl as you did me?"

"My dearest Dora, the world hears such stories every day and, I am afraid, rather admires the heroes of them."

"What does it say, then, of cowardly men who, having won such a victory, boast of it?"

"I own that the world looks askance on such a man, and very properly too. It is a base, cowardly thing to do. What other course is left me? You drive me to it: I have no wish to play such a contemptible part; I have no wish to boast of a victory—I shall hate myself for doing it; but what else is there for it? Listen, once and for all. Dora—I cannot help calling you by the old familiar name—I will have you for my wife: I will marry you; nothing, I swear, except death, shall take you from me. I will make you happy, I will see that every desire of your heart is fulfilled; but I swear you shall be my wife. There is no escape—no alternative; either that or disgrace, degradation, and ruin. Do not think I shall hesitate from any fear of ruin to myself; I would ruin myself to-morrow to win you. You might as well try to stem the force of a tide as to alter my determination."

She saw that she was conquered; mortifying, humiliating as it was, she was conquered—there was no help for her.

She stood quite still for one moment; then she said slowly:

"Will you give me time?"

His face flushed hotly; his triumph was coming. A smile played round his lips and brightened his eyes.

"Time? Yes; you can have as much time as you like. You see the solution plainly, do you not? Marry me, and keep your fair name, your high position; defy me, and lose it all. You see it plainly?"

"Yes, there is no mistake about it—you have made it most perfectly plain," she said, in a low, passionless voice. "I quite understand you. Give me time to think it over—I cannot decide it hurriedly."

"What time do you require?" he asked. "I shall not be willing to wait very long."

"It is June now," she continued; "you cannot complain if I say give me until the end of August."

"It shall be so, Dora. Will you give me your hand upon it?"

"No," she replied, "I will not give you my hand. Come at the end of August, and I will give you your answer."

"I shall not be deprived of the happiness of seeing you until then, Dora?"

"I cannot say; I will not be followed, I will not be watched. I claim my perfect freedom until then."

"You shall have it. Do not think worse of me than I deserve, Dora. If I had found you married, I would not have spoken, I would never even have hinted at the discovery; but you are not married, darling, nor, while I live, shall any man call you wife except myself."

How bitterly at that moment she regretted not having been married! If she had known—if she had only known, he should have found her the wife of Earle!

"I have no wish to injure you, or to do anything except make life pleasant for you; but my love for you has mastered me, it has conquered me. You must be mine!"

Such passion shone in his eyes, gleamed in his face, that she shrunk back half frightened. He laughed, as he said:

"It is one thing, you see, Dora, to light a fire, another to extinguish it."

"Now, will you leave me, Lord Vivianne? You have placed the pleasing alternative very plainly before me; we have agreed upon a time until you come for my answer—that will be at the end of August. Until then your own good sense will show you the proper course to pursue; you need neither seek nor avoid me."

He bowed.

"I hope, Lady Studleigh, you will have overcome your great objection to my presence before you see me again. I will now go. Let me give you one word of warning. A desperate man is not to be trifled with; if you attempt to escape me, if you place yourself in any way legally out of my reach, you shall answer to me, not only with your fair name, but with your life! You hear?"

"I hear," she replied, calmly, "but I do not come of a race that heeds threats. Good-morning, my lord."

"Dora," he said, "for the sake of old times—of the old love—will you not give me one kiss?"

"I would rather see you dead!" was the reply, given with an angry bitterness she could not control.

He laughed aloud.

"I shall soon see that pretty spirit humbled," he said. "Good-morning, my lady."

And the next minute he was gone.

She stood for some little time where he had left her. Such fiery passion and anger surging in her heart as almost drove her mad. Her face flushed crimson with it, her eyes flamed, she twisted her white hands until the gemmed rings made great dents in them. She hated him with such an intensity of hatred, that she would have laughed over his death. Her graceful figure shook with its heavy strain of anger—her lips parted with a low, smothered cry.

"I pray Heaven to curse him!" she cried, "with a terrible life and a terrible death; to send him a thousandfold the torture he has given to me! I—I wish I could kill him!"

In the might of her wrath she trembled as a leaf upon a tree. She raised her right hand to heaven.

"I swear I will never marry him," she said. "Let him threaten, punish, disgrace, degrade me as he will, I swear that I will never marry him. I will lose love, happiness, wealth, position, nay even life first; but I swear also that I will torture him and pay him for all he has made me suffer!"

She walked to and fro, never even seeing the brilliant blossoms and the glossy leaves, trampling the fragrant flowers she gathered underfoot, moaning with a low, piteous wail. It was too cruel—too hard. She had sinned—yes, she knew that—sinned greatly; but surely the punishment was too hard. Others sinned and prospered; why was she so heavily stricken? She was young when she sinned—careless, ignorant, heedless; now she was to lose all for it. She had beauty that made all men her slaves; she had wealth such as she had never dreamed of; she had one of the highest positions in the land; she had, above all, the love of Earle, the love and fealty of Earle. Now, in punishment for this one sin, she must lose all. Would Heaven spare her?

Was it of any use in this her hour of dire need, praying? Why, in all her life—her brief, brilliant life—she had never prayed; was it of any use her beginning now? She did not even remember the simple words of the little prayer she had been used to say with Mattie at her mother's knee—it was all forgotten. She knew there was a God in heaven, although she had always laughed and mocked at religion, deeming it only fit for tiresome children and old women; surely there was more in it than this.

She knelt down and stretched out her hands with a yearning look, as though some voice in the skies would surely speak to her; then she could not remember how it happened, the fragrance of the flowers seemed to grow too strong for her, the glass roof, the green, climbing plants, the brilliant blossoms, seemed to fall on her and crush her. With a long, low cry she fell with her face on the ground, a streaming mass of radiant white and golden hair.

It was there, that, going in an hour afterward, Earle found her, and raising her from the floor, thought at first that she was dead.

Great was the distress, great the consternation; servants came hurrying in, the doctor was sent for. The earl and the countess returning, were driven half frantic by the sight of that white face and silent figure. It hardly reassured them to hear that it was only a fainting fit.

"Brought on by what?" asked the earl, in a fever of anxiety.

"Nothing more than the reaction after too great physical fatigue," replied the doctor.

"The Lady Doris looks stronger than she really is; the best advice I can give is, that she should leave London at once, and have some weeks of perfect rest in the country. Medicine is of no use."

Lady Linleigh quite agreed in this view of the subject, and the earl declared impetuously that they should go at once—to-morrow if she is better, he said, "I should not like such another fright."

That evening when Lady Doris lay on the little couch in Lady Linleigh's boudoir, and Earle sat by her side, he said to her:

"What caused that sudden illness, my darling? Did anything frighten you?"

"No; I was only tired, Earle."

"Tired! I am beginning to dread the word. Do you know what they told me, Doris?"

"No," she replied, looking at him with frightened eyes; "what was it?"

"One of the servants said she was quite sure that she had heard some one talking to you in the conservatory; but when I went in you were quite alone. Had any one been there?"

"What nonsense," she cried evasively; time and experience had taught her that it was foolish to

risk the truth recklessly.

"I thought it was a mistake," said loyal Earle. "Who would be likely to be with you there, when you had reserved the morning for me?"

She closed her tired eyes, and said to herself how thankful she should be when all this was over.

CHAPTER LXXII.
THE EARL RELUCTANTLY ASSENTS.

Three days later they were once more at Linleigh Court. The earl would hear of no opposition; he ruthlessly broke all engagements, sacrificed all interest and pleasure; his daughter's health, he said, must be paramount with him, and so it was. The only drawback was that Earle could not go; he might run down for two or three days, but until Parliament broke up he could not be away for very long. The earl and countess were amused to see how both lovers felt the separation.

"Thank Heaven!" said Lady Estelle. "Ah! Ulric, you do not know how I thank Heaven that our child loves Earle."

"Did you ever doubt it, my lovely, sentimental darling?" said Lord Linleigh.

"I was not sure; I was always more or less afraid," said the countess. "She spoke so lightly of love; but now she seems very fond of Earle."

"I do not think the woman is born who could help loving Earle," said Lord Linleigh; "he is the finest, noblest man I know. She shows her good taste in loving him."

"She will be very happy," said Lady Estelle, with tears in her eyes. "She will be one of the happiest women in the world, and I am so grateful for it, Ulric; it might have been all so different for the poor child."

Lord Linleigh looked thoughtfully at her.

"Do you know, Estelle, I have an idea that Doris is very much changed? Have you noticed it?"

"She seemed to me much fonder of Earle, and not so strong as she was; I have not noticed any other difference."

"Then it must be my fancy. She has seemed to me more thoughtful, at times even sad, then strangely reckless. A strange idea has come to me—do you think she has any secret connected with that former lonely life of hers?"

"I do not think so," replied Lady Estelle, growing very pale.

"That was a strange notion of yours, my dear, sending her there. Still, those good people seem to have done their best for her."

"I believe," said Lady Estelle, hastily, "that she was quite as safe as she would have been under my own roof. I think I have noticed what you mean—a nervous kind of uncertainty and dread: but I am quite sure it is not because of any secret. Ulric; it is rather because she has been overtaxed. I remember speaking to her about it some time since. She will soon be well now."

Lady Estelle was right. Away from that terrible incubus, the dread of meeting the man she feared and detested; away from his baneful influence, she speedily recovered health and spirits; the dainty color flushed back in her lovely face, her eyes grew radiant, sweet snatches of song came from her lips; she was once more the bright, gay Doris, whose winsome smiles and charms had won all hearts. Lady Linleigh laughed at her fears, and for a short time all was happiness at Linleigh Court.

Earle came down for a few days, and then the wedding-day was fixed. It was to be on the tenth of August, and when the wedding was over they were to go right away until Lady Doris had recovered her usual strength.

It was not until afterward that Earle remembered how strange it was that she should have hurried on the wedding; when he came to think it over, he found that it was so. It was Doris who planned and arranged everything; he had but acquiesced, he had not been the prime mover in it. So it was settled—the tenth of August; not many more weeks of suspense and anxiety, not much more dread. Her revenge and her love would be gratified alike. She should be Earle's wife on the tenth; on the twentieth, when Lord Vivianne came, she should be far away with Earle to protect her; Earle to shield her. It would be useless to pursue her then; even if he did his worst, and betrayed her, she did not care, her position would be secure. Oh, it would be such glorious revenge, to find her married, after all his solemn oaths that she should be his wife, and belong to no other—either to him or to death!

"I will deceive him to the very last," she thought. "I will delude him until the very hour which sees me Earle's wife."

She bent all her energies to this. It was easy enough to win from Earle a promise of total silence;

it was not quite so easy to win that same promise from the earl and countess. She did win it, though.

On that same evening that Earle left, a superb night in June, when the stars were gleaming in the skies, and the night air was heavy with sweet odors, Lord and Lady Linleigh had gone out into the grounds. The evening was far too beautiful to be spent indoors, and she followed them. They were sitting under the great drooping beeches, watching the loveliness of that fair summer night.

The same thought struck both of them as Doris came to them, that neither starlight nor moonlight had ever fallen on so fair a figure as this. Her long dress of white sweeping silk trailed over the long grass, she wore fragrant white lilies on her breast and in her golden hair; she might have been the very spirit of starlight, from her fair, picturesque loveliness. She went up to them, and bending down to kiss Lady Linleigh's hand, she knelt on the grass at their feet.

"You are alone," she said, "the two arbiters of my destiny. I am so glad, for I have a favor—a grace to ask."

"It is granted before it is asked," said the countess.

But Lord Linleigh laughed.

"No," he said, "that would hardly be wise; we cannot allow that."

She raised her face to his, and he saw how earnest it was in its expression of pleading and prayer.

"Dear papa," she said, gently, "you must not refuse me this."

"I will not, my darling, if it be in reason," he replied.

"Earle told me that you and he had arranged our wedding-day for the tenth of August," she continued. "Dear papa, dear Lady Linleigh, I want you to promise that it shall be kept a profound secret from the whole world."

"My dear Doris!" cried the countess.

"It is quite impossible," said the earl. "Besides, I see no reason for such a thing. Why should you want it so?"

"It *is* possible," she said. "I have been with you long enough to know that with you everything is possible. *Why* I wish it done, is my whim, my folly—my secret, if you will."

"I really do not see——" began the earl; but she laid one soft, white hand on his lips.

"Let me show you, papa. Let me hear your objections, and vanquish them one by one."

"To begin with—your train of bridesmaids, they must be invited."

"Papa," she interrupted, "I want none, I will have none, only Mattie, my foster-sister—let her come, no one else."

"Then the marriage settlements?" said the perplexed earl.

"They can be arranged with all possible secrecy, if you only say one word to your lawyers."

"But the bishop, and the marriage. My dear Doris, it is impossible, impracticable, ridiculous!"

"I am sure that you will be sorry, papa, if you refuse me."

And something in her voice struck the earl with keen anxiety.

"Have you any secret, sensible reason for what you ask, Doris?" he said, gravely, the old suspicion that there had been something strange in his daughter's life coming back to him with double force.

"I have my own fancy, papa; do not thwart it, do not oppose me now that I am so soon to leave you. You will always be pleased to think how much of my own way you have given me in this instance."

"Let her do as she will, Ulric," said Lady Linleigh; "it would be cruel to refuse her."

"Listen to my idea first, papa. This is the sort of wedding I should like—you, of course, can please yourself whether you let me have it or not. I should like no one except Mattie to know anything about it in advance of the day. I should like my wedding *trousseau* to be as magnificent and grand as you please, all ordered, arranged, and prepared, to be kept in London ready for me, so that I may select what I want to take abroad with me, then I should like Earle to come on the eighth, as though he were coming for an ordinary visit; on the ninth, I should be quite willing for you to tell the servants in the house, so that wedding favors, flowers, and a wedding breakfast can be prepared; then, early on the morning of the tenth, I should like to drive over to the old church at Anderley with Earle, Mattie, and you—Lady Linleigh, if she will come—no one else; then to be married in that pretty church, where the morning sun always shines so brightly, and then go away with Earle. No pealing of bells, no jewels, no showers of wedding presents, no pomp, no bishop, with assistant ministers, no ceremony, no grandeur. That is just what I should like, papa."

"I never heard such an extraordinary idea in all my life," said the earl. "I do not know what to answer. I should like you to have your own way; but such a wedding for an earl's daughter is unheard of."

"Yes; it is different to Hanover Square, miles of white satin and lace, bishops, bells, jewels, carriages, friends, and all that kind of thing. I know it is quite different; but let me have my own way, papa, please. Pray intercede for me, Lady Linleigh."

The countess turned to her husband.

"Let it be so, Ulric," she said.

He was silent. He would have refused altogether, but for the uncomfortable suspicion haunting him that she had some painful though hidden motive, and that it was connected with that past life of hers, of which he knew so little; but for that, he would have laughed the whole idea to scorn.

"My dear Doris, I cannot understand. Most ladies look upon their wedding as the crowning ceremony of their lives, the grandest event that can possibly happen to them—the very opportunity for a display of splendor and magnificence."

"I know they do," she replied, gently. Then, as her hands clasped his, he felt her shudder, as though cold. She raised her face, and kissed him; she clasped her white arms round his neck. "Papa," she cried, "although I am your own child, I have never been much to you; the best part of my life has been spent away from you; I have never seen my mother's face; she is not here to plead to you for me. I shall have gone away from you, and altogether, you will have known but little of me. I hope Heaven will send you other children to love and bless you; but, papa, do not refuse my prayer. In the after years, when I am far away, and perhaps a fair-haired son stands pleading where I stand pleading now, you will like to remember that you yielded to my prayer—that you granted me the greatest favor it was in your power to grant."

The earl looked down. Lady Linleigh was weeping bitterly.

"You hear, Ulric!" she said, in a low, passionate voice; "you hear! She says she has no mother to plead for her! Let me plead in the mother's place! Do what she asks!"

"I never did anything so unwillingly in all my life," said the earl; "it is unheard of, inconsistent, ridiculous in the highest degree; but I cannot refuse the prayer of my wife and child; it must be as you wish."

He saw, even in the starlight, the expression of relief that came over the beautiful, restless face.

"You promise, then," said Doris, "and you too, Lady Linleigh, that you will not tell to any creature living, except Mattie Brace, when I am to marry, whom I am to marry, or anything about it?"

"I promise," said Lady Estelle.

"And I too," repeated the earl, "although it is sorely against my better judgment, my will, my common sense, and everything else."

"Never mind, papa," said Lady Doris, "you have made me happy."

But even then, as she spoke, the tragedy was looming darkly over her.

CHAPTER LXXIII.
THE COUNTESS BECOMES CURIOUS.

"We ought to be very much flattered," said Lord Linleigh, with a smile, as he laid an open letter before his wife. "When did we leave London?—in June. It is only the middle of July, yet some of our friends are growing weary for us."

It was such a July morning as makes the dwellers in cities ill with envy—when the earth hangs like a huge, shining jewel in the firmament of heaven—a morning when life seems the greatest luxury, when to breathe and to live is a blessing without alloy. The sky was dark blue, without even one little white cloud to obscure it; it looked so far off, so much further than when low-lying clouds touch the earth. The sun was golden bright, warm without intense heat; and the air—ah! well, it would require a poet to tell how balmy and soft it was—how it came over the meadows laden with the breath of sweet clover—how it came from the woods with the odor of wild hyacinths—how it came from the gardens with the fragrance of rose and of lily, with the fragrance of every flower that blows. Then it was filled with soft, delicious thrills—with the cooing of the ring-doves, and the song of the lark. Nature was in her happiest mood.

The earl and countess had come down early to breakfast—the long windows were open—the perfumed air came in. They smiled, as among the letters they saw one from Earle to Doris.

"He writes every day," said Lord Linleigh.

"Quite right," said Lady Estelle. "I like to see lovers deeply in love."

They smiled again, when, fresh and fair as the morning itself, Doris came down. Her face flushed when she saw the letter; a sweet, dewy brightness came into her eyes; she laid it aside as though waiting for time.

"Read your letter, Doris," said Lady Linleigh, and the girl opened it.

Ah! well, perhaps life does not hold a greater pleasure than reading a passionate love-letter on a bright summer morning. Her dainty color deepened as she read; the light grew brighter in her eyes.

"My love!" thought the girl; "how he loves me."

And with the fragrant breath of the summer morning, with the light of the blue skies, with the song of the birds, there came to her a pang of regret that she was so utterly unworthy of this great pure love, that her soul was so terribly stained by crime. Then, she said to herself that she would atone for it, that she would to the very best of her power make up for it; that she would be so loving, so tender, so true, he should never have cause to regret it. For it was such a love-letter as would have touched any girl's heart; written with the fire of a poet and of a lover. She lost herself in a day-dream, in a golden trance of happiness: it was coming so near, this wedding-day which was to bind her to Earle forever, and free her from all care.

It was Lady Linleigh's voice that roused her, and she was asking:

"What friend is coming—who is coming, Ulric?"

"Lord Vivianne—he does not say how long he intends remaining. There is the letter; read it."

But the countess was preparing a cup of fragrant tea after the fashion she liked best, and Lord Linleigh, seeing that, said:

"I will tell you about it, Estelle. Lord Vivianne says he shall be passing through Anderley on his way to Leeson, and he should very much like to spend a few days with us. I can but answer in the affirmative, I suppose."

"Certainly; it will be a change for you; you have been very quiet lately; we can have a picnic and a dinner-party while he is here."

Lord Linleigh glanced with a shrewd smile at his daughter. It did not seem to him wonderful that his lordship should be passing through Anderley; the only pity was, that it was all in vain. But he did not see his daughter's face, it was turned from him.

The love-letter had fallen from her hands, the golden light had faded from the skies, the beauty of the morning had vanished; her face grew pale, her eyes darkened.

Why was he coming? Whatever might be the reason, it meant mischief to her, she was sure of it. He had promised not to come near her until the end of August, then he was to come for her answer. What was bringing him now?

"I must bear it, I have to live it through," she said to herself, "no matter what it may be."

In a dumb passion of despair, she heard Lady Linleigh ask when he was coming.

"He will be here by the end of the week," said the earl, carelessly; then he laughed a little.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Lady Estelle.

"My dear Estelle, I am just thinking how eagerly you seized upon his coming as an excuse for a little gayety," he replied; "you who assured me so seriously you preferred quiet and solitude."

Lady Estelle blushed.

"I plead guilty, Ulric," she said. "It must be because I am very happy myself that I like to see every one else happy, too."

They both wondered why Lady Doris was so silent.

"It must be from sheer excess of happiness," thought the countess.

Lord Linleigh asked:

"Will you drive with me this morning, Doris, or would you prefer to ride or walk?"

"Will you go with me?" asked Lady Estelle. "I am going to Streathaw."

"No, thank you, papa. Thank you, Lady Linleigh. I am going to spend the morning in the gardens."

"That means writing a long letter to Earle," said Lord Linleigh, with a smile.

She did not contradict him; and Lady Estelle, when she kissed her and bade her good-morning, thought how beautiful it was to be young, happy, and in love.

Doris went out. There was the shade of fragrant trees, the brilliant colors of a thousand flowers; and Doris saw and heard nothing—she was full of despair.

"Why is he coming," she cried, passionately, "just as I was growing so happy, learning to forgot

him and his terrible threats—why is he coming? It is like the serpent stealing into paradise. Ah, Heaven! if I could but undo that unhappy past."

Standing there in the sunshine, with every blessing from heaven lavished upon her—more, according to outward appearances, to be envied than any girl in England—she saw the great canker-worm of her life in its true colors. Sin had spoiled all for her.

Sin! Why, she could remember when, in the innocence of her youth and beauty, she had laughed at the word sin—she had scoffed at it. "What did sin matter?" she had said, to herself; "the only thing was to make the very best of life, to enjoy it with all her power, to grasp its pleasures before they had time to fade." Sin! why it was all sheer nonsense.

Now, when sin had found her out, when its black trail had entered her life and poisoned it—when its consequences, pursuing her, were leading her to shame and disgrace, she began to recognize it for what it was. She said to herself that if she could begin life over again she would be quite different; she would try to be good, like Mattie; she would think less of her own beauty; and if the same temptation came to her again, which had been so artfully offered her once, she would refuse it. She wished with all her heart that she had turned a deaf ear to Lord Vivianne's entreaties. "I *did* know it was wrong," she said to herself, with unusual candor; "I had enough of what was good in me to know that, and I am sorry, really sorry that I did it."

Who knows how much repentance the Father above requires from a soul? Who shall measure His mercy? The terrible tragedy was drawing nearer; and it might be that the sorrow which rose from the poor, weak, vain soul that morning was sufficient to save it.

So she lived the time through until Lord Vivianne came. She was glad that Lady Linleigh had arranged for a little gayety; meeting him alone would have been simply unendurable. As it was, she met him in a drawing-room half-crowded with guests. He found time and opportunity for saying a few words to her:

"How beautiful you look, Dora! I have never seen you looking so well!"

"I should be flattered at pleasing such fastidious taste as yours," she replied.

"Yes, you do look most lovely; those waves of green and white, and the water-lilies in your hair—you look like Undine!"

"Before or after she had found her soul?" she asked, with a mocking smile.

He laughed that low, light laugh for which she hated him.

"I have never quite made up my mind as to whether women have souls or not," he said. "I am inclined to think not; if they have, they certainly make queer use of them."

"Lady Linleigh!" cried the girl, to the countess, who was just passing by, "what do you imagine Lord Vivianne says?"

"I cannot imagine," replied the countess, with a smile.

"He says he is inclined to believe women have no souls; or, if they have, they make queer use of them."

The countess looked slightly shocked.

Lord Vivianne gave one angry look at the spoiled beauty.

"That is a very dreadful opinion to hold, my lord," said Lady Estelle.

"Lady Studleigh is hardly just to me," he replied. "She tells you what I say, but she does not tell you, although she knows, *what led me to form that opinion*."

The countess looked quickly from one to the other with a grave intentness that did not escape either. There was something more than mere badinage in this—something which she did not at all understand. Then Lady Doris saw that she had made a mistake in trying to expose him—she must not play with edged tools.

Lady Linleigh left them, not feeling quite satisfied. Why should he speak in that contemptuous manner of women, to a woman who was so young, so beautiful? It was not chivalrous—it was not even gentlemanly. And Lady Doris' manner puzzled her too; it was as though she wished to expose Lord Vivianne, to make others think evil of him. She could not forget the little circumstance.

"Yet it must be a fancy of mine," she thought. "They have so seldom met, they know so little of each other, there can be nothing but the most commonplace acquaintance between them."

Still it made her curious, and she purposely selected Lord Vivianne to take her down to dinner, in order that she might, after a little diplomatic fashion of her own, question him.

"How do you think Lady Studleigh is looking?" she asked him, when they had a chance for a few quiet words. "She was not well at all when we left London."

"I think her looking as beautiful as it is possible for any one to look," he replied, "and as well."

"I am glad you think so. It must have been a great privation for her to leave London in the very

midst of the season, or, I should say, in the midst of a brilliant *finale*."

"Yes; I do not remember, of late years, any one who created such a furor as Lady Studleigh," was his reply.

"You met her often during the season?"

"Yes, I met her very frequently; it was impossible to go much into society without doing so—she was an unusual favorite."

The countess saw plainly that if he admired her he was not going to say so; she would not be able to get at his real opinion. Yet the very caution of his words and manner, the restraint in his speech, the guarded expression of his face, all told her that she was right in her half-formed fancy. There was something unusual—either on his part or hers—which she could not make out. She would not devote more time to him that evening; the guests were numerous, and must be entertained.

The gentlemen did not remain long in the dining-room, and the drawing-room presented a beautiful picture; the lamps were all lighted and shone like huge pearls among the countless flowers; the gay dresses and shining jewels of the ladies seemed to shine with unwonted luster. The sweet summer evening was so warm and so fragrant, the rich silken hangings were drawn, and the long windows were open, and from them the countess saw a fairyland of moonlight and flowers.

"I wish we had some music," said the earl; "it only wants that to complete the enchantment. Doris, will you sing?"

She went to the piano, and the rich voice floated through the room. Many who saw her then never forgot her; the green and white dress floating round her, the water-lilies in her golden hair, a flush on the beautiful face, while the rich voice poured out such a strain of melody as few had ever heard equaled.

They who saw her then, and knew what followed, did not forget the picture.

CHAPTER LXXIV.
A LAST VAIN APPEAL.

"The night is so fine," said the earl, "you young people would enjoy a short time on the lawn. Look at those lilies asleep in the moonlight—go and wake them. Then we will have the card-tables. That is as it should be—cards for the old, moonlight for the young."

That was the very chance Lord Vivianne had been longing for; he did not think he could bear suspense much longer. Now he was sure of a *tete-a-tete*. Here, in these rooms, half-filled with people, it had been an easy matter to avoid him, or to make others join in the conversation; it would not be as easy out there in the moonlight.

Lady Linleigh, who had never for one moment relaxed her keen, untiring watch, saw him go up to Lady Doris, and speak a few words to her in a low voice. At first the beautiful face flushed hotly, and the bright eyes seemed to flash out a proud defiance. Then there was an expression of half-startled fear, followed by one of submission most unusual in her.

"There is a mystery," she said to herself; "there is something between him and my darling!"

The mother's first impulse was to screen her, to help her. Lady Linleigh crossed the room and went to her.

"Doris," she said, in a clear distinct voice, that all might hear, "Doris, do not go if you prefer remaining here."

The girl raised her eyes to the calm gentle face, and Lady Linleigh was shocked to see tears in them.

"Thank you," she said, calmly; "I shall enjoy going out. Who could resist the moon and the flowers?"

"Then do not remain long. You look tired, and we must remember you are not strong."

Lord Vivianne joined them.

"Lady Studleigh has graciously promised to show me the fountains by moonlight. I will watch her faithfully, and at the first symptom of fatigue I promise you she shall return."

Then the countess could say no more. She saw Lord Vivianne carefully draw the black lace shawl over the white neck and arms.

"Not that you can be cold," he said, in reply to some objection, "but, as Lady Linleigh says, we must be careful of you."

And he smiled down on her with an air of protection and of appropriation, for which she in her

rage could have struck him dead, and which made Lady Linleigh wonder exceedingly.

"It is ten thousand pities," she thought, "that he does not know she is engaged to Earle."

Then a new suspicion came to her, which made her even more uncomfortable. Was it possible that her daughter's passionate desire for secrecy had anything to do with Lord Vivianne? Was her daughter *afraid* of letting him know that she was going to be married? The very torment of the suspicion, faint as it was, filled her with dread. Then she saw the happy little group of guests on the lawn, she caught one glimpse of the white water-lilies and green dress as Lady Studleigh disappeared with her cavalier.

"What has come over me?" said the countess. "I have a presentiment, heavy as death! What can be wrong? I shall begin to think I am growing old and fanciful. What danger can be near my darling?"

She set herself resolutely to play at whist, but every now and then her partner saw her turn pale and shudder, as though she were cold.

Doris and Lord Vivianne were out in the moonlight together, and alone at last. At first they maintained complete and perfect silence. Lord Vivianne placed the white jeweled hand on his arm. She did not make the least objection; it was all useless, she was in his power, and she knew it; she would not even ask the question that trembled on her lips, and filled her with despairing wonder—what had brought him there? She walked by his side, silent, proud, and uncomplaining.

"My darling," he said, at last, "does not this evening remind you of Florence, and the moonlight on the river?"

"If I am to talk to you, Lord Vivianne, and it seems I am compelled to do so, I must ask you to refrain from using such expressions as 'darling.' I will not answer you if you do: they are utterly hateful to me."

"Yet I remember the time when they pleased you passing well. Do you remember, Dora, when I gave you a diamond ring? You have diamonds now on your neck and arms, in your ears, and your hair. They shine like fire-rivers over your beautiful figure; you are so accustomed to them that they have ceased to have any particular value for you. But do you remember your delight in the first?"

"Women remember their first diamonds, as they do their first long dress or their first lover," she replied.

"I suppose so. Oh, Dora, be a little kind to me! We are here in this sweet moonlight together, yet you do not give me one word, one smile. You were not always so hard or so cruel. In Florence, you used to walk with both these beautiful white hands clasped over my arm. Do you remember it?"

Then she raised to his a face that, in its pride and anger, he never forgot.

"I will not permit you to mention those days to me," she cried. "They are hateful; the very memory of them brands me as with a red-hot iron. I will not bear it. I would sooner—listen to me—I know the words are unwomanly—I would sooner pass through the infernal fires than go to Florence with you again."

He laughed.

"I like to see you in a passion, Dora; it suits you; you would have made a grand tragedy queen. I do not wish to vex you or to tease you, because, as you know, I wish to make you my wife. Do you know, can you guess, what has brought me here?"

"No. You have broken our compact in coming, I know that!"

Still it was the question over which she had pondered, by day and by night, ever since she had heard he was coming. It made her heart beat fast, but she would not give way; there was not the least sign of emotion.

"Do you not wonder what has brought me here, Dora?" he repeated.

"I am very indifferent," she said; "no one could be more so."

"I will tell you. I came to see if you were keeping faith with me, if there was any rumor of a lover, any rumor of an engagement. I came purposely for that."

"And if there had been?" she said.

"If there had been, why, you see, Dora, matters would have turned out very awkwardly for both of us."

"You are satisfied that there is not?"

"Yes, tolerably so. There is no lover here; I hear of none in the neighborhood. And you are not engaged to be married—that I do know!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I have made inquiries in the proper direction. I am, I may say, quite satisfied."

He could not tell the sensation of intense relief that came over her—the wild throbbing of her heart. She was safe then, so far, and could marry Earle. Half of the dread and fear she had felt faded away from her.

"I own," continued Lord Vivianne, "that I have suspected you unjustly. You deceived me once, and I fancied that you intended to deceive me again; you eluded me once, you will not elude me again?"

"You thought I was going to do so?"

"I thought your manner strange, your leaving London in the height of your triumph strange, your coming to this quiet, though beautiful country home strange."

"I told you that I wanted time for reflection," she said.

"Yes: and even that, when I came to think of it, was strange. Of course I shall keep my word now that I have given it. But why should you, how can you, need time for reflection? The idea is utterly absurd. You cannot for a moment hesitate between my threat and my offer."

"But I do hesitate," she said, "incredible as it may seem to you."

He looked in her face, so fair and calm in the moonlight, and so proud.

"I wish you would tell me why you hesitate?" he said.

"I will. I dislike you so much. The idea of having to spend my life with you is so utterly abhorrent to me, that I hesitate between that and the total ruin that would follow my refusal."

"You must indeed dislike me," he said, "if you prefer ruin, shame and disgrace to me."

"I do."

"Will you tell me why?" he asked.

"I should have thought both answer and question useless. Why, to begin with, you tempted me to sin and shame, by flattering my vanity and my pride——"

"You did not really require much temptation, Lady Studleigh."

"Thank you—you are as generous as you are gentlemanly. Granted that I did not require much temptation, you placed what little I did want before me. Do you not see," she cried, with sudden passion, "that you have spoiled my life? It would be bright, hopeful, full of charm, but for *you*—you have marred and blighted it. I do not like you—I never did. The very way in which you won me was hateful to me; your love was all self. I never liked you. And now, when I could be happy—ah, Heaven, so unutterably happy—you come like a black shadow and rob my life of every bit of happiness that it contains. No wonder that I loathe you!"

"No," he said, gently, "it is not."

"Then why do you not be kind to me, and let me be quite free?" she asked, emboldened by the softening of his voice.

"You have guessed the reason," he replied. "You have said—it is because I am selfish to my heart's core. I sacrificed you once to my selfish love; is it likely that I should hesitate a second time?"

"You might well hesitate, because I suffered so keenly over the first."

The red flush deepened on his face, a strange light came into his eyes.

"I will not let you go free, neither will I cease from my endeavors to make you my wife; and the reason is because I love you. Oh, proud, fair, lovely woman! I love you with the very madness of love, with a desperation of the fiercest passion with a love that is my doom and yours. You have heard of men made desperate through love: look at me, you will see it. I will kill you if you attempt to leave me—if you attempt to give the love that ought to be mine to another man!"

"Thank you for the threat," she said.

"You drive me to threats, you give me no other recourse. I would fain be all that is kind and good to you; I would worship you; I would lay all that I have at your feet, only begging of you to take it. What would I not do to prove how dearly I love you."

"It is all self. We will have the plainest possible understanding. If there be any manhood in you, it shall be shamed. You shall have it in plain words. You quite understand that if ever I should marry you, it would be because by threats you had compelled me to do so; that I should hate and detest you if I became your wife even more than I hate and detest you now. As the days passed on, my loathing would become greater, so that no friendly word would ever pass between us, and I should consider you simply as a tyrant who bound me in chains. You understand all this?"

"I will risk it," he replied. "I should not despair of regaining your love in time."

The face she turned to him was pallid in its despair.

"You never would regain it," she said, calmly. "Yet there is one way in which even now you might gain my liking, my esteem, my sincere friendship."

His face kindled at the words.

"How, Dora? Tell me how!" he cried, eagerly.

"By saying to me: 'You are free. I took advantage of your youth and innocence; I am sorry for it. You are free! Forgive me the wrong that has been done, and let us friends.' If you would do that, Lord Vivianne, even now I should like you with a warm, true liking."

He was silent for a few minutes; her appeal had touched him greatly. Looking at him, she saw that his face had softened. Impulsively she laid a warm, soft hand on his.

"I never thought to use words of persuasion to you," she said. "I never thought to plead or to pray to you, but I do so now: be kind to me, and let me go free."

He was tempted for one minute; but that warm, soft hand crept like fire through his veins, his pulses thrilled, his heart beat.

Give her up!—this fair woman whose beauty maddened him! No! never, never—come what might!

"I would not release you, Dora. I would not give you up, if every angel, and every fiend combined, tried to take you from me!"

CHAPTER LXXV.
"HEAVEN SAVE EARLE!"

"August at last," said Lady Linleigh; "it is the first to-day. Not long now, Doris, until the tenth."

"No; not long," was the reply.

"Everything is ready and waiting at Hyde House," continued the countess; "the whole of your *trousseau* is ready, and a more magnificent one was never designed."

"I am more than satisfied with it," said the young beauty, "What time will Mattie Brace be here, Lady Linleigh?"

"About noon. I shall send the carriage to the station."

"I will drive my pretty ponies," said Doris, eagerly. "I have only used them once since papa gave them to me. She will be so pleased if I meet her."

"It is well thought of, my dear," said Lady Estelle. "Doris, do you know what I have done?"

"No, something kind and nice, like yourself; I know by the sound of your voice."

"I have ordered a very nice little *trousseau* for Mattie—dresses that will not be unsuited to her at home, yet will do for her to wear here. I shall be so lonely when you are gone that I thought of asking her to remain here. I shall miss you so much, Doris."

"And I shall miss you, dear Lady Linleigh. I never thought when you came home to my father's house, that I should learn to love you so dearly."

Lady Linleigh clasped her arms round the girl's neck.

"Tell me one thing," she said, caressingly; "do you think I have been as kind to you as your own mother would have been?"

"I do not think, dear Lady Linleigh; I am quite sure," she replied.

"It is an odd fancy of mine," said the countess, with a wistful smile, "but I have always been so fond of children. I have such a longing to hear a child call me mother. Doris—you will have left me in ten days. Will you kiss me, and say, 'Heaven bless you, my own mother?'"

"Of course I will. Heaven bless you, my own dear mother; you have been one to me. You have helped me in every little trouble and perplexity; you have been kind to me, without ceasing. Why, Lady Linleigh, your face is wet with tears!"

"Is it, darling? I feel your going away so much. But we must not remain talking here. If you wish to drive to the station, it is high time the ponies were brought round, and I myself wish to see that everything is as she will like it in Mattie's room."

The warmer days of the golden summer had passed away rapidly; it was the first of August, and the marriage was to be on the tenth. So great and entire had been the secrecy preserved, that no creature in that vast establishment knew anything at all about it, the servants and every one else thought that Mattie was simply coming for her yearly visit; but that the wedding of their young lady was on the *tapis*, no one for a moment suspected.

Lord Vivianne had not made a very long stay at Linleigh Court; matters were not very pleasant for him there. Lady Linleigh seemed suddenly to have grown very observant, and he found but few opportunities of speaking to Doris. After his impassioned, violent words on that evening, she

had made no answer; the rapture and tenderness had all died from her face—a hard, fixed look came in her eyes.

"Let the worst come now," she said; "it will serve him right."

She pleaded and prayed no more; and it was well for him that he could not read the thoughts that were in her mind. He poured out such a torrent of passionate words she heard none of them. After a time she said:

"I think we have been out quite long enough, Lord Vivianne: we will return, if you please."

When they reached the lawn again, where the ladies, with their attendant cavaliers, were enjoying the fair, sweet night, he suddenly took her right hand, and kissed it.

"I shall hope to make this mine, one day," he said.

She snatched it from him with sudden violence, and it struck the trunk of a tree with such terrible force that he thought she had broken it.

"I will cut my hand off," she said, "if you touch it again."

He was startled by her vehemence.

"You do indeed hate me, Dora," he said, sadly.

"I do, indeed," was the reply.

And then they saw Lady Linleigh walking across the lawn to them.

"My dear Doris," her ladyship cried, "what is the matter, darling? See! you have a great stain of blood on your dress—and your hand! What has happened?"

She took the white hand, with its purple, bleeding bruise, into her own.

"What is the matter, Doris? Lord Vivianne, what is the matter?"

She saw that he looked dreadfully distressed.

"Dear Lady Linleigh, it is nothing," said Lady Doris, quickly, fearing that he would speak. "I was resting against the gate there, and I thought something was on my hand, a snake crawled over it —a horrible, slimy snake—and in my hurry, I bruised it against the gate—that is all."

"But," said the countess, perplexedly, "Lord Vivianne was with you."

"Oh, yes, he was there!"

"I was there, Lady Linleigh, and I am terribly distressed over the accident, but Lady Studleigh was too quick for me, before I could assure her that there was nothing the matter, she had flung her hand so violently that I thought she had broken it. There was no snake."

"There could not be," said the countess. "I have never heard of any snakes at Linleigh. Give me your hand, child. What a terrible bruise!"

The countess took her injured hand and gently bound it, little dreaming how it had been hurt.

After that Lord Vivianne had been very much subdued. Such an excess of hatred startled him; he could not realize it, he was half alarmed at the violence of the passion he had evoked; still no idea of yielding came to him. As he watched her, day after day, her beauty, her grace, grew more and more enchanting to him. It was not so much love as madness that possessed him; lie would not have relinquished his hold or have given her up to have saved his life.

During the remainder of his stay the countess kept keen, unwavering watch over him, but he had learned his lesson after what he had seen. How little she recked of physical pain, how careless she was of herself. He dared not venture to tease her; he felt that she was quite capable of committing murder if he drove her too far; he contented himself by saying to her when he was going:

"It is understood between us, then, Lady Studleigh, that I return on the twentieth of August for your decision."

"It is quite understood," she replied, with calm dignity.

"I hope it will be a favorable one to me, and I hope my reception will be kinder next time than it has been this."

"You will always be welcomed according to your deserts," she replied.

"I hope, above all, the poor, bruised hand will be better when I come again," he said, with a meaning smile, "and that you will not find any more snakes in those beautiful moon-lit grounds."

"It will be as well for the snakes to keep away," she said.

When he went, the little current of gayety that had come with him died away all together. Lady Linleigh was relieved when he had gone; without knowing what to suspect, she suspected something; she felt like some one walking on the brink of a volcano; but when he was gone, and a few days had passed without anything happening, she felt relieved. She had not forgotten the

incident of the bruised hand; although everything else might be fancy, that was not. When Lord Vivianne bade the earl good-bye, he said:

"I have enjoyed my visit very much, Lord Linleigh; so much that if I should return by the same route about the end of August, I shall beg permission to repeat it."

The earl most cordially assured him that he would be welcome.

And so the bright summer days had worn away. To Lady Doris each one brought a fresh sensation of relief. The tenth was drawing near. Lord Vivianne was still in utter and profound ignorance of all that was transpiring. She would be married and away when he came back; how she enjoyed the thought of his discomfiture. She laughed aloud as she thought of his impotent anger.

"He may do as he likes then," she said; "I shall be Earle's wife. My fortune will be settled on me, and I shall defy him; if he tells his story then, he will not find many to believe him; Earle will not believe anything against his wife, I am sure. I must bribe some respectable family to say that I lived with them as governess in Florence. I shall conquer the difficulty when I am once married to Earle."

This was her one haven of refuge, her rock, her safe harbor from all storms; the end which she so ardently desired to gain; the one great object in life that she proposed for herself; it seemed to her all must be well then. She had written to Mattie asking her to come to Linleigh on the first of August: but so desirous was she of keeping her own secret, that she had not told her what for, and she did not tell her until they were driving in the pretty pony carriage back to the court; then she was so eager to tell her story, that she did not notice how pale the brown face had grown, or how the dark eyes looked full of unshed tears.

"So you have sent for me, Doris, to be your bridesmaid," said Mattie; "you, who might have some of the noblest and highest ladies in the land?"

"There would be none that I love like you, Mattie. We were sisters for years, you know."

Then Mattie was silent for a little time. She said to herself at first, that if she had known why Doris wanted her, she would not have gone, she would rather have done anything, have suffered anything than seen Earle married. Then she reproached herself for being selfish, and tried to throw all her heart and soul into her sister's plans.

Lady Doris wondered why Mattie suddenly kissed her face, and said:

"Heaven bless you, my darling; I hope you will be very happy. I should think, Doris, that you are the happiest girl in all the world."

"Yes," said Doris, "I think I am;" and she added to herself, bitterly, "Would to Heaven I were!"

The countess was more than kind to Mattie; in her own mind she was always thinking how to pay back to Mark Brace's daughter the kindness they had shown Doris. When the two young girls stood together in Lady Doris' dressing-room, she drew off her driving-gloves and laid them on the table; then for the first time Mattie saw the terrible bruise on the white hand; she bent down to look at it.

"What have you done to your pretty hand, Doris?" she asked. "What a frightful bruise!"

"I knocked it against something," was the vague reply. But Mattie saw the burning flush on her sister's face.

"What a pity. Now you will be married with a black, dreadful looking bruise on your hand. That will not get well in ten days."

"Sometimes I think it will never get well at all, Mattie," said Lady Doris, "it has been done some weeks already; I forget how long."

Mattie kissed the dark skin, and Lady Doris shuddered as she remembered whose lips had rested on that hand before.

"When is Earle coming?" she asked, and Lady Doris answered:

"On the eighth, he cannot leave London before, you have no idea what a famous man he is becoming Mattie."

She was glad to hear it; yet the old familiar prayer rose to her lips. Without knowing why, she said to herself: "Heaven save Earle!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

"I SHALL WAKE UP AND FIND IT A DREAM."

The eighth of August! When had any day so beautiful shone before? It was as though the birds had woke earlier to sing. How the sun was shining and the flowers blooming! Lady Doris opened her eyes to the fairest and loveliest day that had ever dawned.

"Earle is coming to-day!" was her first thought.

"Earle is coming!" sung the birds.

"Earle is coming!" whispered the wind, as it stirred the sweet green leaves. She had rested well; for it seemed to her now that her troubles were nearly ended. In two more days she would be his wife; then, who could touch her, what evil could come to her?

Earle was to be at Linleigh by noon. The hours would roll so swiftly, so sweetly by until then. Only two days! She sung to herself sweet little snatches of love songs. While she was dressing she looked at herself in wonder; could it be the same Doris who once thought nothing on earth of any value except money and grandeur? Could she have so mingled her love and life into another's as almost to have lost her own identity, and to think of nothing except Earle?

"I never thought that I should be so much in love," she said, to herself. "How strange it seems!"

She did not quite understand herself. It was not that she loved Earle so passionately; the capability of great love was not hers. It was not that; it was that Earle, the master-mind, had, by the force and nobility of his own character, completely influenced her, and had won a complete ascendency over her. She had not much power of loving; what she had was his. But Earle represented peace, happiness, and prosperity to her—Earle was her sure haven of rest, her shield against all evil, her refuge against her direst enemy and bitter foe, Lord Vivianne.

So, welcome, bright, sunny day!—welcome golden sun and sweet flowers!

The post brought her her daily love-letter; but it was brief. It said simply:

> "I cannot write much to my darling. I shall see her to-day, and, in two days more, she will be mine until death parts us."

He thought of the words when he saw them again.

Every face wore its brightest look at the breakfast-table that day. The earl and countess were happy in their beautiful daughter's happiness; Mattie, because she entered so easily into the joy of others.

"Doris," said Mattie, "will you come out? We shall have just time for a stroll in the woods before Earle comes."

Lady Doris laughed.

"I really cannot, Mattie. The spirit of unrest is on me, I cannot go anywhere or do anything until I have seen Earle."

"Have you decided yet about your wedding-dress?" asked Mattie. "This strange caprice of silence makes me afraid to speak; but, silence or not, it is high time that it was seen about."

Lady Doris laughed.

"I am so amused at myself, Mattie," she said. "If any one had ever told me, some years, even some months since, that I should be quite indifferent over my wedding-dress, I would not have believed it."

"But *why* are you indifferent?" asked Mattie. "I *cannot* understand. Is it because you are not marrying a nobleman—is it because you are marrying Earle?"

"No," was the reply. "You can believe me or not, Mattie, just as you please, but I assure you I am more proud in marrying Earle than if I were marrying a king."

"So I should imagine. Earle is a king; then why this strange desire for secrecy?"

The beautiful eyes were raised wistfully to her face.

"I may tell you, perhaps, some day, Mattie, but not now, dear—not now. You will marry some good, kindly man, Mattie—some one like yourself, who never knew the fiery heat of temptation; who has always kept—as you have kept—his eyes on Heaven; then, some day, dear, when you are sitting with your little children around you, I shall come to you—world-worn and weary, perhaps, who knows!—longing to lay my head in the clover grass, and then I may tell you all—but not now."

"Then there is a secret?" said Mattie, gently.

"Yes," was the wary reply, "there is a secret."

The words seemed half forced from her.

"Does Earle know it?" asked Mattie.

"No, and never will. Do not talk to me, dear; you have been my sister many years, and I love you very much; if ever I seek a confidante it will be you. You need not be anxious over my wedding-dress, Mattie. Lady Linleigh has presented me with my *trousseau*, and she tells me that no royal princess ever had a more sumptuous one; she told me also that a box would come from Paris to-day, for you and for me; rely upon it, that will contain my wedding-dress."

"How kind Lady Linleigh is to you," said Mattie. "I do not think your own mother could love you better."

"I do not think she would love me half so much," was the laughing reply. Then, in the warm, sunlit air, they heard the sharp clang of the clock—eleven. "He will be here in an hour," said Doris.

"Shall you not go and change your dress?" asked the simple little foster-sister. "I thought great ladies always dressed very grandly to receive their lovers."

"My dear Mattie," was the coquettish reply, "*could* I look better?"

No, she could not. A white dress of Indian muslin showed every curve and line of that beautiful figure. It was open at the throat, and a lovely rose nestled against the white breast; it was relieved by dashes of blue, and the long, waving, golden hair was fastened by a single blue ribbon. No jewels, no court attire, no magnificence of dress ever became her as did this; she looked young, fresh, and fair as the dawn of a bright spring morning. No one looking at her could have guessed that the foul canker of sin had entered that young heart and soul.

"I am very happy here," she continued, languidly. "I am watching the butterflies and the flowers. Look at that one, Mattie, with the gorgeous purple wings; see, now he hovers round that tall, white lily, then he goes away to the clove carnations; he does not know which to choose. Oh, happy butterfly, to have such a choice! I wonder what it is like, Mattie, to feel quite free from care?"

They were seated under a group of white acacia trees on the lawn, and with every breath of wind the fragrant blossoms fell in a sweet shower over them; the sun shone on the rippling fountains, on the fair flowers, and on the faces of the two girls.

"Free from care!" repeated Mattie, with something like surprise. "Why, my darling, if you are not free from care, who is?"

"I was not speaking or even thinking of myself; I was merely thinking how happy all kinds of birds, and butterflies, and flowers must be to enjoy the dew, and the sunshine, and the sweet winds."

"Happy, but they have no soul, Doris."

She laughed a low, bitter laugh that pierced Mattie like the point of a sword.

"A soul!" she repeated. "I am not sure that a soul brings happiness; those who have souls have the responsibility of saving them."

"Doris, you do not deserve to be happy, for you are not good," cried Mattie; and three days afterward she remembered the words with the keenest pain.

But Lady Doris was unusually gentle; she bent down and kissed the kindly face.

"I am *not* good, but I am going to try to be better, dear; it seems to be part of my nature to say bad things. I am not quite sure if I always mean them. Hark, Mattie; I hear the sound of carriage wheels. Earle is coming!"

The beautiful face grew white in its intensity of feeling.

Mattie rose from her seat.

"He will like best," she said, "to meet you alone. I will tell him your are here."

It seemed to Doris that the sun shone more golden, the wind seemed to whisper more sweetly, when she heard the sound of footsteps and the voice she loved so well. The next moment strong loving arms were around her, passionate kisses fell on her face, lips and hands.

"My darling!" cried Earle. "My wife, so soon to be my wife."

It was one happy half-hour, stolen almost from paradise, for he loved her so dearly; he found heaven in her face; and she was at rest, at peace with him.

Then Lord Linleigh and Mattie came. The earl with happy smiles and merry jests; he was so glad in her joy.

"Love is very delightful," he said, "but, Doris, we must offer something substantial to a traveler; suppose we substitute cold chicken and Madeira. Then Lady Linleigh desired me to say that a most wonderful box had arrived from Paris, and she wanted you to unpack it."

Then he bent down and kissed the fair face so dear to them all.

"I can hardly believe that we are to lose you in two days, my darling," he said.

"Nor can I believe that I shall win her," said Earle. "I often have the impression that I shall wake up and find it a dream, and that Earle Moray will be in the cornfields at home."

"You are a poet," laughed the earl, "and poets are not accountable for anything."

Then they went together to lunch. Mattie knew that it was by Lady Linleigh's orders that the table was so gracefully ornamented with flowers and fruit; the pretty thought was like her. They

spent perhaps one of the happiest hours of their lives together. Then Lady Linleigh said:

"Now for the Parisian box. Earle, you must be banished while that is unpacked."

The ladies went together up to Lady Linleigh's room.

"We will have no curious ladies' maids or servants," she said; "we will unpack this ourselves. The key came to me this morning by registered letter. Doris, my dear, the box and its contents are yours—you shall unpack them."

Lady Studleigh took the key and opened it. There were layers of fine white wadding and tissue paper. One by one Lady Doris raised the costly packets in her hands and laid them down. There was a bridesmaid's costume all complete, a marvel of pink and white silk, with everything to match; white silk shoes, with little pink rosettes; white bonnet, that looked as though a puff of wind would blow it away, and a costly pink plume; gloves, fan, jewels, all matched exactly, and Mattie's face grew radiant.

"All this for me! Oh, Lady Linleigh, how am I to thank you?"

"By looking your prettiest in them," laughed the countess, as she placed the fairy-like bonnet on the brown, shining hair. "I thought pink would suit you, Mattie; so it does. See how nice she looks, Doris."

Lady Studleigh kissed her foster-sister's face.

"Mattie always looks nice," she said, "just as she always looks happy and good."

Then came the bride's costume.

"You would not allow the earl and myself to show that we felt your wedding to be the happiest event of our lives," said Lady Linleigh; "but you could not prevent my intention of seeing you dressed as a bride."

Such a wedding-dress—one of Worth's most marvelous combinations of white satin and white lace—a dress fit for a queen; and it was trimmed so beautifully with wreaths of orange blossoms. There, in a pretty scented box, lay the bridal veil—such a wonder of lace, so exquisitely worked, large enough to cover a bride, yet so fine and delicate that it could be drawn through a wedding-ring. Then came the wreath of orange blossoms!

Lady Studleigh was accustomed by this time to splendor—there was little in the way of dress that could ever give her the agreeable sensation of surprise; but she uttered a little cry of admiration as she saw the elegant costly presents the countess had arranged for her. Everything was complete and beautiful, even to the little bouquet-holder, made of pure white pearls. She took Lady Linleigh's hands and kissed them.

"Are you pleased, my darling?" she asked, gently.

"Oh, Lady Linleigh, you have left me without words—quite without words! I cannot thank you."

The countess bent her head.

"Could your own mother have pleased you more?" she asked.

"No—a thousand times no!" was the sincere reply.

Then Mattie said: "Lady Linleigh, let us dress Doris in her bridal robes, so that Earle may see her."

And the countess laughed as she gave consent.

CHAPTER LXXVII.
TRYING ON THE WEDDING-DRESS.

"What does she look like?" cried Mattie in a passion of admiration, as they placed the bridal veil on the golden head.

"It would require a poet to tell us," said the countess; "and as we have one close at hand, we will ask him. Mattie, go and bring Earle here. Close the door after you. I should not like every one to know what we have been doing."

And presently, Earle stood before a figure that seemed to him too beautiful to be real—a tall, graceful figure that seemed to rise from the waves of white satin and lace—as a graceful flower from its stem. Through the bridal veil he caught the sheen of the golden hair—the dainty color of the face—the deep color of the violet eyes. The sweet odor of orange blossoms floated to him.

"Doris," he said, in a low voice; "my beautiful love, let me see your face."

It was Lady Linleigh who threw back the veil, so that he might see the lovely, blushing face. Tears stood in the young lover's eyes, although he tried to control his emotion.

"Is it possible, Lady Linleigh?" he asked, "that this is my wife—that—well, I had better not say too much; you do not think I shall wake up and find it all a dream?"

"No, it is real enough."

Then he drew nearer to her.

"You will let me give you one kiss, Doris—Lady Linleigh will not be horrified. You will be Lady Moray soon. What is my poor name worth, that it should be so highly honored?"

He kissed her sweet lips.

"I must be careful," he said. "You look like a fairy. Perhaps you would vanish if a mere mortal touched you. Now, let me look at you, darling—at your dress, your veil, and your wreath. The picture is perfect. I wish that I could put it into words."

He did, afterward—into words over which all England wept. Then, for a few minutes, the three—Lady Linleigh, Mattie, and Earle—stood looking at her in silence, they hardly knew why. Then Earle said:

"When I see that pretty veil again, it will be on the head of my beloved wife."

Then they all three looked at the veil. Heaven help him! he little dreamed how and when he should see it again. If they could have had the faintest foreknowledge of that, the tragedy might have been averted.

Then Earle went away, and the bridal robes were taken to Lady Linleigh's boudoir.

"They will not be seen there," said the countess. "I will lock the door and keep the key; to-morrow it will not matter."

And Mattie helped her—poor, helpless child!—place them over a chair so that the shining robes might not be injured.

It was Earle who proposed a ramble to the woods; dinner was to be later than usual.

"Let us all three go," he said. "Mattie with us, Doris; it may be years before we meet all together so happy again."

So it was settled, and they spent the remainder of that sunny, happy day together.

They were sitting in a green, sunny dell, with the fall grass and wild flowers springing luxuriantly around them, the tall trees spreading overhead, the little birds filling the wood with song.

Lady Doris had never been so happy; she had almost forgotten the dark background of sorrow and care. Mattie was happy, for it was impossible to see them so young, so loving, with their graceful caresses and love, without rejoicing with them.

"This is like Brackenside," said Earle. "How often we have sat together in the woods there! And Mrs. Brace used to wonder how the farms would advance if they were left to us."

"And well she might wonder," said Mattie; "even when I believed Doris to be my own sister, I thought her the most beautiful, but the most useless of human beings!"

"Thank you," laughed Lady Studleigh.

"It is altogether like a fairy tale," said Earle; "if I had read such a story, I should say it was untrue; I should call such a story exaggerated; yet, here we are, the living, breathing actors in the drama."

"It is not such a very wonderful history, Earle," said Lady Studleigh; "there are many private marriages, many children brought up in ignorance of their real name and station; many a man like you—a gentleman and genius by birth—rises by the simple force of his own merit to be one of the magnates of the land."

Then she sighed to herself, and her brightness was for one moment overcast as she remembered that hers was the only part of the story that was improbable or extraordinary; no one would believe that she had been guilty as she had been.

How often, in after years, they went back to that bright, long day. Earle never saw a wild flower, or a green fern, that he did not turn from it with a sick, aching heart.

They dined together; the earl would not have any visitors; it was the last day but one of their darling, and they would have it all to themselves. There they sat in the gloaming, and Doris sang to them. Who knew the pain, the aching in one lonely heart? who knew the quiet heroism of the girl with the brown, kindly face and shining hair?

The lamps were lighted, and, Lord Linleigh, laughing to think how they had all been engrossed, drew a large parcel toward himself.

"This shows," he said, "that we have something unusual going on. This packet of periodicals has been in the library for several days, and no one has thought of opening it. It is the first time such a thing has happened."

He unfastened the string and looked through them casually. One, however, seemed to attract his

attention. It was beautifully illustrated, and he laid it down with a smile.

"Read that, Doris," he said; "it contains a warning for you."

"What is the warning, papa? I would rather take it from you than from print."

"I have not read it. Look at the engraving. It is evidently the story of a bride who, on her wedding-eve, dresses herself in her bridal-robes—girlish vanity, I suppose—just to see how she looks. The wedding-dress catches fire, and she is burned to death. Moral: young ladies should never try on their wedding-dresses beforehand."

"What a tragical story!" said the countess.

"I can never see the use of such stories," said Mattie; "they make every one sad who reads them."

"Burned to death on her wedding-eve," said Earle, "and all because she wanted to see if she should be charming enough in the eyes of her lover! There is no poetic justice in that."

"What was the heroine's name, papa?" asked Doris.

"Miriam Dale. I always notice that if a heroine is to come to any pathetic end she is called Miriam."

"Did she love her lover very much?" asked Doris.

"Read the story, my dear," said the earl, indolently; "it is not much in my line. The engraving caught my attention—a beautiful, frantic girl, dressed in bridal robes and wreathed in flames. There is something terrible about it."

Doris rose from her seat and opened the book; then, after looking at the picture, she laid it down with a long, shuddering sigh.

"Stories often fail in poetic justice," she said. "If that girl was young and innocent, if she had done no wrong, why should she have been killed on her wedding-eve?"

"Stories are, after all, but sketches taken from life," said the earl, "and life often seems to us, short-seeing mortals, to fail in poetic justice, although, no doubt, everything is right and just in the sight of Heaven. Doris is growing serious over it."

"We tried her wedding-dress on this morning, but there was no fire near it, and no harm came of it."

"I am no believer in those stupid superstitions, although I have heard it is unlucky to try on a wedding-dress; still I do not believe it will make one iota of difference."

"How can it?" said Earle, calmly; and they all remembered that conversation a few hours afterward.

The ninth of August came, and Lord Linleigh, as they sat at breakfast, said laughingly:

"Now for a sensation! What will be said and thought by the different members of this establishment when it is known that there is to be a wedding to-morrow? It passes my comprehension. I promised to be patient, but it was almost cruel of you, Doris, to place me in such a predicament. I suppose I must call the principal servants together and tell them that Lady Studleigh is to be married to-morrow, without form or ceremony of any kind. There will be what the papers call a startling surprise!"

"We have plenty to do," said the countess; "there will be no time for rambles in the wood. Ulric, when you have made your announcement, will you go to the vicarage? You have arrangements to make there, and you must take Earle with you. I cannot spare Doris to him this morning."

So the gentlemen went away.

"It is a strange whim of Doris', this desire for secrecy," said the earl, as they rode along. "I must confess I do not understand it; do you?"

"Not in the least," replied Earle, "she seemed very intent upon it. I think, Lord Linleigh," he added, with a laugh, "that I shall learn one thing as I grow older."

"What will that be?" asked the earl.

"Not to try to fathom the caprice of ladies, but to yield gracefully to it."

"You are a wise man," said Lord Linleigh, with a look of sincere admiration; "that is the true secret of wedded content."

While Lord Linleigh and Earle were busy at the vicarage, where it required some time and some persuasion to induce the rector to believe what they had to say, the ladies were wonderfully busy. The news spread, and as Lord Linleigh had foreseen, caused a great sensation.

Lady Studleigh to be married to-morrow!—and such a marriage—no ceremony, no gayeties, nothing at all!

Lady Linleigh had, however, considerably changed the state of affairs, by saying that the arrangements for the wedding had been hurried so as to permit of Lady Doris going abroad in

August, and, before going, she intended making a handsome present to each member of the household. Their opinion was, in consequence, considerably changed.

When the earl and his household met at dinner there were much laughter and amusement—much to tell; the rector's amazement, the astonishment of every one who heard the news. The earl was in high spirits, laughing and jesting all the more that he saw his wife's gentle face growing sad and sorrowful.

"You will be gone this time to-morrow," she said. "I shall fancy I hear your voice and see your face all day, and for many long days."

"Yes," said Doris, softly, "I shall be gone this time to-morrow."

"But you will not be so very far away," said Mattie.

"No further than London," said Earle. "I like crossing the Channel; do you, Doris?"

"No, I am not a good sailor," she replied.

"Ladies seldom are," said the earl. "Estelle, I have resolved Doris' last evening with us shall be the happiest she has spent at Linleigh. We will not have one sad word."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.
A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

The evening was over at last, and to Doris it had been the happiest day, perhaps, of her life. Lord Linleigh had sent to his cellars for some of his choicest wines—wines that only saw daylight when the daughters of the house were married or its heirs christened—wine that was like the nectar of the gods, golden in hue, fragrant of perfume, and exhilarating as the water of life old traditions sing of. He had ordered the dessert to be placed outside in the rose-garden.

"We will imitate the ancients," he said; "we will drink our wine to the odor of sweet flowers."

So they sat and watched the golden sun set in the west. It seemed to them it had never set in such glorious majesty before. The sky was crimson, and gold, and purple, then pale violet, and pearly gleams shone out; a soft veil seemed to shroud the western skies, and then the sun had set.

Lady Doris had sat for some time watching the sun set in silence. Suddenly she said:

"I shall never forget my last sunset."

"Your last sunset?" repeated Earle. "Do you mean that you will never see it set again?"

"No; I mean my last sunset at Linleigh. Earle, if all those strange stories of heaven are true, it must be a beautiful place; and this fair sky, with its gleaming colors, is only the wrong side after all."

The faint light died in the west, the flowers closed their tired eyes, the lovely twilight reigned soft and fragrant, the air grew almost faint with perfume from lily, from rose, from carnation; then some bird, evidently of erratic habits, began a beautiful vesper hymn, and they sat as though spell-bound.

"A night never to be forgotten," said the earl. "Doris, that little bird is singing your wedding-song."

If they could but have heard what the little bird was telling—a warning and a requiem both in one.

Doris arose and went to the tree in whose branches the bird was hidden; she raised her face to see if she could see it in the thick green leaves. As she stood there, in the light of the dying day, the earl said:

"You will have a beautiful wife, Earle."

They all looked at her as she stood there in a beautiful dress of shining white silk, with a set of opals for ornaments; her fair white arms and white neck were half shrouded in lace, her golden hair was fastened negligently with a diamond arrow and hung in shining ripples over her shoulders; the faint light showed her face, fair and beautiful as a bright star.

"You will have a beautiful wife," he repeated, thoughtfully.

And as they all saw her then, they saw her until memory reproduced no more pictures for them.

"We have a fine moonlight night," said Earle. "Doris, this time to-morrow evening we shall be leaning over the steamboat side, watching the light in the water, and the track of the huge wheels; then you will be my wife."

Lady Linleigh rose and drew her shawl round her shapely shoulders.

"We must not forget to-morrow in the happiness of to-night," she said; "it will not do to have a pale bride. I am going in."

But first she went up to the tree where Doris was standing.

"It is rather a hopeless task, Doris, to look for a bird in the growing darkness," she said; "and, my darling, I have come to wish you good-night."

Doris turned to her, and bending her graceful head, laid it on her mother's shoulder.

"It is not only good-night, but good-bye," she said; "I shall hardly see you to-morrow."

She clasped her warm, soft arms round the countess' neck.

"Good-bye, dearest Lady Linleigh," she said; "you have been very good to me; you have made home very happy for me; you have been like the dearest mother to me. Good-night; may Heaven bless you!"

Such unusual, such solemn words for her to use! The two fair faces touched each other. There was a warm, close embrace, then Lady Linleigh went away. When did she forget that parting, or the last look on that face?

"I am jealous," said Lord Linleigh, parting the branches and looking at his daughter. "I wanted the kindest good-night. What has my daughter to say to me? It is my farewell, also. To-morrow you will be Lady Moray, and I shall be forgotten."

Her heart was strangely touched and softened.

"Not forgotten by me, papa," she said; "next to Earle, I shall always love you better than any one in the world."

"*Next* to Earle. Well, I must be content. That is enough. Good-night, my dear and only child; may Heaven send you a happy life."

He, too, took away with him the memory of the sweet face and tender eyes; a memory never to die. He nodded to Earle.

"I must be lenient," he said, "and give you young lovers ten minutes longer. I shall be in the library, Earle. Come and smoke a cigar with me. I have something to say to you."

Mattie had gone to her room; Doris had promised to meet her there. The little bird, startled by the voices perhaps, had ceased to sing; and the lovers stood under the spreading tree alone.

"Ten minutes out here with you, my darling," said Earle; "it is like two years in paradise. How kind they are to us, Doris; how happy we shall be!"

But he had not many words. He laid the golden head on his breast, where he could see and kiss the fair face; he held the white hands in his; he could only say, over and over again, how happy they should be to-morrow. His wife to-morrow! Surely the moon had never shone upon a fairer picture or a lighter heart. The ten minutes were soon over.

"Good-bye to the moonlight," said Earle, "to the tired flowers and shining stars, and the fair, sleeping world."

He parted with her at the foot of the broad staircase; she was going to her room.

"Good-night," said Earle, kissing the red lips; "good-night, and sweet dreams."

But when he had gone about two steps away, she called him back again. She raised her arms and clasped them round his neck; she raised her face that he might kiss it again.

"My darling Earle, my love Earle, my lover, my husband!" she said, with a passion of love in her face, "good-night."

He was half startled. He watched her as she went up the broad staircase, the white, shining silk, the gleaming opals, the golden hair, the fair, sweet face—watched her until she was out of sight; then, despite his happiness, he turned away with a sigh.

"She will be my own to-morrow, and I shall not need to feel anxious over her," he said to himself; and then he went in to smoke his cigar with the earl.

Doris called in Mattie's room and said:

"Good-night. Have you any nice book lying about here, Mattie?" she asked. "I know quite well that I shall not sleep; I do not feel the least tired."

She chose one of the volumes Mattie brought to her.

"I should like to read that story papa was telling us of," she said; "but it is in the library, and he is smoking there with Earle."

"I would not read it; a gloomy, melancholy story like that is not fit for your wedding-eve."

Doris stood with the waxen taper in her hand.

"Even," she said, "if a girl has not been quite good, even if she has been what good people call

wicked, it would be cruel to kill her on her wedding-eve, would it not?"

"What a strange idea, Doris!—and how strange you look! Put that book away and go to sleep, so that Earle may see bright eyes to-morrow."

They parted, and Doris passed into her own room. According to her usual custom, she locked the door and took out the key.

The first room was her sleeping-room. She did not wait there; it was empty. She had told Eugenie, her maid, not to wait for her on that evening, as she might be late. Then came the bath and dressing-room; they also were empty, although both were brilliantly lighted. She reached the boudoir, fitted for her with such taste and luxury. The lamps were lighted, and there, on the chair where Mattie and she had so carefully placed it, lay the beautiful wedding costume. There could be no mistaking it; the veil was thrown over the dress, and the wreath of orange blossoms lay on the veil. She looked at them for some minutes in silence, thinking of the Miriam who was burned on the night of her wedding-day.

Then she opened the book and began to read. How useless it was—the letters swam before her eyes. It was her wedding-day to-morrow; after to-morrow all her cares and troubles would be over; after to-morrow all would be peace.

She lay down upon the little couch, with a long, low sigh. It was wonderful how tired and wearied she felt. She had suffered such a fever, such a torture of suspense, that the reaction of feeling that she was in perfect safety at last was too much for her. There came a fever of unrest upon her, her heart beat with terrible rapidity, her hands were like fire, her eyes and lips seemed to burn as though they had been touched by flame; she had not known until now how much she had suffered. Then she pictured Lord Vivianne coming on the twentieth and finding her married—married and gone far out of his reach! How he would rage! It would serve him right. He might tell his story then. Who would believe him? They would all think it the bitter exaggeration of a disappointed man.

Then the room seemed to grow warm, the perfume of the flowers overpowering.

"I wish," she thought, "that I had not let Eugenie go; I feel nervous and lonely to-night."

She half-debated within herself whether she should go back to Mattie or not. The sense of being thought cowardly deterred her.

There lay the moonlight, so calm, so still, so bright, streaming through the open window.

"I will go down into the grounds," she said to herself; "a walk there will refresh me, and I shall be able to rest."

She took out her watch and looked at it; it was nearly midnight.

"There will be a pale bride to-morrow," she said, "if I am not to sleep all night."

She unfastened the door that divided the room from the spiral staircase leading to the grounds. The staircase itself was almost hidden by dense green foliage and flowers; because it was so nearly hidden no one thought it dangerous; no stranger would have observed it. She went down to the grounds, it was so cool, so bright, still, and beautiful; the dew was shining on the grass, the moon and stars were shining in the sky; there was a rich odor of rare flowers; the night wind seemed to cool her heated brain; her lips grew pale and cool; the burning heat left her hands; it refreshed her.

"I will walk here for half an hour," she said, "then I shall be sleepy enough."

It struck her that she would go round to the library window, where Earle was with her father. She hoped they would not see her; but if they did, she should tell them she could not rest. Then she remembered that the earl had cautioned her never to use the spiral staircase at night lest it should be dangerous. She walked round to the side of the house. Ah! there was the light from the library-window; they were still there.

Then—her heart almost stood still—she saw the figure of a man advancing across the carriage-drive toward the great hall-door.

At midnight. Who could it be?

The moon shone full upon him; and as he drew nearer, she saw the face of her mortal enemy, her hated foe—Lord Vivianne!

CHAPTER LXXIX.
WHY HE SUSPECTED.

Lord Vivianne!—there was no mistake. The moon shone full in his face; she knew the impatient walk; she knew every line of his figure, and for one moment her heart almost stopped beating.

What, in the name of the most high Heaven, did he want there?

She saw him going quickly up the broad flight of steps; the moon, shining on them, made them white as snow; the light from the library window shone softly on the ground.

He had stretched out his hand to ring the bell, when, with a sudden impulse, a sudden cry, she called out:

"Stop!"

Another half-minute and she had almost flown across the lawn and stood by his side.

"Stop!" she cried again, and laying her hand on his arm; then she looked at him. "You!" she said —"is it you?"

"Yes, Lady Studleigh; there is little cause for wonder—it is the man you were about so cleverly to deceive."

"In Heaven's name," she cried, impetuously, "what has brought you here? Do not ring the bell! What has brought you to my father's house? You were not to come until the twentieth."

In her fear and agitation she lost something of her usual dignity.

"That was nicely managed," he replied, with a sneer; "you were to be married on the tenth, and I was to come on the twentieth. It was dramatically arranged, Lady Studleigh; it is very sad it should have failed."

For one moment her face grew white as with the ghastly pallor of death, her eyes grew dim, her arms fell nervously by her side. So she stood for a few minutes; then she said, in a low, hoarse voice:

"Do not ring the bell; do not arouse them; I will talk to you now. Come this way."

Side by side they walked down the broad path together; in the bewilderment of her thoughts she had but one idea—it was to keep him away from the library window.

"Now," she said, breathlessly, "let us talk here."

The moon was bright—so pitifully bright, it traced their shadows along the white stone; it seemed to rejoice in the warm night.

"What have you to say?" he asked, curtly. "I can tell you why I am here. I have come for your answer ten days before the time, because I have heard that you are going to play me false: I am here to tell Lord Linleigh by what right I claim you as my wife; I am here to tell all whom it may concern what you have been to me."

Suddenly she remembered that the room Earle occupied looked over the terrace. What if, tempted by the beauty of the night, he should come to the window, and look out? What if the earl should hear voices or see shadows? Oh, what was she to do?

Her alarm heightened by seeing a light at one of the windows opposite: whether it was one of the servants or not, she could not tell; but it alarmed her.

All at once she remembered that she had free access to the house, she had but to go back to her rooms by the spiral staircase. Again she laid her hand on Lord Vivianne's arm.

"I dare not remain here," she said. "Do you see that light? We shall be seen."

"What if we are?" he replied; "it will not matter if one or two find out to-night what the world must know to-morrow."

"Hush!" she cried, in an agony of alarm. "How cruel, how merciless you are! Great Heaven, what shall I do?"

"You can do nothing now, my lady; your time is come; you should have kept faith with me."

"Will you come to my rooms?" she cried, in an agony of terror.

It seemed to her that his voice sounded so loudly and so clearly in the summer air, all the world must hear it.

"To your rooms? Yes, I will go there."

"Follow me," she said.

She led the way up the spiral staircase into the boudoir, wishing at every step he took he might fall dead.

She had forgotten the bridal veil and dress lying there.

The lamps were lighted in the boudoir. She carefully closed the door lest any sound should reach their ears; then she came back to him.

He stood on the top of the staircase, half uncertain whether to enter or not.

She went to him. By the light of the lamps he saw how marvelously pale she had grown; and how terrible was the fear that shone in her eyes.

He looked carelessly round the room. He did not see at first what was the glittering heap of white raiment; nor had he noticed the orange wreath. But he saw, lying on the stand amid the flowers, a large, sharp knife. It had been left there by some careless servant who had been cutting the thick branches that wreathed the windows. His eyes lingered on it for one half-minute; if he had known what was to happen, he would most surely have flung it far from him.

She looked up into his face with cold, determined eyes.

"Now," she said, "do your worst; say your worst. I defy you!"

"Women are the greatest simpletons in creation," he said; "they imagine it so easy to break faith with a man. You have to find out how difficult it is."

She made no reply.

"By right of what has passed between us," he continued, "I claim you for my wife. You told me you would consider the claim, and that you would give me your decision on a certain date."

No answer. All the defiance that pride could suggest was in her white face.

"You promised me, also, that you would not attempt in any way to evade that claim."

"I did, and I was quite wrong in making you that promise."

"That is quite beside the mark; it has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Having made the promise, you were bound to keep it. I relied implicitly on your good faith. I left you, intending to return and hear your decision. What do I find out? That you have simply been deceiving me, duping me—most cleverly as you thought, most foolishly as you will see. You imagined that on the twentieth I should come to see you, and find you married and gone. You have doubtless laughed to think how you should befool me."

"I do not deny it," she said, contemptuously.

A strange light flashed in his eyes.

"I would have you beware," he said. "I told you long ago that my overweening love for you was driving me mad. Be careful how you anger me."

"I have the same amount of contempt for your anger as for your love," she said.

"Take care! I have told you before, desperate men do desperate deeds. Take care! I have found out your pretty plot, and am here to spoil it."

"What have you discovered?" she asked.

"For the first thing, that while you have been so cleverly deceiving all London, you were engaged the whole time to Earle Moray, the lover you so kindly left for me."

"After that?" she asked.

His face grew dark in its fury as he replied:

"That you—love him!"

"I do!" she cried, with sudden passion, "my whole heart loves him, my whole soul calls him conqueror!"

He raised his hands menacingly, his fury knew no bounds.

"You would strike me!" she said, sneeringly. "If you killed me, I should say the same over and over again; I love him and I hate you. What else have you discovered?"

"That you intend to marry him on the tenth. That is the extent of my knowledge; I know no more. But whether you are going to run away with him, or whether Lord Linleigh intends to countenance a ceremony that will be a lie, I cannot tell. Running away is more in your line, certainly."

"Would you mind telling me," she asked, "how you know this?"

He laughed.

"I will tell you, with pleasure," he replied; "the more so as I think it reflects great credit on my powers of penetration. I was in London the day before yesterday, in New Bond Street, and, while walking leisurely along, I met your poet and gentleman, Earle Moray."

"I wish that I could strike you dead for using his name," she said.

"I am sure you do, and I do not blame you. Under the circumstances, it is the most natural wish in the world. As I was saying, I met your cavalier; he was walking along, with a smile on his face—evidently wrapped in most pleasant thoughts. He started when he saw me, and looked slightly confused."

"My poor Earle!" she murmured; "my poor Earle!"

"The very fact of his looking confused aroused my suspicion. Why should he be confused, just because he had met me? I spoke to him, and he seemed disinclined to talk to me. Another thing

struck me—he seemed to wish to get rid of me. He is very transparent, poor fellow. I was quite determined that he should not lose me. Walking on, we passed Horton & Sons, the great jewelers, and, in some vague way, Lady Studleigh, I had a presentiment that I was at one end of a mystery."

"You are a clever fiend," she said.

"Praise from such lips is praise, indeed! As we passed the door of Horton & Sons, from the very confused way in which he looked at it, I felt sure that he had been inclined to enter—in fact, that he intended to enter, but would not because I was there. I instantly resolved that I would baffle him; so we walked together up and down the street. Each time he passed the door I saw him look longingly at it. I began to think that I had missed my vocation; I ought to have been a detective. At last, to his utter relief, I am sure, I said adieu.

"I watched him. No sooner had I gone away, than he hastened to the shop. I said to myself, what could he possibly want there? what could he want to buy that he would not let me see? Then I went into the shop after him. It is a large place, and I stood where I could both hear and see him without being seen or heard. Innocently enough—I laugh when I think of it—he asked for a case of wedding-rings; he wanted the best, of solid gold. That was to hold you, my lady. It would require a strong ring to make you all his, would it not? He asked for the best—poor, deluded fool!"

Her white face and glittering eyes might have warned him; but they did not.

"He chose the ring, evidently having the size by heart. Then he asked to see some pearl lockets. He selected one, and asked for a certain motto to be engraved on it. But he asked again when it could be done. They told him in two days. This did not suit him; he must have it in a few hours; he was leaving town to-morrow. They asked if he would leave it and they would try. He replied, 'No; that he wanted both ring and locket on the tenth.' And then he left the shop. I need not tell you how that startled me. Why should he want a wedding-ring on the tenth. Then—I can hardly tell you how it was—a certain suspicion entered my mind that the wedding-ring and locket were for you!"

"My poor Earle!" she said, with a long, low sigh.

"I secured the services of some one whom I knew to be clever, trustworthy, and keen. We watched your friend, and found that he was making preparations for a long absence, and that he was going abroad. Still, I must confess, I was not prepared to hear that he had started yesterday, and had taken a first-class ticket to Anderley. It did not require a genius, you know, to put all these strange coincidences together. I guessed in one moment that you were playing me false. I should have been here before, but that an imperative engagement kept me in town. I started at noon to-day, and, owing to some mistake in the trains, did not reach Anderley until too late to take a fly, a cab, or horse, or anything else. I was compelled to walk here, and that accounts for my delay, for my late visit. Now I am here."

She looked steadily at him.

"Yes," she said, "you are here. What do you want?"

CHAPTER LXXX.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER MIDNIGHT.

"My demands are few, Lady Studleigh. You are to be married to-morrow to Earle Moray, according to *your* arrangement; according to *mine*, nothing of the sort will happen, but you will give your poet his dismissal, and marry me instead."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, my lord," she replied.

"Yes, you will. You will find that alternative, bad as it is, better than the fate that awaits you if you refuse. I grant that it is a thousand pities matters have gone so far; it is your own fault; you will find yourself in a great dilemma: you should have been more straightforward. To-morrow, instead of being married, you must tell the earl, your father, who indulges you so absurdly in everything, that you have altered your mind; that there will be no wedding, after all. He cannot possibly be surprised at any caprice of yours. It will cause no alteration in any one's plans, as no one has been told of the marriage."

"You have planned it all easily," she said, haughtily.

"Yes, when one sees such determined opposition to a settled plan, it is time to make arrangements. I must confess that, coming along, I planned it all, so as to give you the least trouble."

"You are, indeed, kind," she said, sarcastically.

"Ah, my lady, I do not mind your sneers; not the least in the world. You must send for the earl in the morning; tell him the wedding must be deferred, that you have been thinking matters over, and you have come to the conclusion that your happiness is at stake. If you do not like to stay

here after such a grand *expose*, then ask him to take you abroad, or anywhere else. I will join you in a few weeks. Then *my* wooing can begin, and *I will marry you*."

She laughed a mocking, bitter, satirical laugh, that drove him half mad.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she said. "Now for your alternative."

"If you refuse, I shall go away now. To-morrow I shall return, and, before the man who is to be your husband, before your parents and friends, I will tell what you were to me, and what my claim on you is."

"Very well," she replied, calmly; "I accept the alternative; tell them. I cannot answer for the earl and countess; what they will do is, of course, a mystery to me; but Earle will forgive me, I feel quite sure of it; he loves me so dearly, he will forgive me and make me his wife. You will have proved yourself a villain and coward for nothing."

"Earle will never marry you," he said; "no man in his senses would, when he knows what I can tell him."

"I will risk it," she replied. "Do you know that it is even a relief to me that the worst is come? I do not know what I have dreaded, but I am quite sure of one thing—you will do your worst, and you have told me what it is. Let the sword fall: it has hung over my head long enough. Earle loves me. Earle is just as noble and generous as you are the reverse. Earle is forgiving; he will be hurt and angry, but when I tell him how vain I was, and how you tempted me, he will forgive me."

"I do not think so, Lady Studleigh."

"Because you do not know him; you judge him by yourself. Even if he refuses to pardon me at first, if he thinks me beyond forgiveness. I will be patient and humble, and wait. He will love me again in time, and my sorrow will purify me from my sin."

A tender beautiful light came over her white face, a sweet smile played round her lips. She raised her eyes fearlessly to his.

"You see," she said, "how little you can do, after all. You might kill me, but you could not bend my pride; you could not incline my heart to one loving thought of you."

"So I perceive. Then you positively prefer open shame and disgrace, the scorn and mocking of the world?"

"Yes," she said; "I prefer it."

"You must hate me very much, Lady Studleigh."

Sudden passion flamed in her eyes.

"I do, indeed," she replied. "No woman ever hated man more."

"And yet I love you."

She turned from him with an air of haughtiest indignation. He followed her. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the white glittering bridal costume.

"What is that?" he cried, and his whole face worked with fury, indignation and anger.

Before she could interfere to stop him, he had taken the wreath and veil in his hands. He laughed as he held them in derision.

"Oh, fair, pure and spotless bride!" he cried; "well may they robe you in bridal white, hide your face with a bridal veil, crown you with orange blossoms! They will do well."

She made a step forward and would have taken the veil from his hands, but he would not release it.

"See," he cried, "how I serve your bridal veil! I would do the same to your heart, and his, if I could."

His face was transformed with rage, his eyes flashed fire, sudden fury leaped from his heart to his lips, sudden murder sprung like a flame of fire that seemed to scorch him.

He tore the beautiful veil into shreds, he trampled it under foot, he stamped on it in the violence of his rage and anger.

"So I would serve you!" he cried; "so I would serve him if I could!"

She drew back as his violence increased; not frightened—she was physically too brave for that; but wondering where it would lead him to, what he would do or say next.

"You are the falsest woman under heaven!" he cried. "You ought not to live; you are a mortal enemy of man!"

A weaker or more cowardly woman would have taken alarm and have cried out for help; but she did not know fear. If she had but given the least alarm, there were brave hearts near who would have shed their last drop of blood in her defense, who would have died over and over again for her; but she stood still, with a calm, sorrowful smile on her face.

"So much for your veil!" he cried, with a mocking sneer. "Now for the wreath!"

He took the pretty, scented flowers from the box, where loving hands had so gently laid them, and crushed them into a shapeless, dead heap.

"That will never lie on your golden hair, my Lady Studleigh," he said.

She made no effort to save the pretty wreath; his furious violence dismayed her and made her mute. She saw him stamp on the orange blossoms that should on the morrow have crowned her; she saw them lie crushed, torn, destroyed at his feet, and she looked on in a kind of trance. To her it was like a wild, weird, dark dream.

Then he took the costly wedding-dress, with its rich trimmings of white lace, and he laughed as he tore it asunder, flinging it under his feet; then pausing to look on his work of destruction with a smile.

"There will be no wedding to-morrow, fair lady," he said. "Ah, Dora, why have you driven me mad? why have you unmanned me? why have you made me ashamed of myself?"

There was a strange glitter in her eyes, and a strange expression on her face.

"I did not mean to be so violent; you have driven me to it. Not that I regret destroying your wedding-dress: I would do it over again a hundred times; but I am sorry to have frightened you."

"You could not frighten me," she replied.

And if ever calm scorn was expressed by any human voice, it was by hers.

There came a lull in the storm. He stood looking partly at the ruin he had caused, partly at her. She seemed, strange to say, almost to have forgotten him. She stood where the light of the lamp fell on her disheveled hair and flushed face.

The fragrant calm of the summer night reigned unbroken outside, a calm broken only by the musical rustle of the leaves. The moon shone bright as day; its beams fell on the sleeping flowers, and silvered the waving trees; they fell, too, on the beautiful face, with its look of restless scorn.

During that moment so strangely silent she thought of Earle—Earle, whom she was to marry to-morrow—Earle, whom she would marry, let the morrow bring what it might. No matter if her wedding-dress were torn into shreds—no matter if Lord Vivianne stood with a drawn sword in his hand to bar her progress to the altar—no matter if the whole world cried out, with its clanging, brazen voice, that she was lost, she would marry him!

She turned to her enemy, with a flush on her face, a scornful light in her eyes.

"You are but a coward after all," she said, "a paltry, miserable coward! You can do me no real harm, and you cannot take me from Earle."

"You did not always think me a coward, my Lady Dora. There was a time when you delighted to sun yourself in my eyes; you have not always held aloof from me as you do now. I have held you in my arms; I have kissed your lips; I have won you as no one else will ever win you. I like to look at you and remember it; I like to dwell on my recollections of those old days. Ah! your face flushes. Let me kiss you now."

He hastened toward her, trampling in his hot haste on the torn shreds of the wedding-dress.

"Do not touch me!" she cried. "Do not come near me!"

"I have kissed you before, and I will kiss you again," he said.

"I will kill you if you dare to touch me!"

She snatched up the first thing that came to her hand; it was the long, shining, sharp knife that had been used to prune the overhanging branches.

"I will kill you," she repeated, with flaming eyes, "if you come near me!"

He laughed, but the angry blood surged into his brain. He went nearer; he seized the white hand that held the knife. The beautiful face, the white, bare neck were close to him.

"I hate you!" she hissed.

Only God, who sees all things, knows what followed. Her words, may have angered him to murder heat; his passion of love and sense of wrong may have maddened him—only God knows.

There was a struggle for one half minute, followed by a low, gasping cry:

"Oh, Heaven! I am not fit to die!"

It may have been that in the struggle the point of the knife was turned accidentally against her; but the next moment she fell to the ground, with the blade buried deep in her white breast.

The crimson life-blood flowed—it stained his hands, still grasping her—it stained the torn wedding-dress, the bridal veil—it soon formed a pool on the carpeted floor. He stood over her for a minute, stunned, horrified.

"Dora!" he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Oh, Heaven! I did not mean to kill her."'

She opened her eyes, and her white lips framed one word, half sigh, half moan—"Earle!"—and then the soul of the unhappy girl went out to meet its Judge.

He made no attempt to raise her; he stood like a man lost.

The crimson stain crept onward until it touched his feet.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried again; "I did not mean to kill her."

Then his whole soul seemed to shrink and wither away with fear. He had killed her; it was the pallor of death blanching the lovely face; and—oh, horror!—the crimson stain had reached the golden hair.

She was dead; he had slain her in his mad frenzy. He looked at the cruel knife buried in the white flesh—he dare not touch it. He looked at the face so rapidly growing cold in death—he dare not touch it. He would have given his life to have touched those cold, dead lips, but he dare not, because he had murdered her. He clinched his strong hands in an agony that knew no words.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried again; "I have slain her!"

He gave one hurried glance around on a scene he was never to forget—the luxurious boudoir, its hangings, its lights and flowers; the bridal costume, all torn into shreds: the crimson stain, spreading so slowly, so horribly; the beautiful dead face upraised to the light; the white breast, with its terrible wound; the quiet figure, the golden hair—and, with a moan of unutterable remorse, he turned away.

It just occurred to him that his only safety lay in flight. The door was opened that led to the spiral staircase; the next moment he was creeping along under the shadow of the wall, and Lady Doris Studleigh lay dead and alone!

CHAPTER LXXXI.
THE SILENT BRIDE.

"Good-night, Earle," said Lord Linleigh; "now that is really the last time. You shall not draw me into another discussion. I will not say another word. Remember you are to be married to-morrow."

"I am not likely to forget it," said Earle, with a happy laugh.

"Let us have some rest," said Lord Linleigh. "I am positively afraid to look at my watch. I know it is late."

"It is not two o'clock," said Earle; "but I will be obedient. I will say no more."

Yet they talked all the time as they went slowly up the grand staircase.

"I hope Doris will cure you of liking to sit up late," said the earl, as he stood for one moment against the door of his room.

"Hark!" said Earle, suddenly bending his head in a listening attitude. "Hark!"

"What is it?" asked Lord Linleigh.

"I fancied I heard a cry," said Earle, and the two listened intently. All was silent.

"It must have been fancy," said the earl.

"It may have been, but it really sounded like a sudden, half-choked cry."

"Some of the servants are about still. It is nothing. For the last time, good-night, Earle."

Then they parted, each going to his room; but Earle could not forget that cry.

"How foolish I am," he thought; "but I shall not rest at all unless I know that Doris is all right."

He went down the broad corridor that led to her suit of rooms; he saw that the outer door was closed; he listened, all was hushed and silent; there was not a stir, not a movement, not a sound.

"Good-night, my love," said Earle; "fair dreams, sweet sleep. You will be mine to-morrow."

It was all right. He laughed at himself for the foolish fear, and went back to his own room. He never saw the white, despairing face and creeping figure of the wretched man who had done the atrocious deed.

He slept soundly for some few hours, then the kindly sun woke him, shining on his face—a warm, sweet greeting, and he thought Heaven was blessing his wedding-day. The birds were all singing in the trees, the flowers blooming, the whole world fair and smiling.

"My love will be mine to-day!" he thought. "Shine on, blessed sun! there is no day like this!"

It would have gladdened his mother's heart had she been there to have seen him bend his head so reverently, and pray Heaven to shower down all blessings on Doris.

They had arranged, in deference to her wishes, that no great difference should be made between this and other mornings. She would not go down to meet them at the early breakfast; she would not see Earle until they reached the church, but Lord Linleigh and the countess, Mattie and Earle, had agreed to breakfast together.

It was about the usual hour when Earle entered the breakfast-room. Lady Estelle was there alone. She looked up with a charming smile on her gentle face.

"Either we are very early, or the others are very late," she said. She went up to him. "I am glad to see you for one moment alone on this happy day, Earle—to thank you for keeping my secret—and pray Heaven to bless you and my darling, that you may lead the happiest of all lives together."

Then she bent down and kissed him. Her fair hair drooped over him; it seemed to Earle as though a soft, fragrant cloud had suddenly enwrapped him. Then Mattie came in, and a message was brought from Lord Linleigh, praying them to wait five minutes for him. It seemed quite natural for Mattie and Earle to pass through the long, open glass doors, and spend the five minutes among the flowers.

"You have a glorious day for your wedding, Earle," said Mattie. "I think the sun knows all about it; it never shone so brightly before. The best wish that I can offer is that your life may be as bright as the sunshine."

It seemed only natural for him to turn to her and say:

"Have you seen Doris this morning?"

"No," she replied. She had been to the door of her room, but it was so silent she did not like to arouse her.

Then Earle went to a moss-rose tree and gathered a beautiful bud, all shrouded in its green leaves.

"Mattie," he said, "will you take this to her, with my love?"

"What this love is!" laughed Mattie, as she went on her errand.

While she was gone the earl came in, and they sat down to breakfast. It was some little surprise to Earle when Mattie came back with the rose in her hand.

"Doris is not awake yet, and her maid did not seem willing to call her. She was up late last night, I think."

He said nothing, but he thought to himself it was strange Doris should sleep so soundly on this most eventful morning of her life.

They took a hurried breakfast; then Mattie said:

"Now it is growing late—our beautiful bride must be roused."

Lady Estelle looked up hurriedly.

"Is Doris still in her room?" she asked. "How strange that she sleeps so soundly!"

In the long corridor Mattie met the pretty Parisienne, Lady Doris' maid, Eugenie.

"You must rouse Lady Studleigh; she will be quite late if you do not."

"My lady sleeps well," said the girl, with a smile, as she tripped away. It was some short time before she returned; she looked pale and scared, half-bewildered.

"I cannot understand it, Miss Brace," she said. "I have been rapping, making a great noise at my lady's door, but she does not hear, she does not answer!"

Mattie looked perplexed. The maid continued:

"It is very strange, but it seems to me the lights are all burning—there is a streak of light from under the door."

"Then Lady Doris must have sat up very late, and has forgotten to extinguish them; that is why she is sleeping so soundly this morning. I will go with you and we will try again."

Mattie and the maid went together. Just as Eugenie had said, the door was fastened *inside*, and underneath it was seen a broad clear stream of lamplight. Mattie knocked.

"Doris," she said, "you must wake up, dear. Earle is waiting. It will be time to start for church soon!"

But the words never reached the dead ears; the cold lips made no answer.

"Doris!" cried the foster-sister again; and again that strange silence was the only response.

"Let me try, Miss Brace," said Eugenie, and she rapped loud enough to have aroused the seven sleepers. Still there came no reply.

The two faces looked pale and startled, one at another.

"I am afraid, Miss Brace," said the maid, "that there is something wrong!"

"What can be wrong? Has Lady Studleigh gone out, do you think, and taken the key of the room with her? If so, why should she leave the lamps burning? Oh, my lady!—Lady Studleigh! do you not hear us?"

Then Mattie began to fear! What had happened? She waited some time longer, but the same dead silence reigned.

"What shall we do, Miss Brace?" asked Eugenie. Her face grew very pale as she spoke. "I am quite sure that there is really something the matter. Lady Studleigh must be ill. Shall I fetch the countess?"

A vision of the fair, gentle face of Lady Estelle, with its sweet lips and tender eyes, seemed to rise before her.

"No," she replied; "if you really think there is anything wrong, you had better find the earl. But what can it be? Doris, my darling sister, do you not hear? Will you not unfasten the door!"

"I will go at once," said Eugenie.

Mattie begged that she would say nothing to the countess.

The maid hastened away and Mattie kept her lonely watch by the room door. She listened intently, but there was no sound, no faint rustle of a dress, no murmur of a voice; nothing but the glare of lamplight came from underneath. In spite of herself the dead silence frightened her. What could have happened? Even if Doris were ill she could have rung her bell and opened the door. There was little likelihood of her being ill: it was not many hours since they had parted, and then she was in the best of health and spirits.

The earl came quickly down the corridor.

"What is the matter, Mattie?" he asked, in a loud, cheery voice. "Eugenie is telling me some wonderful story about not being able to wake my daughter. What does it mean? Doris ought to be dressed and ready."

He started when his eyes fell on Mattie's bewildered face.

"You do not mean to say that there is anything wrong?" he cried.

"I hope not, Lord Linleigh, but we have been here nearly half an hour, doing all that is possible to wake Doris, and we cannot even make her hear."

He looked wonderfully relieved.

"Is that all? I will soon wake her."

He applied himself vigorously to the task with so much zeal that Mattie was half deafened.

"That will do," he said, laughingly. "Doris, you heard that, I am sure."

There was no reply. Mattie laid her hand on his arm.

"Lord Linleigh," she asked, "do you see the gleam of the lamplight under the door? The night lights are still burning."

Then he looked a little startled.

"Mattie," he said, hurriedly, "young ladies live so fast nowadays; do you think Doris takes opiates of any kind—anything to make her sleep?"

"I do not think so," she replied.

Then again, with all his force, the earl called to her, and again there was no response.

"This is horrible," he said, beating with his hands on the door. "Why, Mattie, Mattie, it is like the silence of death."

"Shall you break the door open?" she asked.

"No, my dear Mattie," he said, aghast; "is there any need? There cannot be anything really serious the matter; to break open the door would be to pre-suppose something terrible. How foolish I am! There is the staircase—I had forgotten that." He stopped abruptly and turned very pale. "Surely to Heaven," he cried, "nothing has happened through that staircase door being left open? I always felt nervous over it. Stay here, Mattie; say nothing. I will run round."

As he passed hurriedly along he saw Earle, who, looking at his face, cried:

"What is the matter, Lord Linleigh?"

"Nothing," was the hurried reply, and the earl hastened on.

He passed through the hall—through the broad terrace to the staircase leading to his daughter's suit of rooms.

The door was open—he saw that at one glance—open, so that in all probability she had risen and gone out in the grounds. His heart gave a great bound of relief; she was out of doors—there could be no doubt of it; gone, probably, to enjoy one last glimpse of her home.

There was a strange feeling of oppression, a strange heaviness at his heart. He raised his hand to his brow, and wondered to feel the great drops there.

"I will go to her room," he said to himself, "she will be there soon; she is dreaming her time away, I suppose."

Yet he went very slowly. Ah, dear Heaven! what is that?

A thin, crimson stain stealing gently along the floor; a horrible crimson stain!

Great Heaven! what did it mean?

The next moment he is standing, with a white, terrible face, looking at the ghastly sight, that he is never to forget again, let him live long as he may. The lurid light of the lamps contrasts with the sweet light of day. There on the floor lies the wedding-dress, the veil and wreath—torn, destroyed—out of all shape—stained with that fearful crimson; and lying on them, her golden hair all wet and stained, her white neck bare, her dead face calm and still, was Doris—his beautiful, beloved daughter.

He uttered no cry; he fell on his knees by the fair, dead girl, and looked at her.

Murdered! dead! lying there with her heart's blood flowing round her! Dead! murdered! while he had slept!

All the sudden shock and terror of his bereavement came over him in a sudden passion of despair.

He uttered one long, low cry, and fled from the room.

CHAPTER LXXXII.
HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD.

Lord Linleigh rushed from the room like one mad—he was utterly lost. That his beautiful daughter, who was to have been married that day, lay there murdered and dead, was an idea too terrible to contemplate. He fled from the place, but he could not fly from reality. How, in Heaven's name, was he to confront the mother of this unhappy girl? How was he to tell her lover? What was he to do?

For once the courage of the Studleighs—oh, fatal boast!—failed him. He sank down on the last step of that fatal staircase, white, sick, trembling, and unmanned.

"What shall I do?" he moaned to himself. "Oh, Heaven, what shall I do?"

It must be told—there was no time to lose: even now he could hear a hurried murmur, as of expectation and fear.

When he rose to return his limbs trembled like those of a little child; he was compelled to clutch the iron rail and the boughs of the trees for support. It was not sorrow—he had not realized yet that it was his daughter, his only child who lay dead—he was simply stunned with horror. The dead face, the crimson-stained hair, the bare white breast with its terrible wound, the sun shining over the ghastly scene.

The hall-door was open as he had left it, and he saw the servants hurrying on their different affairs; no murmur of dread had reached them. There was to be a wedding, and, on the strength of it, they had each of them received a handsome present. Their faces were all smiles; but one or two, passing along, looked aghast as the master of that superb mansion, with his white face and horror-stricken eyes, came in.

The library was the nearest room at hand. He went in.

"Tell Miss Brace I want to see her directly," he said.

And in a few minutes Mattie stood trembling before him.

"There is something the matter," she said, in a low voice, "and, Lord Linleigh, you are afraid to tell me what it is."

He could only hold out his hands toward her with a trembling cry:

"Oh, great Heaven! how shall I tell her?"

She knelt down by his side, and held both his hands in hers. She felt that he was trembling—the strong figure was almost falling.

"Tell me!" she cried, calmly. "I am strong; you can trust me; I will help you all I can."

The good, kindly face grew almost beautiful in its look of high, patient resolve.

He raised his haggard eyes to her face.

"Mattie!" he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Doris is dead!"

She grew very pale, but no word passed her lips; she saw that so much would depend on her; she must not lose her self-control for one minute.

"Doris is dead!" he repeated; "and that is not all—she has been foully, terribly murdered! and she was to have been married to-day!"

She was quite silent for some minutes, trying to realize the meaning of his words; then her old prayer stole to her lips:

"We must try to spare Earle," she said. "Heaven save Earle!"

Lord Linleigh caught hold of her.

"Mattie," he said, in a low, gasping voice, quite unlike his own, "I have not realized yet that it is my child, Doris; I can only understand a murder has been done. Have I lost my reason?"

"No. You must be brave," she said. "Think of Lady Linleigh. Such a blow is enough to kill her."

His head fell on his hands, with a low moan.

"You do not know—you do not know all," he said.

Just at that moment they heard the voice of Lady Estelle in the hall. He started up, everything forgotten except the wife he loved so dearly, the mother whose child lay dead.

"Do one thing for me, Mattie," he gasped. "Go to her—on some pretext or other—take her to her own room; she must not see, she must not know. Keep her there; I must tell Earle."

Mattie hastened to obey him. Lady Estelle was speaking to one of the servants in the hall.

"Mattie," she said, "I do not understand this delay. If some one does not hurry matters a little, we shall have no wedding to-day."

Then the girl's anxious face and pale lips struck her.

"Surely," she said, "there is nothing wrong! Has Doris changed her mind?"

"No, dear Lady Linleigh: she is not quite well; and probably there will be no wedding to-day. I want you to come with me to your own room—I want to talk to you."

"I shall go to Doris," said the countess: "if she is not well, *my* place is with her."

But Mattie caught her hands, and the countess, always yielding, went with her.

"Is she really ill, Mattie? Is it some terrible fever—some terrible plague? Never mind—I will go and kiss it from her lips; I must be with her."

The poor lady wrung her hands in a paroxysm of despair; her face quivered with grief. Mattie tried all that was possible to console her. What could she do? It was the heartbroken cry of a mother for a child; but she could not tell.

"We must be patient, dear lady," she said, "and wait until Lord Linleigh sends or comes."

She persuaded the countess to lie on the couch. She complied, trembling, weeping.

"You must be hiding something from me," she said. "She was to have been married this morning. Oh, Mattie, tell me what it is?"

Mattie Brace passed through many hours of sorrow and sadness, but none so dark as that which she spent shut up with Lady Linleigh. She could hear the sound of hurried footsteps. Once or twice she heard a cry of fear or dismay. She heard the rapid galloping of horses, and she knew that they were gone in search of the doer of the deed. Yet all that time she had to sit with assumed calm by the side of Lady Estelle. No one came near them. The silence of death seemed to reign over that part of the house; while from Mattie's heart, if not from her lips, went every minute the prayer:

"Heaven save Earle!"

What had passed was like a terrible dream to all those who shared in it. Lord Linleigh had gone in search of Earle. He found him busied in his preparations; happy and light of heart, as he was never to be again. He turned with a musical laugh to the earl.

"We have just ten minutes," he said. "I hope Doris is ready."

Then the smile died on his lips, for he caught one glimpse of the white face and terrified eyes. With one bound he had cleared the distance between them, and stood impatiently clutching Lord Linleigh's arm.

"What is that in your face?" he cried. "What is it? What is the matter?"

"Heaven help you, my poor boy!" said the earl, in a broken voice. "It would seem better to take away your life at once than to tell what I have to tell."

"Doris is ill. She—no—she cannot have changed her mind again—she cannot have gone away!"

"You will not be married to-day," said the earl, sadly. "My poor Earle."

"I cannot believe it," he cried. "Is Heaven so cruel; would God let that sun shine—those birds sing—those sweet flowers bloom? Yes, kill me, slay me, take my love away. I will not believe it."

"Hush," said the earl, laying his hand on the quivering lips; "hush, my poor Earle. Whatever happens, we must not rail against Heaven."

"It is not Heaven," he cried. "I tell you, God would not do it. He would not take my darling from me. You are afraid to say what has happened. I know she has gone away and left me, as she did before. Oh! my love, my love! you shall not cheat me! I will follow you over the wide world; I will find you, and love you, and make you my own! Oh! speak to me, for mercy's sake! Speak—has she gone?"

"My dear Earle, I do not know how to tell you, words seem to fail me. Try to bear it like a man, though it is hard to bear—Doris is dead!"

He saw the young lover's face grow gray as with the pallor of death.

"Dead?" he repeated, slowly—"*dead!*"

"Yes; but that is not all. She has been—you must bear it bravely, Earle—she has been cruelly murdered!"

He repeated the word with the air of one who did not thoroughly understand.

"Murdered! Doris! You cannot be speaking earnestly. Who could, who would murder her?"

Lord Linleigh saw that he must give him time to realize, to understand, and they both sat in silence for some minutes, that ghastly gray pallor deepening on the young lover's face. Suddenly the true meaning of the words occurred to him, and he buried his face in his hands with a cry that Lord Linleigh never forgot. So they remained for some time; then Lord Linleigh touched him gently.

"Earle," he said, "you have all your life to grieve in. We have two things to do now."

The white lips did not move, but the haggard eyes seemed to ask, "What?"

"We have to bury her and avenge her; we have to find out who murdered her while we slept so near."

The word *murder* seemed to come home to him then in its full significance; his face flushed, a flame of fire came into his eyes. He clutched the earl's hand as with an iron grasp.

"I was bewildered," he said. "I did not really understand. Do you mean that some one has killed Doris?"

"Yes; she lies in her own room there, with a knife in her white breast. Listen, Earle: I have my own theory, my own idea. I was always most uncomfortable about that staircase; the door opens right into her room. I have so often begged of her to be sure and keep it locked. I fancy that, by some oversight, the door was left open, and some one, intent on stealing her jewelry, perhaps, made his way to her room. She was no coward; she would try to save it; she would, perhaps, defy and exasperate the burglar, and he, in sudden fury, stabbed her; then, frightened at his own deed, he hastened away. There are signs of a struggle in the room, but I cannot say if there is anything missing."

"I must go to her," said Earle.

"Nay," replied Lord Linleigh, gently; "the sight will kill you."

"Then let me die—I have nothing to live for now! Oh, my darling! my dear lost love!"

He knelt down on the ground, sobbing like a child. Lord Linleigh stole away gently, leaving him there.

In another five minutes the whole household was aroused, and the dismay, the fear, the consternation could never be told in words.

The servants at first seemed inclined to lose themselves, to wander backward and forward without aim, weeping, wringing their hands, crying out to each other that their lady had been murdered while they slept; but Lord Linleigh pointed out forcibly that some one must have done the deed, and it behooved them to search before the murderer could make good his escape. No one was to enter the room until the detectives had arrived, and men were to mount the fleetest horses, to gallop over to Anderley, and bring the police officers back with them.

Then, when all directions were given, he went back to Earle. He was no coward, but he could not yet face the wife whose only child lay dead. Earle was waiting for him. Terrible as the moment was, he could not help noticing the awful change that had come over that young face: the youth and the brightness had all died from it; it was haggard and restless; he looked up as the earl

entered the room.

"Lord Linleigh," he said, and every trace of music had died from his voice, "it was no fancy of mine last night—that sound I heard last night was from Doris: it was her smothered cry for help, perhaps her last sound. Oh, Heaven! if I had but flown when I heard it—flown to her aid! Yet I did go. I went to the very door of her room, and all was perfect silence. Let me go to her—do not be hard upon me—I must look upon the face of my love again."

"So you shall, but not yet."

Lord Linleigh shuddered.

"I would to Heaven that I had never seen the terrible sight," he said; "but you, Earle, believe me, you could not see it and live!"

CHAPTER LXXXIII.
THE CAPTAIN ASKS STRANGE QUESTIONS.

Two hours had passed; it was the full glowing noon now of the summer day. The sun shone so brightly and warmly it was difficult to bear its rays; the air was faint with the rich odor of countless flowers; it was musical with the song of a thousand birds; the bright-winged butterfly hovered round the roses. Then the sweet summer silence was broken by the gallop of horses and the tramp of men.

Captain Ayrley had arrived with two clever officers; the whole town of Anderley was astir: in the silence of the soft summer night, red-handed murder had been among them, and robbed them of the fairest girl the sun had ever shone on. Foul, sneaking, red-handed murder! The whole town was roused: some went to the church where the rector awaited the bride, and told him the beautiful girl who was to have been married that day had been found dead, with a knife in her heart.

Up the broad staircase leading to the grand corridor they went slowly, that little procession of strong men. Captain Ayrley would not use the spiral staircase, he wished to see the place just as it was.

"If the outer door is locked," he said, "we will soon force it."

The next sound heard in that lordly mansion was the violent breaking open of a door; then, the earl being with them, they entered, accompanied by the doctor.

He could do nothing but declare how many hours she had been dead.

"Since two in the morning," he believed, and the earl shivered as he listened.

That was the time when Earle had heard the stifled cry.

Captain Ayrley was shrewd and keen, a man of great penetration; nothing ever escaped him. He asked each person to stand quite still while he looked round the room.

"There has been no violent entrance," he said; "the murderer must have come up the spiral staircase gently enough, there is not a leaf of the foliage destroyed! he evidently entered no other room but this. Strange—if he came for the purpose of robbery; for there, in the sleeping chamber, I see costly jewels that would have repaid any mere burglar."

He looked around again.

"There are no less than three bells," he said. "Where do they sound?"

"One went to the maid's room, another to the servants' hall, the third to the housekeeper's room."

"It was a strange thing," said Captain Ayrley, "that the young lady, having these bells at hand, did not sound an alarm; she had plenty of time."

"How do you know," asked the earl, "that she had plenty of time?"

The officer pointed to the bridal costume, all lying in shreds upon the floor.

"It must have taken some time to destroy those," he said; "they could not have been so completely destroyed in one single instant. Look again; you will find that they have been done with clean hands—there is not a mark upon them. That was done before the murder; the proof is that the lady has fallen, as you perceive, on the *debris*."

"You are right," said Lord Linleigh.

Then, with the same skill and care, he examined every other detail. The earl told him about the knife.

"It is, you perceive," he said, "a pruning-knife. It was fetched from one of the hot-houses yesterday, to cut some branches Lady Studleigh said darkened her room. I saw it yesterday

afternoon lying on that table, when I had come to speak to my daughter. Would to Heaven I had taken it away with me!"

Captain Ayrley looked very thoughtful.

"If that be the case, then it is quite evident the person did not come *prepared* to do murder! it must have been an afterthought."

"Perhaps my daughter made some resistance—tried to call for help, or something of that kind," said the earl.

Still the captain looked puzzled.

"Why not have called for help while these things were being destroyed?" he said. "I am sure there is a mystery in it, something that does not quite meet the eye at the first glance. Will you call Lady Studleigh's maid. Throw—throw a sheet over there first; that is not a fitting sight for any woman's eye."

Then came Eugenie, with many tears and wailing cries. She had nothing to tell, except that last evening her lady had, for the first time, spoken to her of her marriage, and had shown her the wedding costume.

"I took up the dress and looked at it," she said, "then I laid it over that chair. My lady wanted to see how large the veil was. I opened it, and we placed it on this chair: the wreath lay in a small scented box on the table. I remember seeing the knife there; it was left yesterday after the branches were cut. My lady told me to take it back, but I forgot it."

She knew no more, only that she had tried her hardest to open the door that morning, and had not succeeded. She was evidently ignorant and unconscious enough.

"Had your lady any enemy?" asked the earl.

"No," replied the maid; "I believe every one who saw her worshiped her.

"Was there any tramp or poacher to whom she had refused alms, or anything of that kind?" asked the captain.

"I should say not; my lady always had an open hand."

"She expressed no fear last evening, but seemed just as usual?" asked the earl.

"She was happier than usual, if anything, my lord," was the reply.

Then the medical details were taken down, and the body of the dead girl was raised from the ground. The doctor and the maid washed the stains from the golden hair. The housekeeper was summoned, and the two women, with bitter tears, laid the fair limbs to rest. She was so lovely, even in death! The cruel wound could not be seen. They would have arrayed her in her wedding-dress had it not been destroyed. They found a robe of plain white muslin, and put it on her: they brushed out the shining ripples of golden hair, and let it lie like a long veil around her; they crossed the perfect arms, and laid them over the quiet breast. Though she had died so terrible a death, there was no trace of pain on the beautiful face: it was calm and smiling, as though the last whisper from her lips had been anything rather than the terrible words.

"Oh, God! I am not fit to die!"—anything rather than that.

Eugenie went down into the garden and gathered fair white roses, she crowned the golden head with them; she laid them on the white breast, and over the silent figure, perfect in its pale loveliness as sculptured marble; so beautiful, so calm! Oh, cruel death, to have claimed her! Then the maid wept bitter tears over her, she could not tear herself from the room where the beautiful figure lay. Silently the earl entered, and bowed his head over the cold face, hot tears fell from his eyes upon it.

"I will avenge you, my darling," he said. "I will hunt your murderer down."

He went back to the room, where Captain Ayrley awaited him, with a strange expression on his face.

"I do not like to own myself defeated, Lord Linleigh," he said; "but I must own I am baffled here. I can see no motive for this most cruel murder."

"Robbery," said the earl, shortly.

"No: I cannot think so. The maid, who evidently understands her business, tells me that there is not so much as a ring, or an inch of lace missing; whatever the motive may have been, it was certainly not robbery; if so, when the victim lay helpless and dead, why not have carried off the plunder? There is jewelry enough here to have made a man's fortune; if any one risked murder for it, why not have taken it away?"

"Perhaps there was some noise, some interruption; the man grew frightened and ran away."

"I see no sign of it; there is nothing disturbed. Besides, my lord, there is another thing that puzzles me more than all. Why should a man, whose object was simply plunder, employ himself in tearing a wedding-dress and bridal-veil to pieces; why should he have delayed in order to crush

her wedding-wreath in his hand, and trample it underneath his feet, especially when, as circumstantial evidence goes to prove, his victim must have been in his presence—must, if she had any fear, have had plenty of time to have rung for help. I do not understand it."

"It certainly seems very mysterious," said Lord Linleigh. "I do not at all understand the destruction of the wedding costume."

"Do not think me impertinent, my lord, if I ask whether there was any rival in the case? This is not a common murder—I would stake the whole of my professional skill on it. It is far more like a crime committed under the maddening influence of jealousy than anything else."

"I do not see that it is possible. My daughter, as was only natural for a beautiful girl in her position, had many admirers; but there was no one who would be likely to be jealous. Another thing is, by her own especial wish and desire, the fact of her marriage was to be kept a profound secret; no one knew one single word about it except ourselves."

"And that was by her own especial desire?" said Captain Ayrley.

"Yes, it was her whim—her caprice."

"She may have had a reason for it," said the captain, gravely. "I should imagine she had."

"And what would you imagine that reason to be?" asked the earl.

"I should say that, for some reason or other, she was afraid of its being known. There are many things hidden in lives that seem calm and tranquil; it seems to me that the unfortunate young lady was afraid of some one, and perhaps had reason for it."

The earl sat in silence for some minutes, trying to think over all his daughter's past life; he could not remember anything that seemed to give the least color to the officer's suspicions. He raised his eyes gravely to the shrewd, keen face.

"You may be right, Captain Ayrley," he said; "it is within the bounds of possibility. But, frankly, on the honor of a gentleman, I know of nothing in my daughter's life that bears out your suspicions; therefore I should wish you not to mention them to any one else; they can only give pain. For my part, not understanding the destruction of the wedding-dress, I firmly believe that it is a case of intended burglary, and that either while trying to defend herself or to give the alarm, she was cruelly murdered. I believe that, and nothing more. At the same time, if you like to follow out any clew, I will do all in my power to help you. For the present we will not add to horror and grief by assuming that such a crime can be the result of jealous or misspent love. Try by all means to catch the murderer—never mind who or what he is."

Captain Ayrley promised to obey. Yet, though they searched and searched well, there was not the least trace, no mark of footsteps, no broken boughs, no stains of red finger marks, nor could they find any trace, in the neighborhood, of tramps, vagrants, or burglars. It seemed to Captain Ayrley, that the Linleigh Court murder would be handed down as a mystery to all time.

Lord Linleigh did not enter the room, where lay the beautiful, silent dead, with Earle, he dreaded the sight of his grief, he could not bear the thought of his sorrow.

Earle went in alone, closing the door behind him, that none might hear or see when he bade his love farewell. Those who watched in the outer room heard a sound of weeping and wild words: they heard sobs so deep and bitter, that it was heartrending to remember it was a strong man weeping there in his agony. They did not disturb him: perhaps Heaven in its mercy sent him some comfort—none came from earth; nothing came to soften the madness of anguish when he remembered this was to have been his wedding day, and now his beautiful, golden-haired darling lay dead, cold, silent, smiling—dead! What could lessen such anguish as his?

CHAPTER LXXXIV.
A MOTHER'S ANGUISH.

They wondered why Lord Linleigh allowed no one to take the fatal news to his wife but himself. The secret of her early ill-starred love and marriage had been so well kept all those years, it was useless to betray it now. He knew well what her anguish would be. He dreaded all scenes of sorrow, but he loved his wife, and no one must be with her in the first hour of her supreme trouble and bereavement.

He went to her room when the detectives left, and found Mattie still keeping watch over her. Before speaking one word to his wife, he turned to Mattie.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, gently; "you have carried out my wishes most faithfully. Will you go to Earle? Eugenie will take you where he is."

Then when she had quitted the room, Lady Estelle flung herself into his arms.

"Ulric," she cried, "tell me what is the matter? I know that something terrible has happened to Doris—what is it?"

"My darling wife," he said, "try to bear it. I have sad news for you—the saddest that I could bring you. Doris is dead!"

But even he, knowing how dearly the mother loved her child, was hardly prepared for the storm of anguish that broke over her.

"Dead!" she cried, "and never knew me as her mother! Dead! and never clasped her sweet arms round my neck! Dead! without one word! I cannot believe it, Ulric. How did it happen? Oh, my darling, my golden-haired child, come back to me, only just to call me mother! How did it happen, Ulric? Oh, I cannot believe it!"

He was obliged to tell her the pitiful story. Not one word did he say of the wedding costume destroyed, or the captain's suspicion—not one syllable; yet, strange to say, the same idea occurred to her. His wife had lain her head on his breast; she was weeping bitterly, and he clasped his arm round her. He said in a grave voice quite unlike his own:

"It must have been some beggar or tramp, who knew the secret of that spiral staircase, and had resolved upon breaking into the house by that means—some one who had learned, in all probability, that our daughter's jewels were kept in her chamber. Perhaps she carelessly left the outer door unlocked, and, while she was sitting dreaming, the burglar entered noiselessly; then, when she rose in her fright to give the alarm, he stabbed her."

She did not think just then of asking if the jewels were stolen or not; but, strange to say, she started up with a sudden cry.

"Oh, Ulric, Ulric! was it all right with her, do you think? I have always been afraid—just a little afraid—since I heard how she begged for secrecy over her wedding. Do you think she was frightened at any one? Perhaps some one else loved her, and was madly jealous of her."

He did not let her see how her words startled him—so like those used by Captain Ayrley. He tried to quiet her.

"No, my darling Estelle. Doris had many lovers—we knew them—men of high repute and fair renown; but there was not one among them who would have slain her because she loved Earle. Remember yet one thing more—no one know she was going to marry Earle; it had not even been whispered outside of our own house. It was a robbery, and nothing else, carefully planned by some one who knew the only weak spot in the house. I have no doubt of it."

Then she broke down again, and cried out with wild words and burning tears for her child—her only child, who had never known her as her mother.

They wondered again why the earl, with his own hand led Lady Linleigh to the silent death-chamber. He did not wish any one to be near, to see or to hear her.

He lived long after, but he never forgot that terrible scene; he never forgot how the mother flung herself by the side of that silent figure—how caressingly her hands lingered on the golden hair, on the sweet, dead face; he never forgot the passionate torrent of words—words that would have betrayed her secret over and over again a thousand times had any one been present to hear them. She laid her face on the pale lips.

"My darling," she cried, "come back to me, only for one hour: come back, while I tell you that I was your mother, darling—your own mother. My arms cradled you, my lips kissed you, my heart yearned over you. I am your own mother, darling. Come back and speak one word to me—only one word. Oh, Ulric, is it death? See, how beautiful she is! Her hair is like shining gold, and she is smiling! Oh, Heaven, she is smiling! She is not dead!"

But he drew her back, telling her it was only a sunbeam shining on the dead face—that she was dead, and would never smile again.

"Only touch one hand," he said; "there is nothing so cold as death."

She could only cry out, "her darling! her darling!" Oh, for the days that were gone—spent without her! How dearly she would love her if she would but come back again!

Lord Linleigh was always thankful that he had brought her there alone; and though he knew such indulgence in violent sorrow to be bad for her, he would not ask her to go away until it was almost exhausted; then he knelt down by her side.

"Estelle," he said, "you remember that it was for your father's sake we resolved to keep this secret—nay, we promised to do so. You must not break this promise now. You kept it while our darling lived; keep it still. Control your sorrow for your father's sake. Kiss the quiet lips, love, and tell our darling that you will keep our secret for all time."

She had exhausted herself by passionate weeping and passionate cries, she obeyed him, humbly and simply, as though she had been a child. She laid her quivering lips on the cold white ones, and said:

"I shall keep our secret, Doris."

Then he led her away.

That same day Lord Linleigh sent telegrams to the Duke and Duchess of Downsbury and to

Brackenside. Before the noon of the next day the duke and duchess had reached Linleigh Court. The duke took an active part in all the preparations for the ceremony of interment. The duchess shut herself up in her daughter's room, and would not leave her. Later on in the day Mark and Mrs. Brace came: their grief was intense. Lord Linleigh little knew how near he was then to the solving of the mystery; but the same carefully prepared story was told to them as was told to every one else—a burglar had broken into her room, and, in the effort to give an alarm, Lady Doris Studleigh had been cruelly murdered. Nothing was said of the crushed bridal wreath or the torn wedding-dress.

Honest Mark never heard that there was any other mystery connected with the murder than the wonder of who had done it. Perhaps had he told the story of Lord Vivianne's visit to Brackenside, it would have furnished some clew; but the earl was deeply engrossed and troubled. Mark never even remembered the incident. Had he heard anything of the captain's suspicions, he might have done so. It did not seem to him improbable that the young girl had been slain in the effort to save her jewelry; and jewel robberies, he read, were common enough.

Though the summer's sun shone and the flowers bloomed, the darkest gloom hung over Linleigh Court. Who could have believed that so lately it had been gay with preparations for a wedding? Lady Doris lay white, still, and beautiful in her silent room. Earle had shut himself up in the solitude of his chamber, and refused to come out into the light of day. Lady Estelle was really ill, and the duchess never left her. The one source of all help and comfort, the universal consoler, was Mattie; in after times they wondered what they should have done without her.

The duke and Lord Linleigh were incessantly engaged.

For many long years nothing had made so great a sensation as this murder—all England rang with it. So young, so beautiful, so highly accomplished, heiress to great wealth, and on the point of marriage with the man she loved best in all the world. It was surely the most sad and pathetic affair within the memory of man. There was a suspicion of romance in it, too—murdered on the eve of her marriage.

Some of the best detective skill in England was employed to trace out the murderer; but it was all in vain. The duke offered an unprecedented reward, the earl another, and government another; but it was all in vain; there did not seem to be the slightest clew—no handkerchief with the murderer's name, no weapon bearing his initials, no trace of any kind could be discovered of one of the most horrible crimes in the whole annals of the country.

There had been an inquest. The maid Eugenie, Mattie Brace, Earle, and Lord Linleigh, all gave their evidence; but when it was sifted and arranged, there was absolutely nothing in it; so that the verdict given was, "Found murdered, by some person or persons unknown."

Nothing remained then but to bury her. The brief life was ended; there was no more joy, no more sorrow for her—it was all over; neither her youth, her beauty, nor her wealth could save her. Her sin had found her out, and the price of her sin was death. There could have been no keener, swifter punishment than hers, and sin always brings it.

It seems so easy; the temptation, like that of Doris, is so sudden, so swift, so sweet; the retribution seems so far off. But, sure as night follows day, surely as the golden wheat ripens under the summer sun, it comes at last.

Until the hour she was taken from the sight of men she never lost any of her marvelous loveliness; until the last she looked like a marble sculpture, the highest perfection of beauty. They wondered—those who loved her best, as they knelt by her side and kissed her for the last time—why such wondrous loveliness had been given to her; it had brought her no good—it had given her swift, terrible death. Rank, wealth, position, all have their perils, but it seemed to those who watched her that surely the greatest peril of all is the peril of beauty. She had been so vain of her fair face; it seemed to her that fair, fragile beauty was the chief thing in life. It had led her to vanity, and from vanity to sin of the deepest, deadliest dye. She had paid the price now—her life was the forfeit. The sheen of the golden hair, the light of the proud eyes, the beauty of the radiant face, the grace of the perfect figure, were all hidden away; that for which she had sinned and suffered—for which she had neglected her heart, mind, and soul—for which she had neglected Heaven—was already a thing of the past. Let poets and artists rave of beauty—let the dead girl answer, "What had beauty done for her?"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

A SURPRISE FOR LORD LINLEIGH.

The funeral at Linleigh Court is still talked of in the county. There had not been for many generations such a scene. The whole country side were present; the rich and the noble to sympathize and assist, the poor to look on in wonder. They stood in groups under the trees discussing the event, they told each other that she had been beautiful as an angel, with hair that shone like the sun: that when she was younger and before she had come into possession of her fortune she had loved some one very much, a handsome, young poet; and after she came into her fortune, she had been true to him, and had refused some of the greatest men in England, to

marry him.

Tears stood in the eyes of those simple men and women as they told each other the story—that the night before her wedding-day she had been so cruelly murdered by a burglar who wanted her jewelry. Was there ever a story so sad. They stood bare-headed as that mournful procession passed by, pointing out to each other the chief mourners. "There was the young poet," they said—but who would have recognized Earle? His face was quite changed; the youth, the beauty had died from it, it was white with the pallor of despair; the eyes were haggard and wild, the lips quivered piteously, as the lips of a grieving child. It was hard to believe that he had ever been handsome, gallant, and gay. Women wept as they looked at him, and men stood bare-headed, mute, silent, before a great sorrow that they could so well understand. There was the earl; he looked very sad, grieved, and anxious, but he was a Studleigh, and on that debonair race trouble always sat lightly; they had grand capabilities for throwing off sorrow. They showed each other the stately Duke of Downsbury, one of the noblest men in England, who was not ashamed to take his station by the side of Mark Brace, the honest farmer; then followed a long train of nobles, gentlemen, and friends.

The long procession wound its way through the park, the leaves fell, the flowers stirred idly in the summer wind, as though recognizing the fact that a fairer flower had been laid low; the birds sang joyously, as though death and sorrow were not passing through their midst, and the bright sun shone warm and golden as they carried the beautiful Lady Doris to her last home. Oh! sweet summer and fragrant flowers, singing birds and humming bees, no sadder sight than this ever passed through your midst!

The same minister who was to have married her read the funeral service over her. She was to be buried in the family vault of the Studleighs, but, at the last, Lady Estelle had clung to her, declaring that she could not endure her darling buried out of her sight, that she must sleep in the sunshine and flowers, where she could see her grave; and the duke begged Lord Linleigh to grant her prayer. So it was done; and in the pretty churchyard so green and silent, with its tall trees and flowers, she sleeps the long sleep that knows no waking.

The sparrows build their nests there, the gray church-tower is a home for the rooks, the wood-pigeons coo in the tall trees, the nightingale sings her sweetest songs, and the fairest blossoms grow over her grave. The white marble cross gleams through the trees and on it one may read the short, sad story of Lady Doris Studleigh.

That same summer day, guests and friends returned home, the duke and duchess alone remaining, with Mattie Brace. Mark and his wife took their leave.

"I shall never forget her," said honest Mark, as he wrung Earle's hand; "she was the most winsome lass I ever saw; I shall never look up at the skies without thinking I see her sweet face there."

Some months afterward—he did not attend to it just then—Lord Linleigh settled a handsome annuity on the farmer and his wife. They lived honored, esteemed, and respected to a good old age; but they never forgot the child who had come to them in the wind and the rain—the beautiful girl whose tragical end cast a shadow over their lives.

A deep, settled gloom fell over Linleigh. Many thought that Earle would never recover; the spring of his life seemed broken. It would have been hard for him if he had never found her in Florence; but having so found her, having won her love, her heart, her wild, graceful fancy, having made so sure that she would one day be his wife, it was harder still. Every resource, every energy, every hope, seemed crushed and dead.

He remained at Linleigh Court through the winter. Lord Linleigh would say to him at times:

"We must think about your future, Earle; it is time something was done."

His only answer was that he wanted no future; that the only mercy which could be shown to him now, was an early death and a speedy one.

They had great patience with him, knowing that youth is impatient with sorrow, with despair—knowing that time would lessen the terrible grief, and give back some of its lost brightness to life.

At the end of the autumn even his physical strength seemed to fail him, and the doctors, summoned by Lord Linleigh in alarm, said he must positively spend the winter in some warmer climate.

"Let me stay and die here," he said to the earl.

But Lord Linleigh had grown warmly attached to him. He was intent on saving him if possible. The duchess came to the rescue: she said, that after the terrible shock some change was needful for all. If Lady Estelle did not feel equal to going abroad, let her spend the winter at Downsbury Castle with them, while Lord Linleigh and Earle went abroad together. Though Lady Estelle demurred at being separated from her husband, she saw that the change of scene and travel would be most beneficial for him, so she consented.

She went to Downsbury Castle with the duchess, and Lord Linleigh took Earle to Spain.

They were absent nearly five months, but time and travel did much for them. Earle recovered his lost strength and much of his lost energy; once more his genius reasserted itself; once more

grand, beautiful, noble ideas shaped themselves before him; once more the strong manly desire to be first and foremost in the battle of life came over him. Together they planned great deeds. Earle was to take his place in Parliament again; he was to be Lord Linleigh's right hand.

"You will always be like an elder son to me," said Lord Linleigh one day. "I shall have no one to study but you."

Then Earle was doubly fortunate; the duke had an excellent civil appointment in his power; when it became vacant, he offered it to Earle, who gratefully accepted it.

"Now," said Lord Linleigh to him, "your position is secure—your fortune is made."

And Earle sighed deeply, remembering how happy this might have made him once.

They were to return to England in April; and then a grand surprise awaited the earl. He received a letter to say that Lady Estelle, having grown tired of Downsbury Castle, had gone to a pretty estate of his in Wales—Gymglas—and that, on his return, he was to join her there.

"What a strange whim," said Lord Linleigh to Earle. "Gone to Gymglas. I have not been in Wales for some time. It will be quite pleasant—quite a treat to me."

When he returned to England, they went at once to Gymglas.

They reached the hall one fine day in April, when the world was all fair with the coming spring. Lord Linleigh thought he had never seen his wife looking so young or so fair. He had left her pale, with a quiet, languid sadness that seemed almost like despair: now her face was flushed with a dainty color, her eyes were bright; she was animated, joyous, and happy. It was a strange, subtle change, that he hardly understood.

"My darling Estelle," he said, "how happy I am to see you looking so bright! Has anything happened while I have been away?"

"Am I looking so well?" she asked, in a voice so full of heart's music he hardly recognized it. "Do you love me better than ever, Ulric?"

"Yes, a thousand times, if it be possible," he replied.

"Come with me," she said.

He half hesitated. He was tired, hungry, and longing for rest and refreshment.

She laughed in a gay, saucy fashion, quite unlike her own.

"I know," she said, "you think a glass of sherry would be far better than any little sentimental surprise I could give you. Wait and see; follow me."

She looked so charming and irresistible, he forgot all that he wanted and went after her. He expected to see a new conservatory or some pretty improvement in the old hall; but, rather to his surprise, she led the way up-stairs. He had almost forgotten the house; it was so large and old-fashioned. The beautiful countess stood quite still as they reached a large door, and placed her finger mysteriously on her lips.

"I am quite sure that you will be more pleased than ever you have been in your life before," she said.

She opened the door, and he followed her into a large, lofty, beautifully furnished room. In the midst of it stood a cozy and costly cradle. His wife took his hand and led him to it. She drew the silken curtain aside, and there lay the loveliest babe the sun ever shone on—a little, golden head, shining with curls—a face like a rosebud, with sweet little lips. One pretty hand lay outside on the silken coverlet. Lord Linleigh looked on in wonder too great for words.

"What is this?" he said, at last.

His wife laughed a sweet, low, happy laugh, such as he had not heard from her lips since the days of her happy girlhood.

"I will introduce you," she said. "Lord Linleigh, this is your son and heir, Lawrence Lord Studleigh, called in nursery parlance 'Laurie the beautiful!'"

The earl looked at his wife in a bewildered manner.

"You do not mean to tell me that this is my—our son, Estelle?"

"I do, indeed, Ulric. I did not tell you before, because I was afraid. I thought I should die. I never even had the hope of living—that made me go home with my mother. Are you pleased?"

"Why, my darling! how can I tell you? what am I to say to you? Pleased is not the word. I am lost in delight. So I really have a little son. Raise him—he looks like a beautiful bird in a nest. Place him in my arms, and let me kiss him. My own little son! Talk of a surprise! this is one! Call Earle, darling! let Earle see him."

And when Earle came, just as though he knew he was to be admired and worshiped, the baby opened a pair of beautiful eyes, and looked so good and sweet that they were charmed.

Lord Linleigh could not recover himself to think that he who had no hope of succession should

suddenly find this pretty little son. To the end of his life he persisted in teasing his wife by always calling his eldest son "The Surprise."

So that was, indeed, a happy coming home.

Earle went to London then to begin his life's work. The earl and the countess returned to Linleigh, where, in the smiles of her children, Lady Estelle grew young again. Fair-faced daughters and sturdy, noble boys made the walls of the Court ring again. The earl was happy beyond measure, but neither he nor his wife ever forgot the hapless, beautiful girl whom they had lost.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.
HAUNTED BY A DEAD FACE.

Two years after the birth of his son, the earl and countess went to London for the season. It so happened that the desire for a picture he had seen led him to the studio of Gregory Leslie. The artist was engaged for the moment, and asked Lord Linleigh to wait. While so waiting, he occupied himself in looking round at the pictures on the wall. He stopped before one as though spell-bound. If ever he had seen the face of his daughter at all, it was shining there on the canvas, beautiful as the radiant dawn of the morning, with the sunlight on her hair, and in her eyes a light that seemed to be from heaven. She was standing in the midst of flowers, and his own face grew pale as he looked at the radiant loveliness of hers.

"Doris," he said to himself; "but how comes she here?"

He saw the white hands that he remembered last as folded in death; he saw the white, graceful breast that had been disfigured by that terrible wound.

"My darling Doris," he said; "how came you here?"

He was standing there, with tears in his eyes, when Mr. Leslie entered the room.

"I should like to ask a few questions about that picture, Mr. Leslie," he said, courteously. "Is it for sale?"

"I can hardly say; I have had a very large bid for it. It was purchased some time since by one of our merchant princes, who has since failed, and I bought the picture at his sale; since then I have been offered a large sum for it."

"It is my daughter's portrait," said the earl, calmly. "I cannot see how it came into your possession."

"I painted it," said Mr. Leslie.

"You did! Where did you see my daughter?"

Then the artist told him the whole story of his going to Brackenside, and the earl told him the story of Lady Doris Studleigh's childhood.

"I never believed that she was Mark Brace's daughter," said Gregory Leslie; "she was so daintily beautiful—her grace was so complete, so high-bred, I could not fancy that she belonged to them. Was the mystery of her journey to Florence ever explained?"

"What mystery?" asked the earl, quickly; so quickly that Mr. Leslie thought that he had been wrong in naming it at all.

"There was some little confusion," he said. "Her face is very beautiful; it attracted great attention, and one of my fellow artists assured me that he had seen her in Florence, and that she was married."

"Nothing of the kind!" said the earl.

Then an uncomfortable conviction seized upon him. Could there be any truth in this? Could there be any truth in the idea—the suspicion that his wife entertained that all had not been well with Doris? Could there have been a mystery in that young life, so soon, oh, so soon ended?

The earl sighed deeply. It would be better, perhaps, to let it alone. If there had been anything wrong, it was too late to right it now. Let the dead past bury its dead. She was a Studleigh, and there were many of that race whose lives would not bear looking into. He dismissed the subject from his mind, and said to himself he would think of it no more.

"Who wants this picture?" he asked, abruptly. "I am sure that Lady Linleigh would like it."

"It is a strange coincidence that you should call this morning," said Mr. Leslie; "the gentleman who wishes so strongly for it appointed to meet me at two—it wants but ten minutes of the time. Will you wait and see him? Perhaps, under the circumstances, he might be willing for you to have the original, which I might copy."

Lord Linleigh was perfectly willing. He was rather surprised, however, when the door opened, to

see—in the expected visitor—Lord Vivianne! Lord Vivianne—but so changed, so unlike himself, that it was with difficulty he recognized him. His hair was white as snow, his face furrowed with deep lines, haggard, careworn and miserable. He looked like a man bowed down with care, wretched beyond words.

When he saw Lord Linleigh he grew even more ghastly pale, and all sound died away on his lips.

The earl eagerly extended his hand.

"Lord Vivianne!" he cried, "what a stranger you are! I am heartily glad to meet you again."

He did not understand why that great, gasping sigh of relief came from the wretched lips.

"I have thought of you," continued the earl. "Of course you heard the story of my terrible trouble?"

More ghastly still grew the white face.

"Yes, I heard of it; who did not?"

"Poor child!" sighed the earl; "It was a terrible blow to us; the very night before her wedding-day, too."

Ah! the night before the wedding-day! He was not likely to forget that. He saw it all again—the beautiful, defiant face; the wedding costume; the long, sharp knife; the bare, white breast. Ah! merciful God, was he never to forget! He groaned aloud, then saw the earl looking at him in wonder.

"You did not know, Lord Linleigh," he said, "that I loved your daughter. If I had gone to Linleigh again in August, it would have been to ask her to be my wife."

The earl held out his hand in silent sympathy.

"It was a terrible blow," he said.

Then he thought to himself that it was because he had loved his daughter that Lord Vivianne wished for the picture.

"I fancied once or twice," he said, "that you admired her. I did not know you loved her."

"I did. If any one had told me it was in my power to love any woman, or to mourn for any woman as I have done for her, I should have laughed at the notion. My life is blighted."

They sat then in silence for some time; then the earl said:

"I am glad that I have met you. Lady Linleigh and I have often spoken of you. Will you pay us a visit at Linleigh Court?"

"No," replied the wretched man, with a shudder. "You are very kind. I thank you, but my visiting days are over. I am nothing but a curse to myself and to others."

"You will get better in time," said the earl.

It was a new idea to him to play the part of comforter to a man of the world, and he did it awkwardly.

"I grow worse; not better," was the desponding reply. "I suppose, Lord Linleigh, nothing more was heard of that dreadful occurrence—the crime was never traced?"

"No; it was one of those mysteries that baffle solution," he replied. "The rewards offered have been enormous, and we have employed the best detectives in England, without success."

"It is very strange," said Lord Vivianne, musingly.

"Yes, it is strange. I am quite certain of one thing," said the earl, with energy; "it will come to light—murder always does—it will come to light."

The white face grew even whiter.

"You believe that?" said Lord Vivianne, in a low, hoarse voice.

"Yes," said the earl. "Although I am not what the world would call a religious man, I am quite sure that a just God will never allow such a crime to go unpunished. Now, about the picture. Lord Vivianne, if you loved my dear, dead daughter, I can well understand that you want this."

Then they finally agreed that Lord Linleigh should have the original, and Mr. Leslie should paint a copy for Lord Vivianne. Lord Linleigh at the same time ordered a copy for Earle. Then, looking at the picture, he saw the name. He looked at the artist with a smile.

"'Innocence,'" he said. "Why did you call that picture 'Innocence?'"

"Because the face was so fair, so fresh, so bright. I could think of no other name. There is in it the very innocence and beauty that angels wear. Look at the clear, sweet eyes, the perfect lips, the ideal brow."

"'Innocence!'" said Lord Vivianne, in a strange voice; "It was well named."

They both looked at him quickly, but he was on his guard again. He shook hands with the earl. They never met again. He said adieu to Leslie, and begged that the portrait might be sent home as soon as possible. Then he went away. The earl and the artist looked after him.

"That is a dying man," said Gregory Leslie, slowly.

"If he dies," said the earl, "it will be love for my daughter that has killed him."

The earl was never any nearer to the solution of the mystery. That Lord Vivianne, who spoke so openly of having loved her, had any hand in her death, he never even faintly surmised. He took the picture home, and it hangs now in Linleigh Court, where the earl's children pause sometimes in their play to ask about their elder sister, Doris, whose name the picture says was "Innocence."

It was not long afterward that the fashionable world was startled from its serenity by the sad intelligence of the suicide of Lord Vivianne. Then they heard a strange story, although no one could solve it. His servants told how dreadfully he had suffered. Let those who laugh at the retribution that follows sin believe. Slowly, and in terrible torture, had that wretched life ended. He had rushed from the scene of his crime, mad with baffled love, with fiercest passion, with regret and remorse. Mad with the wild fury of his own passions—above all, with the terrible knowledge of her death—for many days and nights he neither slept, rested, ate, nor drank. He went away to Paris. It was not exactly that he feared pursuit—he knew that it was not likely that any suspicion should attach itself to him. But, wherever he went, he saw that dead face, that golden web with the crimson stain.

In Paris he plunged into the wildest dissipation. He tried drink—all possible resources—in vain. Where the sun shone brightest, where the gaslight flared, where painted faces smiled—he saw the same sight—a white face looking up, still and cold in death.

If by chance he were left alone, or in the dark, his cries were awful. His servants talked about him, but they never thought crime or remorse was busy with him; they fancied he had drank himself into a fit of delirium. They could have told, and did tell after his death, of awful nights when he raved like a madman—when he was pursued by a dead woman, always holding a knife in her hand; they told of frantic fits of anguish when he lay groaning on the floor, biting his lips until they bled, so that one's heart ached to hear him.

Let no man say that he can sin with impunity; let no man say sin remains unpunished.

The time came when he said to himself, deliberately, and with full purpose, that he would not live. What was this tortured, blighted life to him? Less than nothing.

Once, and once only, he asked himself if it were possible to repent—repent of his sins, his unbridled passions, his selfish loves? Repent? He laughed aloud in scornful glee. It would, indeed, be a fine thing, a grand idea for him, a man of the world; he who had been complimented on being the Don Juan of the day. He—to repent? Nonsense! As he had lived he would die.

What mad folly had possessed him? He gnashed his teeth with rage when he thought of what he had done. Then something brought to his mind the remembrance of that picture, and his heart filled with hope. Perhaps if he could buy it—could have the pictured face in its living, radiant beauty always before him, it might lay the specter that haunted him; it might turn the current. He had forgotten almost what the lovely, living face was like; he only remembered it cold and dead.

He purchased the picture, but it only worked him deeper woe—deeper, darker woe. He fancied the eyes followed him and mocked him; he had a terrible dread that some time or other the lips would open and denounce him.

Then, when he could bear it no longer, he determined to kill himself. He would have no more of it.

All London was horrified to hear that Lord Vivianne had been found dead; he had shot himself. Even the journals that, as a rule, avoided details, told how he died with his face turned to a picture—the picture of a beautiful girl with a fair face, tender eyes, and sweet, proud lips—a picture called "Innocence."

If any one dare to believe that he can sin with impunity, let him stand for one minute while a sin-stained suicide is laid in his lonely grave.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.
SILENT LOVE REWARDED.

Five years had passed since the occurrence of the events recorded in the preceding chapter. Lord Vivianne's place was filled, his name forgotten; flowers bloomed fair and fragrant on the grave of Lady Doris; the earl and countess had drawn themselves more from public life, and found their happiness in the midst of their children. The duchess seemed to have renewed her youth in those same children, and was never so happy as when she could carry one or two of them off with her to Downsbury Castle.

One autumn day Mattie Brace stood at the little gate that led from the garden to the meadow.

The sun was shining, and the red-brown leaves were falling from the trees. She was thinking of Earle; how prosperous, how fortunate he had been during these last few years, when he had worked with all his heart to drown his sorrow. How he had worked! And now he reaped the reward of all industry—success. The critics and the public hailed him as the greatest poet of the day. In the House of Commons he was considered a brilliant leader, a brilliant speaker. He had speculated, too, and all his speculations turned out well; he had sent his last poem to Mattie, and told her he should come to hear her opinion from her own lips.

It was not a great surprise to her, on that bright autumn day, to see him crossing the meadows. How many years had she waited for him there! She thought him altered. They had written to each other constantly, but they had not met since the tragedy. He was older, his face had more strength and power, with less brightness. She thought him handsomer, though so much of the light of youth had died away from him.

He held out his hand to her in loving greeting, then he bent down and kissed her face.

"Such a kind, sweet face, Mattie," he said: "and it is sweeter than ever now."

He spoke truly. Mattie Brace had never been a pretty girl, but she was not far from being a beautiful woman. The rich brown hair was smooth and shining as satin; the kindly face had an expression of noble resolve that made it beautiful; the brown eyes were clear and luminous; the lips were sensitive and sweet. Earle looked at her with critical eyes.

"You please me very much, Mattie," he said. "Do you know what I have come all the way from London to ask you?"

"No," she replied, in all simplicity, "that I do not."

"I want you to be my wife, dear. I know all that lies between us. If I cannot offer you the enthusiastic worship of a first love, I can and do offer you the truest and deepest affection that a man can give. I always liked you, but of late have begun to think that you are the only woman in the world to me."

"Can I make you happy, Earle?" she asked, gently.

"Yes, I am sure of it."

"But I am not beautiful," she said, sadly.

An expression of pain came over his face.

"Beauty! Oh, Mattie, what is it? Besides, you are beautiful in my eyes. Be my wife, Mattie; I will make you very happy."

It was not likely that she would refuse, seeing that she had loved him for years. They were married, much to the delight of Lord and Lady Linleigh.

Now Earle has a beautiful house of his own: his name is honored in the land; his wife is the sweetest and kindest of women; his children are fair and wise. He has one golden-haired girl whom they call Doris; and if Earle loves one of the little band better than another, it is she. He has a spacious and well-adorned room opening on a flowery lawn; it is called a study. And here sometimes, at sunset, his children gather round him, and they stand before a picture—a picture on which the sunbeams fall, shining on a radiant face, with bright, proud eyes, and sweet, smiling lips—a picture known to them by the name of "Innocence."

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other

medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state’s laws.

The Foundation’s business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation’s website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.