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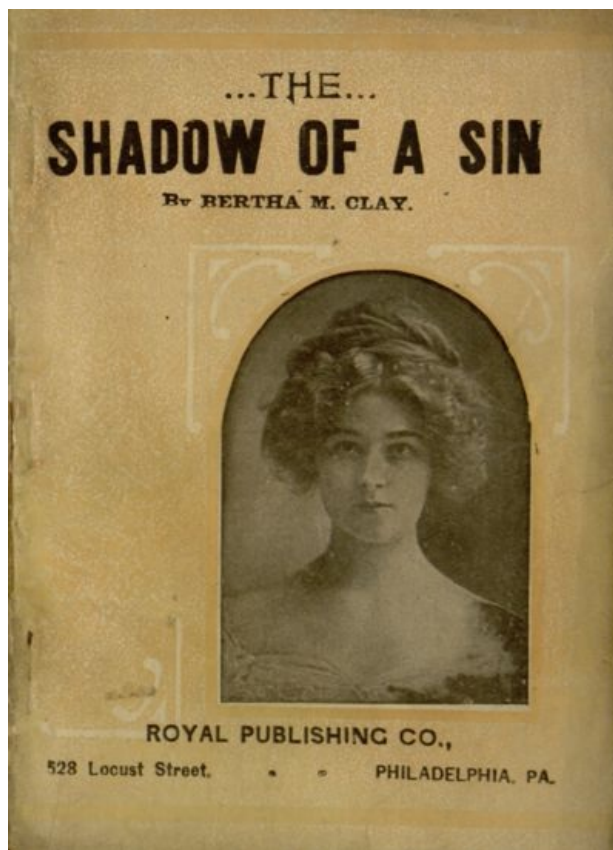
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**...THE...
SHADOW OF A SIN**

By BERTHA M. CLAY
ROYAL PUBLISHING CO.,
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THE SHADOW OF A SIN

BY BERTHA M. CLAY
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THE SHADOW OF A SIN.

[Pg 3]

CHAPTER I.

"She is coming—my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat
Had it lain for a century dead."

A rich musical voice trolled out the words, not once, but many times over—carelessly at first, and then the full sense of them seemed to strike the singer.

"Had it lain for a century dead," he repeated slowly. "Ah, me! the difference between poetry and fact—when I have lain for a century dead, the light footfalls of a fair woman will not awaken me. 'Beyond the sun, woman's beauty and woman's love are of small account;' yet here—ah, when will she come?"

The singer, who was growing impatient, was an exceedingly handsome young man—of not more than twenty—with a face that challenged all criticism—bright, careless, defiant, full of humor, yet with a gleam of poetry—a face that girls and women judge instantly, and always like. He did not look capable of wrong, this young lover, who sung his love-song so cheerily, neither did he look capable of wicked thoughts.

"You really must come, for I said
I would show the bright flowers their queen."

That is the way to talk to women," he soliloquized, as the words of the song dropped from his lips. "They can not resist a little flattery judiciously mixed with poetry. I hope I have made no mistake. Cynthia certainly said by the brook in the wood. Here is the brook—but where is my love?"

He grew tired of walking and singing—the evening was warm—and he sat down on the bank where the wild thyme and heather grew, to wait for the young girl who had promised to meet him when the heat of the day had passed.

He had been singing sweet love-songs; the richest poetry man's hand ever penned or heart imagined had been falling in wild snatches from his lips. Did this great poem of nature touch him—the grand song that echoes through all creation, which began in the faint, gray chaos, when the sea was bounded and the dry land made, and which will go on until it ends in the full harmony of heaven?

He looked very handsome and young and eager; his hair was tinged with gold, his mouth was frank and red; yet he was not quite trustworthy. There was no great depth in his heart or soul, no great chivalry, no grand treasure of manly truth, no touch of heroism.

He took his watch from his pocket and looked at it. "Ten minutes past seven—and she promised to be here at six. I shall not wait much longer."

He spoke the words aloud, and a breath of wind seemed to move the trees to respond; it was as though they said, "He is no true knight to say that."

A hush fell over them, the bees rested on the thyme, the butterflies nestled close to the blue-bells, the little brook ran on as though it were wild with joy. Presently a footstep was heard, and then the long expected one appeared. With something between a sigh and a smile she held out one little white hand to him. "I hardly thought you would wait for me, Claude. You are very patient."

"I would wait twice seven years for only one look at your face," he rejoined.

"Would you?" interrogated the girl wearily. "I would not wait so long even for a fairy prince."

She sat down on the heather-covered bank, and took off her hat. She fanned herself with it for a few minutes, and then flung it carelessly among the flowers.

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"You do not seem very enraptured at seeing me, Hyacinth," said the young lover reproachfully. The girl sighed wearily.

"I do not believe I could go into a rapture over any thing in the world," she broke out. "I am so tired of my life—so tired of it, Claude, that I do not believe I could get up an interest in a single thing."

"I hope you feel some little interest in me," he said.

"I—I—I cannot tell. I think even bitterest pain would be better than the dead monotony that is killing me."

She remembered those words in after years, and repented of them when repentance was in vain. [Pg 5]

"Surely you might smile now," said Claude. "I hope you do not find sitting by my side on this lovely evening monotonous."

She laughed, but the laugh had no music in it.

"No, I cannot say that I do; but you are going away soon, you tell me, and then the only gleam of sunshine in my life will fade, and all will be darkness again."

"What has depressed you so much?" he asked. "You are not yourself to-day."

"Shall I tell you what my day has been like?" she said. "Shall I describe it from the hour when the first sunbeams woke me this morning until now?" He took both the small white hands in his.

"Yes, tell me; but be merciful, and let me hear that the thought of meeting me has cheered you."

"It has been the only gleam of brightness," she said, so frankly that the very frankness of the words seemed not to displease him. "It was just six when I woke. I could hear the birds singing, and I knew how cool and fresh and dewy everything was. I dressed myself very quickly and went down-stairs. The great house was all darkness and silence. I had forgotten that Lady Vaughan does not allow the front or back doors to be opened until after breakfast. I thought the birds were calling me, and the branches of the trees seemed to beckon me; but I was obliged to go back to my own room, and sit there till the gong sounded for breakfast."

"Poor child!" he said caressingly.

"Nay, do not pity me. Listen. The breakfast-room is dark and gloomy; Lady Vaughan always has the windows closed to keep out the air, and the blinds drawn to keep out the sun; flowers give her the headache, and the birds make too much noise. So, with every beautiful sound and sight most carefully excluded, we sit down to breakfast, when the conversation never varies."

"Of what does it consist?" asked the young lover, beginning to pity the young girl, though amused by her recital.

"Sir Arthur tells us first of what he dreamed and how he slept. Lady Vaughan follows suit. After that, for one hour by the clock, I must read aloud from Mrs. Hannah More, from a book of meditations for each day of the year, and from Blair's sermons—nothing more lively than that. Then the books are put away, with solemn reflections from Lady Vaughan, and for the next hour we are busy with needlework. We sit in that dull breakfast-room, Claude, without speaking, until I am ready to cry aloud—I grow so tired of the dull monotony. When we have worked for an hour, I write letters—Lady Vaughan dictates them. Then comes luncheon. We change from the dull breakfast-room to the still more dull dining-room, from which sunshine and fragrance are also carefully excluded. After that comes the greatest trial of all. A closed carriage comes to the door, and for two long, wearisome hours I drive with Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan. The blinds are drawn at the carriage windows, and the horses creep at a snail's pace. Then we return home. I go to the piano until dinner time. After dinner Lady Vaughan goes to sleep, and I play at chess or backgammon, or something equally stupid, until half-past nine; and then the bell rings for prayers, and the day is done."

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"It is not a very exhilarating life, certainly," said Claude Lennox.

"Exhilarating! I tell you, Claude, that sometimes I am frightened at myself—frightened that I shall do something very desperate. I am only just eighteen, and my heart is craving for what every one else has; yet it is denied me. I am eighteen, and I love life—oh, so dearly! I should like to be in the very midst of gayety and pleasure. I should like to dance and sing—to laugh and talk. Yet no one seems to remember that I am young. I never see a young face—I never hear a pleasant voice. If I sing, Lady Vaughan raises her hands to her head, and implores me 'not to make a noise.' Yet I love singing just as the birds do."

"I see only one remedy for such a state of things, Hyacinth," said the young lover, and his eyes brightened as he looked on her beautiful face.

"I am just eighteen," continued the girl, "and I assure you that looking back on my life, I do not remember one happy day in it."

"Perhaps the happiness is all to come," said he quietly.

"I do not know. This is Tuesday; on Thursday we start for Bergheim—a quiet and sleepy little town in Germany—and there we are to meet my fate."

"What is your fate?" he asked.

"You remember the story I told you—Lady Vaughan says I am to marry Adrian Darcy. I suppose he is a model of perfection—as quiet and as stupid as perfection always is."

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"Lady Vaughan cannot force you to marry any one," he cried eagerly.

"No, there will be no forcing in the strict sense of the word—they will only preach to me, and talk at me, until I shall be driven mad, and I shall marry him, or do anything else in sheer desperation."

"Who is he, Hyacinth?" asked her young lover.

"His mother was a cousin of Lady Vaughan's. He is rich, clever, and I should certainly say, as quiet and uninteresting as nearly all the rest of the world. If it were not so, he would not have been reserved for me."

"I do not quite understand," said Claude Lennox. "How it is? Was there a contract between your parents?"

"No," she replied, with a slight tone of scorn in her voice—"there is never anything of that kind except in novels. I am Lady Vaughan's granddaughter, and she has a large fortune to leave; this Adrian Darcy is also her relative, and she says the best thing to be done for us is to marry each other, and then her fortune can come to us."

"Is that all?" he inquired, with a look of great relief. "You need not marry him unless you choose. Have you seen him?"

"No; nor do I wish to see him. Any one whom Lady Vaughan likes cannot possibly suit me. Oh, Claude, how I dread it all!—even the journey to Germany."

"I should have fancied that, longing as you do for change and excitement, the journey would have pleased you," observed Claude.

She looked at him with a half-wistful expression on her beautiful face.

"I must be very wicked," she said; "indeed I know that I am. I should be looking forward to it with rapture, if any one young or amusing were going with me; but to sit in closed carriages with Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan—to travel, yet see nothing—is dreadful."

"But you are attached to them," he said—"you are fond of them, are you not, Hyacinth?"

"Yes," she replied, piteously; "I should love them very much if they did not make me so miserable. They are over sixty, and I am just eighteen—they have forgotten what it is to be young, and force me to live as they do. I am very unhappy."

She bent her beautiful face over the flowers, and he saw her eyes fill with tears.

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"It is a hard lot," he said; "but there is one remedy, and only one. Do you love me, Hyacinth?"

She looked at him with something of childish perplexity in her face.

"I do not know," she replied.

"Yes, you do know, Hyacinth; you know if you love me well enough to marry me."

No blush rose to her face, her eyes did not droop as they met his, the look of perplexity deepened in them.

"I cannot tell," she returned. "In the first place, I am not sure that I know really what love means. Lady Vaughan will not allow such a word in her presence; I have no young girl friends to come to me with their secrets; I am not allowed to read stories or poetry—how can I tell you whether I love you or not?"

"Surely your own heart has a voice, and you know what it says."

"Has it?" she rejoined indifferently. "If it has a voice, that voice has not yet spoken."

"Do not say so, Hyacinth; you know how dearly I love you. I am lingering here when I ought to be far away, hoping almost against hope to win you. Do not tell me that all my love, my devotion, my pleading, my prayers have been in vain."

The look of childish perplexity did not leave her face; the gravity of her beautiful eyes deepened.

"I have no wish to be cruel," she said; "I only desire to say what is true."

"Then just listen to your own heart, and you will soon know whether you love me or not. Are you pleased to see me? Do you look forward to meeting me? Do you think of me when I am not with you?"

"Yes," she replied calmly; "I look with eagerness to the time when I know you are coming; I think of you very often all day, and I—I dream of you all night. In my mind every word that you have ever said to me remains."

"Then you love me," he cried, clasping her little white hands in his, his handsome face growing brighter and more eager—"you love me, my darling, and you must be my wife!"

She did not shrink from him; the words evidently had little meaning for her. He must have been blind indeed not to see the girl's heart was as void and innocent of all love as the heart of a dreaming child.

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"You must be my wife," he repeated. "I love you better than anything else in the wide world."

She did not look particularly happy or delighted.

"You shall go away from this dull gloomy spot," he said; "I will take you to some sunny, far-off city, where the hours have golden wings and are like minutes—where every breath of wind is a

fragrant sigh—where the air is filled with music, and the speech of the people is song. You will behold the grandest pictures, the finest statues, the noblest edifices in the world. You shall not know night from day, nor summer from winter, because everything shall be so happy for you."

The indifference and weariness fell from her face as a mask. She clasped her hands in triumph, her eyes brightened, her beautiful face beamed with joy.

"Oh, Claude, that will be delightful! When shall it be?"

"So soon as you are my wife, sweet. Do you not long to come with me and be dressed like a lovely young queen, in flowers, and go to balls that will make you think of fairyland? You shall go to the opera to hear the world's greatest singers; you shall never complain of dulness or weariness again."

The expression of happiness that came over her face was wonderful to see.

"I cannot realize it," she said, with a deep sigh of relief and content. "The sky looks fairer already. I can imagine how bright this world is to those who are happy. You do not know how I have longed for some share of its happiness, Claude. All my heart used to cry out for warmth and love, for youth and life. In that dull, gloomy house I have pined away. See, I am as thirsty to enjoy life as the deer on a hot day is to enjoy a running stream. It would be cruel to catch that little bird swinging on the boughs and singing so sweetly—it would be cruel to catch that bright bird, to put it in a narrow cage, and to place the cage in a dark, dull room, where never a gleam of sunshine could cheer it—but it is a thousand times more cruel to shut me up in that gloomy house like a prison, with people who are too old to understand what youth is like."

"It is cruel," he assented; and then a silence fell over them, broken only by the whispering of the wind.

"Do you know," she went on, after a time, "I have been so unhappy that I have wished I were like Undine and had no soul?" [Pg 10]

Yet, even as she uttered the words, from the books she disliked and found so dreary there came to her floating memories of grand sentences telling of "hearts held in patience," "of endurance that maketh life divine," of aspirations that do not begin and end in earthly happiness. She drove such memories from her.

"Lady Vaughan says 'life is made for duty.' Is that all, Claude? One could do one's duty without the light of the sunshine and the fragrance of flowers. Why need the birds sing so sweetly and the blossoms wear a thousand different colors? If life is meant for nothing but plain, dull duty, we do not need starlit nights and dewy evenings, the calm of green woods and the music of the waves. It seems to me that life is meant as much for beauty as for duty."

Claude looked eagerly into the lovely face.

"You are right," he said, "and yet wrong. Cynthy, life was made for love—nothing else. You are young and beautiful; you ought to enjoy life—and you shall, if you will promise to be my wife."

"I do promise," she returned. "I am tired to death of that gloomy house and those gloomy people. I am weary of quiet and dull monotony."

His face darkened.

"You must not marry me to escape these evils, Hyacinth, but because you love me."

"Of course. Well, I have told you all my perplexities, Claude, and you have decided that I love you."

He smiled at the childlike simplicity of the words.

"Now, Hyacinth, listen to me. You must be my wife, because I love you so dearly that I cannot live without you and because you have promised. Listen, and I will tell you how it must be."

Hyacinth Vaughan looked up in her lover's face; there was nothing but the simple wonder of a child in hers—nothing but awakened interest—there was not even the shadow of love.

"You say that Lady Vaughan intends starting for Bergheim on Thursday, and that Adrian Darcy is to meet you there; consequently, after Thursday, you have not the least chance of escape. I should imagine the future that lies before you to be more terrible even than the past. Rely upon it, Adrian Darcy will come to live at the Chase if he marries you; and then you will only sleep through life. You will never know its possibilities, its grand realities." [Pg 11]

An expression of terror came over her face.

"Claude," she cried, "I would rather die than live as I have been living!"

"So would I, in your place. Cynthy, your life is in our own hands. If you choose to be foolish and frightened, you will say good-by to me, go to Bergheim, marry Darcy, and drag out the rest of a weary life at the Chase, seeing nothing of brightness, nothing of beauty, and growing in time as stiff and formal as Lady Vaughan is now."

The girl shuddered; the warm young life in her rebelled; the longing for love and pleasure, for life and brightness, was suddenly chilled.

"Now here is another picture for you," resumed Claude. "Do what I wish, and you shall never have another hour's dulness or weariness while you live. Your life shall be all love, warmth, fragrance and song."

"What do you wish?" she asked, her lovely young face growing brighter at each word.

"I want you to meet me to-morrow night at Oakton station; we will take the train for London, and on Thursday, instead of going to Bergheim, we will be married, and then you shall lead an enchanted life."

An expression of doubt appeared on her face; but she was very young and easy to persuade.

"It will be the grandest sensation in all the world," he said. "Imagine an elopement from the Chase—where the goddess of dulness has reigned for years—an elopement, Cynthy, followed by a marriage, a grand reconciliation tableau, and happiness that will last for life afterward."

She repeated the words half-doubtfully.

"An elopement, Claude—would not that be very wrong—wicked almost?"

"Not at all. Lady Helmsdale eloped with her husband, and they are the happiest people in the world; elopements are not so uncommon—they are full of romance, Cynthia."

"But are they right?" she asked, half timidly.

"Well in some cases an elopement is not right, perhaps; in ours it is. Do you think that, hoping as I do to make you my wife, I would ask you to do anything which would afterward be injurious to you? Though you are so young, Cynthia, you must know better than that. To elope is right enough in our case. You are like a captive princess; I am the knight come to deliver you from the dreariest of prisons—come to open for you the gates of an enchanted land. It will be just like a romance, Cynthy; only instead of reading, we shall act it." And then in his rich cheery-voice, he sung,

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"But neither bolts nor bars shall keep
My own true love from me."

"I do not see how I can manage it," said Hyacinth, as the notes of her lover's song died over the flowers. "Lady Vaughan always has the house locked and the keys taken to her at nine."

"It will be very easy," returned Claude. "I know the library at the Chase has long windows that open on to the ground. You can leave one of them unfastened, and close the shutters yourself."

"But I have never been out at night alone," she said, hesitatingly.

"You will not be alone long, if you will only have courage to leave the house. I will meet you at the end of the grounds, and we will walk to the station together. We shall catch a train leaving Oakton soon after midnight, and shall reach London about six in the morning. I have an old aunt living there who will do anything for us. We will drive at once to her house; and then I will get a special license, and we will be married before noon."

"How well you have arranged everything!" she said. "You must have been thinking of this for a long time past."

"I have thought of nothing else, Cynthy. Then, when we are married, we will write at once to Lady Vaughan, telling her of our union; and instead of starting for that dreary Bergheim, we will go at once to sunny France, or fair and fruitful Italy, where the world will be at our feet, my darling. You are so beautiful, you will win all hearts."

"Am I so beautiful?" she asked simply. "Lady Vaughan says good looks are sinful."

"Lady Vaughan is—" The young man paused in time, for those clear, innocent eyes seemed to be penetrating to the very depths of his heart. "Lady Vaughan has forgotten that she was ever young and pretty herself," he said. "Now, Cynthy, tell me—will you do what I wish?"

"Is it not a very serious thing to do?" she asked. "Would not people think ill of me?"

His conscience reproached him a little when he answered "No"—the lovely, trusting face was so like the face of a child.

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"I do not expect you to say 'Yes' at once, Hyacinth—think it over. There lies before you happiness with me, or misery without me."

"But, Claude," she inquired eagerly, "why need we elope? Why not ask Lady Vaughan if we can be married? She might say 'Yes.'"

"She would not; I know better than you. She would refuse, and you would be carried off on Thursday, whether you liked it or not. If we are to be married at all we must elope—there is no help for it."

The young girl did not at once consent, although the novelty, the romance, the promised happiness, tempted her as a promised journey pleases a child.

"Think it over to-night," he said, "and let me know to-morrow."

"How can I let you know?" she asked. "I shall be in prison all day; it is not often that I have an hour like this. I shall not be able to see you."

"Perhaps not, but you can give me some signal. You have charge of the flowers in the great western window?"

"Yes, I change them at my pleasure every day."

"Then, if after thinking the matter over, you decide in my favor, and choose a lifetime of happiness, put white roses—nothing but white roses—there; if, on the contrary, you are inclined to follow up a life of unendurable *ennui*, put crimson flowers there. I shall understand—the white

roses will mean 'Yes; I will go;' the crimson flowers will mean 'No; good-by, Claude.' You will not forget, Cynthy."

"It is not likely that I shall forget," she replied.

"You need not have one fear for the future; you will be happy as a queen. I shall love you so dearly; we will enjoy life as it is meant to be enjoyed. It was never intended for you to dream away your existence in one long sleep. Your beautiful face was meant to brighten and gladden men's hearts; your sweet voice to rule them. You are buried alive here."

Then the great selfish love that had conquered him rose in passionate words. How he caressed her! What tender, earnest words he whispered to her! What unalterable devotion he swore—what affection, what love! The girl grew grave and silent as she listened. She wondered why she felt so quiet—why none of the rapture that lighted up his face and shone in his eyes came to her. She loved him—he said so; and surely he who had had so much experience ought to know. Yet she had imagined love to be something very different from this. She wondered that it gave her so little pleasure.

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"How the poets exaggerate it!" she said to herself, while he was pouring out love, passion, and tenderness in burning words. "How great they make it, and how little it is in reality."

She sighed deeply as she said these words to herself, and Claude mistook the sigh.

"You must not be anxious, Hyacinth. You need not be so. You are leaving a life of dull, gloomy monotony for one of happiness, such as you can hardly imagine. You will never repent it, I am sure. Now give me one smile; you look as distant and sad as Lady Vaughan herself. Smile, Cynthy!"

She raised her eyes to his face, and for long years afterward that look remained with him. She tried to smile, but the beautiful lips quivered and the clear eyes fell.

"I must go," she said, rising hurriedly, "Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan are to be home by eight o'clock."

"You will say 'Yes,' Cynthy?" he said, clasping her hands in his own. "You will say 'Yes,' will you not?"

"I must think first," she replied; and as she turned away the rush of wind through the tall green trees sounded like a long, deep-drawn sigh.

Slowly she retraced her steps through the woods, now dim and shadowy in the sunset light, toward the home that seemed so like a prison to her. And yet the prospect of an immediate escape from that prison did not make her happy. The half-given promise rested upon her heart like a leaden weight, although she was scarce conscious in her innocence why it should thus oppress her. At the entrance to the Hall grounds she paused, and with a gesture of impatience turned her back upon the lofty sombre-looking walls, and stood gazing through an opening in the groves at the gorgeous masses of purple and crimson sky, that marked the path of the now vanished sun.

A very pretty picture she made as the soft light fell upon her fair face and golden hair, but no thought of her young, fresh beauty was in the girl's mind then. The question, "Dare I say—'Yes'?" was ever before her, with Claude's fair face and pleading, loving tones.

"O, I cannot decide now," she thought wearily, "I must think longer about it," and with a sigh she turned from the sunset-light, and walked up the long avenue that led to her stately home.

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How her decision—though speedily repented of and corrected—yet cast the shadow of a sin over her fair young life; how her sublimely heroic devotion to THE RIGHT saved the life of an innocent man, yet drove her into exile from home and friends, and how at last the bright sunshine drove away the shadows and restored her to home and friends, all she had lost and more, remains for our story to tell.

CHAPTER II.

Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan lived at Queen's Chase in Derbyshire, a beautiful and picturesque place, known to artists, poets, and lovers of quaint old architecture. Queen's Chase had been originally built by good Queen Elizabeth of York, and was perhaps one of the few indulgences which that not too happy queen allowed herself. It was large, and the rooms were all lofty. The building was in the old Tudor style, and one of its peculiarities was that every part of it was laden with ornament: it seemed to have been the great ambition of the architect who designed it to introduce as much carving as possible about it. Heads of fauns and satyrs, fruit and flowers—every variety of carving was there; no matter where the spectator turned, the sculptor's work was visible.

To Hyacinth Vaughan, dreamy and romantic, it seemed as though the Chase were peopled by these dull, silent, dark figures. Elizabeth of York did not enjoy much pleasure in the retreat she had built for herself. It was there she first heard of and rejoiced in the betrothal of her fair young daughter Marguerite, to James IV. of Scotland. A few years afterward she died, and the Chase was sold. Sir Dunstan Vaughan purchased it, and it had remained in the family ever since. It was now their principal residence—the Vaughans of Queen's Chase never quitted it.

Though it was picturesque it was not the most cheerful place in the world. The rooms were dark by reason of the huge carvings of the window frames and the shade of the trees, which last, perhaps, grew too near the house. The edifice contained no light, cheerful, sunny rooms, no wide large windows; the taste of the days in which it was built, led more toward magnificence than cheerfulness. Some additions had been made; the western wing of the building had been enlarged; but the principal apartments had remained unaltered; the stately, gloomy rooms in which the fair young princess had received and read the royal love-letters were almost untouched. The tall, spreading trees grew almost to the Hall door; they made the whole house dark and perhaps unhealthy. But no Vaughan ventured to cut them down; such an action would have seemed like a sacrilege.

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From father to son Queen's Chase had descended in regular succession. Sir Arthur, the present owner, succeeded when he was quite young. He was by no means of the genial order of men: he had always been cold, silent, and reserved. He married a lady more proud, more silent, more reserved than himself—a narrow-minded, narrow-hearted woman whose life was bounded by rigid law and formal courtesies, who never knew a warm or generous impulse, who lived quite outside the beautiful fairyland of love and poetry.

Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan had but one son, and though each idolized him, they could not change their nature; warm, sweet impulses never came to them. The mother kissed her boy by rule—at stated times; everything was measured, dated, and weighed.

The boy himself was, strange to say, of a most hopeful, ardent, sanguine temperament; generous, high-spirited, slightly inclined to romance and sentiment. He loved and honored his father and mother, but the rigid formality of home was terrible to him; it was almost like death in life. Partly to escape it and partly because he really liked the life, he insisted on joining the army—much against Lady Vaughan's wishes.

"Why could he not be content at home, as his father had been before him?" she asked.

Captain Randall Vaughan enjoyed his brief military career. As a matter of course he fell in love, but far more sensibly than might have been imagined. He married the pretty, delicate Clare Brandon. She was an orphan, not very rich—in fact had only a moderate fortune—but her birth atoned for all. She was a lineal descendant of the famous Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, whom the fair young ex-queen of France had married.

Lady Vaughan was delighted. A little more money might have been acceptable, but the Vaughans had plenty, and there was no young lady in England better born and better bred than Clare Brandon. So the young captain married her and Sir Arthur made them a very handsome allowance. For one whole year they lived in perpetual sunshine, as happy as they could possibly be, and then came an outbreak in our Eastern possessions, and the captain's regiment was ordered abroad.

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It was like a deathblow to them. Despite all danger, Mrs. Vaughan would have gone with her husband, but for the state of her health, which absolutely forbade it. Her despair was almost terrible; it seemed as if she had a presentiment of the coming cloud. If the war had not been a dangerous one the young captain would most certainly have sold out; but to do so when every efficient soldier was required, would have been to show the white feather, and that no Vaughan could do—the motto of the house was "Loyal even to death." He tried all possible means to console his wife, but she only clung to him with passionate cries, saying she would never see him again.

It was impossible to leave her alone and she had no near relatives. Then Lady Vaughan came to the rescue. The heir of the Vaughans, she declared, must be born at Queen's Chase: therefore her son's wife had better remain with her. Randall Vaughan thankfully accepted his mother's offer, and took his wife to the old ancestral home. It was arranged that she should remain there until his return.

"You will try for my sake to be well and happy," he said to her, "so that when I come back you will be strong and able to travel with me, should I have to go abroad, again."

But she clasped her tender arms around him and hid her weeping face on his breast.

"I shall never see you again, my darling," she said, "never again!"

They called the unconsciousness that came over her merciful. She remembered nothing after those words. When she opened her eyes again he was gone.

How the certainty of her doom seemed to grow upon her! How her sweet face grew paler, and the frail remnant of vitality grew less! He had been her life—the very sun and centre of her existence. How could she exist without him? Lady Vaughan, in her kind, formal way, tried to cheer her, and begged of her to make an effort for Randall's sake; and for Randall's sake the poor lady tried to live.

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They were disappointed in one respect; it was not an heir that was born to the noble old race, but a lovely, smiling baby girl—so lovely that Lady Vaughan, who was seldom guilty of sentiment, declared that it resembled nothing so much as a budding flower, and after a flower, she said it must be named. They suggested Rose, Violet, Lily—none of them pleased her; but looking one day through the family record, she saw the name of Lily Hyacinth Vaughan. Hyacinth it must be. The poor, fragile mother smiled a feeble assent, and the lovely baby received its name. Glowing accounts were sent to the young captain.

CHAPTER III.

The news was not long in reaching England. When Lady Vaughan read it she knew it was Clare's death-warrant. They tried to break it to her very gently, but her keen, quick perception soon told her what was wrong.

"He is dead," she said; "I knew that I should never see him again."

Clare Vaughan's heart was broken; she hardly spoke after she heard the fatal words; she was very quiet, very patient, but the light on her face was not of this world. She lay one day with little Hyacinth in her arms, and Lady Vaughan, going into her room, said,

"You look better to-day, Clare."

"I have been dreaming of Randall," she said smiling; "I shall soon see him again."

An hour afterward they went to take the little one from her—the tender arms had relaxed their hold, and she lay dead, with a smile on her face.

They buried her in Ashton churchyard. People called her illness by all kinds of different names, but Lady Vaughan knew she had died of a broken heart. The care of little Hyacinth devolved upon her grandmother. It was a dreary home for a child: the rooms were always shaded by trees, and the sombre carvings, the satyr heads, the laughing fauns, all in stone, frightened her. She never saw any young persons; Sir Arthur's servants were all old—they had entered the service in their youth, and remained in it ever since.

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Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan felt their son's death very keenly; all their hopes died with him; all their interest in life was gone. They became more dull, more formal, more cold every day. They loved the child, yet the sight of her was always painful to them, reminding them so forcibly of what they had lost. They reared her in the same precise, formal manner in which their only son had been reared. She rose at a stated time; she retired at a certain hour, never varying by one minute; she studied, she read, she practiced her music—all by rule.

The neighborhood round Queen's Chase was not a very populous one. Among the friends whom the Vaughans visited, and who visited them in return, there was not one young person, not one child. It never seemed to enter their minds that Hyacinth, being a child, longed for the society of children. At certain times she was gravely told to play. She had a doll and a Noah's ark; and with these she amused herself alone for long hours. As for the graces, the fancies, the wants, the requirements of childhood, its thousand wordless dreams and wordless wants, no one seemed to understand them at all. They treated the child as if she were a little old woman, crushing back with remorseless hand all the quick fancies and bright dreams natural to youth.

Some children would have grown up wicked, hardened, unlovely and unloving under such tuition; but Hyacinth Vaughan was saved from this by her peculiar disposition. The child was all poetry. Lady Vaughan never wearied of trying to correct her. She carefully pruned, as she imagined, all the excess of imagination and romance. She might as well have tried to prevent the roses from blooming, the dew from falling, or the leaves from springing. All that she succeeded in was in making the child keep her thoughts and fancies to herself. She talked to the trees as though they were grave, living friends, full of wise counsel; she talked to the flowers as though they were familiar and dear playfellows. The imagination so sternly repressed ran riot in a hundred different ways.

It was most unfortunate for the child. If she had been as other children—if her imagination, instead of being cruelly repressed, had been trained and put to some useful purpose—if her love of romance had been wisely guarded—if her great love of poetry and beauty, her great love of ideality, had been watched and allowed for—the one great error that darkened her life would never have been committed. But none of this was done. She was literally afraid to speak of that which filled her thoughts and was really part of her life. If she asked any uncommon question Lady Vaughan scolded her, and Sir Arthur, his hands shaking nervously, would say, "The child is going wrong—going wrong."

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It was without exception the dullest and saddest life any child could lead. At thirteen there came two breaks in the monotony—she had a music-master come from Oakton, and she found a key that fitted the library door. How often had she stood against the library windows, looking through them, and longing to open one of those precious volumes; but when she asked Sir Arthur for a book, he told her she could not understand them—she must be content to play with her doll.

There were hundreds of suitable books that might have been provided for the child; she was refused any—consequently she read whatever came in her way. She found this key that fitted the library door, and used it. She would quietly unlock it, and take one of the books nearest to her without fear of its being missed, for Sir Arthur seldom entered the room. In this fashion she read many books that were valuable, instructive, and amusing. She also read many that would have been much better left alone. Her innocence, however, saved her from harm. She knew so little of life that what would have perhaps injured another was not even noticed by her.

In this manner she educated herself, and the result was exactly what was to be expected. She had in her mind the most curious collection of poetry and romance, the most curious notions of right and wrong, the most unreal ideas it was possible to imagine. Then, as she grew older, life began to unroll itself before her eyes.

She saw that outside this dull world of Oakton there was another world so fair and bright that it dazzled her. There was a world full of music and song, where people danced and made merry,

where they rode and drove and enjoyed themselves, where there was no dulness and no gloom—a world of which the very thought was so beautiful, so bewildering, that her pulse thrilled and her heart beat as she dreamed of it. Would she ever find her way into that dazzling world, or would she be obliged to live here always, shut up with these old, formal people, amid the quaint carvings and giant trees? And then when she was seventeen, she began to dream of the other world women find so fair—the fairyland of hope and love. Her ideas of love were nearly all taken from poetry: it was something very magnificent, very beautiful, taking one quite out of commonplace affairs. Would it ever come to her?

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She thought life had begun and ended too, for her, when one day Lady Vaughan told her to come into her room—she wished to talk to her. The girl followed her with a weary, hopeless expression on her face. "I am going to have a lecture," she thought; "I have said a word too little or a word too much."

But, wonderful to say, Lady Vaughan was not prepared with a lecture. She sat down in her great easy-chair and pointed to a footstool. Hyacinth took it, wondering very much what was coming.

"My dear Hyacinth," she began; "you are growing up now; you will be quite a woman soon; and it is time you knew what Sir Arthur and I have planned for you."

She did not feel much interest in learning what it was—something intolerably dull it was sure to be.

"You know," continued Lady Vaughan, "there has never been the least deception used toward you. You are the only child of our only son; but it has never been understood that you were to be heiress of the Chase."

"I should not like to have the Chase," said Hyacinth timidly. "I should not know what to do with it."

Lady Vaughan waved her hand in very significant fashion.

"That is not the question. We have not brought you up as our heiress because both Sir Arthur and I think that the head of our house must be a gentleman. Of course you will have a dowry. I have money of my own, which I intend to leave you. Mr. Adrian Darcy, of whom you have heard me speak, will succeed to Queen's Chase—that is, if no other arrangement takes him from us; should he have other views in life, the property will perhaps be left differently. I cannot say. Sir Arthur and I wish very much that you should marry Mr. Darcy."

The girl looked up at the cold, formal face, with wonder in her own. Was this to be her romance? Was this to be the end of all her dreams? Instead of passing into a fairer, brighter world, was she to live always in this?

"How can I marry him?" she asked quickly. "I have never seen him."

"Do not be so impetuous, Hyacinth. You should always repress all exhibition of feeling. I know that you have never seen him. Mr. Darcy is travelling now upon the Continent, and Sir Arthur thinks a short residence abroad would be very pleasant for us. Adrian Darcy always shows us the greatest respect. You will be sure to like him—he is so like us; we are to meet him at Bergheim, and spend a month together, and then we shall see if he likes you."

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"Does he know what you intend?" she asked half shyly.

"Not yet. Of course, in families like our own, marriages are not conducted as with the plebeian classes; with us they are affairs of state, and require no little diplomacy and tact."

"Was my father's a diplomatic marriage?" she asked.

"No," replied Lady Vaughan, "your father pleased himself; but then, remember, he was in a position to do so. He was an only son, and heir of Queen's Chase."

"And am I to be taken to this gentleman; if he likes me he is to marry me; if not, what then?"

The scornful sarcasm of her voice was quite lost on Lady Vaughan.

"There is no need for impatience. Even then some other plan will suggest itself to us. But I think there is no fear of failure—Mr. Darcy will be sure to like you. You are very good-looking, you have the true Vaughan face, and, thanks to the care with which you have been educated, your mind is not full of nonsense, as is the case with some girls. I thought it better to tell you of this arrangement, so that you may accustom your mind to the thought of it. Everything being favorable, we shall start for Bergheim in the middle of August, and then I shall hope to see matters brought to a sensible conclusion."

"It will not be of any consequence whether I like this Mr. Darcy or not—will it, Lady Vaughan?"

"You must try to cultivate a kindly liking for him, my dear. All the nonsense of love and romance may be dispensed with. Well brought up as you have been, you will find no difficulty in carrying out our wishes. Now, draw that blind a little closer, my love, and leave me—I am sleepy. Do not waste your time—go at once to the piano."

CHAPTER IV.

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Having acquainted her young relative with the prospective arrangements she had made for her,

Lady Vaughan composed herself to sleep, and Hyacinth quietly left the room. She dared not stop to think until she was outside the door, in the free, fresh air; the walls of the old house seemed to stifle her. Her young soul was awakened, but it rose in a hot glow of rebellion against this new device of fate. She to be taken abroad and offered meekly to this gentleman! If he liked her they were to be married; if not, with the sense of failure upon her, she would have to return to the Chase. The thought was intolerable.

Was this the promised romance of her life? "It is not fair," cried the girl passionately, as she paced the narrow garden paths—"it is not just. Everything has liberty, love, and happiness—why should not I? The birds love each other, the flowers are happy in the sun—why must I live without love or happiness, or brightness? I protest against my fate."

Were all the thousand tender and beautiful longings of her life to be thus rudely treated? Was all the poetry and romance she had dreamed of to end in "cultivating a kindly liking" and a diplomatic marriage? Oh, no, it could not be! She shed passionate tears. She prayed, in her wild fashion, passionate prayers. Better for her a thousand times had she been commonplace, unromantic, prosaic—better that the flush of youth and the sweet longings of life had not been hers. Then a break came in the clouds—a change that was to be most fatal to her. One of the families with whom Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan were most intimate was that of old Colonel Lennox, of Oakton Park.

Colonel Lennox and his wife were both old; but one day they received a letter from Mrs. Lennox, their sister-in-law, who resided in London, saying how very pleased she should be to pay them a visit with her son Claude. Mrs. Lennox was very rich. Claude was heir to a large fortune. Still she thought Oakton Park would be a handsome addition, and it would be just as well to cultivate the affection of the childless uncle.

Mrs. Lennox and Claude came to Oakton. Solemn dinner-parties, at which the young man with difficulty concealed his annoyance, were given in their honor, and at one of these entertainments Hyacinth and Claude met. He fell in love with her.

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In those days she was beautiful as the fairest dream of poet or artist. In the fresh spring-tide of her young loveliness, she was something to see and remember. She was tall, her figure slender and girlish, full of graceful lines and curves that gave promise of magnificent womanhood. Her face was of oval shape; the features were exquisite, the eyes of the darkest blue, with long lashes; her lips were fresh and sweet; her mouth was the most beautiful feature in her beautiful face—it was sweet and sensitive, yet at times slightly scornful; the teeth were white and regular; the chin was faultless, with a pretty dimple in it.

It was not merely the physical beauty, the exquisite features and glorious coloring that attracted; there were poetry, eloquence, and passion within these. Looking at her, one knew instinctively that she was not of the common order—that something of the poet and genius was there. Her brow was fair and rounded at the temples, giving a great expression of ideality to her face; her fair hair, soft and shining, seemed to crown the graceful head like a golden diadem.

Claude Lennox, in his half-selfish, half-chivalrous way, fell in love with her. He said something to Lady Vaughan about her one day, and she gave him to understand that her granddaughter was engaged. She did not tell him to whom, nor did she say much about it; but the few words piqued Claude, who had never been thwarted in his life.

On the first day they met, his mother had warned him not to fall in love with the beautiful girl, who might be an heiress or might have nothing—to remember that in his position he could marry whom he would, and not to throw himself away.

Lady Vaughan, too, on her side, seemed much disposed to forbid him even to speak to Hyacinth. If he proposed calling at Queen's Chase, she either deferred his visit or took good care that Hyacinth should not be in the way; and all this she did, as she believed, unperceived. It was evident that Sir Arthur also was not pleased; though the old gentleman was too courtly and polished to betray his feeling openly in the matter. He did not like Claude Lennox, and the young man felt it. One day he met the two young people together in a sequestered part of the Chase grounds, and though he did not utter his displeasure, the stern, angry look that he gave Claude, fully betrayed it. Hyacinth, whose glance had fallen to the ground in a sudden accession of shyness that she scarce understood, at her grandfather's approach, did not see his set, stern face. Nor did Sir Arthur speak to her of the matter. On talking it over to Lady Vaughan, the two old people concluded that a show of open opposition might awaken a favor toward Claude in the young girl's heart to which it was yet a stranger, and they contented themselves with throwing every possible obstacle in the way of the young people's intercourse. This was, in this case, mistaken policy. If the old gentleman had spoken, he might have saved Hyacinth from unspeakable misery, and his proud old name from the painful shadow of disgrace that a childish folly was to bring upon it. The young girl stood greatly in awe of her grandfather, but she respected him, and in a way loved him, through her fears. And she was now being led, step by step, into folly, through her own ignorance of its nature.

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Claude Lennox was piqued. He was young, rich, and handsome; he had been eagerly sought by fashionable mothers. He knew that he could marry Lady Constance Granville any day that he liked; he had more than a suspicion that the pretty, coquettish, fashionable young widow, Mrs. Delamere, liked him; Lady Crown Harley had almost offered him her daughter. Was he to be defied and set at naught in this way—he, a Lennox, come of a race who had never failed in love or war? No, it should never be; he would win Hyacinth in spite of all. He disarmed suspicion by ceasing, when they met, to pay her any particular attention. His lady-mother congratulated

herself; she retired to London, leaving her son at Oakton Park. He said his visit was so pleasant that he could not bring it to a close. The colonel, delighted with his nephew, entreated him to stay, and Claude said, smiling to himself, that he had a fair field and all to himself.

His love for Hyacinth was half-selfish, half-chivalrous. It was pique and something like resentment that made him first of all determined to woo her, but he soon became so interested, that he believed his life depended on winning her. She was so different from other girls. She was child, poet, and woman. She had the brightest and fairest of fancies. She spoke as he had never heard any one else speak—as though her lips had been touched with divine fire.

Fortune favored him. He went one morning to the Chase, and found Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan at home—alone. He did not mention Hyacinth's name; but as he was going out, he gave one of the footmen a sovereign and learned from him that Miss Vaughan was walking alone in the wood. She had complained of headache, and "my lady" had sent her out into the fresh air.

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Of course he followed her and found her. He made such good use of the hour that succeeded, that she promised to meet him again. He was very careful to keep her attention fixed on the poetry of such meetings; he never hinted at the wrong of concealment, the dishonor of any thing clandestine, the beauty of obedience; he talked to her only of love, and of how he loved her and longed to make her his wife. She was very young, very impressionable, very romantic; he succeeded completely in blinding her to the harm and wrong she was doing; but he could not win from her any acknowledgement of her love. She enjoyed the break in the dull monotony of her life. She enjoyed the excitement of having to find time to meet him. She liked listening to him; she liked to hear him praise her beauty, and rave about his devotion to her. But did she love him? Not if what the poets wrote was true—not if love be such as they describe.

CHAPTER V.

So for three or four weeks of the beautiful summer, this little love story went on. Claude Lennox was *au fait* as to all the pretty wiles and arts of love, he made a post-office of the trunk of a grand old oak-tree—a trunk that was covered with ivy; he used to place letters there every day, and Hyacinth would fetch and answer them. These letters won her more than any spoken words; they were eloquently written and full of poetry. She could read them and muse over them; their poetry remained with her.

When she was talking to him a sense of unreality used to come over her—a vague, uncertain, dreamy kind of conviction that in some way he was not true; that he was saying more than he meant, or that he had said the same things before and knew them all by heart. His letters won her. She answered them, and in those answers found some vent for the romance and imagination that had never had an outlet before. Claude Lennox, as he read them, wondered at her.

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"The girl is a genius," he said; "if she were to take to writing, she would make the world talk of her. I have read all the poetry of the day, but I have never read anything like these lines."

Claude Lennox had been a successful man. He had not been brought up to any profession—there was no need for it; he was to inherit a large fortune from his mother, and he had already one of his own. He had lived in the very heart of society; he had been courted, admired and flattered as long as he could remember. Bright-eyed girls had smiled on him, and fair faces grown the fairer for his coming. He had had many loves, but none of them had been in earnest. He liked Hyacinth Vaughan better than any one he had ever met. If her friends had smiled upon him and everything had been *couleur de rose*, he would have loved lightly, have laughed lightly, and have ridden away. But because, for the first time in his life, he was opposed and thwarted, frowned upon instead of being met with eagerness, he vowed that he would win her. No one should say Claude Lennox had loved in vain.

He was a strange mixture of vanity and generosity, of selfishness and chivalry. He loved her as much as it was in his nature to love any one. He felt for her; the descriptions she gave him of her life, its dull monotony, its dreary gloom, touched his heart. Then, too, his vanity was gratified; he knew that if he took such a peerlessly beautiful girl to London as his wife, she would be one of the most brilliant queens of society. He knew that she would create an almost unrivalled sensation. So love, vanity, generosity, selfishness, chivalry, all combined, made him resolve to win her.

He knew that if he were to go to Queen's Chase and ask permission to woo her, it would be refused him—she would be kept away from him and hurried away to Germany. That was the honest, honorable course, but he felt sure it was hopeless to pursue it. Man of the world as he was, the first idea of an elopement startled him; then he became accustomed to it, and began at last to think an elopement would be quite a romance and a sensation. So, by degrees he broke it to her. She was startled at first, and then, after a time, became accustomed to it. It would be very easy, soon over, and when they were once married his mother would say nothing; if the Vaughans were wise, they too would be willing to forgive and say nothing.

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He found Hyacinth so simple, so innocent and credulous, that he had no great difficulty in persuading her. If any thought of remorse came to him—that, as the stronger of the two he was betraying his trust—he quickly put the disagreeable reflection away—he intended to be very kind to her after they were married, and to make her very happy.

So he waited in some anxiety for the signal. It was not a matter of life or death with him; neither did he consider it as such; but he was very anxious, and hoped she would consent. The library window could be seen from the park; he had but to walk across it, and then he could see. Claude Lennox was almost ashamed to find how his heart beat, and how nervously his eyes sought the window.

"I did not think I could care about anything so much," he said to himself; "I begin to respect myself for being capable of such devotion."

It was early on Wednesday morning, but he had not been able to sleep. Would she go, or would she refuse? How many hours of suspense must he pass before he knew? The sun was shining gayly, the dew lay on the grass—it was useless to imagine that she would be thinking of her flowers; yet he could not leave the place—he must know.

At one moment his hopes were raised to the highest point—it was not likely that she would refuse. She would never be so foolish as to choose a life of gloom and wretchedness instead of the golden future he had offered her. Then again his heart sunk. An elopement! It was such a desperate step; she would surely hesitate before taking it. He walked to the end of the park, and then he returned. His heart beat so violently when he raised his eyes that it seemed to him as if he could hear it—a dull red flush rose to his face, his lips quivered. He had won—the white flowers were there!

There was no one to see him, but he raised his Glengarry cap from his head and waved it in the air.

"I have won," he said to himself; "now for my arrangements."

He went back to Oakton Park in a fever of anxiety; he telegraphed from Oakton Station to the kind old aunt who had never refused him a favor, asking her, for particular reasons which he would explain afterward, to meet him at Euston Square at 6 A.M. on Thursday.

"There is some one coming with me whom I wish to put under your charge," he wrote; and he knew she would comply with his request. [Pg 29]

He had resolved to be very careful—there should be no imprudence besides the elopement; his aunt should meet them at the station, Hyacinth should go home with her and remain with her until the hour fixed for the wedding.

Hyacinth had taken her life into her own hands, and the balance had fallen. She had decided to go; this gray, dull, gloomy life she could bear no longer; and the thought of a long, dull residence in a sleepy German town with a relative of Lady Vaughan's positively frightened her.

Claude had dazzled her imagination with glowing pictures of the future. She did not think much of the right or wrong of her present behavior; the romance with which she was filled enthralled her. If any one had in plain words pointed out to her that she was acting badly, dishonorably, deceitfully, she would have recoiled in dread and horror; but she did not see things in their true colors.

All that day Lady Vaughan thought her granddaughter very strange and restless. She seemed unable to attend to her work; she read as one who does not understand. If she was asked a question, her vacant face indicated absence of mind.

"Are you ill, Hyacinth?" asked Lady Vaughan at last. "You do not appear to be paying the least attention to what you are doing."

The girl's beautiful face flushed crimson.

"I do not feel quite myself," she replied.

Lady Vaughan was not well pleased with the answer. Ill-health or nervousness in young people was, as she said, quite unendurable—she had no sympathy with either. She looked very sternly at the sweet crimsoned face.

"You do not have enough to do, Hyacinth," she said gravely; "I must find more employment for you. Miss Pinnock called the other day about the clothing club; you had better write and offer your services."

"As though life was not dreary enough," thought the girl, "without having to sew endless seams by the hour!"

Then, with a sudden thrill of joy, she remembered that her freedom was coming. After this one day there would be no more gloom, no more tedious hours, no more wearisome lectures, no more dull monotony; after this one day all was to be sunshine, beauty, and warmth. How the day passed she never knew—it was like a long dream to her. Yet something like fear took possession of her when Lady Vaughan said: [Pg 30]

"It is growing late, Hyacinth; it is past nine."

She went up to her and kissed the stern old face.

"Good-night," she said simply with her lips, and in her heart she added "good-by."

She kissed Sir Arthur, who had never been quite so harsh with her and as she closed the drawing-room door, she said to herself,

"So I leave my old life behind."

CHAPTER VI.

A beautiful night—not clear with the light of the moon, but solemn and still under the pale, pure stars; there was a fitful breeze that murmured among the trees, rippling the green leaves and stirring the sleeping flowers. The lilies gleamed like pale spectres, the roses were wet with dew; the deer lay under the trees in the park; there was hardly a sound to break the holy calm.

Queen's Chase lay in dark shadow under the starlight, the windows and doors all fastened except one, the inmates all sleeping save one. The great clock in the turret struck ten. Had any been watching, they would have seen a faint light in the room where Hyacinth Vaughan slept; it glimmered there only for a minute or two, and then disappeared. Soon afterward there appeared at the library window a pale, sweet, frightened face; the window slowly opened and a tall, slender figure, closely wrapped in a dark gray cloak, issued forth from the safe shelter of home, under the solemn stars, to take the false step that was to darken her life for so many years.

She stole along in the darkness and silence, between the trees, till Claude came to her; and her heart gave a great bound at his approach, while a crimson flush rose to her face.

"My darling," he said, clasping her hand in his, "how am I to thank you?"

Then she began to realize in some faint degree what she had done. She looked up at Claude's handsome, careless face, and began to understand that she had given up all the world for him—all the world.

"You are frightened, Hyacinth," he said, "but there is no need. Your hand trembles, and your face is so pale that I notice it even by starlight." [Pg 31]

"I am frightened," she confessed. "I have never been out at night before. Oh, Claude, do you think I have done right?"

He spoke cheerily: "That you have, my darling. Such gloomy cages were never made for bright birds like you; let me see you smile before you go one step further."

It was almost midnight when they reached Oakton station; the few lamps glimmered fitfully and there was no one about but the sleepy porters.

"Keep your veil well drawn over your face, Hyacinth," he whispered; "I will get the tickets. Sit down here and no one need see you."

She obeyed him, trembling in every limb. She sat down on the little wooden bench, her veil closely drawn over her face; her cloak wrapped round her; and then, after what seemed to be but a moment of time, yet was in reality over ten minutes, the train ran steaming into the station. One or two passengers alighted. Claude took her hand and placed her in a first-class carriage—no one had either seen or noticed her—he sprang in after her, the door was shut, the whistle sounded, and the train was off.

"It is done!" she gasped, her face growing deadly white, and the color fading even from her lips. She laid her head back on the cushion. "It is done!" she repeated, faintly.

"And you will see, my darling, that all is for the best."

He would not allow her time to think or to grow dull. He talked to her till the color returned to her face and the brightness to her eyes. They looked together from the carriage windows, watching the shining stars and the darkened earth, wondering at the beautiful, holy silence of night, until the faint gray dawn broke in the skies. Then a mishap occurred.

The train had proceeded on its way safely enough until a station called Leybridge had been reached. There the passengers for London leave it, and await the arrival of the mail train. Hyacinth and Claude left the carriage; the train they had travelled by went on.

"We have not long to wait for the mail train," said Claude, "and then, thank goodness, there will be no more changing until we reach London."

The faint gray dawn of the morning was just breaking into rose and gold. Hyacinth looked pale and cold; the excitement, the fatigue, and the night travelling were rapidly becoming too much for her. [Pg 32]

They walked up and down the platform for a few minutes. A quarter of an hour passed—half an hour—and then Claude, still true to his determination that Hyacinth should not be seen, bade her to sit down again while he went to inquire at the office the cause of delay. There were several other passengers, for Leybridge Junction was no inconsiderable one.

Suddenly there seemed to arise a scene of confusion in the station. The station master came out with a disturbed face; the porters were no longer sleepy, but anxious. Then the rumor, whispered first with bated breath, grew—"An accident to the mail train below Lewes. Thirty passengers seriously injured and half as many killed. Traffic on the line impossible."

Claude heard the sad news with a sorrowful heart. He did not wish Hyacinth to know it—it would seem like an omen of misfortune to her. "When will the next train start for London?" he asked one of the porters.

"There is none between now and seven o'clock," the man replied.

"Was there ever anything so unfortunate?" muttered Claude to himself.

Leybridge was only twenty miles from Oakton.

"I should not like any one to see me about the station," he thought; "and Hyacinth is sure to be known here. How unfortunate that we should be detained so near home!" He went out to her: "You must not lose patience, Hyacinth," he said; "the mail train is delayed, and we have to wait here until seven."

She looked up at him, alarmed and perplexed. "Seven," she repeated—"and now it is only three. What shall we do, Claude?"

"If you are willing, we will go for a walk through the fields. I fancy we shall be recognized if we stop here."

"I am sure we shall—I have often been to Leybridge with Lady Vaughan."

They went out of the station and down the quiet street; they saw an opening that led to the fields.

"You will like the fields better than anywhere else," said Claude, and she assented.

They crossed a stile that led into the fertile clover meadows. It seemed as though the beauty and fragrance of the summer morning broke into full glow to welcome them; the rosy clouds parted, and the sun shone in the full lustre of its golden light; the trees, the hedges, the clover, were all impearled with dew—the drops lay thick, shining and bright, on the grass; there was a faint twitter of birds, as though they were just awakening; the trees seemed to stir with new life and vigor.

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"Is this the morning?" said Hyacinth, looking round. "Why, Claude, it is a thousand times more beautiful than the fulness of day!"

CHAPTER VII.

Hyacinth and Claude stood together leaning against the stile. Something in the calm beauty of the summer morning awoke the brightest and purest emotions in him; something in the early song of the birds and in the shining dewdrops made Hyacinth think more seriously than she had yet done.

"I wonder," she said, turning suddenly to her lover, "if we shall ever look back to this hour and repent what we have done?"

"I do not think so. It will rather afford subject for pleasant reflection."

"Claude," she cried suddenly, "what is that lying over there by the hedge? It—it looks so strange."

He glanced carelessly in the direction indicated. "I can see nothing," he replied. "My eyes are not so bright as yours."

"Look again, Claude. It is something living, moving—something human I am sure! What can it be?"

He did look again, shading his eyes from the sun. "There is something," he said slowly, "but I cannot tell what it is."

"Let us see, Claude; it may be some one ill. Who could it be in the fields at this time of the morning?"

"I would rather you did not go," said Claude; "you do not know who it may be. Let me go alone."

But she would not agree to it; and as they stood there, they heard a faint moan.

"Claude," cried the girl, in deep distress, "some one is ill or hurt; let us go and render assistance."

He saw that she was bent upon it and held out his hand to help her over the stile. Then when they were in the meadow, and under the hedge, screened from sight by rich, trailing woodbines, they saw the figure of a woman.

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"It is a woman, Claude!" cried Hyacinth; and then a faint moan fell on their ears.

Hastening to the spot, she pushed aside the trailing eglantines. There lay a girl, apparently not much older than herself, fair of face, with a profusion of beautiful fair hair lying tangled on the ground. Hyacinth bent over her.

"Are you ill?" she asked. But no answer came from the white lips. "Claude," cried Hyacinth, "she is dying! Make haste; get some help for her!"

"Let us see what is the matter first," he said.

The sound of voices roused the prostrate girl. She sat up, looking wildly around her, and flinging her hair from her face; then she turned to the young girl, who was looking at her with such gentle, wistful compassion.

"Are you ill?" repeated Hyacinth. "Can we do any thing to help you?"

The girl seemed to gather herself together with a convulsive shudder, as though mortal cold had seized her.

"No, I thank you," she said. "I am not ill. I am only dying by inches—dying of misery and bad treatment."

It was such a weary young face that was raised to them. It looked so ghastly, so wretched, in the morning sunlight, that Hyacinth and Claude were both inexpressibly touched. Though she was poorly clad, and her thin, shabby clothes were wet with dew, and stained by the damp grass, still there was something about the girl that spoke of gentle culture.

Claude bent down, looking kindly on the dreary young face.

"There is a remedy for every evil and every wrong," he said; "perhaps we could find one for you."

"There is no remedy and no help for me," she replied; "my troubles will end only when I die."

"Have you been sleeping under this hedge all night?" asked Hyacinth.

"Yes. I have no home, no money, no food. Something seemed to draw me here. I had a notion that I should die here."

Hyacinth's face grew pale; there was something unutterably sad in the contrast between the bright morning and the crouching figure underneath the hedge.

"Are you married?" asked Claude, after a short pause.

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"Yes, worse luck for me!" she replied, raising her eyes, with their expression of guilt and misery, to his, "I am married."

"Is your husband ill, or away from you? or what is wrong?" he pursued.

"It is only the same tale thousands have to tell," she replied. "My husband is not ill; he simply drinks all day and all night—drinks every shilling he earns—and when he has drunk himself mad he beats me."

"What a fate!" said Claude. "But there is a remedy—the law interferes to protect wives from such brutality."

"The law cannot do much; it cannot change a man's heart or his nature; it can only imprison him. And then, when he comes out, he is worse than before. Wise women leave the law alone."

"Why not go away from him and leave him?"

"Ah, why not? Only that I have chosen my lot and must abide by it. Though he beats me and ill-treats me, I love him. I could not leave him."

"It was an unfortunate marriage for you, I should suppose," said Hyacinth soothingly. The careworn sufferer looked with her dull, wistful eyes into the girl's beautiful face.

"I was a pretty girl years ago," she said, "fresh, and bright, and pleasing. I lived alone with my mother, and this man who is now my husband came to our town to work. He was tall, handsome, and strong—he pleased my eyes; he was a good mechanic, and made plenty of money—but he drank even then. When he came and asked me to be his wife, my mother said I had better dig my grave with my own hands, and jump into it alive, than marry a man who drank."

She caught her breath with a deep sob.

"I pleased myself," she continued, with a deep sigh; "I had my own way. My mother was not willing for me to marry him, so I ran away with him."

Hyacinth Vaughan's face grew paler.

"You did what?" she asked gently.

"I ran away with him," repeated the woman; "and, if I could speak now with a voice that all the world could hear, I would advise all girls to take warning by me, and rather break their hearts at home than run away from it."

Paler and paler grew the beautiful young face; and then Hyacinth suddenly noticed that one of the woman's hands lay almost useless on the grass. She raised it gently and saw that it was terribly wounded and bruised. Her heart ached at the sight.

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"Does it pain you much?" she inquired.

The woman laughed—a laugh more terrible by far than any words could have been.

"I am used to pain," she said. "I put that hand on my husband's shoulder last night to beg him to stay at home and not to drink any more. He took a thick-knotted stick and beat it; and yet, poor hand, it was not harming him." Hyacinth shuddered. The woman went on, "We had a terrible quarrel last night. He vowed that he would come back in the morning and murder me."

"Then why not go away? Why not seek a safe refuge?"

She laughed again—the terrible, dreary laugh. "He would find me; he will kill me some day. I know it; but I do not care. I should not have run away from him."

"Why not go home again?" asked Hyacinth.

"Ah, no—there is no returning—no undoing—no going back."

Hyacinth raised the poor bruised hand.

"I am afraid it is broken," she said gently. "Let me bind it for you."

She took out her handkerchief; it was a gossamer trifle—fine cambric and lace—quite useless for the purpose required. She turned to Claude and asked for his. The request was a small one, but the whole afterpart of her life was affected by it. She did not notice that Claude's handkerchief was marked with his name in full—"Claude Lennox." She bound carefully the wounded hand.

"Now," she said, "be advised by us; go away—don't let your husband find you."

"Go to London," cried Claude eagerly; "there is always work to be done and money to be earned there. See—I will give you my address. You can write to me; and I will ask my aunt or my mother to give you employment."

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book and wrote on it; "Claude Lennox, 200 Belgrave Square, London."

He looked very handsome, very generous and noble, as he gave the folded note to the woman, with two sovereigns inside it.

"Remember," he said, "that I promise my mother will find you some work if you will apply to us."

She thanked him, but no ray of hope came to her poor face. She did not seem to think it strange that they were there—that it was unusual at that early hour to see such as they were out in the fields.

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"Heaven bless you!" she said gratefully. "A dying woman's blessing will not hurt you."

"You will not die," said Claude cheerily; "you will be all right in time. Do you belong to this part?"

"No," she replied; "we are quite strangers here. I do not even know the name of the place. We were going to walk to Liverpool; my husband thought he should get better wages there."

"Take my advice," said Claude earnestly—"leave him; let him go his own road. Travel to London, and get a decent living for yourself there."

"I will think of it," she said wearily; and then a vague unconsciousness began to steal over her face.

"You are tired," said Hyacinth gently; "lie down and sleep again. Good-by." The birds were singing gayly when they turned to leave her.

"Stay," said Claude; "what is your name?"

"Anna Barratt," she replied; and only Heaven knows whether those were the last words she spoke.

CHAPTER VIII.

The woman laid her weary head down again as one who would fain rest, and they walked away from her.

"We have done a good deed," said Claude thoughtfully; "saved that poor woman from being murdered, perhaps. I hope she will do what I advised—start for London. If my mother should take a fancy to her, she could easily put her in the way of getting her living."

To his surprise, Hyacinth suddenly took her hand from his, and broke out into a wild fit of weeping.

"My darling, what is it? Cynthia, what is the matter?"

She sat down upon a large moss-covered stone and wept as though her heart would break. The sight of those raining tears, the sound of those deep-drawn sobs and passionate cries filled him with grief and dismay. He knelt down by the girl's side, and tried to draw her hands from her face.

"Cynthia, you make me so wretched! Tell me what is wrong—I cannot bear to see you so."

Then the violence of her weeping abated. She looked at him. "Claude," she said, "I am so sorry I left home—it is all so wicked and so wrong. I must go back again."

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He started from her. "Do you mean that you are sorry you have come with me, Hyacinth?"

"Yes, very sorry," she sobbed. "I must go back. I did not think of consequences. I can see them so plainly now. It is wicked to run away from home. That poor woman did it, and see what has come to her. Claude, I believe that Providence has placed that woman across my path, and that the words she has spoken are a warning message."

"That is all nonsense, Cynthia; there can be no comparison between the two cases. I am not a ruffian like that woman's husband."

"No you are not; but the step was wicked, Claude. I understand all now. Be kind to me, and let me go back home."

"Of course," said Claude sullenly, "I cannot run away with you against your will. If you insist upon it, I will do as you ask; but it is making a terrible simpleton of me."

"You will forgive me," she returned. "You will say afterward that I acted rightly. I shall be miserable, Claude—I shall never be happy again—if I do not return home."

"If you persist in this, we shall be parted forever," he said angrily.

"It will be best," she replied. "Do not be angry with me, Claude. I do not think—I—I love you enough to marry you and live with you always. I have blinded myself with romance and nonsense. I do not love you—not even so much as that poor woman loves her husband. Oh, Claude, let me

return home."

She looked up at him, her face wet with tears, and an agony of entreaty in her eyes.

"You might have found this out before, Hyacinth. You have done me a great wrong—you have trifled with me. If you had said before that you did not love me, I should never have proposed this scheme."

"I did not know," she said, humbly. "I am very sorry if I have wronged you. I did not mean to pain you. It is just as though I had woke up suddenly from an ugly dream. Oh, for my dear mother's sake, take me home!"

He looked down at her, for some few minutes in silence, vanity and generosity doing hard battle together. The sight of her beautiful, tearful face touched, yet angered him, he did not like to see it clouded by sorrow; yet he could not bear to think that he must lose its loveliness, and never call it his own.

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"Do you not love me, Hyacinth?" he asked sadly.

"Oh, no—not as I should love you, to be your wife. I thought I did not, but you said I did. I am quite sure of it, Claude; ever since we started I have been thinking so."

"Well, I must bear my disappointment like a man, I suppose," he said; "and since you wish to go back, I suppose you must. But remember all that you are going back to, Cynthia."

"It is better to break one's heart at home than to run away from it," she rejoined.

"I see," he said quietly; "that woman has frightened you. I thought you brave—you are a coward. I thought you capable of great sacrifice for my sake—you are not so. You shall go home in safety and security, Miss Vaughan."

"Heaven bless you, Claude!" she cried. "You are very good to me."

"I do not like it, mind," he said. "I think it is the shabbiest trick that was ever played on any man. Still, your wishes shall be obeyed." Without another word, they went back to the station.

"I will inquire at what time the train leaves here for Oakton," he said. "Stay outside, Hyacinth—it will not do for you to be seen now."

She was very fortunate. A train went back to Oakton at six o'clock—a quick train too—so that she would be there in little more than half an hour.

"Then," she said breathlessly, "I can walk quickly back again. I can get into the grounds—perhaps into the house—unnoticed. I pray Heaven that I may do so! If I may but once get safely freed from this danger, never will I run into any more. How much would I not give to be once more safe at home!"

Claude looked as he felt—exceedingly angry. "I will accompany you," he said, "as far as the Oakton station, and then I must walk back to the park. I can only hope that I have not been missed. I will take care that no woman ever makes such a simpleton of me again."

He went to the booking-office and obtained two tickets. When the train was ready for starting, and not before, he went to summon Hyacinth, and by a little dexterous management, she got into a carriage unseen.

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They did not exchange words on that return journey; he was too angry—too indignant; she was praying that she might reach home safely—that she might not be too heavily punished for her sin.

At last the train reached Oakton. There were few people at the station. She gave up the ticket to the official, who little guessed who she was.

"Thank Heaven," she said, with quivering lips. The next minute she was on the road that led to the woods. Claude followed her.

"We will say good-by here, Claude," she said, holding out her hand to him.

"And you were to have been my wife before noon!" he cried. "How cold, how heartless women are!"

"You should not have persuaded me," she said, with gentle dignity. "You blinded me by talking of the romance. I forgot to think of the right and wrong. But I will not reproach you. Good-by."

He held her hand one minute; all the love he had felt for her seemed to rise and overwhelm him—his face grew white with the pain of parting from her.

"You know that this good-by is forever," he said sadly; "you know that we who were to have been all in all to each other, who were to have been married by noon, will now in all probability never meet again."

"Better that than an elopement," she returned "Good-by, Claude."

He bent down and kissed her white brow; and then, without another word, she broke from him, and hastened away, while he, strong man as he was, lay sobbing on the grass.

Fortune favored her. No one saw her hurrying back through the woods and the pleasure-grounds. She waited until the back gates were all unfastened, and the maid whose office it was to feed the bantams Lady Vaughan was so proud of, came out. She spoke to her, and the maid thought Miss Vaughan had come, as she had often done before, to watch the feeding of the poultry. She wondered a little that the young lady was dressed in a gray travelling cloak, and wore a thick veil.

"Just for all the world," said the maid to herself, "as though she were going on a long journey." She was struck, too, by the sound of Miss Vaughan's voice; it was so weak, so exhausted; it had none of its usual clear, musical tones.

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"Mary," said Hyacinth, at last, "do you think you could get me a cup of tea from the kitchen? Breakfast will not be ready for some time yet."

The good-natured maid hastened down into the kitchen, and soon returned with a cup of hot, strong tea. Hyacinth drank it eagerly; her lips were parched and dry. The tea revived her wonderfully. Suddenly Mary exclaimed,

"Oh, Miss Vaughan where have you been? Your cloak is covered with dust."

"Hush, Mary," she said, with a forced smile. "Do not tell tales of me." And then she hastened into the house. She met no one; her little room was just as she had left it. No one had entered, nothing was disturbed. She locked the door and fell on her knees. Rarely has maiden prayed as Hyacinth Vaughan prayed then. How she thanked Providence—how her heart, full of gratitude, was raised to Heaven! How she promised that for all the remainder of her life she would be resigned and submissive.

How safe and secure was this haven of home after all! She shuddered as she thought of that dreadful night passed in the confusion of railway travelling; of the woman whose pitiful story still rang in her ears.

"Thank Heaven, I have escaped!" she cried. "With all my heart I offer thanks!"

Then she changed her dress and did her best to remove all traces of fatigue, and when the breakfast bell rang she went down-stairs with a prayer on her lips—she was so thankful, so grateful, for her escape. Claude Lennox did not fare so well; he had been missed and the colonel was very angry about it.

"You have been dining with the officers again, I suppose," he said, "and have spent the night over cards and wine. It is bad, sir—bad. I do not like it. It is well Mrs. Lennox does not know it."

He made no excuses; he said nothing to defend himself; all the servants in the house knew there was a dispute between the colonel, their master, and Mr. Lennox.

"If my conduct does not please you, uncle," said the young man, "I can go, you know."

This threat somewhat mollified the colonel, who had no great wish to quarrel with his handsome young nephew.

"I have no wish to be harsh," he said, "but a whole night at cards is too much."

"I am sorry I have not pleased you," rejoined Claude. "I shall go back to London on Saturday; my engagements will not permit me to remain here after then."

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He was angry and annoyed; he had been baffled, irritated, placed in a false and most absurd position; he did not care to remain at Oakton. He could not endure to look at Hyacinth Vaughan's face again. But he did not know what terrible events were to happen before Saturday. The future, with its horrible shame and disgrace, was hidden from him.

CHAPTER IX.

"What has come over the child?" thought Lady Vaughan to herself. "She is so submissive, so quiet, so obedient, I hardly know her."

For, though Lady Vaughan exercised Hyacinth's patience very severely the whole of that day, in the packing up, no murmur escaped her lips; she was very quiet and subdued, and made no complaint even when she heard that they were to travel in a close carriage; no impetuous bursts of song came from her lips—no half-murmured reply to Lady Vaughan's homilies. That lady thought, with great complacency, how very efficacious her few words must have been.

"It is the prospect of being married, I suppose, that has made her so good," she said to herself.

She little knew that the girl's heart was weighed down with gratitude to Heaven for an escape that she deemed almost miraculous. She little thought how suddenly the quiet old home had become a sure refuge and harbor to her—and how, for the first time in her life, Hyacinth clung to it with love and fondness.

She was busy at work all day, for they were to start early on the next morning. She executed all Lady Vaughan's commissions—she did all her errands—she helped in every possible way, thinking all the time how fortunate she was—that the past two months were like a horrible dream from which she had only just awoke. How could she have been so blinded, so foolish, so mad? Ah, thank heaven, she had awoke in time!

She was not afraid of discovery, though she knew perfectly well that, if ever Lady Vaughan should know what she had done, she would never speak to her again—she would not allow her to remain at Queen's Chase. But there was no fear of her ever learning what she had done; thanks to Claude's care, no one had recognized her—her secret was quite safe. But the consciousness that she had such a secret, humiliated her as nothing else could have done. Her grandmother might well wonder what brought that expression of grateful contentment to her beautiful face.

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Then Lady Vaughan bade her go to rest early, for she must be up by sunrise. She went, tears of gratitude filling her eyes. She was at home, and so safe!

She thought very kindly of Claude. She was sorry for his discomfiture, and for the pain he suffered; but a sudden sense of womanly dignity had come over her.

"He should not have persuaded me," she said to herself over and over again. "He knows the world better than I do; he is older than I am. He should have been the one to teach me, and not to lead me astray."

Still she felt kindly toward him, and she knew that, as time went on, and the gloom of her home enclosed her again, she should miss him. She was too grateful for her escape, however, too remorseful for what she had done, to feel any great grief at losing him now.

On the Thursday morning, when great events of which she knew nothing were passing around her, Hyacinth rose early, and the bustle of preparation began. They did not go to Oakton station. Sir Arthur had his own particular way of doing every thing, and he chose to post to London. He did not quite approve of railway travelling—it was levelling—all classes were mixed up too much for his taste. So they drove in the grand old family carriage to London, whence they travelled instate to Dover, thence to Bergheim.

As far as it was possible to make travelling dull, this journey was rendered dull. Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan seemed to have only one dread, and that was of seeing and being seen. The blinds of the carriage windows were all drawn. "They had not come abroad for scenery, but for change of air," her ladyship observed several times each day. When it was necessary to stay at a hotel, they had a separate suite of rooms. There was no *table d'hote*, no mixing with other travellers; they were completely exclusive.

As they drew near Bergheim, Hyacinth's beautiful face grew calm and serene. She even wondered what he would be like, this Adrian Darcy. He was a scholar and a gentleman—but what else? Would he despise her as a child, or admire her as a woman? Would he fall in love with her, or would he remain profoundly indifferent to her charms? She was startled from her reverie by Lady Vaughan's voice.

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"We will drive straight to the hotel," she said; "Mr. Darcy has taken rooms for us there."

"Shall we see him to-night?" asked Sir Arthur.

"No, I should imagine not. Adrian is always considerate. He will know we are tired, and consequently not in the best of moods for visitors," she replied. "He will be with us to-morrow morning."

And, strange to say, Hyacinth Vaughan, who had once put from her even the thought of Adrian Darcy, felt some slight disappointment that she was not to see him until the morrow.

CHAPTER X.

"This is something like life," thought Hyacinth Vaughan, as the summer sun came streaming into her room.

It was yet early in the morning, but there was a sound of music from the gardens. She drew aside the blinds, and saw a lake in all its beauty, the most cheerful, the brightest scene upon which she had ever gazed.

The Hotel du Roi is by far the most aristocratic resort in Bergheim. "Kings, queens, and emperors" have lodged there; some of the leading men and the fairest women in Europe have at times made their home there. The hotel has a certain aristocratic character of its own. Second-rate people never go there; its magnificence is of too quiet and dignified a kind. The gorgeous suites of rooms are always inhabited by some of the leading Continental families. Bergheim itself is a sleepy little town. The lake is very beautiful; tall mountains slope down to the edge; the water is deep, clear, and calm; green trees fringe the banks; water-lilies sleep on its tranquil breast. The Lake of Bergheim has figured in poetry, in song, and in pictures.

Hyacinth gazed at it with keen delight. Suddenly it struck her that the house was not Lady Vaughan's, consequently not under her ladyship's control, and that she could go out into those fairylike looking grounds if she wished.

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She took her hat and a black lace shawl and went down-stairs. She was soon reassured. She was doing nothing unusual. One or two ladies were already in the gardens, and in one of the broad open paths she saw an English nursemaid with some little children around her. Hyacinth walked on with a light, joyous heart. She never remembered to have seen the world so fair; she had never seen sunshine so bright, or flowers so fair; nor had she ever heard such musical songs from the birds.

Over the girl's whole soul, as she stood, there came a rapturous sense of security and gratitude. She was safe; the folly, amounting almost to sin, of her girlhood, was already fading into the obscurity of a dark, a miserable dream. She was safe under heaven's blessed sunlight, life growing fairer and more beautiful every hour. She was grateful for her escape.

Then it struck her that she heard the sound of falling water, and she went down a long, vine-covered path—surely the loveliest picture in the world. The vines had been trained so as to form

a perfect arch; the grapes hung in rich, ripe bunches; flowers grew underfoot; and at the end of the grove was a high white rock from which water fell with a rippling, rushing, musical sound, into a small clear pool. Hyacinth looked at the scene in wonder. She had never seen anything so pretty in her life. She went up to the water; it was cool, so clear, so fresh and sparkling. She threw off her hat and plunged her hands into it. She laughed aloud as the water ran foaming over them. She little dreamed what a lovely picture she herself made standing under the shade of the vines, her fair, brilliant face almost dazzling in the dim light, her fair hair shining like gold. The morning breeze had brought the most dainty and exquisite bloom to her face, her eyes were as bright as stars, her lips like newly-blown roses, and, as she stood with the foam rushing over her little white hands, the world might have searched in vain for one more lovely.

Then she thought how refreshing a draught of that sparkling water would be. She gathered a large vine-leaf and filled it. She had just raised it to her lips when a rich, deep, musical voice said:

"Do not drink that water; it is not considered good."

The vine-leaf fell from her hands, her face flushed crimson. She had thought that she was quite alone. She looked around, but could see no one. [Pg 46]

"I beg pardon if I have alarmed you," said the same voice, "but the water of the fall is not considered good; it is supposed to come from the lake."

Then she looked in the direction whence the voice proceeded—a gentleman was reclining on a rock by the waterfall. He had been reading, for an open book lay by his side; but Hyacinth strongly suspected, from the quiet smile on his lips and in his luminous eyes, that he had been watching her.

"I am afraid I startled you," he continued; "but the water is not so clear as it looks."

"Thank you," she returned, gently.

He took up his book again, and she turned to leave the grove. But in those few moments, the world had all changed for her. She walked out of the vine grove, and sat down by the edge of the lake, trying to live every second of those few minutes over again.

What was that face like? Dark, beautiful, noble—the face of a king, with royal brows, and firm, grave, yet sweet lips—a face that in her girlish dreams she would have given to the heroes she loved—to King Arthur—to the Chevalier Bayard—to Richard the Lion Heart—the face of a man born to command, born to rule.

She had looked at it for perhaps only two minutes, but she could have sketched it accurately from memory. The dark hair was thrown back in masses—not in effeminate curls, but in the same waving lines that may be seen on the heads of famous Grecian statues; the forehead was white, broad, well-developed, rounded at the temples, full of ideality, of genius, of poetry, of thought; the brows were dark and straight as those of a Greek god; the eyes luminous and bright—she could not tell what they were like—they had dazzled her. The dark mustache did not hide a beautiful mouth that had nothing effeminate in it.

It was a face that filled her mind with thoughts of beauty. She mused over it. There was nobility, power, genius, loyalty, truth, in every feature. The voice had filled her ears with music.

"I wish," she thought, "he had given me some other command; I should like to obey him; I would do anything he told me; he has the face and the voice of a king. I have read of god-like men; now I have seen one. Shall I ever see him again? I can imagine that face flashing with indignation, eloquent with pleading, royal in command, softened in tenderness, eloquent in speech." [Pg 47]

Her reverie was interrupted by the sound of a bell. "That must be for breakfast," she thought, and she hurried back to the house. She did not see the stranger follow her, with a smile still on his face.

Lady Vaughan was unusually gracious.

"You have been out in the gardens, my dear," she said to the young girl, who evidently expected a reproof. "That is right. You are looking very well this morning."

She spoke coldly; but in her heart she marvelled at the girl's wonderful beauty. She had seen nothing so fair, so dainty, so brilliant as the bloom that overspread her lovely face. "I have had a note from Mr. Darcy," continued her ladyship, "and he will be with us before noon."

During breakfast Lady Vaughan was more gracious than ever Hyacinth remembered to have seen her. When it was over, she said to the girl:

"I should like you to look your best, Cynthy, when Mr. Darcy comes. Make a fresh toilet, and then amuse yourself as you like until I send for you."

Over the glowing dream of the morning the name of Adrian Darcy seemed to fall like the breath of a cold east wind over flowers. She had for the time almost forgotten him, and at the sound of his name a whole host of disagreeable memories arose.

"Never mind," she said to herself; "they cannot force me to marry him against my will. I can tell him I do not like him." She went away, with smiles on her lips and music in her heart, to change her dress, as Lady Vaughan had desired. A surprise awaited her in her room; Pincott, Lady Vaughan's maid, was standing before a large trunk.

"These are dresses, Miss Vaughan," she said, "that my lady has ordered from Paris for you. She did not tell you, because she wished to keep it as a surprise for you."

The girl's face flushed crimson.

"For me!" she cried. "How kind of her! Oh, Pincott, how beautiful they are!"

The maid unfolded the glistening treasures of silk, lace, and velvet, displaying them to Hyacinth's enraptured eyes.

"My lady ordered me to attend to your toilet, this morning, Miss Vaughan," continued Pincott, who knew perfectly well why her mistress desired the young girl to look her best. "I have brought these blush roses; no ornaments look so well as natural flowers."

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From the collection of dresses one of embroidered Indian muslin was selected. It was daintily trimmed with pale pink ribbon and white lace, and was exquisitely made. The girlish graceful figure, with its beautiful curves and symmetrical lines, was shown to perfection; the sleeves fell back, showing a fair, rounded arm. Pincott had great natural taste; she dressed the fair hair after some simple girlish fashion, and fastened a blush rose in it; she fastened another in the high bodice of the white dress.

"You look lovely, Miss Vaughan," she said; and Hyacinth, looking at her fair flower-like face, blushed for her own great beauty.

Then Pincott left her, and the way in which she amused herself was by sitting at the open window, dreaming of the face she had seen at the waterfall. She was roused by the maid's return. "Lady Vaughan will be glad to see you in her room, Miss Vaughan. Mr. Darcy is there."

Again the name fell like cold water over her, chilling her bright dreams, her growing content and happiness: and again she consoled herself by remembering that no one could force her to marry Mr. Darcy against her will. She heard the sound of voices as she drew near the room; she opened the door and entered, her beautiful face calm and serene, looking as fair a picture of youth and loveliness as ever greeted human eyes. "Hyacinth," said Lady Vaughan, "come here my dear. I want to introduce you to Mr. Darcy."

She went up to her. A tall figure stood near Lady Vaughan's chair. Lady Vaughan took her hand.

"This is my granddaughter. Hyacinth—Mr. Darcy."

Hyacinth raised her eyes. Was she blinded by a great golden sunbeam? Was she dreaming? Was she haunted or bewitched? Adrian Darcy, whom she had dreaded to see, whose name even she had detested, was the same gentleman that she had seen by the waterfall.

When she remembered all she had been thinking and dreaming, it was no wonder that the beautiful face grew crimson as a damask rose, and that the bright eyes fell until he could see nothing of them. She was spell-bound—this unknown hero of whom she had dreamed the whole summer morning was Adrian Darcy! He held out his hand to her.

"We are old friends," he said frankly. "I saw this young lady about to drink some clear, cold, sparkling poison this morning, and I interfered to prevent her doing so."

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Then he was obliged to explain to Lady Vaughan who smiled most graciously; but Hyacinth said never a word. She could not realize the truth, yet she sat like one blinded by a great flood of sunlight. If she had known how this sweet shy confusion became her—how beautiful it was—how Adrian Darcy admired it! Nothing could have charmed him half so much.

"How beautiful she is!" he thought. "She is like a rosebud shrouded in green leaves."

Hyacinth was almost in despair.

"How stupid he will think me!" she reflected. "But I cannot help it—I cannot speak."

When she had collected her senses sufficiently to listen, Adrian was saying—

"Yes; we have very good music here, indeed. I think the hotel gardens on a bright summer day the most charming place I know. The fountains are very beautiful; and the band is one of the best I have heard. Lady Vaughan, I hear the music beginning now; will you allow me to escort you? There are very comfortable seats in the gardens!"

He saw the sudden, startled flush of joy in the young face. Hyacinth raised her head and looked eagerly at her grandmamma; but Lady Vaughan excused herself.

"The journey has been delightful," she said, "but fatiguing. To-morrow I will go out, but not to-day. Hyacinth will go, though, Adrian, if you will be so kind as to give the child the pleasure."

The "child" rose, her cheeks aflame, her heart beating as it had never beat before. To go out into those sunlit gardens and to listen to music with him—well, she had not even guessed before what a beautiful, happy world it was. She put on the prettiest of her hats—one with a white plume—and a lace mantilla, and then stood, half smiling, but wholly happy, waiting for him. He came up to her smiling.

"Hyacinth," he said, "we are—to use an old-fashioned term—of the same kin; so I am not going to call you Miss Vaughan. And I want you not to look so shy, but to feel quite at home with me."

At home with him, this hero, this king amongst men, whose presence filled her whole soul with light! It could never be.

"I had no idea," he continued, "that I had such a fair young kinswoman. Lady Vaughan had always written as though you were a child."

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Her heart sank. Was this how he thought of her—was this what made him so kind and gracious to her?

"I am not a child," she said, with some little attempt at dignity, "I am more than eighteen."

"Quite a philosophic age," was the smiling reply. "Now, Hyacinth, tell me, what do you like to look at best—flowers, trees, or water?"

"I like all three," she said truthfully.

"Do you? Then I will find you a seat where you can see all. Here is one not too near the music."

He had found a quaint, pretty garden seat, under the shade of a tall spreading tree. In front of them were beds of lilies and roses, and the blue waters of the lake. The band began to play the sad, passionate music of Verdi's "Miserere;" and to Hyacinth Vaughan it seemed as though the earth had changed into heaven.

"Do you like music?" he said watching the changes on the beautiful young face.

"Yes," she replied, "but I have heard so little."

"You have had a very quiet life at Queen's Chase, I should imagine," he said.

"Yes, as quiet as life could well be."

"You should not regret it. I am quite of the old *régime*. I think young girls should be so reared."

"For what reason?" she asked.

"For a hundred reasons. If there is one character I detest more than another, it is that of a worldly woman. Delicacy, purity, refinement, are all so essential—and no girl can possess them brought up under the glare and glitter of the world. You have been singularly fortunate in living at Queen's Chase."

"Thank Heaven," she thought to herself, "that he does not know the shameful escape I tried to make—that he does not know how I loathed and hated the place."

"But," she said aloud, "it is not pleasant to be always dull."

"Dull! No. Youth is the very time for enjoyment; every thing rejoices in youth. You, for instance, have been happy with your books and flowers at Queen's Chase: the world now is all new to you. You are not what fashionable jargon calls 'used up.' You have not been playing at being a woman while you were yet a child; your heart has not been hardened by flirtations; your soul has not been soiled by contact with worldlings; you are fresh, and pure, and beautiful as the flowers themselves. If you had been living all these years in the hot-bed of society, this would not have been the case. There is nothing so detestable, so unnatural, as a worldly young girl."

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He liked her as she was! For the first time in her life Hyacinth blessed Lady Vaughan and Queen's Chase.

"I do not want to tire you with argument," he continued, "but tell me Hyacinth, what becomes of a flower, the growth of which has been forced?"

"It soon dies," she replied.

"Yes; and girls brought up in the artificial atmosphere of modern society, and its worship of Mammon, its false estimates, its love of sensation and excitement, soon die to all that is fairest and best in life. You," he continued, "enjoy—see, your face tells tales, Hyacinth—you enjoy the sunshine, the flowers, the music, the lake."

"Yes, indeed I do," she confessed.

"If you had danced and flirted through one or two London seasons, you would not enjoy nature as you do; it would pall upon you—you would be apt to look at it through an eye-glass, and criticise the color of the water and the tints of the flowers—you would detect notes in the sunbeam and false notes in music."

She laughed. "I should not be so keen a critic, Mr. Darcy."

"One who can criticise is not always one who enjoys most," he said. "I like to see people honestly enjoying themselves, and leaving criticism alone."

The gardens were not crowded; there were seldom visitors enough at the hotel to form a crowd; but Hyacinth was struck by the pleasant, high-bred faces and elegant dresses.

"Do you see that lady there in the gray dress," said Mr. Darcy—"the one with two children by her side?" Hyacinth looked in the direction indicated.

"That is the Princess Von Arten, the daughter of a queen. How simple and unassuming she is! She is staying here with her children. The gentleman now saluting her is the eminent Weilmath."

Her face lighted up.

"I am glad to have seen him," she said; "I have read of him so often. Do you admire him?"

"I admire bravery," he replied, "but not unscrupulous daring. Do you see that lady sitting under the ilex tree?"

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"The one with the sad, thoughtful face?" asked Hyacinth.

"Yes. Twelve months ago she was the leading star of the most brilliant court in Europe; now she has no home that she can call her own."

Hyacinth turned her face to his.

"Mr. Darcy," she said, "is the world then so full of reverses? I thought that, when one was happy

and prosperous, sorrow and trouble did not approach. What is stable if money, and friendship, and happiness fail?"

"Just one thing," he replied, with the beautiful luminous smile she had never seen on any other face—"Heaven!"

CHAPTER XI.

Hyacinth Vaughan repeated one sentence over and over again to herself—they were always the same words—"Thank Heaven, Adrian does not know what I have done."

For, as the days passed on, she learned to care for him with a love that was wonderful in its intensity. It was not his personal beauty that impressed her. By many people Claude Lennox would have been considered the handsomer man of the two. It was the grandeur of Adrian Darcy's character, the loyalty and nobility of his most loyal soul; the beauty of his mind, the stretch and clearness of his intellect, that charmed her.

She had never met any one like him—never met so perfect a mixture of chivalry and strength. She learned to have the utmost reliance upon him. His most lightly spoken word was to her as the oath of another. She saw that every thought, every word, every action of his was so perfectly correct that his least judgment was invaluable. If he said a thing was right, the whole world could not have made her think it wrong; if he disapproved of anything, so entire was her reliance upon him, that she could not be brought to consider it right.

It seemed so strange that she should have been so ready to run away, so as to escape this Adrian Darcy; and now the brightest heaven of which she could dream was his friendship—for his love, after she understood him, she could hardly hope.

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"How can he care for a child like me," she was accustomed to ask herself, "uninformed, inexperienced, ignorant? He is so great and so noble, how can he care for me?"

She did not know that her sweet humility, her graceful shyness, her *naïveté*, her entire freedom from all taint of worldliness, was more precious to him, more charming, than all the accomplishments she could have displayed.

"How can I ever have thought that I loved Claude?" she said to herself. "How can I have been so blind? My heart never used to beat more quickly for his coming. If I had had the same liberty, the same amusements and pleasures which other girls have, I should never have cared for him. It was only because he broke the monotony of my life, and gave me something to think of."

Then in her own mind she contrasted the two men—Adrian, so calm, so dignified, so noble in thought, word, and deed, and so loyal, so upright; Claude, all impetuosity, fire, recklessness and passion—not to be trusted, not to be relied upon. There was never a greater difference of character surely than between these two men.

She learned to look with Adrian's eyes, to think with his mind; and she became a noble woman.

Life at Bergheim was very pleasant; there was no monotony, no dreariness now. Her first thought when she woke in the morning, was that she should see Adrian, hear him speak, perhaps go out with him. Quite unconsciously to herself, he became the centre of her thoughts and ideas—the soul of her soul, the life of her life. She did not know that she loved him; what she called her "love" for Claude had been something so different—all made up of gratified vanity and love of change. The beautiful affection rapidly mastering her was so great and reverent, it filled her soul with light, her heart with music, her mind with beauty. She did not know that it was love that kept her awake throughout the night thinking of him, bringing back to her mind every word he had spoken—that made her always anxious to look well.

"I always thought," she said to him one day, "that grave and thoughtful people always despised romance."

"They despise all affectation and caricature of it," he replied.

"Since I have been out in the world and have listened to people talking, I have heard them say, 'Oh, she is romantic!' as though romance were wrong or foolish."

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"There is romance and romance," he said; "romance that is noble, beautiful and exalting; and romance that is the overheated sentiment of foolish girls. What so romantic as Shakespeare? What love he paints for us—what passion, what sadness! Who more romantic than Fouque? What wild stories, what graceful, improbable legends he gives us! Yet, who sneers at Shakespeare and Fouque?"

"Then why do people apply the word 'romantic' almost as a term of reproach to others?"

"Because they misapply the word, and do not understand it. I plead guilty myself to a most passionate love of romance—that is, romance which teaches, elevates, and ennobles—the soul of poetry, the high and noble faculty that teaches one to appreciate the beautiful and true. You know, Hyacinth, there are true romance and false romance, just as there are true poetry and false poetry."

"I can understand what you call true romance, but not what you mean by false," she said.

"No; you are too much like the flower you are named after to know much of false romance," he

rejoined. "Everything that lowers one's standard, that tends to lower one's thoughts, that puts mere sentiment in the place of duty, that makes wrong seem right, that leads to underhand actions, to deceit, to folly—all that is false romance. Pardon my alluding to such things. The lover who would persuade a girl to deceive her friends for his sake, who would persuade her to give him private meetings, to receive secret letters—such a lover starts from a base of the very falsest romance; yet many people think it true."

He did not notice that her beautiful face had suddenly grown pale, and that an expression of fear had crept into her blue eyes.

"You are always luring me into argument, Hyacinth," he said, with a smile.

"Because I like to hear you talk," she explained. She did not see how full of love was the look he bent on her as he plucked a spray of azalea flowers and passed it to her. Through the tears that filled her downcast eyes she saw the flower, and almost mechanically took it from his hand, not daring to look up. But in the silence of her own room she pressed the flowers passionately to her lips and rained tears upon them, as she moaned, "Oh, if he knew, what would he think of me? what would he think?"

CHAPTER XII.

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Hyacinth Vaughan was soon to learn more of Mr. Darcy's sentiments. He was dining with them one day, when the conversation turned upon some English guests who had arrived at the hotel the evening before—Lord and Lady Wallace.

"She looks quite young," said Lady Vaughan. "She would be a nice companion for Hyacinth."

Mr. Darcy, to whom she was speaking, made no reply. Lady Vaughan noticed how grave his face had grown.

"Do you not think so, Adrian?" she asked.

"Since you wish me to speak, my answer is, no; I do not think so."

"Do you mind telling me why?" pursued Lady Vaughan "I have been so long out of the world I am ignorant of its proceedings."

"I would rather you would not ask me, Lady Vaughan," he said.

"And I would rather hear what you have to tell," she persisted, with a smiling air of command that he was too courteous not to obey.

"I do not think Lady Wallace would be a good companion for Hyacinth, because she is what people of the period call 'fast.' She created a great sensation three years ago by eloping with Lord Wallace. She was only seventeen at the time."

Lady Vaughan looked slightly disgusted; but Hyacinth, who perhaps felt in some measure that she was on her trial, said: "Perhaps she loved him."

Adrian turned to her eagerly. "That is what I was trying to explain to you the other day—false romance—how the truest, the purest, the brightest romance would have been, not eloping—which is the commonplace instinct of commonplace minds—but waiting in patience. Think of the untruths, the deceit, the false words, the underhand dealings that are necessary for an elopement!"

"But surely," said Lady Vaughan, "there are exceptions?"

"There may be. I do not know. I am only saying what I think. A girl who deceives all her friends, who leaves home in such a fashion, must be devoid of refinement and delicacy—not to mention truth and honesty."

"You are very hard," murmured Hyacinth.

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"Nay," he rejoined, turning to her with infinite tenderness of manner; "there are some things in which one cannot be too hard. Anything that touches the fair and pure name of a woman should be held sacred."

"You think highly of women," she said.

"I do—so highly that I cannot bear even a cloud to shadow the fairness and brightness that belong to them. A woman's fair name is her inheritance—her dower. I could not bear, had I a sister, to hear her name lightly spoken by light lips. What the moss is to the rose, what green leaves are to the lily, spotless repute is to a woman."

As he spoke the grave words, Hyacinth looked at him. How pure, how noble the woman must be who could win his love!

"Ah me, ah me!" thought the girl, with a bitter sigh, "what would he say to me if he knew all? Who was ever so near the scandal he hated as I was? Oh, thank Heaven, that I drew back in time, and that mine was but the shadow of a sin!"

There were times when she thought, with a beating heart, of what Lady Vaughan had said to her—that it was her wish Adrian Darcy should marry her. The lot that had once seemed so hard to her was now so bright, so dazzling, that she dared not think of it—when she remembered it, her

face flushed crimson.

"I am not worthy," she said over and over again to herself—"I am not worthy."

She thought of Adrian's love as she thought of the distant stars in heaven—bright, beautiful, but far away. In her sweet humility, she did not think there was anything in herself which could attract him. She little dreamed, how much he admired the loveliness of her face, the grace of her girlish figure, the purity, the innocence, the simplicity that, despite the shadow of a sin, still lingered with her.

"She is innately noble," he said one day to Lady Vaughan. "She is sure always to choose the nobler and better part; her ideas are naturally noble, pure, and correct. She is the most beautiful combination of child and woman that I have ever met. Imagination and common sense, poetry, idealisms and reason, all seem to meet in her."

Years ago, Adrian Darcy had heard something of Lady Vaughan's half-expressed wish that he should marry her granddaughter. He laughed at it at the time; but he remembered it with a sense of acute pleasure. His had been a busy life; he had studied hard—had carried off some of the brightest honors of his college—and, after leaving Oxford, had devoted himself to literary pursuits. He had written books which had caused him to be pronounced one of the most learned scholars in England. He cared little for the frivolities of fashion—they had not interested him in the least—yet his name was a tower of strength in the great world.

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Between Adrian Darcy and the ancient Barony of Chandon there was but the present Lord Chandon, an old infirm man, and his son, a sickly boy. People all agreed that sooner or later Adrian must succeed to the estate; great, therefore, was the welcome he received in Vanity Fair. Mothers presented their fairest daughters to him; fair-faced girls smiled their sweetest smiles when he was present; but all was in vain—the world and the worldly did not please Adrian Darcy. He cared more for his books than woman's looks; he had never felt the least inclination to fall in love until he met Hyacinth Vaughan.

It was not her beauty that charmed him, although he admitted that it was greater than he had ever seen. It was her youth, her simplicity, her freedom from all affectation, the entire absence of all worldliness, the charm of her fresh, sweet romance, that delighted him. She said what she thought, and she expressed her thoughts in such beautiful, eloquent words that he delighted to listen to them. He was quite unused to such frank, sweet, candid simplicity—it had all the charms of novelty for him. He had owned to himself, at last, that he loved her—that life without her would be a dreary blank.

"If I had never met her," he said to himself, "I should never have loved anyone. In all the wide world she is the only one for me." He wondered whether he could speak to her yet of his love. "She is like some shy, bright bird," he said to himself, "and I am afraid of startling her. She is so simple, so child-like, in spite of her romance and poetry, that I am half afraid."

His manner to her was so chivalrous that it was like the wooing of some gracious king. She contrasted him over and over again with Claude—Claude, who had respected her girlish ignorance and inexperience so little. So the sunny days glided by in a dream of delight. Adrian spent all his time with them; and one day Lady Vaughan asked him what he thought of his chance of succeeding to the Barony of Chandon.

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"I think," he replied slowly, "that sooner or later it must be mine."

"Do you care much for it?" she asked. "Old people are always inquisitive, Adrian—you must forgive me."

"I care for it in one sense," he replied; "but I cannot say honestly that title or rank give me any great pleasure. I would rather be Adrian Darcy, than Baron Chandon of Chandon. But, Lady Vaughan, I will tell you something that I long for, that I covet and desire."

"What is it?" she asked, looking at the handsome face, flushed, eager, and excited.

"It is the love of Hyacinth Vaughan," he answered. "I love her—I have never seen anyone so simple, so frank, so *spirituelle*. I love her as I never thought to love any woman. If I do not marry her, I will never marry anyone. I have your permission, I know; but she is so shy, so coy, I am afraid to speak to her. Do you think I have any chance, Lady Vaughan?"

She raised her fair old face to his.

"I do," she replied. "Thanks to our care, the girl's heart is like the white leaf of a lily. No shadow has ever rested on her. She has not been flirted with and talked about. I tell you honestly, Adrian, that the lilies in the garden are not more pure, more fair, or fresh than she."

"I know it," he agreed; "and, heaven helping me, I will so guard and shield her that no shadow shall ever fall over her."

"She has never had a lover," continued Lady Vaughan. "Her life has been a most secluded one."

"Then I shall try to win her," he said; and when he had gone away Lady Vaughan acknowledged to herself that the very desire of her heart was near being gratified.

CHAPTER XIII.

It may be that Hyacinth Vaughan read Adrian Darcy's determination in his face, for she grew so coy and frightened that had he not been brave he would have despaired. If by accident she raised her eyes and met his glance her face burned and her heart beat; when he spoke to her it was with difficulty she answered him. She had once innocently and eagerly sought his society—she had loved to listen to him while he was talking to Lady Vaughan—she had enjoyed being with him as the flowers enjoy the sunlight. But something was awake in her heart and soul which had been sleeping until now. When she saw Adrian, her first impulse was to turn aside and fly, no matter whither, because of the sweet pain his presence caused her. He met her one morning in the broad corridor of the hotel; she looked fresh and bright, fair and sweet as the morning itself. Her face flushed at his coming, she stopped half undecided whether to go on or turn and fly.

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"Hyacinth," he said, holding out his hand in greeting, "it seems an age since I have had any conversation with you. Where do you hide yourself? What are you always doing?"

Then he paused and looked at her—admiration, passion, and tenderness unspeakable in his eyes. She little knew how fair a picture she presented in her youthful loveliness and timidity—how graceful and pure she was in her girlish embarrassment.

"Have you not one word of greeting, Hyacinth? It is the morning of a fresh day. I have not seen you since the noon of yesterday. Speak to me—after your own old bright way. Why, Hyacinth, what has changed you? We used to laugh all the sunny summer day through, and now you give me only a smile. What has changed you?"

She never remembered what answer she made him, nor how she escaped. She remembered nothing until she found herself in her own room, her heart beating, her face dyed with burning blushes, and her whole soul awake and alarmed.

"What has changed me?" she asked. "What has come over me? I know—I know. I love him!"

She fell on her knees and buried her face in her hands—she wept passionately.

"I love him," she said—"oh, Heaven, make me worthy to love him!"

She knelt in a kind of waking trance, a wordless ecstasy. She loved him; her heart was awake, her soul slept no more. That was why she dreaded yet longed to meet him—why his presence gave her pain that was sweeter than all joy.

This paradise she had gained was what, in her blindness and folly she had flown from; and she knew now, as she knelt there, that, had all the treasures of earth been offered to her, had its fairest gifts been laid at her feet, she would have selected this from them.

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At last the great joy, the great mystery, the crowning pleasure of woman's life, was hers. She called to mind all that the poets had written of love. Was it true? Ah, no! It fell a thousand fathoms short. Such happiness, such joy as made music in her heart could not be told in words, and her face burned again as she remembered the feeble sentiment that she had dignified by the name of love. Now that she understood herself, she knew that it was impossible she could ever have loved Claude Lennox; he had not enough grandeur or nobility of character to attract her.

When she went down to the *salon*, Sir Arthur and Adrian were there alone; she fled like a startled fawn. He was to dine with them that day, and she spent more time than usual over her toilet. How could she make herself fair enough in the eyes of the man who was her king? Very fair did she look, for among her treasures she found an old-fashioned brocade, rich, heavy, and beautiful, and it was trimmed with rich point lace. The ground was white, with small rosebuds embroidered on it. The fair, rounded arms and white neck shone out even fairer than the white dress; a few pearls that Lady Vaughan had given her shone like dew-drops in the fair hair. She looked both long and anxiously in the mirror, so anxious was she to look well in his eyes.

"Miss Vaughan grows quite difficult to please," said Pincott to her mistress, later on; and Lady Vaughan smiled.

"There may be reasons," she returned; "we have all been young once—we must not quite forget what youth is like. Ah—there is the dinner-bell."

But, as far as the mere material dinner was concerned, Adrian did not show to great advantage; it was impossible to eat while that lovely vision in white brocade sat opposite to him.

"She flies from me—she avoids me," he thought; "but she shall listen. I have tamed the white doves—I have made the wildest, brightest song-birds love me and eat from my hands. She shall love me, too."

He could not succeed in inducing her to look at him; when he spoke she answered, but the sweet eyes were always downcast.

"Never mind. She shall look at me yet," he thought.

After dinner he asked her to sing. She saw with alarm that if she did so she would be alone with him—for the piano was at the extreme end of the room. So she excused herself, and he understood perfectly the reason why.

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"Will you play at chess?" he asked.

Not for the wealth of India could she have managed it.

"I shall win you," his eyes seemed to say. "You may try to escape. Flutter your bright wings, my pretty bird; it is all in vain."

Then he asked her if she would go into the grounds. She murmured some few words of apology

that he could hardly hear. A sudden great love and sweetest pity for her youth and her timidity came over him. "I will be patient," he said to himself; "the shy bird shall not be startled. In time she will learn not to be so coy and timid."

So he turned away and asked Sir Arthur if he should read the leading article from the *Times* to him, and Sir Arthur gratefully accepted the offer. Lady Vaughan, with serenely composed face, went to sleep. Hyacinth stole gently to the window; she wanted no books, no music; a fairyland was unfolded before her, and she had not half explored it. She only wanted to be quite alone, to think over and over again how wonderful it was that she loved Adrian Darcy.

"Come out," the dewy, sleepy flowers seemed to say. "Come out," sung the birds. "Come out," whispered the wind, bending the tall magnolia trees and spreading abroad sweet perfume. She looked round the room; Lady Vaughan was fast asleep, Sir Arthur listening intently, and Adrian reading to him. "No one will miss me," she thought.

She took up a thin shawl that was lying near, opened the long window very gently, and stepped out. But she was mistaken: some one did miss her, and that some one was Adrian. No gesture, no movement of hers ever escaped him. She was gone out into the sweet, dewy, fragrant gloaming, and he longed to follow her.

He read on patiently until—oh, pleasant sight!—he saw Sir Arthur's eyes begin to close. He had purposely chosen the driest articles, and had read slowly until the kind god Morpheus came to his aid, and Sir Arthur slept. Then Adrian rose and followed Hyacinth. The band was playing at the further end of the gardens, and Mozart's sweet music came floating through the trees.

It was such a dim pleasant light under the vines, and the music of the dripping water was so sweet. His instinct had not deceived him: something white was gleaming by the rock. He walked with quiet steps. She was sitting watching the falling waters, looking so fair and lovely in that dim green light. He could contain himself no longer; he sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

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"I have found you at last, Hyacinth," he said—"I have found you at last."

CHAPTER XIV.

Hyacinth Vaughan turned round in startled fear and wonder, and then she saw her lover's face, and knew by her womanly instinct what was coming. She made no effort to escape; she had been like a frightened, half-scared bird, but now a great calm came over her, a solemn and beautiful gladness.

"Hyacinth, forgive me," he said—"I have been looking for you so long. Oh, my darling, if ever the time should come that I should look for you and not find you, what should I do?"

In this, one of the happiest moments of his life, there came to him a presentiment of evil—one of those sharp, sudden, subtle instincts for which he could never account—a sense of darkness, as though the time were coming when he should look for that dear face and not find it, listen for the beloved voice and not hear it—when he should call in vain for his love and no response meet his ears. All this passed through his mind in the few moments that he held her in his arms and looked in her pure, faultless face.

"Have I startled you?" he asked, seeing how strangely pale and calm it had grown. "Why have you been so cruel to me, Hyacinth? Did you not know that I have been seeking for you all day, longing for five minutes with you? For, Hyacinth, I want to ask you something. Now you are trembling—see how unsteady these sweet hands are. I do not want to frighten you, darling; sit down here and let us talk quietly."

They sat down, and for a few moments a deep silence fell over them, broken only by the ripple of the water and the sound of distant music.

"Hyacinth," said Adrian, gently, "I little thought, when I came here four short weeks since, thinking of nothing but reading three chapters of Goethe before breakfast, that I should find my fate—the fairest and sweetest fate that ever man found. I believe that I loved you then—at that first moment—as dearly as I love you now. You seemed to creep into my heart and nestle there. Until I die there will be no room in my heart for any other."

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She sat very still, listening to his passionate words, letting her hands lie within his. It seemed to her like a king coming to take possession of his own.

"I can offer you," he said, "the deepest, best, and purest, love. It has not been frittered away on half a dozen worthless objects. You are my only love. I shall know no other. Hyacinth, will you be my wife?"

It had fallen at last, this gleam of sunlight that had dazzled her so long by its brightness; it had fallen at her feet, and it blinded her.

"Will you be my wife, Hyacinth? Do not say 'Yes' unless you love me; nor because it is any one's wish; nor because Lady Vaughan may have said, 'It would be a suitable arrangement.' But say it if you love me—if you are happy with me."

He remembered in after-years how what she said puzzled him. She clasped her little white hands; she bent her head in sweetest humility.

"I am not worthy," she whispered.

He laughed aloud in the joy of his heart. "Not worthy? I know best about that, Hyacinth. I know that from the whole world I choose you for my wife, my queen, my love, because you are the fairest, the truest, the purest woman in it. I know that, if a king were kneeling here in my place, your love would crown him. It is I who am not worthy, sweet. What man is worthy of love so pure as yours? Tell me, Hyacinth, will you be my wife?"

The grave pallor left her face; a thousand little gleams and lights seemed to play over it.

"My wife—to love me, to help me while we both live."

"I—I cannot think that you love me," she said, gently. "You are so gifted, so noble, so clever—so brave and so strong."

"And what are you?" he asked, laughingly.

"I am nothing—nothing, that is, compared to you."

"A very sweet and fair nothing. Now that you have flattered me, listen while I tell you what you are. To begin, you are, without exception, the loveliest girl that ever smiled in the sunshine. You have a royal dowry of purity, truth, innocence and simplicity, than which no queen ever had greater. All the grace and music of the world, to my mind, are concentrated in you. I can say no more, sweet. I find that words do not express my meaning. All the unworthiness is on my side—not on yours."

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"But," she remonstrated, "some day you will be a very rich, great man, will you not?"

"I am what the world calls rich, now," he replied, gravely. "And—yes, you are right, Hyacinth—it is most probable that I may be Baron Chandon of Chandon some day. But what has that to do with it, sweet?"

"You should have a wife who knows more than I do—some one who understands the great world."

"Heaven forbid!" he said, earnestly. "I would not marry a worldly woman, Cynthia, if she brought me Golconda for a fortune. There is no one else who could make such a fair and gentle Lady Chandon as you."

"I am afraid that you will be disappointed in me afterward," she remarked, falteringly.

"I am very willing to run the risk, my darling. Now you have been quite cruel enough, Cynthia. We will even go so far as to suppose you have faults; I know that, being human, you cannot be without them. But that does not make me love you less. Now, tell me, will you be my wife?"

She looked up at him with sweet, shy grace. "I am afraid you think too highly of me," she opposed, apologetically; "in many things I am but a child."

"Child, woman, fairy, spirit—no matter what you are—just as you are, I love you, and I would not have you changed; nothing can improve you, because, in my eyes, you are perfect. Will you be my wife, Hyacinth?"

"Yes," she replied; "and I pray that I may be worthy of my lot."

He bent down and kissed the fair flushed face, the sweet quivering lips, the white drooping eyelids.

"You are my own now," he said—"my very own. Nothing but death shall part us."

So they sat in silence more eloquent than words; the faint sound of the music came over the trees, the wind stirred the vine leaves—there never came such another hour in life for them. In the first rapture of her great happiness Hyacinth did not remember Claude, or perhaps she would have told her lover about him, but she did not even remember him. Over the smiling heaven of her content no cloud, however light, sailed—she remembered nothing in that hour but her love and her happiness.

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Then he began to talk to her of the life that lay before them.

"We must live so that others may be the better for our living, Cynthia. Should it happen that you become Lady Chandon, we will have a vast responsibility on our hands."

She looked pleased and happy.

"We will build schools," she said, "almshouses for the poor people; we will make every one glad and happy, Adrian."

"That will be a task beyond us, I fear," he rejoined, with a smile, "but we will do our best."

"I must try to learn every thing needful for so exalted a position," she observed, with a great sigh of content.

"You must be very quick about it, darling," he said. "I am going to presume upon your kindness. It is not enough to know that I have won you, but I want to know when you will be mine."

She made no reply, and he went on.

"I do not see why we need wait—do you, Cynthia?"

"I do not see why we need hurry," she replied.

"I can give you a reason for that—I want you; my life will be one long sigh until I can say in very truth that you are my wife. Will you let me tell Lady Vaughan this evening, that I have been successful?"

She clung to him, her hand clasping his arm. "Not to-night," she said, softly. "Adrian, let me have this one night to myself to think it all over."

"It shall be just as you like, my darling; I will tell her to-morrow. Now, Cynthia, this is the 19th of July—why should we not be married in two months from to-day?" Ah, why not? She said nothing. The wind, that whispered so many secrets to the trees, did not tell them that.

CHAPTER XV.

When Hyacinth woke next morning, it was with difficulty that she disentangled dreams and truth; then the whole of her untold joys rushed over her, and she knew it was no fancy—no dream. She went down to breakfast looking, if possible, more beautiful than she had ever looked; the love-light on her face made it radiant; her eyes were bright as stars. Lady Vaughan gazed at her, as she had often done before, in sheer wonder. During breakfast she heard Sir Arthur complaining of his papers. [Pg 66]

"I am told they will not come until night," he said. "I really do not see how I am to get through the day without my papers."

"What is the cause of the delay?" asked Lady Vaughan.

"Some accident to the mail train. The company ought to be more careful."

"Adrian will perhaps be able to do something to amuse you," said Lady Vaughan.

"Adrian has gone out," returned Sir Arthur, in an injured tone of voice. "Some friends of his came to the hotel late last night, and he has gone out with them; he will not return till evening."

"Who told you so?" asked Lady Vaughan.

"He wrote this note," said Sir Arthur, "and sent it to me the first thing this morning." Then Hyacinth smiled to herself, for she knew the note was written for her.

"We must get through the day as well as we can," said Lady Vaughan.

Greatly to Sir Arthur's surprise, Hyacinth volunteered to spend the morning with him.

"I can amuse you," she said—"not perhaps as well as Mr. Darcy, but I will do my best. We will go out into the grounds if you like; the band is going to play a selection from 'Il Flauto Magico.'"

And Sir Arthur consented, inwardly wondering how sweet, gentle, and compliant his granddaughter was.

Just before dinner a messenger came to the *salon* to say that Mr. Darcy had returned, and, with Lady Vaughan's permission would spend the evening with them.

"He will tell Lady Vaughan this evening," thought Hyacinth; "and then every one will know."

She dressed herself with unusual care; it would be the first time of seeing him since she had promised to be his wife. Amongst her treasures was a dress of white lace, simple and elegant, somewhat elaborately trimmed with green leaves. Pincott came again, by Lady Vaughan's wish, to superintend the young lady's toilet. She looked curiously at the white lace dress.

"Begging your pardon, Miss Vaughan," she said, "but I never saw a young lady so changed. I used to feel quite grieved when you were so careless about your dress." [Pg 67]

"I will try not to grieve you again," said the young girl, laughingly.

"You must not wear either jewels or ribbons with this dress," observed Pincott. "There must be nothing but a simple cluster of green leaves."

"It shall be just as you like," observed Miss Vaughan.

But the maid's taste was correct—nothing more simply elegant or effective could have been devised than the dress of white lace and the cluster of green leaves on the fair hair. Hyacinth hardly remembered how the time passed until he came. She heard his footsteps—heard his voice; and her heart beat, her face flushed, her whole soul seemed to go out to meet him.

"Hyacinth," he cried, clasping her hand, "this day seemed to me as long as a century."

Lady Vaughan was sitting alone in her favorite arm-chair near the open window. Adrian went up to her, leading Hyacinth by the hand.

"Dearest Lady Vaughan," he said, "can you guess what I have to tell you?"

The fair old face beamed with smiles.

"Is it what I have expected, Adrian?" she asked. "Does my little Hyacinth love you?"

The girl hid her blushing face; then she sunk slowly on her knees, and the kind old hands were raised to bless her. They trembled on her bowed head; Hyacinth seized them and covered them with passionate kisses and tears. She had thought them stern hands once, and had felt disposed to fly from their guidance; but now, as she kissed them, she blessed and thanked them that their guidance had brought her to this happy haven of rest.

"Heaven bless you, my child!" said the feeble voice. The lady bowed her stately head and fair old face over the young girl.

"If you have ever thought me stern, Hyacinth," she said—"if you have ever fancied the rules I laid down for you hard—remember it was all for your own good. The world is full of snares—some of them cruel ones—for the unwary. I saw that you were full of romance and poetry; and I—I did my best, my dear. If you have thought me hard, you must forgive me now—it was all for your own good. I know the value of a pure mind, an innocent heart, and a spotless name; and that is the dowry you bring your husband. No queen ever had one more regal. The Vaughans are a proud old race. There has never been even the faintest slur or shadow resting on any one who bore the name; and the highest praise that I can give you is that you are worthy to bear it."

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Adrian did not know why the fair young head was bent in such lowly humility, why such passionate sobs rose to the girl's lips as he raised her and held her for a moment in his arms.

"Go to your room, Hyacinth, and remove all traces of tears," said Lady Vaughan. "We must be glad, not sorry, this evening—it is your betrothal night. And see, here are the papers, Sir Arthur; now you will be quite happy, and forgive that unfortunate mail train."

CHAPTER XVI.

Hyacinth was not long absent. She bathed her face in some cool, fragrant water, smiling to herself the while at finding that Lady Vaughan could be sentimental, thankful that the needful little scene was over, and wondering shyly what this new and bewildering life would be like, with Adrian by her side as her acknowledged lover. So happy she was—ah, so happy! There was not one drawback—not one cloud. She rearranged the pretty lace dress and the green leaves, and then tripped down-stairs, as fair a vision of youth, beauty, and happiness as ever gladdened the daylight. Just as she reached the *salon* door she dropped her handkerchief, and stooping to pick it up, she heard Lady Vaughan say,

"Do not tell Hyacinth—it will shock her so."

"She must hear of it," Sir Arthur returned; "better tell her yourself, my dear."

Wondering what they could be discussing she opened the door and saw a rather unusual *tableau*. Lady Vaughan was still in her comfortable arm-chair; she held a newspaper in her hands, and Sir Arthur and Adrian Darcy were bending over her, evidently deeply interested. Hyacinth's entrance seemed to put an end to their discussion. Adrian went up to her. Sir Arthur took the paper from his lady's hand and began to read it for himself.

"You will not refuse to sing for me to-night, Cynthy?" said Adrian. "It is, you know, as Lady Vaughan says, our betrothal night. Will you give me that pleasure?"

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Still wondering at what she had heard, Hyacinth complied with his request. She played well, and she had a magnificent, well-trained voice. She sung now some simple ballad, telling of love that was never to die, of faith that was never to change, of happiness that was to last forever and ever; and as she sung the divine light of love played on her face and deep warm gratitude rose in her heart. He thanked her—he kissed the white hands that had touched the keys so deftly; and, then she heard Sir Arthur say again:

"He cannot be guilty; it is utterly impossible. I cannot say I liked the young fellow; he seemed to me one of the careless, reckless kind. But rely upon it he is too much of a gentleman to be capable of such a brutal, barbarous deed."

"If he is innocent," observed Lady Vaughan, "he will be released. In our days justice is too sure and too careful to destroy an innocent man."

"Colonel Lennox will never get over it. Such a blow will kill a proud man like him."

"I pity his mother most," said Lady Vaughan.

Every word of this conversation had been heard by Hyacinth and Adrian. She was looking over some music, and he stood by her. A strange, vague, numb sensation was gradually creeping over her. She raised her eyes to her lover's face, and they asked, as plainly as eyes could speak:

"What are they discussing?"

"A strange, sad story," he spoke in answer to the look, for she had uttered no word. Lady Vaughan heard him.

"You will be grieved, Hyacinth," she said; "but that you will be sure to hear of it sooner or later, I would not tell you one word. Do you remember young Claude Lennox, who was visiting his uncle? He came over to the Chase several times."

"I remember him," she replied, vaguely conscious of her own words—for a terrible dread was over her. She could have cried aloud in her anguish, "What is it—oh, what is it?"

"Appearances are against him, certainly," continued Lady Vaughan, in her calm tone—oh, would she never finish?"—"but I cannot think him guilty."

"Guilty of what?" asked Hyacinth; and the sound of her own voice frightened her as it left her rigid lips.

"Guilty of murder, my dear. It is a strange case. It appears that the very day after we left the Chase, a dreadful murder was discovered at Leybridge—a woman was found cruelly murdered

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under a hedge in one of the fields near the station. In the poor woman's clinched hand was a handkerchief, with the name 'Claude Lennox' upon it. On searching further the police found his address, 'Claude Lennox, 200 Belgrave Square,' written in pencil on a small folded piece of paper. The woman's name is supposed to be Anna Barratt. Circumstantial evidence is very strong against Claude. One of the porters at Leybridge Station swears that he saw him walk with a woman in the direction of the fields; a laboring man swears that he saw him returning alone to Oakton Park in the early dawn of the morning; and the colonel's servants say he was absent from Oakton the whole night."

"Still, that may only be circumstantial evidence," said Sir Arthur, "though it is strongly against him. Why should he kill a woman who was quite a stranger to him, as he solemnly swears she was?"

"Who, then, was with him at the station? You see, three people swear to have noticed him leave Leybridge Station with a woman whom none of them recognized."

They might perhaps have continued the discussion, but a slight sound disturbed them, and, looking round, they saw that Hyacinth had fallen to the floor. She had risen from her seat with a ghastly face and burning eyes; her white lips had opened to say, "It is not Claude who killed her, but her husband." She tried to utter the words, but her voice was mute, and then with outstretched arms she fell face foremost to the ground in a dead swoon. Adrian ran to her; he raised her—he looked in wondering alarm at the colorless face with its impress of dread and fear.

"It has frightened her almost to death," he said. "Did she know this Claude Lennox, Lady Vaughan?"

"Yes, very slightly; we met him once or twice at Oakton Park, and he called at the Chase. But I did not like him. I kept Hyacinth carefully out of his way."

"What can we do for her?" he asked, in a trembling voice.

"Nothing," said Lady Vaughan. "Do not call the servants; they make such a fuss about anything of this kind. Let the fresh air blow over her."

They raised her up and laid her upon the couch. Sir Arthur threw open the doors into the conservatory, and opened the windows in that room also, to admit currents of fresh air. Lady Vaughan withdrew with noiseless step to another room for a glass of cool water. Adrian bent over the wholly unconscious form of his darling, his face almost as white as her own in his anxiety. Suddenly he remembered that he had acquired a slight knowledge of surgery in his University life, and drawing a lancet from his pocket, he made a slight incision in the beautiful snowy arm that lay so limp and lifeless upon his hand.

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One or two drops of blood from the cut stained his fingers. Passionately he kissed the wound that he had made in his love, but though a slight moan escaped her lips, Hyacinth did not yet move nor awaken from her swoon. The old people returned, and Lady Vaughan moistened the pallid brow and colorless lips. Again that moan came, the girl moved, and presently the white lips parted with a sigh, and the eyes opened with a look of terror in them which Adrian never forgot.

"I am so frightened!" she said.

"My darling!" cried Adrian, "I am sorry you heard anything about it. Why need you be frightened?"

"I am shocked," she said, and the ghastly fear deepened in her eyes.

"Of course you are—one so young, so fair, so gentle. The very word 'murder' is enough to terrify you."

Then she lay perfectly still—holding her lover's hand in hers, looking at him with such wordless sorrow, such unutterable woe in her face. Lady Vaughan brought her a glass of wine; she drank it, hardly knowing what she did, and then the elder lady, bending over her, kissed her face.

"You must not be so sensitive, my dear," she said. "How will you get through life if you feel for everybody's trouble in this fashion? Of course we are all deeply grieved for the young man, but he is nothing to us."

Her words fell on dulled ears and an unconscious brain; the girl, still holding her lover's hand, turned her face to the wall. She had not been able to collect her thoughts—they were in a state of chaos. Of all that crowded upon her, that seemed to burn into her brain, that crushed and crowded like living figures around her, one stood out clear, distinct, and terrible—Claude was innocent, and no one in the world knew it but herself. Look where she would, these words seemed to be before her, in great red letters—"No one but myself!" She turned her white face suddenly to Adrian Darcy:

"If they find him guilty," she asked, "what will they do to him?"

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"If he is guilty, he will pay for the crime with his life. But now, Cynthia, you must not think so intently of this. Try to forget it for a little time."

Forget it! Ah, if he knew? When should she forget again?

"He is innocent, and no one in the world knows it but myself, and no one else can prove it."

Over and over again she said the words; it seemed to her they had bewitched her. As soon as she had finished them, she began the terrible phrase over again. Then the darkness seemed to fall over her. When she raised her eyes again, Adrian was reading to her. She tried hard to grasp the sense of what he was saying. She tried to understand the words, but they were like a dull distant

sound—not one was plain or distinct to her.

"I must be going mad," she thought, starting up in wild affright; and then Adrian's arms were encircling her. He could feel the terrible beating of her heart; he could see the awful fear in her face.

"My dearest Hyacinth," he said gently, "you must not give way to this nervous fear—you will do yourself harm."

He laid the fair young head on his breast; he soothed and caressed her as he would have soothed a frightened child; and then Lady Vaughan insisted that she was tired and must go to rest. They did not notice that as she left the room she took with her the paper Sir Arthur had been reading.

CHAPTER XVII.

Alone at last; and the ghastly fear, the terrible dread, overwhelmed Hyacinth. The paper dropped from her hands, and she fell, with a low, shuddering cry, on her knees. The news was too cruel, too dreadful, too horrible. She moaned rather than cried—"Oh, merciful Heaven, let me die! let me die!"

The fear that was upon her was far more trying than any physical anguish. Who could have recognized her crouching there with fever in her brain, with anguish in her heart, as the beautiful brilliant girl who quitted that same room a few hours since, radiant with love and hope?

Then she took up the paper, and with wild, distended eyes read this paragraph:

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"SHOCKING MURDER AT LEYBRIDGE.—The whole of this district has been thrown into the greatest consternation by the discovery of a terrible murder that has been committed in the pleasant meadows near the railway station. On Thursday morning as John Dean, a laborer, was going to his work, his attention was attracted by something lying under the hedge in the field known as Lime Meadow. He found, on inspection, that it was the body of a woman who had been most cruelly murdered. He hastened to the police station and gave information to Inspector Henderson. The inspector went at once to the spot with two of his men. The woman had been dead, it was supposed, over two hours; there were signs of a violent struggle; and she had evidently tried hard to defend herself. At first no clew could be discovered as to her identity or that of her murderer; but it was seen that she held a handkerchief tightly clinched in her hands. With some difficulty it was taken away, and the name 'Claude Lennox' was found upon it. Further search brought to light a folded paper, on which the address of Mr. Lennox was written in full. The woman's clothes were marked, 'Anna Barratt.' She was quite a stranger to the neighborhood, and no one remembers to have seen her before. The police immediately began to make inquiries, the result of which was the apprehension of Claude Lennox on the charge of wilful murder. He has been brought before the magistrates at Ashton, and the evidence given is very strong against him. Mr. Lennox is the nephew of Colonel Lennox, of Ashton Park; and it appears that, much to the colonel's anger and annoyance, the young gentleman was absent all Wednesday night. A porter at Leybridge Station swears to having seen Mr. Lennox in company with some woman—whose features he did not see—quite early on Thursday morning. He noticed him particularly, because Mr. Lennox seemed anxious that his companion should escape all observation. He saw them walking toward the meadow, but not having seen the woman's face, could not identify her. Thomas Hannan, a signalman, also swore to the same facts. Robert Cliffe, a day-laborer, deposed that, as he was going to work early on Thursday morning, he saw the accused walking alone and hurriedly toward the park. He thought the gentleman looked agitated. The prisoner admitted at once that the handkerchief and folded paper containing the address were his, but refused to explain how they came into the possession of the deceased. He swore that he was not guilty of the murder, and that the woman was a stranger to him. When asked to state where he had been during the night, he declined. When asked to prove an *alibi*—if he could bring any witnesses to prove where he had been—he replied abruptly that it was impossible—he could not do it. The magistrates have committed him for trial at the Loadstone assizes, and unless he can give some satisfactory information as to where he passed the night of Wednesday, the weight of circumstantial evidence will tell strongly against him. The refusal of Mr. Lennox to make any exculpatory statement has created a great sensation in the neighborhood. The assizes commences on the twenty-third of July."

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The paper fell from Hyacinth's trembling hands, and a terrible moan came from her lips. Clear as the daylight the incidents of that morning rose before her in their full horror.

Whatever happened, cost what it would, she must go—she must clear Claude. No one in the wide world knew that he was innocent, no one could clear him but herself. Dear Heaven, how plainly the whole scene rose before her! The dewy meadows lying so still and calm in the half light—the woman's pale face and bruised hand! How well she remembered wrapping Claude's handkerchief round it. How kind and compassionate Claude had been to her!

"He will kill me some day," the woman had said, speaking of her husband—Hyacinth could hear the voice even now. That was nearly a month ago, and kind, generous, reckless Claude had been lying in prison ever since, on a charge of wilful murder. He would not incriminate her; he might have rebutted the whole charge by telling the story of that night and calling her as a witness, but he would not do so. She had not thought there was such generosity, such chivalry in him. It was a noble thing of him to refuse to speak, but he must not lose his life for her.

The more she weighed the evidence, the more startled she was to find how strongly circumstances were against Claude. She must clear him. If he would not speak, she must.

What would it cost her? Ah, Heaven, more than her life—her love! If she went into court to tell the truth, she could never hope to see Adrian again. He who had valued purity, delicacy, refinement and truth so highly—what would he say when he found that she had not only carried on a clandestine correspondence, deceived those with whom she lived, and stolen out to meet her lover, but had eloped with him—had left home, and travelled as far as Leybridge with him, and walked through the fields with him, and then, repenting, had gone back? What would he say when he knew all? She remembered how sternly he had spoken of Lady Wallace—what would he say of her? She was more unfortunate, more disgraced. Her name henceforward would be associated with a murder case. She, a Vaughan, one of the race, as Lady Vaughan had told her that morning, that had never experienced the shadow of disgrace or shame—she who had been, as they believed, so carefully kept from the world, so shielded from all its snares—she to bow those gray heads with sorrow, and slay her love with unmerited shame?

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She was as one fastened to a stake; turn which way she would, her torture increased. Could she take advantage of Claude's honorable silence and saving herself, like a coward, let him die? Ah, no, she could not. "Loyal, even unto death," was the motto of her race; she could not do that. If she did—though her secret would be safe, her miserable weakness never be known—she would hate herself, loathe her life, so shamefully laden with secrecy and sin.

The temptation to take advantage of Claude's chivalrous silence lasted only a few moments. She would not have purchased life and love at such a price. She must save him.

What would it cost her? Her love—ah, yes, her love! She would never see Adrian again; he would never speak to one so disgraced. For she did not hide from herself the extent of that disgrace; she who had been reared as a lily in the seclusion of home would become, for a few days at least, the subject of scandal; the name of Hyacinth Vaughan would be lightly spoken by light lips; men would sneer at her, women turn away when her name was mentioned.

"Oh, how bitterly I am punished!" she cried. "What have I done that I must suffer so?"

She knew she must go into court when Claude was tried, and tell her shameful story before the hard-headed men of the world. She knew that her name and what she had to tell would be commented upon by every newspaper in England. After that, there could be no returning home, no love, no marriage, no safe rest in a haven of peace. It would be all at an end. She might lie down and die afterward; the world would all be closed to her.

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Only a few hours ago she had lain on that little white bed scarcely able to bear the weight of her own happiness. How long was it since Adrian had asked her to be his wife? The misery, the pain, the anguish of a hundred years seemed to have passed over her head since then.

"Oh, if I had but refused to go when Claude asked me!" she cried in a voice of anguish. "If I had only been true to what I knew was right! I am bitterly punished."

Not more bitterly than he was. The thought seemed to strike her suddenly. He had been in prison for over three weeks; he had been charged with the most terrible crime—he whose only fault was that of loving her too well. She must save him.

Then with a sudden thrill of fear she remembered how near the assizes were—they were to be held on the twenty-third and this was the twentieth. She would have only just time to reach Loadstone. She must say good-by to those who loved her, and had watched over her; she must leave all her love, her hope, her happiness behind, and go forth to save him who was willing to give even his life to save her. She must go. She must find out how she could reach England. The great brooding anguish of despair seemed to have fallen over her; her heart ached until it could ache no more; she wept until she seemed to have no more tears; she appeared to grow insensible to the pain that was wearing her young life away.

"I must go to-morrow night," she said to herself. "I shall see Adrian just once again, and then I must bid him farewell forever. Oh, my love, my love!"

She flung herself upon the floor, and wept until the morning dawned and the summer sun peeped into the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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She was roused from her heavy trance of exhaustion and grief by a knock at her door. It was one of the housemaids bearing in her hand a bouquet of beautiful flowers—"From Mr. Darcy." The girl looked in wonder at her young lady's pale face and heavy eyes.

"You do not seem well this morning, miss," she said.

"I have not slept," returned Hyacinth.

But the few words put her on her guard. She bathed her face, rearranged her hair, and changed her dress, though the weight of misery lay like a weight of lead upon her. Then Lady Vaughan, thinking that she was tired from the emotion and shock of the previous evening, sent word that Miss Vaughan had better remain in her own room for a few hours. The hapless girl was thankful for the respite.

She looked so terribly ill, so ghastly pale, that, when Pincott brought her breakfast, she started in alarm.

"There is nothing the matter," said Hyacinth, "but that I did not sleep well." Pincott went away only half satisfied.

Hyacinth managed to obtain a railway guide. A train would leave Bergheim at ten that night, and reach Ostend on the following morning before the boat started. She would have time to secure a passage and cross. She could take the mail train for Dover, and reach Loadstone so as to be in time for the trial.

At ten that night she must go. She had run away from home once before. Then she had been blinded, tempted and persuaded—then she had believed herself going straight into the fairyland of love and happiness; but now it was all changed. She was running away once more; but this time she was leaving all the hope, all the happiness of her life behind her.

It was well for her that the dull stupor of exhaustion fell over her, or the pain she was suffering must have killed her. She did not know how the time passed. It was like one long, cruel dream of anguish, until the summons came for luncheon. Then she went down stairs. Adrian was not there—that was some consolation. She looked quickly around the room.

"How could I look on his face and live, knowing that I shall see it no more?" she said to herself.

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It was like a horrible travesty—the movements of the servants, the changing of the dishes, Lady Vaughan's anxiety about the cold chicken, Sir Arthur's complaint about the wine, while her heart was breaking, and Claude lay in the prison from which she must free him.

Lady Vaughan was very kind to her. She expressed great concern at seeing her look so ill—tried to induce her to eat some grapes—told her that Adrian was coming to dinner, and would bring some friends with him; then said a few words about Claude, pitied his mother, yet blamed her for not bringing him up better, and the ordeal was over.

Hyacinth went away from the dining-room with a faint, low moan.

"How shall I bear it?" she said—"how shall I live through it?"

It was two o'clock then. How were the long hours to be passed? How was she to bear the torture of her own thoughts? Whither could she go for refuge? Suddenly it occurred to her that she had no money. How was she to travel in England without some?

She did not give herself time for thought; if she had, her courage would have failed her. She went to Sir Arthur's room and tapped at the door. The tremulous, feeble voice bade her enter. Sir Arthur was writing some letters. She went up to him.

"Grandpa," she said, "I have no money—and I want some. Will you give me a little, please?"

He looked at her in surprise—she had never made such a request to him before.

"Money, child," he repeated—"of course you shall have some. You want to buy some trinkets—something for Adrian. What shall I give you—ten—twenty pounds?"

"Twenty, if you please."

He drew a small cash-box near to him, and counted twenty bright sovereigns into her hand.

"Five more, for luck!" he said with a smile. "Always come to me when you want money, Hyacinth."

She kissed him—he was so kind, and she had to leave him so soon.

"Good girl," he said. "You will be very happy, Hyacinth. Adrian Darcy is the noblest man in the wide world."

She turned aside with a groan. Alas! Adrian Darcy was to be nothing to her—in this terrible future that was coming he would have no place. Then she went to her own room, and sat there mute and still. Pincott came to dress her, and the girl went through her toilet mechanically. She never remembered what dress she wore. The maid asked something about it, and Hyacinth looked up with a vague, dreamy expression.

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"It does not matter—anything will do," she said, almost wondering that people could think of such trifles when life and death were in the balance.

"There has been a lover's quarrel," thought Pincott, "and my young lady does not care how she looks."

When the bell rang Hyacinth went down. How she suffered when she looked in her lover's face and listened to his voice, knowing it was for the last time! She did not even hear the name of his friends, when they were introduced to her. She sat wondering whether any one living had ever gone through such torture before—wondering why it did not kill her; and then it seemed to her but two or three minutes before dinner was over. Mr. and Mrs. Vernon—two of the visitors—suggested that they should go out into the grounds; and Adrian, delighted at the chance of a *tête-à-tête* with Hyacinth, gladly consented. In after years she liked to recall this last interview.

"Let us walk to the waterfall," said Adrian. "I shall have a photograph taken of it, Cynthia, because it reminds me so much of you."

She said to herself he would not when he knew all—that he would hate it, and would not think of the place. They sat down in the old favorite resort. Suddenly she turned to him, and clasped his hand with one of hers.

"Adrian," she asked, "do you love me very much?"

The face bent over her afforded answer sufficient.

"Love you?" he replied. "I do not think, Hyacinth, that I could love you more; to me it does not seem possible."

"If you were to lose me, then, it would be a great sorrow?"

"Lose you!" he cried. "Why, Cynthy, I would rather ten thousand times over lose my own life."

She liked to remember afterward how he drew her head upon his breast—how he caressed her and murmured sweet words of tenderness to her—how he told her of his love in such ardent words that the fervor of them lasted with her until she died. It was for the last time. A great solemn calm of despair fell over her. To-morrow she would be far away; his arm would never enfold her, his eyes never linger on her, his lips never touch her more. It was for the last time, and she loved him better than her life; but for her sin and folly, she would now have been the happiest girl in the wide world.

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"My darling," he murmured, "as though weak words could tell how dear you are to me."

He kissed her trembling lips and then she broke from him with a great cry. She could bear no more. She fled through the pine grove, crying to herself with bitter tears: "If I could but die! Oh, Heaven, be merciful to me, and let me die!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Good-night, Hyacinth," Lady Vaughan said, when, half an hour afterward, the girl went to her with a white face and cold rigid lips; "good-night. I hope to see you something like yourself to-morrow—you do not seem well."

And for the last time, Hyacinth Vaughan kissed the fair, stately old face. "To-morrow—ah, where would she be to-morrow?"

"You have been very kind to me," she murmured, "and I am not ungrateful."

Afterward Lady Vaughan understood why the girl lingered near her, why she kissed the withered, wrinkled hands with such passionate tenderness, why her lips opened as if she would fain speak, and then closed mutely. She thought of Hyacinth's strange manner for several minutes after the young girl had quitted the room.

"That terrible news shocked her. She is very sensitive and very tender-hearted—the Vaughans are all the same. I am heartily glad she is to marry Adrian: he is gentle enough to understand and firm enough to manage her. I shall have no more anxiety about the child."

Hyacinth had looked her last on them, and had spoken to them for the last time. She stood in her room now waiting until there should be a chance of leaving the hotel unnoticed, then it suddenly struck her how great would be the consternation on the morrow, when she was missed. What would Adrian do or say—he who loved her so dearly? She went to her little desk and wrote a note to him. She addressed it and left it on the toilet table of her room.

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Then she went quietly down-stairs. No one was about. She opened the great hall-door and went out. Some few people still lingered in the grounds; she was not noticed. She walked down the long carriage-drive, and then stood in the street of the little town, alone. She found her way to the station. A great, despairing cry was rising from her heart to her lips, but she stifled it, a faint strange sensation, as though life were leaving her, came over her. She nerved herself.

"I must live until he is free," she said with stern determination—"then death will be welcome!"

They were no idle words that she spoke; all that life held brightest, dearest, and best, was past for her. Her only hope was that she might reach Loadstone in time to save Claude. She knew how soon she would be missed, and how easily she might be tracked. Suppose that they sent or went to her room and found it empty, and then made inquiries and learned that she had taken a ticket for Ostend? They could not overtake the train, but they could telegraph to Ostend and stop her. In that case she would be too late to save Claude. The station was full of people. She saw a lad among them—he seemed to be about fifteen—and she went up to him.

"Are you going to Ostend?" she asked.

He doffed his hat and bowed.

"I am going by this train," he replied. "Can I be of any service to the *Fraulein*?"

"I am always nervous in a crowd," she said—"will you buy my ticket?"

He took the money. He could not see her face, for it was veiled, but he could distinguish its white, rigid mystery, and, full of wonder, he complied with her request. In a short time he returned with the ticket.

"Can I do anything else for you, *Fraulein*?" he asked.

"No," she replied, thanking him; and all the way to Ostend, the lad mused over the half-hidden beauty of that face, and the dreary tones of the sad young voice.

"There is some mystery," he said; and afterward, when he had read the papers, he knew what the mystery was.

She was safely seated in the furthest corner of a second-class carriage at last, her heart beating so that each throb seemed to send a thrill of fiery pain through her. Would she be in time? The train was an express, and was considered an unusually fast one, but it seemed slow to her—so slow. Her heart beat fast and her pulse throbbed quickly. Her face burned as with a flaming fire.

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"What shall I do," she thought, with a terrified face, "if I fall ill, and cannot save him? Suppose—my brain is on fire now—suppose it becomes worse, and when the train stops I have no sense left to speak? They will try him—they will sentence him to death before I arrive. He will perhaps be dead when I am able to speak. What shall I do?" And the dread so overpowered her that she cried aloud in her anguish.

"Are you ill?" asked a fellow-traveller, kindly.

"No, I was dreaming," she replied, hurriedly.

She pressed her hand on her hot brow—she tried to still the quick nervous beating of her heart; but all was in vain. The night was hot; the atmosphere seemed overcharged with electricity; there was not a breath of air stirring; the noisy clang of the wheels seemed to pierce her brain; a sound as of rushing torrents filled her ears. She tried to calm herself—to steady those quivering nerves—to remember what she would have to say in a short time, when she would be standing before a tribunal of justice to save Claude's life. She tried and failed in the effort; she broke down and laughed a strange, unnatural laugh. The noise of the train drowned it, the monotonous clangor of the wheels dulled all other sounds. The next minute the overstrained nerves—the over-taxed brain—had given away, and she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The train drew near to Ostend, and those who loved her had not discovered Hyacinth's flight. Lady Vaughan wondered she did not come down as usual to breakfast. Pincott went to see if she was up. She tapped at the door; there was no answer, and the maid went to tell her lady. "I am almost glad," said Lady Vaughan; "she looked very ill last night. She is sleeping; do not awaken her, Pincott."

But when noon came, and Hyacinth had not rung, Pincott went to her room again. She opened the door this time and walked in. The room was empty, the bed had not been slept in, and there was no trace of Miss Vaughan. The woman turned quite white and sunk, half-fainting, on a chair. She was frightened. Presently, recovering herself a little, she looked round. "How foolish I am!" she thought. "Miss Vaughan must have gone down unknown to me and her room has been arranged." Still she trembled with a strange presentiment of dread. Suddenly her eyes fell upon the note addressed to Mr. Darcy—it was sealed. "There can be no harm in my giving him this," she said.

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She went down-stairs and made inquiries about Miss Vaughan. No one had seen her—she could hear nothing of her. Then Pincott went to her lady. It so happened that Mr. Darcy was chatting with her.

"What do you say?" interrupted Lady Vaughan, sharply. "You cannot find Miss Vaughan? Pray use your common sense, Pincott; do not say such absurd things."

But Adrian had caught sight of the note in the maid's hand. "What is this?" he asked.

"I found it in Miss Vaughan's room, sir," said Pincott; "it is addressed to you."

He took it from her and opened it. As he read a deadly pallor came over his face.

"Great Heaven!" he cried. "What can this mean?"

Lady Vaughan asked what had happened. He passed the note to her and she read:

"I have looked at you and have spoken to you for the last time, Adrian. I am going away and I shall never see any of you again. You will try to comfort Lady Vaughan. Pray Heaven my sin and my disgrace may not kill her.

"You will find out from the newspapers what I have gone to do; and oh, my lost dear love, when you read this, be merciful to me! I was so young, and I longed so for some of the brightness of life. I never loved him; and, as you will see, I repented—ah, me, so sorely!—before half the journey was accomplished. I have never loved any one but you—and that I have lost you is more bitter than death.

"Many people have died from less suffering than that which I am undergoing now. Oh, Adrian, I do not think I deserved this terrible punishment! I did not mean to do anything wrong. I do not ask you to forgive me! I know you never can. You will fling off all thought of me as of one unworthy. I told you I was unworthy, but I—oh, Adrian—I shall love you till I die! All my thoughts will be of you; and I pray to Heaven that I may die when I have achieved what I am going to do. Living, you must loathe me; dead, you will pity me.

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"Adrian, I have written your name here. I have wept hot, bitter tears over it; I have kissed it; and now I must part from you, my heart's own love! Farewell for ever and ever!

"What does it all mean?" he cried, great drops of anguish gathering on his brow. "Where is the child? What has she done?"

"I do not know," said Lady Vaughan—"I cannot understand it, Adrian. She has done nothing. What can she have done? All her life has been passed with me."

"I shall see in the newspapers what she has done, she says. What can she mean?"

A sudden light seemed to break in upon him: he turned to Lady Vaughan. "Rely upon it," he said, "it is some fancy of hers about that murder. I shall not lose a moment. I shall go in search of her."

CHAPTER XX.

The court at Loadstone was crowded to excess. Since the town was built there had never been so great a sensation. The terrible murder at Oakton had been a subject of discussion over all England. The colonel was one of the most prominent men in the county; he had always been very proud and very exclusive, and the county had grown proud of the old aristocrat. It was a terrible blow to him when his nephew was charged with wilful murder.

All the *élite* of the county had crowded to the trial. Loadstone had never been so full; the hotels could not hold half the number who flocked to hear Claude Lennox tried. There were no more lodgings to be had for love or money. It was not only the county people who testified their interest. Claude Lennox was well-known, and had been courted, popular, and eagerly *fêted* in London drawing-rooms. Many of his old friends, members of his club came to see him tried.

It was an unusual case because of the rank, wealth, and position of the accused—Claude Lennox, the idol of London coteries, the Adonis of the clubs, the heir of grand, exclusive Colonel Lennox. Then the murder seemed so utterly motiveless. The young man swore most solemnly that he knew nothing of the deceased—that she was a stranger whom he had relieved. The handkerchief found upon her he said was his, and that it had been given from motives of charity, to bind her bruised hand. The address on the scrap of paper he admitted was in his own writing—he had given it to her, hoping that either his mother or his aunt would be able to find her work. More than that he refused to say. He refused to account for his time—to say where he had been that night—to make any attempt to prove an *alibi*. He was asked who was his companion at Oakton station, and he refused to answer. His lawyer was in despair. The able counsel whom his distracted mother had sent to his assistance declared themselves completely nonplussed.

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"Tell us how you passed the night," they had said, "so that we may know what line of defense to adopt."

"I cannot," he replied. "I swear most solemnly that I know nothing of the murder. More than that I cannot say."

"It is probable you may pay for your obstinacy with your life," said Sergeant Burton, one of the shrewdest lawyers in England.

"There are things more painful than death," Claude replied, calmly; and then the sergeant clapped his hands. "There is a woman in the case," he said—"I am sure of it."

Sergeant Burton and Mr. Landon were retained as counsel for Claude; but never were counsel more hopeless about their case than they. They could call no witnesses in Claude's favor—they did not know whom to call. "He will lose his life," said Mr. Landon, with a groan. "What infatuation! What folly! It strikes me he could clear himself if he would."

But the twenty-third of July had come round, and as yet Claude had made no effort to clear or defend himself. The morning of his trial had dawned at last. It was a warm, beautiful summer day, the sun shone bright and warm. Loadstone streets were filled, and Loadstone Assize Court was crowded. There was quite a solemn hush when "The Crown vs. Lennox" came on. Most of those present knew Claude Lennox—some intimately, others by sight. They looked curiously at him, as he stood in the dock; the air of aristocratic ease and elegance that had always distinguished him was there still, but the handsome face had lost its debonair expression; there were deep lines upon it—lines of thought and care.

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"How do you plead, prisoner at the bar—Guilty, or Not Guilty?"

The silence was profound.

"Not guilty, my lord," replied the clear voice; and in some vague way a thrill of conviction shot through each one that the words were true.

Then the business of the trial began. All present noticed the depressed air of the prisoner's counsel and the confident look of the counsel for the prosecution.

"No rebutting evidence," seemed to be the mysterious whisper circulating through the court.

Then the counsel for the prosecution stated his case. It seemed clear and conclusive against the accused; yet the dauntless face and upright figure were hardly those of a murderer. The prisoner was absent from home the whole of the night on which the murder was committed; he was seen at Leybridge station with a woman; he was observed to walk with her toward the meadow where the body was found; his handkerchief was found tightly clinched in her hands, and his London

address in her pocket; witnesses would swear to having seen him return alone to Oakton Park, looking terribly agitated. At the same time, the counsel for the Crown admitted that there had been no witnesses to the deed; that no possible motive could be ascribed for the murder; that against the moral character of Mr. Lennox there was not one word to say; that no weapon had been found near the scene of the murder; that on the clothes worn by Mr. Lennox at the time there was not the least stain of human blood. These were points, the counsel admitted, that were in favor of the accused.

At this juncture, just as people were remarking how depressed the prisoner's counsel were looking, there was a slight commotion in the crowded court. A note, written in pencil, was handed to Sergeant Burton; as he read it a sudden light came over his face, and he hastily quitted his seat, first handing the note to the junior counsel, who read:

"I have evidence to give that will save Mr. Lennox's life. Can you spare a few minutes to hear what I have to say?"

"HYACINTH VAUGHAN."

Sergeant Burton was absent for a little while; but he returned in time to hear the concluding part of the opposing counsel's speech. It told hard against the accused, but the learned sergeant only smiled as he listened. He seemed to have grown wonderfully composed. Then the witnesses for the prosecution were called, and gave their evidence clearly enough. Some in court who had felt sure of Claude's innocence began to waver now. Who was with him at Leybridge? That was the point. There was no cross-examination of the witnesses.

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"I have no questions to ask," said the counsel. "My client admits the perfect truth of all the evidence."

"This is my case, gentlemen of the jury," concluded the counsel for the prosecution, as he sat down.

"And it is a strong one, too," thought most of the people present. "How can all these facts be explained away?"

Then Sergeant Burton rose.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "this is the most painful case I have ever conducted; a more grievous mistake than this accusation of murder against an innocent gentleman has never been made. I will prove to you not only that he is quite innocent of the crime, but that, in his chivalrous generosity, he would rather have forfeited his life than utter one word in his own defense which would shadow, even in the slightest, a woman's honor. I will prove to you that, although the accused was at Leybridge with a lady, and not only spoke to, but relieved the deceased, yet that he is entirely innocent of the crime laid to his charge."

The silence that followed was profound. For the first time Claude's face grew anxious and he looked hurriedly around.

"The first witness I shall call," said the learned counsel, "is one who will tell you where Mr. Lennox spent his time on the night of the murder; will tell you how he relieved the poor woman; will, in short, give such evidence as shall entirely free him of the most foul charge. Call Miss Hyacinth Vaughan."

At the mention of the name the prisoner started and his face flushed crimson.

"Why did she come?" some one near heard him murmur. "I would have died for her."

Then, amid profound and breathless silence, there entered the witness-box a graceful girlish figure, on which all eyes were immediately bent. She raised her veil, and a thrill of admiration went through that thronged assembly as the beautiful, colorless face, so lovely, so pure, so full of earnest purpose, was turned to the judge. She did not seem to notice the hundreds of admiring, wondering eyes—it was as though she stood before the judge alone.

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"Do not speak, Hyacinth," said the prisoner, vehemently; and in a low voice he added: "I can bear it all—do not speak."

"Silence!" spoke the judge, sternly. "This is a court of justice; we must have no suppression of the truth."

"Your name is Hyacinth Vaughan?" was the first question asked.

"My name is Hyacinth Vaughan," was the reply; and the voice that spoke was so sweet, so sad, so musical, that people bent forward to listen more eagerly. Sergeant Burton looked at the beautiful, pallid, high-bred face.

"You were in the company of the accused on the night of Wednesday, the 12th of June?"

"Yes," she said.

"Will you state what happened?" asked the sergeant, blandly.

Hyacinth looked at the judge: her lips opened, and then closed, as though she would fain speak, but could not. It was an interval of intense excitement in court.

"Will you tell us why you were in his company, Miss Vaughan, and whither you went?" said the sergeant.

"My lord," she said—for it was at the judge she looked always—of the presence of the jury she seemed totally ignorant—"I will tell you all about it. I went away with Mr. Lennox—to go to

London—to be married there."

"Unknown to your friends?" asked the judge.

"Unknown to anyone."

Here Hyacinth paused, and the lips that had been speaking turned deathly white.

"Tell us about it in your own way, Miss Vaughan," said the judge—the sight of that tortured young face moved him to deepest pity—"do not be afraid."

Then the fear seemed to die away from her: in all that vast assembly she saw no face but that of the judge looking steadily and intently at her own.

"My lord," she said, "I was very dull at home; everyone was kind to me, but there was no one there of my own age, and I was very dull. I made Mr. Lennox's acquaintance, and liked him very much—I thought I loved him—and when he asked me to run away from home and marry him I was quite willing."

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"But what need was there to run away?" asked the judge, kindly. He knew the question pained her, for her lips quivered and her whole face changed.

"In our folly there were reasons that seemed to us to make it imperative," she replied. "My friends had other views for me, and I was to start for the Continent on Friday, the fourteenth of June. It seemed certain to us that unless we were married at once we should never be married at all."

"I understand," put in the judge, kindly; "go on with your story."

"I did not think much about it, my lord," continued Hyacinth,— "that is, about the right and the wrong of it—I thought only of the romance; and we agreed to go up to London by the train that passed Oakton soon after midnight. I left my home and met Mr. Lennox at the end of my grandparents' grounds; we went to the station together. I kept out of sight while he took tickets for both of us at the booking-office."

"The clerk at Oakton station will prove that the accused purchased two tickets," interrupted Sergeant Burton. The judge nodded, and the young girl continued:

"We got into the train and went as far as Leybridge. There the train stopped. Mr. Lennox told me that the mail train we were to meet had been delayed by an accident, and that we should have to wait some hours at the station. The morning was breaking then, and we were alarmed lest someone should come to the station who might recognize me. Mr. Lennox suggested that, as the morning was bright and pleasant, we should go through the fields, and I gladly consented."

All this time the clear, sweet young voice sounded like music in the warmth and silence of the summer air.

"We reached the field called Lime Meadow, and stood there, leaning over the stile, when I thought I saw something under a hedge. We went to see. It was a woman who had been sleeping there. My lord, she looked very faint, very wild and weak. We spoke to her. She told us that her name was Anna Barratt, and that she was married, but that she was very unhappy. She was going with her husband to Liverpool. She told us her story, my lord, and it frightened me. She told us that she had once been a bright happy girl at home, and that against her mother's advice she had eloped with the man who had sought her hand, and married him. Her words struck me like a sharp blow. She said it was better to break one's heart at home than to run away from it. Mr. Lennox was very sorry for her; and, when I saw her poor bruised hand lying on the grass, I bound it up. My lord, I asked Mr. Lennox for his handkerchief, and I wrapped it around her hand."

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There was such a murmur of excitement in the court that the speaker was obliged to pause.

"Go on, Miss Vaughan," said the judge. Still looking at him, and him only, she continued:

"Mr. Lennox gave her some money. She told us that her husband beat her; that he had bruised her hand, and that she was quite sure he would come back to murder her. Then Mr. Lennox told her, that if she feared that, to get up and come away; he gave her two sovereigns and told her to go to London. He wrote down his address on a piece of folded paper, and told her if she would either come or write to that address, his mother would befriend her. She asked Heaven to bless us, my lord, and turned away her head, as though she were tired. We walked on, and did not see her again."

And again Hyacinth paused, while those in court seemed to hang upon the words that came from her lips.

"Then, my lord," she continued, "I began to think of what she had said—that it was better to break one's heart at home than to run away from it. All at once the folly and wickedness of what I was about to do appeared to me. I began to cry, and begged of Mr. Lennox to take me home."

"A very common termination to an elopement," observed the judge.

"Mr. Lennox was very kind to me," continued the earnest voice. "When he saw that I really wanted to go home, he took me back to Oakton, and left me in the grounds where we had met so short a time before. My lord, I swear to you most solemnly that this is the whole truth."

"Will you explain to us," inquired the prosecution, "why, knowing all this, you have allowed matters to proceed so far against the accused? Why did you not come forward earlier, and reveal the truth?"

"My lord," she said, still looking at the quiet face of the judge, "I knew nothing of the case until

twenty-four hours ago. I started with my grandparents on the Friday morning for the Continent, and have been living at Bergheim since. I knew of the trial only the night before last, and I came hither at once."

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"You came alone; and immediately?"

"Yes," she replied. "I have lost everything by so coming. I can never go back among my kindred again. I shall never be forgiven."

There was a brief pause. The foreman of the jury gave a written paper to the usher to be handed to the judge—a paper which intimated that the jury did not think it necessary to go on with the case, feeling convinced, from the evidence of Miss Vaughan, that Mr. Lennox was perfectly innocent of the crime imputed to his charge. The judge read the paper carefully, and then, looking at the witness, said:

"Miss Vaughan, you committed a great error—an error perhaps in some degree excusable from your youth. But you have atoned for it more nobly than error was ever atoned for before. At the risk of losing all most dear to you, and of exposing yourself to the comments of the world, you have come forward to save Mr. Lennox. I, for one, must express my admiration of your conduct. Your evidence has acquitted the prisoner—the jury have intimated that there is no need to proceed with the case."

Then arose cheers that could not be silenced. In vain the judge held up his hand in warning and the usher cried "Silence!"

"Heaven bless her," cried the women, with weeping eyes.

"She is a heroine!" the men said, with flushed faces.

There was a general commotion; and when it had subsided she had disappeared. Those who had watched her to the last said that when the judge, in his stately manner, praised her, her face flushed and her lips quivered; then it grew deathly pale again, and she glided away.

CHAPTER XXI.

The famous trial was over; the "sensation" was at an end. The accused Claude Lennox stood once more free among his fellow-men. Loud cheers greeted him, loud acclamations followed him. He was the popular idol. His friends surrounded him. "Bravo, Claude, old friend! I thought it would come right. We knew you were innocent. But what a terrible thing circumstantial evidence is!" Claude stood in the midst of a large circle of well-wishers. Colonel Lennox, whose anger had all vanished when he found his nephew in real danger, stood by his side. He seemed to have grown older and grayer.

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"It was a narrow escape for you, Claude," he said, and his voice trembled and his limbs shook.

"My thanks are due to Heaven," said the young man, reverently. "Humanly speaking, I owe my life to that brave girl who has risked everything to save me. Oh, uncle, where is she? We are talking idly here when I owe my life to her; and I know all she has suffered and lost to save me."

They went back hurriedly to the court, but there was no trace of Hyacinth. People stood in little groups in the street, and of every group she was the subject of conversation.

"I shall never forget her," said one woman, "if I live to be a hundred years old. They may talk of heroines if they like, but I never heard of one braver than she has been."

"Did you hear that, uncle?" cried Claude. "How they admire her! She is noble, good, and true. I know what it has cost her to come forward; I know what a home she has had—her people all so rigid, so cold, so formal. How am I to thank her?"

"Marry her at once, Claude," said Colonel Lennox.

"She would not have me. You do not know her, uncle; she is truth itself. How many girls do you think would have had the resolution to turn back on such a journey as she had begun? She does not love me, I am sure; but after what has happened to-day, I would die for her. Where is she? My mother must take her home at once."

They made inquiries, but there was no trace of her. In the general confusion that ensued, amid the crowding of friends to congratulate Claude, and the hurrying of witnesses, no one had noticed her. She had been the centre of observation for a brief interval, and then she had disappeared, and no one had noticed which way she went. Colonel Lennox and Claude were both deeply grieved; they sought Hyacinth everywhere, they sent messengers all over the town, but no trace of her could be found. Claude was almost desperate; he had made every arrangement—his mother was to take her back to Belgrave Square, and he himself was to go at once to Bergheim to win Hyacinth's pardon from her relatives there.

"There is nothing," he said to himself, over and over again, "that I would not do for her."

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He was bitterly disappointed; he would not leave Loadstone until every instruction had been given for communication with him or with Colonel Lennox, if any news should be heard of her. When this was done, he complied with his mother's anxious entreaty and returned with her to London.

"It has been a narrow escape," she said, with a shudder, "and a terrible disgrace. I cannot bear to think of it. You, with your unblemished name, your high position and prospects in life, to be accused of wilful murder! I do not believe you will ever live it down, Claude!"

"Yes, he will," cried the colonel, heartily; "whoever remembers his disgrace, as you term it, will remember also that he was saved by the truth and bravery of the finest and noblest girl in England."

"I will redeem my character, mother," said Claude, earnestly; "this has made a true man of me. I was not very earnest before, but I have paid a terrible price for my boyish escapade. The future with me shall atone for the past."

"The boy is right enough," cried the colonel; "what he says is perfectly true. He wanted more of earnest purpose, and the ordeal that he has just undergone will give it to him. He shall not suffer for the mistake. I will say now what I have never said before—Claude shall be my heir; and," added the colonel, with unconscious egotism, "the world will easily pardon the youthful escapades of the master of Oakton Park."

So Claude's mother did not return quite broken-hearted to London. The trial had been a nine days' wonder—a great sensation; but people seemed more inclined to blame the stupidity of Hyacinth's relatives than the young man, whose fault had been simply that of loving a lovely girl too well. Mrs. Lennox watched anxiously to see if her son had lost caste; but she could not perceive that he had. He was heir of the rich old Indian colonel—heir of Oakton Park. The Duchess of Grandecourt invited him to Rummere Park, and Lady Ansley gave him pretty clearly to understand that her daughter knew how to appreciate him.

"No great harm has been done," sighed the anxious mother, "and I may thank that brave young girl for matters being no worse."

On the third day after the assizes had begun a gentleman—a stranger—drove up hurriedly to the Loadstone court-house. His handsome face was white and haggard, his eyes were dim with fear. He looked as though he had been travelling night and day, and had known neither sleep nor rest. He sprung impatiently from the carriage and hurried up the steps of the court-house. He saw one of the officers standing inside, and he went up to him eagerly.

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"Has the trial for murder commenced?" he asked.

"It is over, sir. It was finished the day that it was begun."

"Tell me all about it, please. Make haste—my time is precious. Was there a young lady—did a young lady come to give evidence?"

"Yes; and her evidence saved the prisoner's life, sir. I will tell you as briefly as I can."

He repeated what had taken place, and as he spoke, an expression of pity came over the handsome face of the listener.

"Poor child," he murmured to himself—"my brave, noble love! What was the young lady's name?" he asked, aloud.

"Vaughan, sir—I remember it well—Hyacinth Vaughan."

"Thank you," said the gentleman, remunerating his informant. "And now can you tell me where she is? Where did she go after the trial?"

"There are many who would like to know that, sir. Colonel Lennox has offered a hundred pounds to anyone who will bring him news of her. I should say every inch of ground in Loadstone had been searched over and over again."

Adrian Darcy—for it was he—looked at the man in bewildered surprise.

"You don't mean to tell me that she is lost?" he cried.

"She is indeed, sir. There have been advertisements, and rewards have been offered; but all has been in vain. The gentleman whose life she saved—Mr. Lennox—is almost wild about her disappearance. But, if you are interested in the case, read the report in the *Loadstone Journal*. It is a splendid one."

"Lost one!" repeated Adrian. "It is impossible! Oh, my darling, my child-like, innocent love, what terrible fate has befallen you?"

CHAPTER XXII.

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The search that Adrian Darcy made proved as unsatisfactory as that which had been conducted by Colonel Lennox. Do what he would, Adrian could find no trace of Hyacinth. He was not long in procuring a copy of the *Loadstone Journal*, and there, in simple, truthful words, he read her story. His first feeling was one of intense indignation against Claude Lennox.

"She is so young," he said to himself—"so young and so easily led. Her very simplicity ought to have been her shield. How could he betray the trust she placed in him?"

Then he saw what was said of Claude. He was young, handsome, gifted, eagerly sought after, greatly admired. It was not to be wondered at that a girl who had led the retired, dull, monotonous life of Hyacinth Vaughan should have been dazzled by him and have placed implicit faith in him. But, after all, she did not love him. If she had she would not have repented of her elopement before it was concluded—she would not have returned home. It had been but a temporary charm after all. She had, doubtless, been captivated by his handsome face. Youth invariably loves youth. It must have been a novelty to her, living as she did in the midst of old people, who, though kind, were cold and formal, to meet someone lively, gay, and fascinating. It was not wonderful that she should let her calmer, better judgment sleep, and act under his influence.

It was such a simple story, and she had told it so clearly, with such humble acknowledgment of her own fault in every word—with such an entire conviction that in coming forward to save Claude Lennox she had lost every hope in life—that his heart ached as he read. He could picture that fair sweet face, with its sorrowful eyes and quivering lips, the centre of all observation in that crowded court. He could almost feel the shock and the horror that had mastered her when she found that she must appear in public and tell the story that she had never dared to tell even him.

"My poor Hyacinth!" he said. "Oh, if she had but trusted me—if she had but trusted me—if she had but told me herself of this error, and not left me to hear it from others! I can forgive that half-elopement; it was but the shadow of a sin, after all, repented of before it was half committed, and atoned for by bitter suffering. But I find it hard to forgive her for not having trusted me." Then, again he remembered how young, how shy, how timid she was. "I must not be hard on her, even in my thoughts," he said; "perhaps she intended to tell me when she was more at her ease with me."

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Then, as the simple story of her heroism told upon him, he ceased to think of her fault, and was lost in admiration of her courage.

"How many there are," he thought, "who would have let the prisoner take his chance, and would have thought more of saving their reputation than of preserving his life! How simple and brave, how true and loyal she is! Oh, Cynthy, my lost love, if you had but trusted me!"

He took up the *Times*, and there he found the story told again. All notice of her fault was quite hidden by the admiration expressed for her courage, her unselfish heroism, her undaunted bravery. "If I could but find her," he said—"find her and tell her the world admires instead of condemning her!"

He understood better than anyone her sensitive disposition; he knew that she would deem herself all unworthy—that she would look upon herself as lost to home, to friends, to hope, to happiness, to love; he knew how her tender conscience magnified even trifling faults, and his heart grew heavy for her. Where was she? What was she doing? What would become of her? He redoubled his efforts, but they were all in vain. After days and weeks fruitlessly spent, he returned to Bergheim, having no good news to tell. By the stately baronet and his wife Adrian's story was heard without one comment. Lady Vaughan's fair old face grew cold and sad.

"Did she—the child I trusted—deceive me so far as to leave my roof with a stranger? Tell me no more, Adrian; my heart is heavy and sore. This is the first taint that has ever fallen on the Vaughans."

"You must not call it a taint," cried Adrian. "Do not forget how young she was, how full of poetry and romance, how easily persuaded—a girl like Hyacinth would be but as a reed in the hands of Claude Lennox."

"The Vaughans are never weak, Adrian; they have ever been a brave and noble race."

"Not one of them has been braver or more noble than Hyacinth," cried Adrian, hotly. "I do not say that she is without fault, or that she is not to blame; but I do say the atonement made far exceeds the fault; think of the courage required of a young girl like her to stand up in a public court and tell the story of an error like hers, even though it was so quickly repented of."

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"Think of the shame," said Lady Vaughan, with a shudder. But Adrian would not have it so. He told Lady Vaughan what the newspapers said of her granddaughter.

"To me," remarked the lady, "it is almost immaterial whether the papers praise her or blame her; the disgrace lies in such a name as hers being in the newspapers at all."

But Sir Arthur was not quite so hard.

"She must have been very dull at Queen's Chase," he said. "I have often thought so. There was not a young face about the place but hers. That young Lennox is very handsome—just the man to take a girl's fancy."

"You have used the right word, Sir Arthur," observed Adrian. "He did stir her fancy, but not her heart; he stirred her imagination. I have no doubt that in his eloquent way he made her believe that in leaving home she was doing something grand and heroic. See how quickly her better judgment came to her aid, and how quickly she repented of her error."

"It is very noble of you to defend her," said Lady Vaughan, "but—but I cannot hold with you. She was the dearly loved child of my old age—all my hopes rested on her. I thought I had preserved her like a lily in the shade, and the result of all my care was an elopement and a public appearance in a court of justice. Oh, Adrian, say no more to me—say no more!"

He found it was useless to defend Hyacinth; the proud and stately old lady could not brook the idea.

"No lady—mind, I mean no true lady—ever makes a public sensation. The child has ruined, blighted her whole life, and no one can help her."

But even Lady Vaughan, after her first resentment had died away, began to share Adrian's uneasiness. "It would have been better," she said, "if the child had returned to us and lived it down!"

It dawned upon her at last, as it did upon all of them, that Hyacinth believed herself cut off from them forever. "It shows at least," said Lady Vaughan, "how keenly she felt the enormity of the wrong done."

As the long months passed on and no news came of Hyacinth, the hot, proud anger died from Lady Vaughan, the fair old face grew wistful and sad; her grandchild's offence grew less in her eyes, and the great atonement made grew greater; and then other events happened: Lord Chandon died, and then Adrian was obliged to return to England. Sir Arthur absolutely refused to remain at Bergheim without him.

"We must go home some time, my lady," he said; "why not now? After all, I think you exaggerate what you call the disgrace: let us go! People, I am sure, will not distress us by even mentioning the matter."

And Sir Arthur was right: whatever opinions might have been expressed among the inhabitants at Oakton, they had, one and all, too much respect for the stately mistress of Queen's Chase to speak their minds before her. It was understood that Miss Vaughan preferred remaining abroad, so there was nothing more to be said. No one knew how sorely the sweet face was missed from the old mansion, or what long hours Lady Vaughan spent in wondering what had become of Hyacinth. Sir Arthur and his wife settled down to the old life again, but they found out then how much brightness had vanished with the fair face they missed so sorely.

The new Lord Chandon took possession of his estate; there was no difficulty about it; he was the direct heir, and the old lord had always spoken of him as his successor. He took possession of Chandon Court, with its magnificent rent-roll, and its thousand treasures of art; but despite his wealth, his position, and his grandeur, Lord Adrian was the most unhappy of men. He would have given all he had, and all he ever hoped to enjoy, to find Hyacinth Vaughan; he would have poured out his wealth like water, so that he might find her. But long months had passed now since the day on which she disappeared, and no news had been heard of her yet.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

As Hyacinth Vaughan left the Loadstone Assize Court she drew her veil tightly over her face, and, looking neither to the right nor left, made her way through the dense crowd of people. No one noticed her; they were all too busily engaged in discussing the events of the trial. She had not the least idea whither she was going, or what she was about to do; all she remembered was that she had broken every tie that bound her to her past life, that it was all dead to her, and that she had saved Claude. How vividly, as she walked through the long street, there came back to her a remembrance of one day when she had driven over with Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan to Loadstone. What a deep gulf lay between that time and this! Then people had bowed to her as though she had been some great lady, and honor and respect had been shown to her. Now, homeless, friendless, she was a fugitive in that same town, and knew not where to lay her head.

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She walked until her limbs ached, and then she stopped suddenly, for the first time asking herself where she was going—what she was to do. "For I am dead," she said to herself, with a low moan, "to all who know me—dead to my beautiful past. There is no Hyacinth Vaughan. And what is to become of the wretched girl who once bore the name? I do not know."

She must go somewhere—she could not pace the long street and the silent road all night; she must rest or she should fall, a helpless inert mass, on the ground. Suddenly she came to the railway station; a porter was shouting—"Train for London! Passengers for London, take your seats!"

She could not account for the impulse which led her to purchase a ticket and take her place in a second-class carriage for London. She had no idea what she should do when she reached her destination.

It was a rest to sit alone in the carriage—a luxury to close the tired eyes, and say to herself that she had no more to do, for Claude was saved; yet, when her eyes were closed, so many strange scenes flashed before them, that she opened them with a terrified cry. It seemed to her that she was too tired even to rest, and that the aching pains in her limbs grew worse, her eyes burned, and her head throbbled with pain.

Yet through it all—through fatigue and pain—there was the great relief that Claude was saved. Of Adrian she dared not think. She knew that this "fiery sorrow" was waiting for her when she should regain strength and calmness, when she could look it in the face; as it was, she shrunk, sick and shuddering, from it. She put it from her. She would have none of it. If she had then remembered all about Adrian Darcy, she would have gone mad and nothing would have saved

her.

The train sped on. When she dared not keep her eyes closed any longer, she watched the fields and trees as the train whirled by. It was strange how mingled were her thoughts; at one time she was at Queen's Chase, sitting with Lady Vaughan in the silent rooms; at another she was with Claude in the faint rosy morning dawn, and the murdered woman was lying under the hedge; then she was with Adrian by the waterfall, and he was telling her, that he should love her for evermore; then she stood beside a green grave in a country churchyard, over which the foliage of a large tree drooped—beneath was a stone with the inscription, "Hyacinth Vaughan—aged eighteen."

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From all these mingled dreams and visions she woke with a terrible scream.

"If I cannot sleep," she thought to herself, "I shall go mad."

Then everything went black before her eyes, her head fell back, and she knew no more until loud, strange voices shouted "Euston Square."

She was in the great Babylon at last. So young, so lovely, so simple in her child-like innocence; alone, unprotected, unknown in the streets of that great city: having neither home nor friends—having neither brain nor mind clear—what was to save her? She left the carriage and sat for some time on one of the seats on the platform; the same heaviness, the same strange mixture of past and present confused her.

"I must sleep," she said to herself—"I must sleep or I shall go mad." She rose and walked out of the station. What a labyrinth of streets, squares, and houses! Where could she find rest? Suddenly across the bewildered mind came one clear thought.

"I have money, and I must take lodgings—I can pay for them; and, in a room of my own, I can sleep until my brain is clear."

She walked slowly down one street, and up another, but saw no announcement of "Lodgings to Let." Then she fancied all the houses were reeling, and the sky closing in upon her. The next moment they were steady again, and she was standing, looking wildly around. Again she walked on a little farther, and then became sick, faint and giddy.

"This is something more than the want of sleep," she said to herself. "I am ill. I cannot walk—I cannot stand. Everything is reeling around me."

Suddenly her eyes fell on a brass plate on the door of a house quite near—"Dr. Chalmers."

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"I will consult him," she thought. "Perhaps he can prescribe something that will take this dreadful feeling away."

She went up the little flight of steps and knocked. Then it seemed as though the door were falling on her, and she seized one of the iron railings to save herself from falling. A neat maid-servant opened the door.

"Is Dr. Chalmers at home?" asked Hyacinth; and the sound of her voice struck her as being so strange that she hardly knew it.

"Yes, miss," was the smiling reply.

"I wish to see him," said Hyacinth.

"What name shall I give?" asked the maid.

"None—I am quite a stranger."

She was shown into the surgery, and sat down on a large low lounge. A strange drowsy calm came over her. She pulled off her hat and veil, and laid back her tired head on the cushion.

Some few minutes elapsed before Dr. Chalmers entered the surgery; and when he did so, he started back in wonder that was half alarm. There on the lounge sat a girl, quite young, and lovely as a vision. The whole face, so white and rigid, was peacefully beautiful—he had never seen anything like it before. A profusion of golden hair had fallen over the cushions, and two little white hands were clasped convulsively together. Dr. Chalmers went a few steps nearer, and then his professional instinct told him that this was no sleep. The girl seemed perfectly unconscious.

He spoke to her, and she seemed to arouse partially, and sat up, gazing before her in a dazed, vacant way. Her little hands fell helplessly upon her lap, and she seemed wholly unconscious of the presence of another in the room. The good doctor looked at her in anxious alarm. He spoke to her once, twice, thrice. She did not hear him. The doctor was wondering what he should do, when she started up with a loud cry.

"He is innocent—he is quite innocent. Oh, shall I be in time to save him?"

She sprung toward the door, but never reached it, for, with a low moaning cry, she fell senseless on the floor. He raised her and laid her on the couch, and then opened the door hastily and went to the foot of the stairs.

"Mother," he called, "will you come down? I want you at once!"

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A kindly-looking lady with a pleasant, comely face entered the room.

"Look here," said Dr. Robert Chalmers, pointing to the white figure. "What are we to do, mother?"

Mrs. Chalmers went up to Hyacinth; with a soft womanly touch she put back the rich, clustering

hair, with keen womanly eyes she noted the loveliness of the white face.

"Has she fainted? Who is she?" she asked of her son.

"I do not know—I had no time to speak to her. She is some lady who has called for medical advice, no doubt. It seems to me more like a case of incipient brain fever than of mere fainting; by the strange way in which she cried out I should imagine her to be quite delirious."

Then they both stood for some minutes gazing in silence on that exquisite face.

"She does not look more than eighteen," said the doctor—"she is very young. What shall we do with her, mother?"

The lady laid her hand on her son's arm.

"We must do as the good Samaritan did when he found his fellow-man wounded and helpless by the wayside," was the gentle reply.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was in September that the poor distraught girl went in the madness of her grief and pain to the doctor's house, and if she had been a child of the house, she could not have been more kindly treated. It was October when she opened her eyes with a faint gleam of reason in their troubled depths. She looked around in wonder; she had not the least idea where she was. The room she was in was exquisitely neat and clean, there were some fine engravings on the walls, the furniture was of quaint design, and there were a few vases and ornaments; yet it was neither the almost royal grandeur of Queen's Chase nor the simple luxury of the hotel at Bergheim. Where was she? Why was she lying in this strange place with this feeling of weakness and weariness upon her?

Presently a kind, motherly, comely face bent over her, and a quiet, soothing voice said: "I am so glad to find you a little better, my dear." [Pg 103]

"Have I been very ill?" she asked; and the sound of her voice was so faint, so unlike her own that it seemed as though it came from a great distance.

"Yes, you have been very ill, dear child."

"Where am I?" she asked; and the kind face smiled again.

"I will tell you all about it when you are a little better. You are quite safe and with good friends. Try to drink this and go to sleep again."

Hyacinth drank something that was warm and nice, and then looked up in the kindly face.

"Do you know," she said, "it is very strange, but I have really forgotten my own name!" She laughed a little hysterical laugh, and Mrs. Chalmers looked anxious.

"I must forbid you to speak again," she said; "my son is the doctor, and, if you disobey me, I shall summon him."

Hyacinth closed her eyes; a quiet sense of rest fell over her, and she was asleep again.

"Poor child," said Mrs. Chalmers, looking at her. "Who is she? I wonder what is her name?"

She slept so long that the kind-hearted woman began to feel uneasy. She went down and told her son.

"Sleeping, is she? Then do not wake her; sleep is the best medicine for her. Mind she has plenty of port wine and beef-tea."

"She says she has forgotten her own name," said Mrs. Chalmers, anxiously.

"She will be all right by and by, mother. I only hope the return of memory will not bring her pain."

The next time Hyacinth opened her eyes, she saw a keen, kind, shrewd face looking at her own, and a pair of dark eyes that smiled as she smiled.

"You are getting better," said Dr. Chalmers.

She raised her hand to her head, and then a slight look of alarm crossed her face. "Where is my hair?" she asked, wonderingly.

"We sacrificed your hair to save your brain," he replied; "it was all cut off."

Then he heard her give a profound sigh, and he guessed that memory was returning. He took one of the thin worn hands in his.

"I do not want you to think of painful things just now," he said. "Will you bear in mind that nothing but absolute rest will restore you to health, and compose yourself accordingly?" [Pg 104]

Hyacinth did as she was advised: she discarded all painful thoughts from her mind, and consequently slept as she had not slept for many long weeks. She awoke one morning calm and composed, with reason and memory fully restored. She knew that she was Hyacinth Vaughan. Slowly and by degrees the terrible past returned to her.

"I was in time, thank Heaven!" she said. "I was in time!" She remembered the crowded court—the hundreds of eyes that had been turned upon her—the thunder of applause that none of the officers could repress—the ringing cheers that followed Claude's release. But after that all was a blank. She remembered nothing that had passed since she stood in the assize court, blind and dizzy, until she opened her eyes in that pretty room.

White, fragile, worn almost to a shadow, helpless as a child, she lay there now with reason in full sway. Dead to her old life, to her friends, her hopes, her plans—dead to her lover and her love—she was painfully beginning a new life, in which none of these had any part—a new life into which she felt that hope, love, or happiness could never come.

A week later, and Hyacinth Vaughan, looking like a frail shadow of her former self, sat, propped up by pillows, in a large easy-chair that had been placed for her near the window; her nerveless hands were clasped, her large eyes, so sad and dreamy, lingered on the clouds that drifted rapidly over the sky.

She was alone and deeply engrossed in thought; the time had come when she must speak to these people who had been so kind to her—when she must tell something of herself. They had been so kind to her, so attentive, so considerate—they had not even asked her name. Mrs. Chalmers always called her "child." Her son had a variety of names for her, the principal of which was Queen Mab. Such kindness could spring only from noble and generous hearts. Both mother and son had refrained from asking her any questions. Said Dr. Chalmers to his mother:

"When she knows us, and feels that she can trust us she will speak."

They had both divined that there had been some terrible sorrow in the girl's life—some sorrow that had struck her down and brought her to the brink of the grave. They knew, too, that she must be a lady of good birth and refinement. But never by word or deed did they distress her by the least symptom of curiosity. They had gone still further—when she attempted to say anything, Mrs. Chalmers had laid kindly fingers on her trembling lips, and said:

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"Hush! Wait till you are stronger and better, my dear and then you shall talk."

But now the time had come when she knew that she must speak to them—must thank them for such kindness as the world rarely shows—must tell them how she was dead, but had risen to this new, fresh life in which the past was to have neither share nor place. The task was terrible to her, but she must undergo it. It seemed a direct answer to her thoughts when the door opened, and Dr. Chalmers came in with his mother. The doctor carried with him a bunch of purple grapes, which he laid before her.

"How kind you are to me!" she said, with trembling lips. "I have been thinking all the morning. How can I thank you? How can I ever repay you?"

"Doctors never expect thanks," said Dr. Chalmers; "and we are repaid by your recovery."

But the beautiful eyes were filled with tears. She took the old lady's hand and raised it to her lips. The doctor held up his finger in warning, but Hyacinth said:

"Let me speak—do let me speak. I cannot live in this silence and constraint any longer."

"Let her speak, Robert," said his mother; "it is best."

Hyacinth kissed again the kindly hand she held in hers. She took the doctor's and clasped them both together.

"You have been so kind to me," she said. "I can never repay you. I have no money to pay even for the necessaries you have given me. I know you do not want it, but I cannot understand how it is that you have been so good to me."

"My dear child," cried Mrs. Chalmers, "we have done nothing but what every Christian should. You came by accident to us, sick unto death, unhappy, friendless, and homeless, as it seemed—what less could we do than to take you in and succor you? We could not send you sick and almost dying into the streets."

"No! but you might have sent me to some hospital. I am sure that few would have done to me as you have done."

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"We have only done what we thought to be right—no more."

"What you have done to me," returned Hyacinth, "I pray Heaven to return to you a thousandfold. I can never sufficiently thank you, but I want to say something else to you."

Her face grew so white, and her lips trembled so, that the doctor was on the point of forbidding another word. She looked piteously at him.

"Let me speak," she said; "the weight on my heart is so great I can hardly bear it. Were I to do what I wish, I should tell you all my story; but think of me as mercifully as you can—I am dead in life."

They looked at her in utter wonder. In the same faint voice she continued:

"I am dead to my home—I shall never see it again, and to my friends—I shall never see them again. I am dead to all the hopes that once made earth like heaven for me."

Her voice died away in a faint, moaning sob, and there was silence—silence that was broken at last by the clear, deep voice of the doctor.

"Will you tell us why this is?" he asked.

"I cannot," she replied, "I can only trust to your mercy. I cannot tell you either my name or my station, or what has slain me, when life was most sweet."

"Did you do something very wrong?" asked Mrs. Chalmers, with a shadow on her kindly face.

Hyacinth raised her beautiful eyes to the drifting clouds, which she could see from the window.

"I did something," she replied—"but, no—I don't think it was so very wrong; hundreds do it, and never think it wrong at all. I only planned it; a fear that it might be wrong came over me, and I did not do it. But the consequences of even the little I did—the shadow as it were of a sin—fell over me, and my whole life is darkened."

"You can tell us no more?" said the doctor.

"No!" she replied; mournfully; "I throw myself on your mercy."

"She has never done anything wrong, Robert," interrupted Mrs. Chalmers, addressing her son; "take my word for it. Look at that innocent face, those clear, true eyes—no one could believe they were coupled with guilt. I trust you, my dear," she added, turning to Hyacinth. "Keep your secret—never mind it; I believe in you, and shall never ask what it is."

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A grateful look came over the girl's face.

"Thank you," she said. "You are right; I am not wicked. In one action of my life I was imprudent and foolish; the consequences of that action, which could not have been foreseen by any one, have crushed me. I am not wicked. See, I ask you to let me kiss your face; if my lips were stained with false words, I would not—I could not do so. I clasp your hands—ah, such true, kind hands they have been to me!—in my own; but, if mine were stained with crime, I could not do it."

"I believe you, my dear child," said Mrs. Chalmers; "you need say no more."

"I may tell you this," continued the girl. "I had a name as old and honored as any in the land; but I have laid it down and shall never use it again. I had friends—kind, strict, noble, generous; I have looked my last upon them. I had—oh, dear Heaven, it is hard to say!—I had a lover, whom I loved dearly, and his face I have looked upon for the last time. I am dead to all—dead in life!"

Her voice faltered, she broke into a passionate fit of weeping. During this time the doctor had spoken never a word, but now he bent over her.

"Child," he said, "you are so young, so simple, that, if any wrong has been done, you have been sinned against, not the sinner. Like my mother, I trust you. We have neither daughter nor sister; you shall be both. Our home shall be your home—what we have you shall share with us as long as life lasts."

She kissed the strong hand clasped in her own; her warm tears fell on it.

"You are very good to me," she said, "and though I tell you that I come to you as one risen from the dead—though I have no name, no friends—you will trust me, you will believe in me?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Chalmers, calmly. "I have not studied the human face all these years to be mistaken at last. I trust you implicitly."

"You must have a name," cried Mrs. Chalmers; "all the world need not know what we know. People will think you are a ward or *protégée* of mine; but you must have a name."

"Let her take ours, mother," suggested her son. But Hyacinth's face flushed.

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"That would hardly do," said Mrs. Chalmers. "I will give you mine, my dear—the name that was mine in my girlhood—people used to think it a pretty one—Millicent Holte."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Millicent Holte—that is the name you must assume," said Mrs. Chalmers to Hyacinth; "and, though I never was so pretty or so sweet as you are, still I was a very happy girl—and I do not like to see a young life blighted. Kiss me, Millicent; you shall be like a daughter to me."

"I do not remember my own mother," observed the girl, simply, laying her fair head on the kindly breast, "and I thank Heaven for sending me to you."

"Before we finish this subject at once and forever," said the doctor, "let me ask you, Millicent, is there anything that I can do for you in connection with your secret? If so, speak to me just as freely as though I were your brother, and command me as you will."

"You can do nothing," she answered, mournfully. "I should not have given up but that I knew all hope was past, nothing can undo what has been done—nothing can remove, nothing lighten its shadow."

"Are you unjustly punished?" he asked.

"Sometimes I think so, but I cannot tell."

"We will not mention the matter again," said the doctor, kindly; "we will think only of the new life and getting well. As a preparatory step to the latter, let me tell you that you must eat all these grapes, and then lie down and sleep again."

For the sweet face had grown so white and worn, so pale and tired—he saw that the effort she

had made had been a most painful one.

"We will leave her alone, mother," he said.

But before Mrs. Chalmers quitted the room she unlocked a drawer and took from it a small purse; this she placed in Millicent's hand.

"This is yours, my dear," she said; "it fell from your pocket the evening you came here."

The sight of the little purse almost unnerved her. She remembered how Adrian had laughed at it, and had promised to buy her one with golden clasps. She took it, and then looked wistfully in the lady's face.

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"No, my dear," said Mrs. Chalmers, "it is not to be thought of for one moment. What my son and I have done has not been for gain. Keep it, my poor child; you will need it in this new life that lies before you."

Then they left her alone, and the thoughts that mastered her were very sad ones. This new life looked almost terrible now that she was brought face to face with it. She began to wonder what they were doing at home, whether she should hear their names again, whether Adrian was still with them, and what he now thought of her. How he must despise himself for having ever loved her—she who had been the subject of popular comment and gossip—she whose name had been upon every lip! He who admired delicacy and refinement, how he must dislike her! She checked herself.

"I must not think of it," she said, "or I shall go mad."

Meanwhile mother and son had gone down to the cozy dining-room, and stood looking at each other in silence.

"It is a strange story, mother," said Dr. Chalmers; "I cannot understand it. What should you think the poor girl has been doing?"

"I cannot even form an idea," replied Mrs. Chalmers; "she has done nothing wrong—I am quite sure of that."

"Yet it must have been something very grave and serious to drive a girl from her home and her friends—to cause her to give up her name, and to be, as she says, dead to life."

"Something unusually grave, no doubt, but without wrong on her part; I could no more doubt her than I could myself. However unhappy or unfortunate she may be, she is good, true, pure, innocent, and simple as a child."

"Yes, I believe so, but it puzzles me greatly to know what her story can be. Still, we have taken her to ourselves, poor child; so we must make her strong and well and happy."

"Robert," said Mrs. Chalmers, gently—and she looked anxiously at her son's handsome, clever face—"be as kind as you will to her, but, my dear, do not fall in love with her."

"You may depend upon it, mother," he returned—and his face flushed and he laughed uneasily—"that, even if I should do so, I will never say one word about it. I shall think of Millicent, poor child, as of some petted younger sister, and do my best for her." Then the doctor opened a ponderous volume, and his mother knew that all conversation was at an end.

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They were not rich, those good Samaritans, although the doctor was making rapid strides in his profession. Theirs had been a hard struggle. The mother had been left a widow when quite young; she had only a small income, the son was desirous of a good education, and then he chose the profession he felt most inclination for. But it had been up-hill work—they had no friends and no influence. They had nothing but his skill and industry to rely upon. Both, however, soon made their way. His practice increased rapidly, and when Hyacinth found refuge with him he had begun to save money, and was altogether in what the people of the world call comfortable circumstances. It was most probably the remembrance of their early struggles that made both mother and son so kind and charitable to the unhappy girl who had fallen under their hands. Perhaps, had they always been prosperous, they might have had harder hearts. As it was, the memory of their past struggles softened them and made them kinder to the whole world.

Mrs. Chalmers, well-born and well-bred herself, was quick to recognize that Hyacinth was a gentlewoman—one who had been accustomed not only to a life of refinement, but of luxury. She was quick also to recognize the pure mind, the innocent, simple, gentle heart.

It was all settled, and Millicent—as Hyacinth Vaughan was now called—became one of the family. Mrs. Chalmers always treated her as though she was her own daughter. The doctor spoiled, indulged, teased, and worshipped her. They did all that was possible for her; still the girl was not happy. She regained her health and strength very slowly, but no color returned to that delicate, lovely face—the beautiful eyes were always shadowed—no one ever saw her smile. As she grew stronger, she busied herself in doing all kinds of little services for Mrs. Chalmers; but this life among the middle class was all new to her. She had never known anything but the sombre magnificence of Queen's Chase and the hotel life at Bergheim. She was lost, and hardly knew what to do. It was new to her to live in small rooms—to be waited on by one servant—to hear and know all that passed in the household—new, strange, and bewildering to her. But she busied herself in attending to Mrs. Chalmers. She did many little services, too, for the doctor; and at last he grew to love the beautiful, sad face and plaintive voice as he had never loved anything before. She grew stronger, but not happier, and they became anxious about her.

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"It is so unnatural in a girl of her age," said Mrs. Chalmers; "the trouble must have been a great

one, since she cannot forget it. In my opinion, Robert, nothing will rouse her but change of scene and work. She seems to be always in a sorrowful dream."

What Mrs. Chalmers said the young girl often thought. After a time she wearied inexpressibly of the dull routine of her every-day life.

"I am dying," she would say to herself—"dying of inanition. I must begin to work."

One day, when the doctor sat alone in his surgery, she went to him and told him.

"If you will only be kind enough to let me work," she said. "I shall always love this my home; but it seems to me that in body and mind I should be much better if I could work."

"And work you shall," decided the doctor; "leave all to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Dr. Chalmers was getting on in the world. His practice had at first been confined exclusively to the locality in which he lived; but of late noble ladies had sent for him, and his name was mentioned with great honor in the medical journals. He had been consulted in some very difficult cases, and people said he saved Lady Poldean's life when all the physicians had pronounced her case hopeless. Honors were falling thick and fast upon him.

Lady Dartelle, of Hulme Abbey, was one of those who placed implicit faith in him. Her ladyship was credited with passing through life with one eye firmly fixed on the "main chance." She never neglected an opportunity of saving a guinea; and she was wont to observe that she had much better advice from Dr. Chalmers for five guineas than she could procure from a fashionable physician for twenty. Her youngest daughter, Clara, had been ailing for some time, and Lady Dartelle decided on leaving Hulme Abbey and coming up to town for the benefit of the doctor's advice. [Pg 112]

Lady Dartelle was a widow—"left," as she was accustomed to observe, emphatically, "with four dear children." The eldest, the son and heir, Sir Aubrey, was travelling on the Continent; her two daughters, Veronica and Mildred, were accomplished young ladies who had taken every worldly maxim to heart, and never bestowed a thought upon anything save of the most frivolous nature.

They had made their *début* some years before, but it had not been a very successful one. The young ladies were only moderately good looking, and they had not the most amiable of tempers. Perhaps this latter fact might account in some degree for several matrimonial failures. The young ladies had not accompanied Lady Dartelle to town—they objected to be seen there out of season—so that her ladyship had the whole of the mansion to herself.

Dr. Chalmers had one day been sitting for some time by the child, examining her, talking to her and asking her innumerable questions. She was a fair, fragile, pretty child, with great earnest eyes and sensitive lips. The doctor's heart warmed to her; and when Lady Dartelle sent to request his presence in her room, he looked very anxious.

"I want you to tell me the truth, doctor," she said. "The child has never been very well nor very ill. I want to know if you think she is in any danger."

"I cannot tell," he replied. "It seems to me that the child's chances are equal for life or death."

"I may not send her to school, then?" she said; and a shade of annoyance passed over the lady's face.

"Certainly not," was the prompt reply. "She will require the most constant and kindly home-care. She should have a kind and cheerful companion. I should not advise you entirely to forget her education, but it must not be forced."

"That is tantamount to saying that I must have a governess at home—and I do not see my way clear to that at all. Servants are bad enough; but the real plague of life are governesses. I have no idea where to find a suitable one. One's troubles seem to have no end."

To which remark the doctor wisely made no reply. Lady Dartelle looked up at him.

"You must see a great deal of the world, Dr. Chalmers. Can you tell me where I can find a trustworthy governess? I must have a gentlewoman, of course; yet she must not be one likely to thrust herself forward. That I could not endure. What is the matter, doctor?" she asked; for Dr. Chalmers' face had suddenly flushed scarlet, and his eyes intimated something which my Lady Dartelle did not quite understand. [Pg 113]

"I was thinking," he replied, "that I do know a young lady who would be all that you require."

"I am very glad," said Lady Dartelle, looking much relieved. "Who is she? What is her name?"

"She is a *protégée* of my mother's—her name is Millicent Holte. She is highly educated, and most sweet-tempered—in fact, I do not think, if all England were searched, that any one so exactly suited for the position could be found. She is of gentle birth, and has a quiet, graceful manner that is very charming. There is only one objection."

"What is that?" asked Lady Dartelle, anxiously.

"She has never been a governess, and might not, perhaps, like the position—I cannot tell."

"She has never taught—of course that would make some difference in the stipend. I do not know that the deficiency need cause concern in respect of anything else. Where is the young lady now?"

"She is staying with my mother," said the doctor, his honest face flushing at the need of concealment.

"That is recommendation sufficient," vouchsafed Lady Dartelle, graciously. "I shall require no other. When will it be convenient for me to see her?"

"I dare say mother could call upon you to-morrow and bring Miss Holte with her."

"That would be very nice. Three o'clock would be a convenient time for me. Suppose Miss Holte should accept the engagement, would she be able, do you think, to return to Hulme Abbey with me at the end of the week?"

"I should imagine so. I do not know of anything to prevent it."

Yet as he spoke, that fair, sweet, sad face seemed to rise before him, and he wondered how he should bear his home when she was there no longer.

Still, he had done what she wanted. She had asked him to find her some work to do, and he had complied with her request. Yet his heart smote him as he thought of her—so fair, so fragile, so sensitive. How would she like to be among strangers? Fortunately he had no conception of the true life of a governess in a fashionable family; if he had had, it would have been the last work of the kind he would have chosen for her in whom he was interested.

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"The work will brace her nerves; it will do her good," he said to himself; "and if by chance she does not like it, she need not stay—there will always be a home for her with us."

When he reached home he told her. She appeared neither pleased nor regretful; it seemed to him that the common events of every-day life no longer possessed the least interest for her. She asked no questions about either Lady Dartelle or her place of residence, or how many children she would have to teach. The young girl agreed with him that she would do well to accept the offer.

"Are you pleased?" he asked. "Do you think you will like the duties?"

"I am very thankful to have some work to do," she replied; "and I am deeply grateful to you, Dr. Chalmers."

"You may well be that. I have never made such a sacrifice in my life as that of letting you go, Millicent. I should not have done so but that I think it will be for your good. Your home is still here, and if you do not like Hulme Abbey, I will fetch you away at once."

That night when the unhappy girl was alone in her room, she threw up her arms with a despairing cry. "How many years have I to live? How many years can I bear this, and live? Oh! Adrian, Adrian, if I could only look once upon your face and die! Oh, my love, my love, how am I to live and never see your face again?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"There is one thing we are quite forgetting," said Dr. Chalmers, "although we call ourselves such clever people."

He pointed as he spoke to the little rings of golden hair, soft, fine as silk, light as gold in color, like the small tendrils of a vine in shape. She raised her beautiful, blushing face to his.

"You did it," she said, half-reproachfully. "I look just like a boy. What shall I do?"

The doctor touched one of the soft golden rings with his finger. "This is anything but the conventional governess style; Millicent should have plain, Madonna-like braids of a dull gray tint—should she not, mother?"

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"I do not like your plan at all, Robert," said Mrs. Chalmers, looking at her sweet, sad face. "I do not see why Millicent cannot be happy with us, nor why she can not recover her strength here. I suppose you know best. One thing is certain; she cannot leave us thus. Should you like, my dear, to wear hair that was not your own?"

"No, I should not like it at all," she replied, her face flushing.

The doctor laughed aloud.

"You will never make a woman of fashion, Millicent, as far as I understand such beings. A lady with a magnificent head of hair of her own carefully puts it out of sight and covers it with some one else's hair. I think the fashion most hateful, but my opinion of course matters little. Seriously speaking, Millicent, my mother must take you to a hair-dresser's, as something must be done; this beautiful, graceful, infantile head would never suit her ladyship."

Much against Millicent's will a hair-dresser was taken into their confidence.

"Could I not wear a cap?" asked Millicent, looking shyly at the magnificent coiffures of all colors.

"It would be very unbecoming," said the hair-dresser.

"A governess in a cap!" spoke Mrs. Chalmers. "No, that will not do at all."

"What does it matter?" thought the girl. "After all, my appearance will really interest no one."

And she submitted passively while a plain band of hair was chosen for her by the hair-dresser and Mrs. Chalmers. When it had been arranged, and she looked in the glass, she hardly recognized her face, the wavy golden hair had always given such a graceful, fairy-like character to her beauty. She looked many years older than she was—sad and subdued. The plain band of hair seemed quite to alter her face. Mrs. Chalmers kissed her.

"Never mind, my dear," she said; "you will soon be your own pretty self again," and the kindly words smote the young girl with deadliest pain. Her own self? Ah, no!—that self was dead, never to live again. It was but fitting that the old, graceful beauty—the girlish beauty Adrian had loved so dearly—should die with it.

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"A very proper person indeed," thought Lady Dartelle, when the interview was nearly at an end; "evidently knows her place and mine; and I may own to myself that the outlay is very little."

For Lady Dartelle had, during the course of the interview, been delighted with the brilliant accomplishments of the young girl. Her playing was magnificent, her singing most exquisite—the pure, sweet contralto voice had been highly cultivated. Then she spoke French and German with such a pure, perfect accent, that Lady Dartelle began to think that the terms expected would be high. She managed the matter skilfully. She carefully concealed her admiration, and dwelt principally on the fact that the young lady had never before been engaged in teaching.

"That makes an immense difference," said her ladyship, diplomatically. "Still, as Miss Holte's appearance pleases me, I will not think of the deficiencies. In addition, Miss Holte, to your teaching my youngest daughter, I should wish you to speak French and Italian with my eldest girls."

Miss Holte bowed acquiescence, and her ladyship, finding that she offered no objection to any amount of work, then mentioned a few other "little duties" she wished to be attended to—"duties" she would not have dared to exact from any one else.

All arrangements were concluded greatly to her satisfaction, and then Lady Dartelle asked Millicent if she would not like to see her new pupil. The young girl said "Yes," and in answer to a summons from her ladyship, the child came into the room.

Then, for the first time, Millicent's heart was touched; the large, earnest eyes looked into her own with an appealing expression, the little burning hand trembled as it lay in her own. Millicent bent down and kissed the sweet face. Something stirred in her heart that had long seemed dead—something that brought with it exquisite pleasure and exquisite pain.

"In cases of this kind," said Lady Dartelle, "I find there is nothing like a clear and straightforward understanding. I should like to tell you, Miss Holte, that when we are quite alone you will sometimes dine with us, and occasionally spend the evening in the drawing-room; but when we have visitors such an arrangement will be impossible. My reasons for saying this," continued her ladyship, blandly, turning to Mrs. Chalmers, "are these. My son Aubrey is a frequent visitor at Hulme Abbey; he often brings friends with him; and then I think precautions with young people are necessary. I have seen sad results among my friends where the precautions I think so necessary have not been taken."

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"I shall never wish for any society but that of my little pupil, Lady Dartelle," said Millicent.

And her ladyship was graciously pleased to observe that Miss Holte seemed to be very sensible.

It was all arranged; but as they drove home a sudden doubt came to Hyacinth. Lady Dartelle spoke of her son's bringing visitors with him. Suppose among them there should be any one she knew—any one who would recognize her? The very thought of it made her sick and faint. No, it was not likely; she had seen so few people, she had known so few—besides, when visitors came, it was Lady Dartelle's wish that she should not appear.

"Even if I do appear," she said, "who that has known me in my bright happy days—who that has known me as Hyacinth Vaughan—would recognize me now?"

Who could discover the lovely, smiling, radiant face under that sad, careworn look? Where was the light that had shone in the beautiful eyes—where were the smiles that had played round the perfect lips—where the grace and happiness that had made the face like sunshine? Years seemed to have passed over that bowed head—years of sorrow, of care, of misery. No one could recognize her. She need have no fear.

She blushed crimson when Dr. Chalmers, on seeing her, laughed. She had forgotten the false braids of hair. Nothing had the power to interest her long. Her thoughts always flew to Adrian. What had he thought of her? Had he forgotten her? What was he doing? She had completely forgotten the braids. The doctor's mischievous laugh made her remember them.

"I declare, Millicent," he said, "I should have passed you in the street without recognizing you. Why, you look ten years older, child, and so altered!" His face grew serious and sad as he remembered the girl as he had seen her first.

"Shall you like Lady Dartelle?" he asked.

Severe suffering had not blunted her keen instinct—the instinct that had shown her that Claude was more enthusiastic than sincere, and that Adrian was the most noble of men.

"I shall like my pupil," she said, "I shall love her in time."

"Now," observed the doctor, "I have hopes of you. This is the first time you have used that word. Millicent," he continued, kindly, yet gravely, "to love any thing, even though it be only a child, will be the salvation of you."

It was arranged that Millicent—Hyacinth had even learned to think of herself by that name—should join Lady Dartelle on the Friday evening; and on the following Saturday they were to go down to Hulme Abbey together. Dr. Chalmers had promised to find time to run down in the course of a few months.

"You will naturally be anxious to see how Miss Holte gets on," said her ladyship, adroitly; "and I shall be glad of your advice about Clara."

Then the time for parting came. The separation proved harder than they had thought. Millicent had grown to love the place and the people, as it was characteristic of her grateful, loving nature, to care for all those who were kind to her. It was her only home now; and the friends who dwelt there had been goodness itself. Her sad heart grew heavier as she thought of leaving them.

"Yet, if I live on here as I have been doing," she said to herself, "I shall lose my reason."

When the time came to say farewell, Dr. Chalmers held her hands in his.

"I am not a man of many words," he said, "but I tell you this—the sunshine and joy of my heart go with you. How much I care for you, you will never know; but Heaven's best blessing go with you and prosper you! If you ever want a friend, send for me."

In another minute Hyacinth had left the house that had been to her as a haven of refuge and a heaven of rest.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The beautiful November day was drawing to a close as Lady Dartelle and Hyacinth neared the end of their journey. It had been a lovely day. The branches of the trees were all bare of leaves, but the sun shone brightly and the sky was clear.

After the railway journey was ended, as they drove along the country roads, a faint color came into Millicent's face, faint and exquisite as the delicate bloom on the inner leaf of a wild rose, and a light shone in her eyes. New life had come to her. The trees seemed to spread out their grand branches as though to welcome her. The time was not so long since she had talked to them in her pretty childlike way, believing they could hear if not answer her. The life in that dull London house, where no green leaf was to be seen, faded like a heavy dream. She could have stretched out her hands to the trees, in fondest welcome. How had she lived so long without seeing them? A long, deep sigh escaped her. Lady Dartelle looked up.

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"I hope you are not tired, Miss Holte?" she said.

"No, not at all, thank you; but the country looks so beautiful, and the trees are like dear old friends."

Her ladyship did not look very well pleased; she had not bargained for a sentimental governess.

"I hope," she returned stiffly, "you will find better friends at Hulme Abbey than the trees are likely to prove."

Another cry of delight escaped Hyacinth, for, on turning a sharp corner of the road, the sea lay spread out before them.

"Is Hulme Abbey near the sea?" she asked.

"Almost too near," said Lady Dartelle, "for when the wind blows and the tide is high we can hear the noise of the surf too plainly—that is the only fault that any one could possibly find with Hulme. Do you like the sea, Miss Holte?"

She did not know. She had seen it twice—once when the world was all fair and she was going to Bergheim, and again when the waves had sobbed a dull requiem to all her hope and her love. Did she like it? The very music seemed full of the sorrow of her life. She thought that she would soon grow to love it with a passion that only poets lavish on the fair beauties of nature. Then the gray turrets of the Abbey came in sight.

"We are at home," said Lady Dartelle.

Hulme Abbey was neither so spacious nor so magnificent as Queen's Chase. It was an ancient building of imposing aspect, with square towers and an old-fashioned gateway, the windows were large, and the exterior of the house was ornamented with heavy carvings of stone. The building stood in the midst of the beautiful grounds; a long chestnut avenue at the back led to the woods, and these last sloped down to the very edge of the sea.

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"We are not many minutes' walk from the shore," said Lady Dartelle, "and one of your most important duties, Miss Holte, will be to take Miss Clara down to the sea every day. The walk will be most beneficial to her."

The lonely, sorrowful heart clung to that idea of the sea; it would be a companion, almost a friend

to her. It had a voice that would speak to her, that would tell her of her love, lost forever, and that would whisper of the mysteries of life, so hard to understand. Lady Dartelle almost wondered at the rapt, sublime expression that came over the sweet, sad face. In another moment they were in the spacious entrance-hall, servants bowing, Lady Dartelle proud and patronizing.

"You are tired, and will like to go to your room," she said. "King, show Miss Holte to her room."

So for that one night the young girl escaped the ordeal she had dreaded—the introduction to the daughters of Lady Dartelle.

Hyacinth rose early the next morning. She could not control her impatience to see the sea; it was as though some one she loved were waiting for her. After a few inquiries from one of the servants, she found her way to the shore; her whole heart went out in rapture to the restless waters. She sat down and watched the waves as they rolled in and broke on the shore. The smell of the salt breeze was delicious, the grand anthem of the waves was magnificent to hear; and as she sat there she wept—as she had not wept since her sorrow fell upon her—tears that eased her heart of its burning load, and that seemed to relieve her brain of its terrible pressure.

Where was Adrian? The waves murmured his name. "My love, my lost, my own," they seemed to chant, as the murmur died along the shore. Where was he? Could it be that these same waves were chanting to him?

"If I could only go to him," she said, "and fall sobbing at his feet, and tell him how I love him!"

Presently she went back to the house, feeling better than she had felt for long months, and found, to her great relief, that none of the ladies were up yet. The servant who had attended to her the night before was in her room.

"My name is Mary King, miss," she said, "and my lady told me I was to attend the school-room. Would you like to see it?"

Millicent followed her and the girl led the way to a pretty little room that overlooked the woods. [Pg 121]
It was plainly furnished; but there was a piano, an easel, and plenty of books and flowers.

"This is the school-room, miss," said the maid, "and my lady thought that, as Miss Clara will be here for only six hours during the day—that is, for study—it would answer as a sitting-room for you as well."

Hyacinth desired nothing better than the grand old trees to look at. The maid wondered that she looked from the window instead of round the room.

"I will bring you your breakfast at once, miss," said the girl. "Miss Clara takes hers with you."

After breakfast Lady Dartelle came in with the written order of studies in her hand, and then Millicent found that her office was no sinecure. There was one thing pleasant—every day she must spend two hours out of doors with the young ladies in order to converse in French and Italian with them.

Lady Dartelle added that she had one remark to make, and that was that she had noticed in Miss Holte a tendency to dreaminess—this was always bad in young people, but especially out of place in a governess. She trusted that Miss Holte would try and cure herself of it. When the lady had gone away, the girl looked round the room, she wondered how long she would have to live in it, and what she would have to pass through. What sorrowful thoughts, what ghosts of her lost love and lost happiness would haunt her! But in her wildest dreams she never fancied anything so strange as that which afterward came to pass.

She found that it was not without reason that she had dreaded the ordeal of meeting the young ladies. They were not amiable girls. They were tall, with good figures and high-bred faces—faces that, if they had taken the trouble to cultivate more amiability and good temper, would even have been passable, if not comely, but they wore continually an expression of pride, discontent, and ill-temper. Lady Dartelle, like the valiant and enterprising lady that she was, did her best with them and tried to make the most of them. She tried to smooth down the little angularities of temper—she tried to develop the best traits in their characters and to conceal their faults. It was a difficult task, and nothing but the urgency of the case would have given her ladyship courage. The Misses Dartelle had been for three years in society, and all prospect of their settlement in life seemed remote. It was a serious matter to Lady Dartelle. She did not care to pass through life with two cross old maids hampering her every movement. [Pg 122]

Sir Aubrey had listened to his mother's complaints, and had laughingly tried to comfort her. "I shall come down some time in February," he said; "and I will bring some of the most eligible bachelors of my acquaintance with me. If you make good use of the opportunity, you will surely get one of the girls 'off.' I know how fatal country-house life is to an idle man."

The prospect was rather a poor one; still Lady Dartelle was not without hope.

The gentleman who was to win one of the Misses Dartelle was not to be envied for the exceeding happiness of his lot. They treated the governess with a mixture of haughty scorn and patronizing disdain which at times even amused her. She was, as a rule, supremely indifferent, but there were times when a sarcasm from one of the young ladies brought a smile to her lips, for the simple reason that it was so very inappropriate.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Time passed on and Christmas came at last. By that time Hyacinth had grown accustomed to her new home. Dr. Chalmers had been to see her, and had professed himself delighted with the change in her appearance. She did not regain all of her lost happiness, but she did regain some of her lost health and strength. Though she had not a single hope left, and did not value her life, the color slowly returned to her face and the light to her eyes. The fresh sea-breeze, the regular daily exercise, the quiet life, all tended to her improvement. She did not seem the same girl when Christmas, with its snow and holly, came round.

Hyacinth found wonderful comfort in the constant childish prattle and numerous questions of little Clara; the regular routine of studies took her thoughts in some measure from herself. She was obliged to rouse herself; she could not brood over her sorrows to the exclusion of everything else. She had thought her heart dead to all love, and yet at Hulme Abbey she had learned to love two things with a passion of affection—one was her little pupil; the other, the broad, open, restless sea. How long her present mode of life was to last she did not know—she had not asked herself; some day or other she supposed it would end, and then she must go somewhere else to work. But it was certain she would have to work on in quiet hiding till she died. It was not a very cheerful prospect, but she had learned to look at it with resignation and patience.

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"The end will come some day," she thought; "and perhaps in a better world I shall see Adrian again."

Adrian—he was still her only thought. When she was sitting at times, by the sea-shore, with the child playing on the sands, she would utter his name aloud for the sake of hearing its music.

"Adrian," she would say; and a light that was wonderful to see would come over the lovely face. "Adrian," the winds and waves would seem to re-echo; and she would bend forward, the better, as she thought, to hear the music of the name.

"Mamma," said Veronica to Lady Dartelle one day, "I think you have done a very foolish thing."

"What is that, my dear?" asked the lady, quite accustomed to her daughter's free criticism.

"Why, to bring that girl here. Do you not see that she is growing exceedingly beautiful? You do not give her enough to do."

"I quite agree with Veronica, mamma," put in Mildred; "you have let your usual judgment sleep." Lady Dartelle looked up in astonishment.

"I assure you, my dears, that when I saw her first she did not look even moderately pretty."

"She has very much altered then," said Veronica. "When she came in with Clara yesterday, I was quite astonished. I have never seen a color half so lovely on any face before."

"I hope," observed Mildred, "that you will keep to your resolution, and not allow her to appear when we have visitors. You know how Aubrey admires a pretty face. Remembering how many plain women there are in the world, and how few pretty ones, it seems odd that you did not bring a plain one here."

A slight expression of alarm came over Lady Dartelle's face.

"If you think there is any danger of that kind," she said, "I will send her away at once. But I am of opinion that you exaggerate her good looks. I see nothing so very noticeable about the girl. And you know I shall never be able to secure another governess so thoroughly accomplished on the same terms; that, of course, is a consideration."

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"You can please yourself, mamma," returned Veronica. "But I warn you that, if you are not very careful, you will most bitterly repent having a girl of that kind about the place when Aubrey comes home. You may do your best to keep her out of the way; but, depend upon it, she will contrive to be seen. Where there's a will there's a way."

"I think you are alarming yourself unnecessarily, my dear Veronica," said Lady Dartelle.

"Am I, mamma? Then judge for yourself. I see the gleam of Clara's scarlet cloak through the trees—they are just returning. Send for Miss Holte; ask her some trifling question; and when she is gone tell me if you have ever seen a more beautiful face."

Lady Dartelle complied with her daughter's request and in a few minutes "Miss Holte" and her little pupil entered the room. Lady Dartelle asked Hyacinth some unimportant question, looking earnestly as she did so at the lovely face. She owned to herself that she had had no idea how perfectly beautiful it was; the faintest and most exquisite bloom mantled it, the sweet eyes were bright, the lips like crimson flowers.

"She must have been ill when I engaged her," thought her ladyship—"I will ask her." Smiling most graciously, she said: "You are looking much better, Miss Holte; the air of Hulme seems to agree with you. Had you been ill when I saw you first?"

The beautiful face flushed, and then grew pale. The young ladies looking on were quick to note it. "Yes," she replied, quietly, "I had been very ill for some weeks."

"Indeed! I am glad to see you so fully restored;" and then a gracious bow intimated to "Miss Holte" that the interview was at an end.

"There, mamma," cried Mildred; "you see that we are perfectly right. You must acknowledge that you have never seen any one more lovely."

Lady Dartelle looked slightly bewildered.

"To tell the truth, my dears," she said, "I have hardly noticed the young girl lately. All that I can say is that I did not observe anything so very pretty about her when I engaged her. I thought her very pleasant-looking and graceful, but not beautiful." [Pg 125]

"I hope she is what she is represented," remarked Mildred; "but Mary King says that she has all the ways of a grand lady, and that she does not understand what I should have imagined every governess to be familiar with."

"My dear Mildred, you are saying too much. She is highly respectable—a ward or *protégée* of Mrs. Chalmers—the doctor would never have named her to me if she had not been all that was irreproachable."

"We will hope for the best; but I advise you again, mamma, to keep her out of sight when our visitors come."

Lady Dartelle smiled calmly—of the success of anything that she undertook that far-seeing lady never doubted. It was the end of January when Lady Dartelle received a letter from her son.

"Here is good news, my dear children," she said, smiling. "Your brother is coming; and he brings with him Lord Chandon and Major Elton. We shall have a very pleasant time, I foresee."

CHAPTER XXX.

February came in mild and clear, with a pleasant foretaste of spring. In the woods the early violets were peeping out and the snow-drops were bowing their white heads; the buds were beginning to form on the hedges and trees, there was a faint song from the birds and silence reigned in the woods, as though the goddess of spring were hovering over them. It was Valentine's Day—in after-years Hyacinth remembered every incident of it—Clara had complained of not feeling well, and they had gone out into the woods—the governess and child. They sat down near a brook on some moss-covered stones. The child was unconsciously a poet in her way.

"Miss Holte," she said, suddenly, "do you never pity the flowers for being obliged to hide so long in the dark cold earth? How they must be longing for sunshine and for spring! It is just as though they were in prison, and the sun is the good fairy that lets them out."

Hyacinth made a point of never checking the child's thoughts; she always allowed her to tell them freely as they came. [Pg 126]

"I think so much about the flowers," continued the little one; "it seems to me that in some distant way they are related to the stars. I wonder if they live as we do—if some are proud of their color, and some of their fragrance—if they love and hate each other—if some are jealous, and others contented; I should like to know."

"The world is full of secrets," returned Hyacinth, musingly—"I cannot tell. But, if flowers could have souls, I can imagine the kind of soul that would belong to each flower."

"So can I," cried the child, joyously. "Why is the world full of secrets, Miss Holte? Men are so clever; why can they not find all the secrets out?"

"Ah, my darling," sighed the young girl, "the skill of man does not go very far. It has mastered none of the great problems of life."

They walked down to the shore and watched the waves rolling in; great sheets of white foam spread over the sand, the chant of the sea seemed on that day louder and more full of mystery than ever.

"The salt breeze has blown away all my headache," said the child; "shall we go home, Miss Holte? Mildred says this is Valentine's Day. I wonder if it will bring anything pleasant to us. I wonder if it is a day we shall remember."

The young governess smiled sadly.

"One day is very much like another," she said, little dreaming that this was to be one of the most eventful of her life.

"My lady wishes to see you, Miss Holte," said the footman to Hyacinth as she entered the room; "she is in her own room."

The young girl went thither at once.

"I want to speak to you, Miss Holte," she said. "As I have already mentioned, I always like sensible, straightforward dealings. My son, Sir Aubrey Dartelle, comes home to-morrow and brings some visitors with him."

My lady was seated at her writing-table, the room was shaded by rose-colored curtains, half drawn, and the young governess fortunately did not stand where her face could be seen.

"I have told you before that when we have visitors at the Abbey I shall wish you and Miss Clara to keep to your own apartments; she is far too young and too delicate to be brought forward in any way." [Pg 127]

"I will be careful to comply with your wishes, Lady Dartelle," replied Hyacinth.

"I am sure you will; I have always found you careful, Miss Holte. I wish Clara to take her morning walk before the day's study begins; and, as we do not breakfast until nearly ten, that will be more convenient. If she requires to go out again, half an hour while we are at luncheon will suffice. I do not know," continued the lady—"I am almost afraid that I shall have to ask you to give up your room for a short time; if it should be so, you can have the one next to Miss Clara—Lord Chandon, Major Elton, and Sir Richard Hastings bring so many servants with them."

Fortunately she did not see the ghastly change that came over that beautiful face as she uttered the name of Lord Chandon; it was as though some one had struck the girl a mortal blow. Her lips opened as though she would cry out, but all sound died on them; a look of fear and dread, almost of horror, came into the violet eyes.

"If I see any necessity for the change," said her ladyship, "I will tell King to attend to it."

No words came from those white, rigid lips. Lady Dartelle never turned her head but concluded, blandly:

"That was what I wanted to speak to you about, Miss Holte."

She evidently expected the young girl to go. But all strength had departed from the delicate frame. Hyacinth was as incapable of movement as she was of speech. At last, in a voice which Lady Dartelle scarcely recognized, it was so harsh and hoarse, Hyacinth said: "I did not hear plainly; what name did you mention, Lady Dartelle?"

"My lady" was too much taken by surprise to reflect whether it was compromising her dignity to reply. A rush of hope had restored the girl's strength. She said to herself that she could not have heard aright.

"Lord Chandon, Major Elton, and Sir Richard Hastings," said Lady Dartelle, stiffly.

"Great heavens," groaned the girl to herself, "what shall I do?"

"Did you speak, Miss Holte?" inquired the elder lady.

"No," replied Hyacinth, stretching out her hand as though she were blinded.

Then Lady Dartelle took up her pen and began to write. This was a signal of dismissal. Presently a sudden idea occurred to her. [Pg 128]

"I had almost forgotten to say that I should wish the rules I have mentioned to be conformed to to-day. It is possible my son may arrive this evening or to-morrow morning. Good morning, Miss Holte."

One meeting Hyacinth would have thought she had been struck with sudden blindness. She stumbled as she walked; with one hand outstretched she touched the wall as she went along. It seemed to her that hours elapsed before she reached her own room; but she found herself there at last. Blind, dizzy, bewildered, unable to collect her thoughts, unable to cry out, though her silence seemed to torture her, she fell on her knees with a dull moan, and stretched out her hands as though asking help from Heaven. How long she knelt there she never knew. Wave after wave of anguish rolled over her soul—pain after pain, each bitter and keen as death, pierced her heart. Then the great waves seemed to roll back, and one thought stood clearly before her.

He from whom she had fled in sorrowful dismay—he whom she loved more dearly than her own life—he whose contempt and just disdain she had incurred—was coming to Hulme Abbey. She said the words over and over again to herself. "Adrian is coming—Heaven help and pity me, Adrian is coming!" Great drops stood on her white brow, her whole body trembled as a leaf trembles in the wind.

A wild idea of escape came to her—she could run away—there was time enough. Ah, now! they were coming perhaps to-night, and if Adrian heard that some one had run away from the house, he would suspect who it was. She wrung her hands like one helpless and hopeless.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "Dear Heaven, have pity on me, for I have suffered enough. What shall I do?"

Another hope came to her. Perhaps, after all, her fears were groundless. Lady Dartelle had said "Lord Chandon." It must be the old lord; she had never heard or read of his death. Adrian was to be Lord Chandon some day; but that day might be far distant yet. She would try to be patient and see; she would try to control her quivering nerves. If it were indeed Adrian, then she must be careful; all hope of escape was quite useless; she must keep entirely to her room until he was gone. She tried to quiet the trembling nerves, but the shock had been too great for her. Her face was ghastly in its pallor and fear. Clara looked at her in dismay. "I do not feel well," she said, in a trembling voice; "you shall draw instead of read." [Pg 129]

She would have given anything to escape the ordeal of reading to the young ladies. But it must be gone through; they made no allowances for headaches. She found them as little disposed to receive as she was to give a lesson.

"Sit down, Miss Holte," said Veronica; "we will not attend to our French just now; it's such nonsense of mamma to insist upon it! Would you mind threading these beads? I want to make a purse."

She placed a quantity of small gold and silver beads in the young girl's hands, and then eagerly resumed her conversation with her sister.

"I am the elder," she argued; "the first chance and the best chance ought to be mine. I have set my heart on winning Lord Chandon, and I shall think it very unkind of you to interfere."

"You do not know whether he will be willing to be won," said Mildred, sneeringly.

"I can but try; you could do no more. I should like to be Lady Chandon, Mildred. Of course I shall not be unsisterly. If I see that he prefers you, I shall do all in my power to help you; but, if he shows no decided preference, it will not be fair for you to interfere with me."

"He may not like either of us," said Mildred, who enjoyed nothing so much as irritating her sister.

"I have an idea that he is to be won; I feel almost certain of it. Sir Richard Hastings would be a good match, too; he is very wealthy and handsome—and so, for that matter, is Major Elton."

"What has that to do with it?" asked Mildred. "You have such confused ideas, Veronica. What was that story mamma was telling you about Lord Chandon?"

"Some doleful romance—I did not listen attentively. I think she said he was engaged, before his uncle's death, to marry some girl he was much attached to, and she ran away. She did something or other horrible, and then fled; I think that was it."

"And does he wear the willow for her still?" asked Mildred.

"I should say he has more sense. When girls do anything horrible, they ought to die. Men never mourn long, you know."

"But what did the girl do?" pursued Mildred. "Did she deceive him and marry some one else—or what?" [Pg 130]

"I did not feel interested enough to listen," replied Veronica. "Mamma seemed to imply everything most terrible; you must consult her if you want to know the particulars. Aubrey says that a man's heart is often caught at a rebound; and he seems to think that if we are kind and sympathizing to Lord Chandon—smoothing his ruffled plumes, you know—one of us cannot fail to win him."

"How long will our visitors remain?" asked Mildred.

"A month; and much may be done in a month, you know. What is that?"

Well might she ask. First the gold and silver beads fell upon the floor; and then the unhappy girl who held them, white and senseless, fell from the seat, and lay like a crushed and broken lily on the ground.

"Ring the bell," said Veronica; "she has fainted, I suppose. How tiresome! I wonder how it is that governesses have such a propensity to faint."

"She looks like a beautiful statue; but if she takes to this kind of thing, mamma will not find her so very useful after all. Here, King," to the servant who entered, "Miss Holte has fainted; tend to her."

And the two sisters swept from the room with the air of two very superior beings indeed. They never dreamed of helping the unconscious girl; such condescension would have been far too great. Mary King and a fellow-servant carried Hyacinth to her room, and laid her on her bed. Kindly hands ministered to her; she was respected and beloved by the servants, who, quick to judge, pronounced her "a real lady"—much more of a lady than the Misses Dartelle. So now in her distress they ministered unto her.

"If I might but die," she said, with a great tearless sob—"if I might but die!"

That she should be looked upon as so utterly lost—as having done something so terrible—seemed worse to her than all.

"I did right to leave them," she said, "and now I shall never look upon them again. I did right to hide myself from the faces of all who knew me. Adrian despises me. I cannot bear it."

Her face burned and her heart beat wildly as she thought of Veronica's insulting words and sneering tones. What she had done was too terrible even for Lady Dartelle to speak of. How rightly she had judged that her proper position was past for ever! How rightly she had decided that her own deed had banished her forever from those whom she loved best! [Pg 131]

Lady Dartelle, with unusual consideration, had sent word that Miss Holte was not to rise; so Hyacinth lay through the day in a stupor of fear and dread, one longing in her heart, one prayer on her lips, and that was to die. She lay trying to form feeble plans of escape, and breaking down every now and then with a terrible cry. Dr. Chalmers had told her if she wanted a friend to send for him; but if he came now, exposure must follow. She was hopeless, helpless, bewildered.

Then she began to think how heavily she had been punished for her sin. Some girls ran away from their home, were married, and lived happily. Why had so cruel a fate befallen her? She lay until evening, her brain burning, her head aching, her whole body one throb of pain. A new fear came to her: what if that terrible fever came back, robbing her of her senses and reason? They would find out then that she was here in some kind of disguise. It was night when she heard the sound of carriage wheels; this was followed by a noise as of many arrivals. Her heart gave one great bound, and then seemed to stand still. She did not know how time passed until Mary King entered with a basin of soup.

"They are all gone to dinner, miss," she said, "and cook has sent you this."

"Have the visitors arrived?" she asked.

"Yes, miss; there seems to be quite a crowd of them. Try to take this—it will do you good."

She tried, but failed. Adrian was there under the same roof, and the wonder was that her sorrow

did not kill her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

When Hyacinth rose the next morning, it was as though long years had passed over her. Lady Dartelle was not unkind or ungrateful. She sent to ask if Miss Holte was better and able to resume her work; she also desired the housekeeper to see that the governess had all she required, and then, thinking that she had done her duty, she forgot all about her.

Hyacinth resumed her work, but a burning thirst was upon her—a thirst that could not be quenched. Adrian was near her, he was under the same roof, breathing the same air, his eyes would rest on the same scenes, he would speak every day to the same people. A fever that nothing could cool seemed to run riot in her veins; her heart burned, her eyes were hot and weary with watching—a thirst, a longing, a fever, a very madness possessed her, and she could not control it. She must see him; she must look upon his face, even should his glance slay her—for she had loved him so dearly, and in all her lonely life she had never loved any one else. As flowers thirst in the sultry heat for dew, as the tired deer longs for cooling streams, so she craved for one glance at the face that had made all the sunshine and brightness of earth for her.

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So she watched and waited. She promised herself this one short glimpse of happiness. She would look on his face, giving full vent to all the passionate love of her heart, and then welcome darkness, oblivion, and death.

Once, in crossing the upper corridor, the door of the billiard-room suddenly opened, and she heard the sound of laughter and of many voices; his was among them—clear, rich, distinct—the old musical tone that had so often made her heart thrill. The sound of it smote her like a deadly blow. She shrunk back, pale with the pallor of death, faint, trembling.

"My love, my love," murmured the white lips. Hyacinth bent eagerly forward—she would have given much to hear the sound again, but it had ceased—the door was closed, and she went on to her room like one who had stood outside the gates of an earthly paradise, yet knew that those gates were never to be opened.

Her recent experiences increased the fever of her longing—a fever that soon began to show itself in her face. She became unwontedly lovely, her beautiful violet eyes shone with a brilliancy and light almost painful to see, the red lips were parted as the lips of one who suffers from intensity of pain, the white hands grew burning hot; the fever of longing was wearing her very life away, and she thought she could still it by one look at his face. She might as well have tried to extinguish flame by pouring oil upon it. At last the chance she had waited and watched for came. Veronica sent to ask her to go to her room.

"I want you to grant me a great favor," she said. "My maid is correct in her ideas of dress, but she has no idea of flowers. I have some flowers here, and knowing your great taste, I should be obliged to you if you would arrange a spray for my hair."

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This speech was so unusually civil for Miss Dartelle that the young governess was quite overpowered.

"I will do it with pleasure," she replied.

"I want it to be very nice," said Miss Dartelle, with a conscious smile that was like a dagger in the girl's breast; "one of our visitors, Lord Chandon, seems to have a mania for flowers. I had almost forgotten—are there any white hyacinths among the collection?"

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"Do you think there are sufficient to form a nice spray, mixed with some maiden-hair fern?" she asked. "I should be so pleased if you could manage it."

"I will try; but, Miss Dartelle, there are so many other beautiful flowers here—why do you prefer the white hyacinths?"

Her voice faltered as she uttered her name—a name she had never heard since she fled from all that was dearest to her. Miss Dartelle, who happened to be in the most gracious humors, smiled at the question.

"I was talking to that same gentleman, Lord Chandon, yesterday, and I happened to ask him what was his favorite flower. He said the white hyacinth—oh, Miss Holte, what are you doing?"

For the flowers were falling from the nerveless hand. How could he have said that? Adrian used to call her his white Hyacinth. Had he not forgotten her? What could he mean?

"So you see, Miss Holte," continued Miss Dartelle, blandly, "that, as I should like to please his lordship, I shall wear his favorite flowers."

Yes, she saw plainly enough. She remembered one of those happy days at Bergheim when she too had worn some fresh, fragrant hyacinths to please him; and she remembered how he had caressed her, and what loving words he had murmured to her—how he had told her that she was fairer in his eyes than any flower that had ever bloomed—how he had taken one of the hyacinths from her, and, looking at it, had said: "You were rightly named, my love. You are a stately, fair, fragrant hyacinth indeed."

Now—oh, bitter irony of fate!—now she was to make another beautiful with these same flowers, in order to charm him.

She was dead to him and to all the bright past; yet at the very thought of his loving another she grew faint with anguish that had no name. She went to the window and opened it to admit the fresh, cool air; and then the opportunity she had waited and longed for came. It was a bright, clear morning, the sun was shining, and the promise of spring filled the air. She did not think of seeing Adrian then; but the window overlooked the grove of chestnut trees, and he was walking serenely underneath them.

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She sunk on her knees, her eyes were riveted on his face with deepest intensity. It was he—Heaven bless him!—looking graver, older, and more careworn, but still the same brave, handsome, noble man. Those were the true, clear eyes that had looked so lovingly into her own; those were the lips, so firm, so grave, so kind, that had kissed hers and told her how dear she was to him; those were the hands that had clasped her own.

Shine on him, blessed sun; whisper round him, sweet wind; for there is none like him—none. She envied the sun that shone on him, the breeze that kissed his face. She stretched out her hands to him. "My love," she cried—"my dear lost love!" Her wistful longing eyes followed him.

This was the one glance that was to cool the fever preying upon her; this was to be her last look on earth at him—and the chestnut grove was not long—he had passed half through it already. Soon—oh, so soon—he would pass out of her sight forever. Suddenly he stood still and looked down the long forest glade; he passed his hand over his brow, as though to drive away some saddening thought, and her longing eyes never left him. She thanked Heaven for that minute's respite, and drank in the grave manly beauty of his face with eyes that were pitiful to see.

"My love," she murmured, in a low hoarse voice, "if I might but die looking at you."

Slowly the large burning tears gathered in the sorrowful eyes, and sob after sob rose to the quivering lips: it seemed to her that, kneeling there with outstretched hands, she was weeping her life away; and then he began to walk again, and had almost passed out of her sight.

She held out her hands to him with weeping eyes.

"Adrian," she called, "good-by, my love, good-by!"

And he, all unconscious of the eyes that were bent upon him, turned away, while the darkness and desolation of death fell over the girl who loved him so dearly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

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Hyacinth had looked upon Adrian. In her simplicity she had believed that with that one look all her fever of pain would vanish. Had it been so? Three days since she had stood in Miss Dartelle's room and watched him from the window; and now she looked like one consumed by some hidden fire. In that great busy household no one noticed her, or possibly remarks would have been made. There was a brilliant flush on the beautiful face, the light in her eyes was unnaturally bright, no lips were ever more crimson. She had slept but little. She had spent the nights in pacing her room, doing battle with her sorrow and her love; she had spent the days in fighting against the physical weakness that threatened to overwhelm her.

"It would have been better," she owned to herself in a passion of despair, "never to have seen him. That one look upon his face has made me more wretched than ever."

"It is all my own fault," she would say again—"all my own fault—no one is in the least degree to blame but myself. I have brought it all upon myself. If I had been content with my home—satisfied with the gifts Heaven had given me—if I had refused to listen to Claude's suggestions—if I had been true to my teachings and true to myself, all this would never have happened—I should have been Adrian's wife. There is no one—no one to blame but myself. I have shipwrecked my own happiness, and all I suffer is just punishment."

Like a vision sent purposely to torture her, there came before her a picture of what might have been but for her folly in consenting to meet Claude. By this time she would have been Adrian's wife, living with him in that grand old house he had described to her, loving and beloved, going sometimes to see Lady Vaughan, and brightening the fair old face by the sight of her own great happiness. All this was impossible now because she had been guilty of a terrible folly. It was all at an end. She had to live her own dreary life, and never while the sun shone or the flowers bloomed would the faintest ray of happiness reach her. What Lady Dartelle had foreseen came to pass. She had so many guests to accommodate that she was obliged to ask Miss Holte to give up her large airy room and take a smaller one on the floor above.

"I hope it will not inconvenience you," said her ladyship. "It will not be for long; we are all going to London in May."

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The young governess appeared quite unconcerned, and Lady Dartelle felt more pleased with her than ever.

The window of Hyacinth's new apartment looked upon the rose-garden; and at the end of the rose-garden there ran a long path, where the gentlemen visitors were accustomed to smoke their cigars.

One morning Miss Dartelle, with a smiling face, entered the school-room where the young governess and her little pupil sat. She bowed graciously to "Miss Holte" and kissed Clara.

"We are all alone to-day," she said. "Our visitors have gone over to Broughton Park. Mamma thinks Clara may have a holiday."

The child did not look so pleased as the elder sister expected.

"And Miss Holte," continued the young lady, "I want to ask you something. You sketch very beautifully, I know. I have seen some of your drawings, they are exceedingly good." This was a preamble that meant work of some kind. "Have you noticed that very remarkable tree in the park, called 'The King's Oak?' It is a large spreading tree, with an enormous trunk overgrown with ivy, and huge overhanging boughs."

"Yes," was the quiet reply, "I know it very well."

"Lord Chandon has asked me to sketch it for him, Miss Holte. It appears that he is as fond of trees as he is of flowers. I draw very well, but I should like the sketch to be something better than I can do. Will you help me, please?"

"Certainly—if you wish it;" and Hyacinth smiled in bitter scorn. "If he had asked me for a sketch," she thought, "no other fingers should have touched it."

"I thought," resumed Miss Dartelle, "that, as the gentlemen are all away to-day, we might spend a few hours over it."

"If you will put on your hat," said Miss Holte, "I will be ready in a few minutes."

Both sisters appeared presently, and they were unusually gracious to Miss Holte. After a pleasant walk they came in sight of the grand old forest-giant. A servant had followed them, bearing camp-stools and all the necessaries for sketching.

"Will you make a sketch of the tree, please, Miss Holte? And, as I must do something toward it, I will work at the minor details." [Pg 137]

Hyacinth sat down at some little distance from the tree and began her task. The morning was bright and almost warm. The sisters at times sat and watched her progress, at others, walked up and down. They conversed before her as unconcernedly as though she had been one of the branches of the oak-tree, and their conversation was all about Lord Chandon. Hyacinth could not hear all they said, but it was evident that Veronica Dartelle was in the highest spirit, and felt sure of her conquest.

Tired of walking, they sat down at last close to Hyacinth, and Miss Dartelle, turning to her sister, said:

"You have no idea how he has altered since he has been here; he was so dull, so reserved, so gloomy at first—now he talks quite freely to me."

"He does not seem to say anything to the purpose," sneered Mildred.

"But he will in time, you will see, Milly. If he could only forget that horrid girl!"

"What 'horrid girl?'" asked Mildred, with some curiosity.

"The girl he used to like—the one who did something or other discreditable. Aubrey told mamma she was a heroine, and one of the truest and noblest girls that ever lived. When Lord Chandon spoke of her to Aubrey, the tears were in his eyes. The girl gave some evidence at a trial, it seems, which saved somebody's life, but lost her home, her friends, and her lover; and has never been seen since."

"She must have been a great simpleton," said Mildred, contemptuously.

"What would you have done in her place?" asked Veronica.

"I should have let the man die," replied her sister. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature. I would not have lost my home, friends, character, lover, and, above all, the chance of being Lady Chandon of Chandon Court, to save the life of any man;" and Mildred Dartelle laughed at the notion of such heroism.

"This girl did. Aubrey says that when Lord Chandon speaks of her it is as though she had done something no other woman could do. All the men are the same. Major Elton said he would give his right hand to see her. What nonsense!"

"Then does Lord Chandon care for her still?" asked Mildred.

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"Not as a lover, I should imagine. He affects the greatest admiration for her, and talks of her incessantly; but I should not think he would ever marry a girl who had compromised herself—besides, he cannot find her. She disappeared after the trial, and the general impression seems to be that she is dead. I will teach him to forget her. You shall come to Chandon Court when I am mistress there, and perhaps we may find a rich husband for you."

"Many thanks," returned Mildred; "perhaps I may find one before you do. Who knows? If Lord Chandon has been so much in love, I do not see how you can hope that he will ever care for you."

"We shall see. Time works wonders."

And then Veronica stood up and looked over the governess's shoulders. "This is beautifully done," she said; "but you have not done much—and how your fingers tremble! How pale you are too! Surely you are not ill again, Miss Holte?" she added, impatiently.

"I am quite well," answered Hyacinth, coldly; and then with an iron will she put back the surging thoughts and memories that were gradually overcoming her. "I will think when I am alone," she said to herself—"now I must work." And work she did—so well that in a short time the sketch was almost completed. Presently Veronica came up to her again, and took the pencil from her hands.

"I must do a little," she said; and she finished some of the shading, and then signed her initials in the corner—"V. D."—and laughed as she did so.

"If Lord Chandon praises the sketch, Miss Holte," she said, "I will repeat his compliments to you. He cannot help being pleased with it, it is so beautifully done. You are a true artist."

"I am glad that you are pleased with it," Hyacinth replied.

And then she began to wonder. She had often been out sketching with Adrian, and he had given her many valuable hints. Would he recognize her pencil? Would it be possible? And then she laughed to herself, and said it was only an idle fear—only her nervous imagination that troubled her.

If what they said was true—and they had no motive for speaking falsely—Adrian did not hate her—he did not even despise her. He had called her true and brave; he had spoken of her with admiration and with tears in his eyes. Ah, thank Heaven for that! Her heart had almost withered believing in his contempt. She knew his estimation of women to be so high that she had not believed it possible he could do anything but hate her. Yet he did not hate her. Tears such as she had not shed since her troubles fell like rain from her eyes—tears that cooled the cruel fever, that were like healing drops. It seemed as though one-half her sorrow had vanished—Adrian did not hate her.

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Life would be a thousand times easier now. She felt that no greater happiness could have been bestowed upon her than to know that he thought well of her. Of course, as Miss Dartelle said, he could never marry her—she had compromised herself. The old sweet tie between them could never be renewed. Less than ever now could she bear the thought of meeting him; but the sharpest sting of her pain was gone—he did not hate her.

She was still dead to him, but how much lighter the load was to her. His hatred and contempt had weighed her to the very earth—had bowed her beautiful head in unutterable shame. That was all gone now; he knew the worst there was to know of her, and yet he had called her brave and true. He had mourned for her, he liked to talk about her, and they all believed her dead.

"So I am, my darling," she sobbed; "I would not make myself known for all the world. In time you will forget me and learn to be happy with some one else. I would not be so selfish as to let you know that I am living. He will love me dead—he will forget all my errors, and remember only that I cared for him so much more than any one can care. I little thought, a few weeks since, that so much happiness was in store for me. I have looked upon his face again; and I know that he speaks kindly of me. I shall never see him more, but my life will be brighter."

The rest of that day passed like a tranquil dream; a deep sweet calm had fallen over her, the hot flush dried from her face, her eyes lost their unnatural brilliancy. Little Clara, looking at her governess, said:

"How beautiful you are, Miss Holte! You look as though you had been talking to angels."

"So I have," she replied; "the angels of comfort and peace."

That night Hyacinth slept, and when she stood before her glass the next morning so much of her beauty had been restored to her that she blushed as she looked at herself. On this eventful morning Clara was not well.

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"Let us go down to the shore," she begged; "I cannot learn any lesson or do anything until we have been there."

The young governess complied with the child's wish. It was not nine o'clock when they left the house.

"The sea is rough this morning," said Clara. "Do you hear how hollow the sound of the waves is? I like high waves—they are all foam."

They hurried down to the shore. The waves ran high; they broke on the sands in great sheets of foam; they seemed to be contesting with each other which should be highest and which should be swiftest.

"I am sure they are playing, Miss Holte," cried the child, clapping her hands for joy. "Let us sit down and watch them."

"I am afraid it is too cold for you to sit down; I must wrap you in my shawl and hold you in my arms, Clara."

So they sat, the child crying out with delight when one wave higher than the others broke at their feet. The fresh salt breeze brought a lovely color into Hyacinth's face, and there were peace and serenity in the depths of her beautiful eyes. Governess and pupil were suddenly startled by seeing a gentleman hastening to them across the sands. The child sprung from the gentle arms that encircled her.

"It is my brother," she cried, "my brother Aubrey!"

The gentleman caught the little figure in his arms.

"I thought it was a mermaid, Clara—upon my word I did. What are you doing here?"

"We came to watch the waves—Miss Holte and I both love the waves."

Sir Aubrey looked round, and with some difficulty repressed a cry of astonishment as his eyes fell upon Hyacinth's lovely face. He raised his hat and turned to his little sister. "You must introduce me, Clara," he said. The child smiled.

"I do not know how to introduce people," she returned, with a happy little laugh. "Miss Holte, this is my big brother, Aubrey—Aubrey, this is Miss Holte, and I love her with all my heart."

They both laughed at the quaint introduction.

"This is charming, Clara. Now, may I stay for a few minutes and watch the waves with you?"

"You must ask Miss Holte," said the child.

"Miss Holte, will you give me the required permission?" he inquired.

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"You must ask Lady Dartelle, Sir Aubrey," she replied, "we are supposed to take our walks by ourselves."

The blush and the smile made her so attractive that without another word Sir Aubrey sat down by her side. He was careful to keep Clara in his arms lest Miss Holte should take her by the hand and retire. "How is it, Miss Holte," he said, "that I have not had the pleasure of seeing you before?"

"I do not know," she replied, "unless it is because my duties have never brought me into the part of the house where you, Sir Aubrey, happened to be."

"I knew Clara had a governess but I did not know—" that she was young and beautiful, he was about to add; but one look at the lovely face checked the words on his lips. "I did not know anything more," he said. "Are you in the habit of coming to the shore every morning?"

"Yes," said Clara, "we love the waves."

"I wish I were a wave," said Sir Aubrey, laughingly.

The child looked up at him with great solemn eyes. "Why, brother?" she asked.

"Because then you would love me."

"I love you now," said Clara, clasping her arms around his neck and kissing his face.

"You are a dear, loving little child," he said, and his voice was so sincere that Miss Holte forgot her shyness and looked at him.

He was a tall, stately gentleman; not handsome, but with a face of decision and truth. He had frank, clear eyes, a good mouth, with kindly lines about it, a quantity of clustering hair, and a brown beard. It was a true, good face, and the young governess liked him at once. Nothing in his appearance, however, caused her to take such a deep interest in him, but solely the fact that he was Adrian's friend.

Perhaps even that very morning he had been conversing with Adrian—had, perhaps touched his hand. She knew for certain that Adrian had spoken to him of her. Her beautiful eyes lingered on his face as though she would fain read all his thoughts. On his part, Sir Aubrey Dartelle was charmed with the young governess. He said to himself that he had never seen any one half so fair, half so lovely; and he vowed to himself that it should not be his fault if he did not meet her again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

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Sir Aubrey Dartelle did not forget that interview; the beautiful face of the young governess haunted him. He went to the sea-shore in the hope of meeting her, but she was prudent and did not go thither. She knew Lady Dartelle's wish that she should not meet any of her visitors—above all, her son. Indeed, when the young girl thought of all that might arise from even that interview, she became frightened.

Those words of Veronica's were always present to her—"he cannot marry her because she has compromised herself." She would not have Adrian see her in this, her fallen and altered state, for the whole world. More than ever she wished to hide herself under the mantle of obscurity. He believed her dead; and, in her noble, self-sacrificing love, she said it was better it should be so. Suppose that Sir Aubrey should say something to Lord Chandon about her, and he should ask to see her? She must be prudent, and not let Sir Aubrey see her again. So the baronet walked disconsolately along the shore; but the lovely face he had seen there once was not to be met again. He determined that he would see her. She evidently loved Clara, and Clara loved her. It was plain, too, that they spent all their time together. Consequently, wherever Clara went, she would go. He would propose to take the child over to Broughton Park, under the pretext of showing her the beautiful swans there. Most certainly if the child went, the governess would go.

He was absorbed in his plan. Walking one morning with Lord Chandon, he was so long silent that his companion looked into his face with a smile.

"What are you thinking about, Aubrey?" he asked. "I have never seen you so meditative before."

The baronet laughed in his gay, careless fashion.

"I have never had the same cause," he said. "I have seen a face that haunts me, and I cannot forget it."

One of the peculiarities of Lord Chandon was that he never laughed after the fashion of many men, and never jested about *affaires du cœur*. There was no answering smile on his face, and he said kindly: "There is no cure for that; I know what it is to be haunted through long days and longer nights by one fair face."

"My mother has such a lovely governess," said Sir Aubrey confidently. "I have never seen a face so beautiful. It seems to me that they keep her a close prisoner, and I am quite determined to see her again."

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"Of what use will that be?" inquired Lord Chandon. "Her face haunts you now, you say; the chances are that if you see her again it will trouble you still more. You cannot marry her; why fall in love with her?"

"I have not fallen in love with her yet," said Sir Aubrey; "but I shall if I see much more of her. As for marrying her, I do not see why I should not. She is fair, graceful, and lovely."

"Still, perhaps, she is not the kind of lady you should marry. Let the little child's governess remain in peace, Aubrey. Straight ways are the best ways."

"You are a good fellow," returned the young baronet, easily touched by good advice. "I should like to see you happier, Adrian."

"I shall live my life," said Lord Chandon—and his voice was full of pathos—"do my duty, and die like a Christian, I hope; but my earthly happiness died when I lost my love."

"That was a sad affair," remarked Sir Aubrey.

"Yes; we will not discuss it. I only mention it to warn you as to admitting the love of any woman into your heart, for you can never drive it away again."

That day, after the gentlemen had entered the drawing-room, Sir Aubrey went up to Lady Dartelle. She was both proud and fond of her handsome son, who as a rule could do pretty much as he liked with her.

"Mother," he said, "why does not little Clara come down sometimes?"

"She can come, my dear Aubrey, whenever you wish," was the smiling reply.

"And her governess—what has she done that she is never asked to play and sing?"

At the mention of the word "governess" Lady Dartelle became suspicious. "He has seen her," she thought, "and has found out how pretty she is."

"One of our arrangements," she said aloud, "was that Clara's governess was not to be asked into the drawing-room when we had visitors."

"Why not?" inquired the baronet, carelessly.

"My dear boy, it would not be prudent; and it would displease your sisters very much, and perhaps interfere with their plans and wishes."

"Being a very pretty—nay, a most lovely girl, she is to be punished for her beauty, then, by being shut out of all society?"

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"How do you know she is beautiful?" asked Lady Dartelle. "Do not speak too loudly, my dear; your sisters may hear you."

"I saw her the other morning on the shore, and I tell you honestly, mother, I think her the most beautiful girl I have ever seen; and she is as good as she is beautiful."

"How do you know that?" asked Lady Dartelle a little anxiously.

"Because she told me quite frankly that you did not wish her to be in the way of visitors, and because she has kept out of my way ever since."

"She is a prudent girl," said Lady Dartelle. "Aubrey, my dear, I know how weak young men are in the matter of beauty. Do not try to get up a flirtation with her. Your sisters do not like her very much; and if there should be anything of what I have mentioned, I shall be obliged to send her away at once. Your own good sense will tell you that."

"My sisters are—what are they?" returned Sir Aubrey, indignantly; "all women are jealous of each other, I suppose."

"Aubrey," said Lady Dartelle, thinking it advisable to change the subject of conversation, "tell me whether you think either Veronica or Mildred has any chance of succeeding with Lord Chandon?"

"Not the least in the world, I should say," he replied, "I fancied when he came down that he would take a little consolation; now I know there is not the least chance."

"Why not?" inquired his mother.

"Because of his love for that brave girl, Miss Vaughan, he will never care for any one else while he lives."

Lady Dartelle's face fell considerably.

"I thought he fancied her dead," she observed.

"So he does; and so she must be; or, with all the search that has been made for her, she would

have been found."

"But, Aubrey, if she were living, and he did find her, do you really think that he would marry her?"

"Indeed he would, mother. Were she alive he would marry her to-morrow, if he could."

"After that terrible *exposé*?" cried Lady Dartelle.

"There was nothing terrible in it," he opposed. "The worst thing the girl did was to half-elope with one of the best *partis* in England. If she had completed the elopement, every one would have admired her, and she would have been received at once amongst the spotless band of English matrons. The very truth and sincerity with which the girl told her story ennobled her in the eyes of every sensible person."

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"Well," said Lady Dartelle, with a sigh, "if you really think, my dear, that there is no chance of his liking either of the girls, I should not ask him to prolong his visit." Lady Dartelle hardly liked the hearty laughter with which her son received her words.

"I will remember, mother," he said. "Will it console you to know that Sir Richard told me yesterday that he never saw such a perfectly-shaped hand as Mildred's?"

"Did he? Mildred likes him, I think. It would be such a comfort to me, Aubrey, if one or the other were married."

"While there's life there's hope. Here comes Major Elton to remind me of my engagement to play a billiard match. Good-night, mother."

But after a few days the good-natured baronet returned to the charge, and begged hard that Clara might be allowed to go to Broughton Park to see the swans. He thought, as a matter of course, that the governess would go with her, but, to make sure, he added: "Be good-natured for once, mother, and let the governess go. I promise neither to speak to her nor to look at her."

But the next morning when the carriage came round, and little Clara, flushed with excitement, took her seat by Lady Dartelle's side, Sir Aubrey looked in vain for the lovely face and graceful figure. He went to the side of the carriage.

"Mother," he said in a low voice, "where is Miss—I do not even know her name—the governess?"

"My dear Aubrey," replied Lady Dartelle, "the governess is fortunately a very sensible young woman, and when I mentioned the matter to her, she positively and resolutely declined to come. I quite approve of her resolution. I have no doubt that she will greatly enjoy a day to herself."

They little dreamed what this day was to bring forth. They were to lunch and dine at Broughton Park, and then drive home in the evening. Veronica was in the highest spirits, for Lord Chandon, declining to ride, had taken his seat in the carriage.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

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"A day to myself," said the young governess, as she heard the carriage drive away. "I have not been alone for so long, and I have so much to think of."

A great silence had fallen over the house; there was no sound of laughing voices, no busy tread of feet, no murmur of conversation; the silence seemed strange after the late gayety and noise. At first a great temptation came over her to roam through the rooms and seek out the traces of Adrian's presence. She might see the books he had been reading, the papers he had touched. She remembered how precious at Bergheim everything seemed to her that he had ever used. It was a great temptation, but she resisted it. She would not disturb the calm that had fallen on her.

"It is of no use," she said to herself, "to open my old wounds. I will go out, and then, if the temptation comes to me again, I cannot yield to it. I will go down to the shore and read; there is no one to interrupt me to-day."

She found a volume that pleased her; and then, book in hand, she walked through the woods and down to the shore, where the restless waves were chanting their grand old anthem. It was only the middle of April, but the day was warm and bright; the sun shone on the blue heaving sea. She sat down under the shelter of a huge boulder and opened her book, but the beautiful eyes soon wandered from the printed pages; a fairer and far more wonderful volume lay open before her. The place where she sat was so retired and solitary that it seemed as though she were alone in the world. She gave herself up entirely to thought. Past and present were all mingled in one long dream.

It was too delightful to be alone, the luxury was so great. She gave a sigh of unutterable relief. Presently the hat she wore incommoded her; she took it off and laid it on the sands. In removing it she disarranged the brown plaits which Mrs. Chalmers had thought such a success. With impatient fingers she removed them, and the graceful head appeared in all its beauty of clustering hair—golden waves of indescribable loveliness. She laughed as the wind played among them.

"I am my own self again," she said; "and I may be myself for a few minutes without any one seeing me."

The wind that stirred the clustering hair had brightened her eyes and brought the most exquisite bloom to her face. [Pg 147]

She began to think of Adrian, and forgot all about the brown plaits; she was living over and over again those happy days at Bergheim. She was recalling his looks and words, every one of which was impressed on her heart. She had forgotten even where she was; the song of the sea had lulled her into a half-waking dream; she forgot that she was sitting there—forgot the whole world—all save Adrian—when she was suddenly startled by a shadow falling between herself and the sunshine, while a voice, half frightened, half wondering, cried out, in tones she never forgot:

"Miss Vaughan!"

With a low cry she rose from her seat and stood with blanched lips; a great dark mist came before her eyes; for one terrible moment it seemed to her that the waters and the sky had met. Then she steadied herself and looked into the face of the man who had uttered her name.

She recognized him; it was Gustave, the favorite valet and confidential servant of Lord Chandon. She clasped her hands with a low moan, while he cried again, in a wondering, frightened voice—"Miss Vaughan!" He looked at her, a strange fear dilating his eyes.

"I am Hyacinth Vaughan," she said, in a low hoarse voice.

The next moment he had taken off his hat, and stood bareheaded before her. "Miss Vaughan," he stammered, "we—we thought you dead."

"So I am," she cried passionately—"I am dead in life! You must not betray me, Gustave. For Heaven's sake, promise not to tell that you have seen me!"

The man looked anxious and agitated.

"I cannot, miss," he replied—"I dare not keep such a secret from my lord."

She stepped back with a moaning cry and white lips. She wrung her hands like one who has no hope, no help.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "Oh, Heaven take pity upon me, and tell me what to do!"

"If you knew, miss," said the man, "what my lord has suffered you would not ask me to keep such a secret from him. I do not think he has ever smiled since you went away. He is worn to a shadow—he has spent a fortune in trying to find you. I know that night and day he knows no peace, no hope, no comfort, no happiness, because he has lost you. I love my lord—I would lay down my life to serve him." [Pg 148]

"You do not know all," she cried.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he returned, sturdily. "I do know all; and I know that my lord would give all he has on earth to find you—he would give the last drop of blood in his heart, the last shilling in his purse. How could I be a faithful servant to him, and see him worn, wretched, and miserable under my very eyes, while I kept from him that which would make him happy?"

"You are wrong," she said, with dignity. "It would not add to your master's happiness to know that I am living; rather the contrary. Believing me dead, he will in time recover his spirits; he will forget me and marry some one who will be far better suited to him than I could ever be. Oh, believe me—believe I know best! You will only add to his distress, not relieve it."

But the man shook his head doubtfully.

"You are mistaken, Miss Vaughan," he said. "If you had seen my master's distress, you would know that life is no life to him without you."

A sudden passion of despair seemed to seize her.

"I have asked you not to betray me," she said. "Now I warn you that if you do, I will never forgive you; and I tell you that you will cause even greater misery than now exists. I am dead to Lord Chandon and to all my past life. I tell you plainly that if you say one word to your master, I will go away to the uttermost ends of the earth, where no one shall recognize me. Be persuaded—do not—as you are a man yourself—do not drive a helpless, suffering woman to despair. My fate is hard enough—do not render it any harder. I have enough to bear—do not add to my burden."

"Upon my word, Miss Vaughan," returned the man irresolutely, "I do not know what to do."

"You can think the matter over," she said. "Meanwhile, Gustave, grant me one favor—promise me that you will not tell Lord Chandon without first warning me."

"I will promise that," he agreed.

"Thanks," said Hyacinth, gratefully, to whom even this concession was a great deal. "I shall not, perhaps, be able to see you again, Gustave; but you can write to me and tell me what you have decided on doing."

"I will, Miss Vaughan," he assented.

"And pray be careful that my name does not pass your lips. I am known as Miss Holte here." [Pg 149]

With a low bow the man walked away; and they were both unconscious that the angry eyes of a jealous woman had been upon them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Kate Mansfield, Miss Dartelle's maid, had taken, as she expressed it, "a great fancy" to Gustave. She was a pretty, quick, bright-eyed girl, not at all accustomed to giving her smiles in vain. Gustave—who had been with Lord Chandon for many years—was handsome too in his way. He had an intelligent face, eyes that were bright and full of expression, and a somewhat mocking smile, which added, in Kate's mind, considerable to his charms. He had certainly appeared very attentive to her; and up to the present Kate had felt pretty sure of her conquest. She heard Gustave say, as his master was out for the day, he should have a long ramble on the seashore; and the pretty maid, having put on her most becoming bonnet, made some pretext for going to the shore at the same time. She quite expected to meet him, "And then," as she said to herself, with a smile, "the seaside is a romantic place. And who knows what may happen?"

But when Kate had reached the shore, and her bright eyes had wandered over the sands she saw no Gustave. "He has altered his mind," she thought, "and has gone elsewhere."

She walked on, somewhat disappointed, but feeling sure that she should meet him before she returned home. Presently her attention was attracted by the sound of a man's voice, and, looking round a boulder, she saw Gustave in deep conversation with the governess, Miss Holte.

Kate was already jealous of Miss Holte—jealous of her beauty and of the favor with which Lady Dartelle regarded her.

"I do hate governesses!" Kate was wont to observe to her friends in the kitchen. "I can do with the airs and graces of real ladies—they seem natural—but I cannot endure governesses; they always seem to me neither the one thing nor the other."

Then a sharp battle of words would ensue with Mary King, who was devoted to the young governess. [Pg 150]

"You may say what you like, Kate, but I tell you Miss Holte is a lady. I know one when I see one."

And now the jealous eyes of Kate Mansfield dwelt with fierce anger on Hyacinth.

"Call her a lady!" she said to herself sneeringly. "Ladies do not talk to servants in that fashion. Why, she clasps hands as though she were begging and praying him about something! I will say nothing now, but I will tell Miss Dartelle; she will see about it." And Kate went home in what she called a "temper."

Gustave walked away full of thought. He would certainly act honorably toward Miss Vaughan—would give her fair warning before he said anything to Lord Chandon. Perhaps, after all, she knew best. It might be better that his master should know nothing of her being there; it was just possible that there were circumstances in the case of which he knew nothing, and there was some rumor in the servant's hall about his master and Miss Dartelle. Doubtless it would be wise to accede to Miss Vaughan's request and say nothing.

But during the remainder of that day Gustave was so silent, so preoccupied, that his fellow-servants were puzzled to discover the reason. He did not even take notice of Kate's anger. He spoke to her, and did not observe that she was disinclined to answer; nor did he seem to understand her numerous allusions to "underhand people" and "cunning ways."

"I almost think," said Gustave to himself, "that I will send Miss Vaughan three lines to say that I have decided not to mention anything about her; she looked so imploringly at me, I had better not interfere."

Of all the blows that could have fallen on the hapless girl, she least expected this. She had feared to meet Lord Chandon, and had most carefully kept out of his way; she had avoided Sir Aubrey lest any chance word of his should awaken Adrian's curiosity. She had taken every possible precaution, but she had never given one thought to Gustave. She remembered now having heard Lady Vaughan say how faithful he was, and how highly Adrian valued his services—how Gustave had never had any other master, and how he spared no pains to please him.

And now suddenly he had become the chief person in her world. Her fate—nay, her life—lay in his hands—honest hands they were, she knew, and could rely implicitly on his word. [Pg 151]

He would give her fair warning. "And when I get the warning," she said to herself, "I shall go far away from England. No place is safe here. For I would not drag him down—my noble, princely Adrian, who has searched for me, sorrowed for me, and who loves me still. I would not let him link his noble life with mine; the name that he bears must not be sullied by me. It shall not be said of the noblest of his race that he married a girl who had compromised herself. People shall not point to his wife and say, 'She was the girl who was talked about in the murder case.' Ah, no, my darling, I will save you from yourself—I will save you from the degradation of marrying me!"

She spent the remainder of the day—her holiday—in forming plans for going abroad. It was not safe for her to remain in England; at some time or other she must be inevitably discovered. It would be far better to go abroad—to leave England and go to some distant land—where no one would know her. She had one friend who could help her in her new decision. Her heart turned gratefully to Dr. Chalmers. Heaven bless him—he would not fail her.

She must tell him that she was not happy—that a great danger threatened her; and she must ask him to help her to procure some situation abroad. Nor would she delay—she would write that very day, and ask him to begin to make inquiries at once. Soon all danger would be over, and she would be in peace. The long day passed all too quickly, she was so busy with her plans. It was

late in the evening when she heard the carriage return, and soon afterward she knew that Adrian was once more under the same roof.

Veronica Dartelle was not in the most sunny of tempers. She had spent a long day with Lord Chandon, yet during the whole of it he had not said a word that gave her the least hope of his ultimately caring for her, while she liked him better and better every day. She wondered if that "tiresome girl" was really the cause of his indifference, or if there was any one else he liked better.

"Perhaps," she thought to herself, "I have not beauty enough to please him. I hear that this girl he loved was very lovely."

An aversion to all beautiful girls and fair women entered her mind and remained there. She was tired—and that did not make her more amiable; so, when Kate Mansfield came in with her story, Veronica was in the worst possible mood to hear it. [Pg 152]

"What are you saying, Kate?" she cried, angrily. "It cannot be possible—Miss Holte would never go to meet a servant. You must be mistaken."

"I am not, indeed, Miss Dartelle. I thought it my duty to mention it to you. They were talking for more than half an hour, and Miss Holte had her hands clasped, as though she were begging and praying him about something."

"Nonsense," said Miss Dartelle—"you must be mistaken. What can Miss Holte know of Lord Chandon's servant?"

Even as she said the words a sudden idea rushed through her mind. "What if the servant was taking some message from his master?"

"I will make inquiries," she said aloud. "I will go to Miss Holte."

But further testimony was not needed, for, as Miss Dartelle crossed the upper corridor, she saw Hyacinth standing by the window. To her came Gustave, who bowed silently, placed a note in her hand, and then withdrew.

"I have had absolute proof now," she said. "This shall end at once."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Lady Dartelle sat alone in her own room. The evening had suddenly grown cold and chilly; heavy showers of rain were beating against the windows; the fine warm day had ended in something like a tempest. Then there came a lull. They could hear the beating of the waves on the shore, while from the woods came the sobbing and wailing of the wind; the night came on in intense darkness and cold. Lady Dartelle had ordered a fire in her room, and told the maid to bring her a cup of warm tea there, for her ladyship was tired with the long day in the fresh air.

She was reclining comfortably, and at her ease, with a new novel in her hand, when the door suddenly opened, and Veronica entered, her face flushed with anger. Lady Dartelle's heart sunk at the sight; there was nothing she dreaded more than an ebullition of temper from her daughters.

"Mamma," cried the young lady, "be good enough to attend to me. You laughed at my advice before; now, perhaps, when the mischief is done, you will give more heed." [Pg 153]

Lady Dartelle laid down her book with a profound sigh of resignation.

"What is the matter, Veronica?" she asked calmly.

"The matter is, mamma, that everything has turned out as I foresaw it would. Your governess has contrived to get up some kind of acquaintance with Lord Chandon." Veronica's face broke down with anger and emotion.

"I feel sure you are mistaken, Veronica. I have reason to think very highly of Miss Holte's prudence. I have not mentioned it before, but I have really been delighted with her. She might have caused your brother to make a fool of himself; but she refrained, and would have nothing to say to him." Veronica laughed contemptuously.

"Why trouble herself about a baronet, when she can flirt with a lord? I tell you, mamma, that girl is a mask of deceit—all the worse, doubly worse, because she tries to blind you by her seeming simplicity."

"What has she done?" asked Lady Dartelle, gravely.

"Yesterday she declined to go with us; but the reason was not, as you imagine, self-denial. She remained at home purposely to meet Gustave, Lord Chandon's valet; and my maid saw her talking to him for more than an hour on the sands. Now, mamma, you and I know what such a proceeding means. Of course Miss Holte's refinement and education forbid the notion that she went out to meet a servant for his own sake. It was simply to receive a message from, or arrange some plan about, his master."

"Servants' gossip, my dear," decided Lady Dartelle.

"Nothing of the kind, mamma. Perhaps you will believe me when I say that as I was passing the

upper corridor—on my way, in fact, to see Miss Holte—I saw Gustave go up to her; she was standing at the window. He put a note into her hand and went away, after making her a low bow."

"You really witnessed that, Veronica, yourself?"

"I did, indeed, mamma; and I tell you that, with all her seeming meekness, that girl is carrying on an underhand correspondence with Lord Chandon. In justice to myself and my sister, I demand that she be sent from the house—I demand it as a right!" she added passionately.

"I will inquire into it at once," said Lady Dartelle; "if she be guilty, she shall go. I will send for her."

While a servant was sent to summon Miss Holte to her ladyship's presence, Lady Dartelle looked very anxious. [Pg 154]

"This is a serious charge, Veronica. Aubrey has taught us to look upon Lord Chandon as a man of such unblemished honor that I can hardly believe he would lower himself to carry on an intrigue in any house where he was visiting, least of all with a governess."

"It is quite possible," said Veronica, "that Miss Holte may have known him before he came here; there is evidently something of the adventuress about her."

But when, a few minutes afterward, Miss Holte entered the room, there was something in the pure lovely face that belied such words.

"Miss Holte," said Lady Dartelle, "I have sent for you on a very painful matter. I need hardly say that during your residence with me I have learned to trust you; but I have heard that which makes me fear my trust may have been misplaced. Is it true that yesterday you met and talked for some time with the servant of Lord Chandon?"

Veronica noted with malicious triumph how the sweet face grew white and a great fear darkened the violet eyes.

Hyacinth opened her lips to speak, but the sound died away upon them.

"Is it true?" asked Lady Dartelle.

"It was quite accidental," she murmured, and she trembled so violently that she was obliged to hold the table for support.

"Governesses do not meet men-servants and talk to them by the hour accidentally," said Veronica.

"You do not deny it, then, Miss Holte?"

"I do not," she replied, faintly. She was thinking to herself, "I shall have time to run away before the blow falls;" and that thought alone sustained her.

"I am sorry for it," continued Lady Dartelle. "May I ask also if that servant brought a note for you this evening, and gave it in your hand?"

"I refuse to answer," she replied, with quiet dignity.

"No answer is needed," said Veronica; "I saw you receive the note."

A deeper pallor came over the fair face—a hunted look came into the sad eyes. The girl clasped her hands nervously.

"I am sorry that this should have happened," said Lady Dartelle. "Knowing you to be a person of refinement and education, I cannot believe you to be guilty of an intrigue with a servant—that I am sure is not the case. I can only imagine that you have some underhand correspondence with a gentleman whom I have hitherto highly respected—with Lord Chandon." [Pg 155]

"I have not. Oh, believe me, Lady Dartelle, indeed I have not! He has never seen me—at least, I mean—O Heaven help me!"

"You see," said Veronica to Lady Dartelle, "that confusion means guilt." Miss Dartelle turned to the trembling, pallid girl.

"Do you mean to tell us," she asked, "that you do not know Lord Chandon?"

"I—I mean," murmured the white lips, and then Hyacinth buried her face in her hands and said no more.

"I think, mamma," said Miss Dartelle, "that you have proof sufficient."

"I am very sorry that you have forgotten yourself, Miss Holte," said her ladyship, gravely. "I shall consider it my duty to speak to his lordship in the morning; and you must prepare to leave Hulme Abbey at once."

The girl raised her white face with a look of despair which Lady Dartelle never forgot. "May I ask your ladyship," she said, faintly, "not to mention my name to—to the gentleman, and to let me go away in the morning?"

This was the most unfortunate question that, for her own sake, she could have asked—it only confirmed Lady Dartelle's opinion of her guilt and aroused her curiosity.

"I shall most certainly speak to Lord Chandon; it is only due to him that he should have the opportunity of freeing himself from what is really a most disgraceful charge."

Hyacinth wrung her hands with a gesture of despair, which was not lost upon the two ladies.

"You can retire to your room," said Lady Dartelle, coolly; "we will arrange to-morrow about the time of your going."

As the unhappy girl closed the door, Veronica turned to her mother with an air of triumph.

"That girl is an adventuress—there is something wrong about her. You will act very wisely to let her go." At a violent blast of the tempest without Veronica paused in her remarks about Miss Holte, and exclaimed, "What a terrible storm, mamma! Do you hear the rain?"

"Yes," replied Lady Dartelle; "they who are safe and warm at home may thank Heaven for it."

The young governess went to her room and stood there a picture of despair. What was she to do? Gustave, in the little note that he had brought, told her he had decided to obey her and say nothing; so that she had begun to feel a sense of security again. The present discovery was more dreadful than anything she had ever imagined, more terrible than anything else that could have happened. What would Adrian say or think? Oh, she must go—go before this crowning shame and disgrace came! In the morning Lord Chandon would be asked about her, and would, of course, deny all knowledge of her. She would probably be forced to see him then—dear Heaven, what misery!

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"I would rather," she said to herself, "die ten thousand deaths. I have wronged you enough, my love—I will wrong you no more."

Perhaps her brain was in some degree weakened by the continued shocks and by bitter suffering, but there came to her in that hour, the crisis of her life, no idea but of flight—anyhow, anywhere—flight where those cruel words could not follow her—flight were it even into the cold arms of death.

She would go to Dr. Chalmers and ask him at once to take her abroad, to guide her to some place where those who persecuted her could never reach her more. She did not stop to think; every footstep made her tremble, every sound threw her into a paroxysm of fear. What if they should be coming to confront her now with Lord Chandon?

"I cannot see him," she said; "death rather than that!"

At last she could bear the suspense no longer. What mattered the rain, the wind, the blinding tempest to her? Out of the house she would be safe; in the house danger greater than death threatened her—danger she could not, would not, dared not face.

She did not stop to think; she did not even go to the bedside of the little one she loved so dearly to kiss her for the last time; a wild, half-mad frenzy had seized upon her.

She must go, for her persecutors were close upon her, were hunting her down. She must go, or her doom was sealed. She put on her cloak and hat, and went down the staircase and out by one of the side doors, unseen, unnoticed. The wind almost blinded her, the rain beat fast and heavy upon her; but the darkness, the storm, the leaden sky, the wailing wind, seemed preferable to what lay before her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

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It appeared to Adrian, Lord Chandon, on the morning following, that there was some unusual confusion in the house. Lady Dartelle was late in coming down to breakfast. When breakfast was over, she asked to speak with Lord Chandon alone, and he followed her to the library.

"My lord," she began, "pray tell me, do you know anything of the whereabouts of this unfortunate girl? I had perhaps better explain to you that much scandal has been caused in my household by the fact that my governess met your valet on the sands, and was seen talking to him for more than an hour. One of my daughters also saw him give Miss Holte a note. Now, as we could not imagine her capable of any correspondence with a servant it was only natural to suppose that he was acting for his master. I sent for Miss Holte and spoke to her, and she evinced the utmost confusion, and terrible agitation. She did not deny that she was acquainted with you. I told her I should consider it my duty to speak to you; this morning we find she must have left the house last night. Had I not reason to seek an explanation, Lord Chandon?"

"You had, indeed," he replied, "but I can throw no light on the mystery. Here is Gustave; perhaps he can enlighten us."

"Gustave," asked Lord Chandon, "for whom have you been carrying notes to Lady Dartelle's governess?"

"For no one, my lord. I took her one note, but it was written by myself."

"Gustave," said Lord Chandon, sternly, "I command you to tell all you know of the lady."

"I promised not to betray her, my lord," and as he spoke he looked wistfully at his master. Adrian thought that he saw tears in his eyes.

"Gustave," he said, "you have always been faithful to me. Tell me, who is this lady?"

"Oh, my lord!" cried the man, in a strange voice, "can you not guess?" Lord Chandon was puzzled, and then his face changed, a ghastly pallor came over it.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, in a trembling voice, "that it is—it is Miss Vaughan?"

A look of wild excitement came over Adrian's face, as he turned to Lady Dartelle.

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"I believe," he said, "that the lady you call your governess is the one I have so long searched for—the lady who is betrothed to me—Miss Vaughan. Where is she?" he cried, "she must be looked for. Thank heaven, I have found some trace of her at last!"

"Where is Aubrey?" he asked, and in a few minutes the young baronet had heard the story. He could scarcely conceal his excitement and wonder. "I will find her," said Adrian to Sir Aubrey. "Will you go down to the seashore, Aubrey? And I will take Gustave with me through the woods. I will find her, living or dead."

They were half way through the woods, walking on in profound silence, when Gustave, looking through a cluster of trees, suddenly clutched his master's arm. "Look, my lord, there is something lying under that tree!"

It was Hyacinth's silent, prostrate form.

"She is dead!" cried Gustave.

But Lord Chandon pushed him away. With a cry of agony the man never forgot, he raised the silent figure in his arms. "My darling!" he cried, "Oh, heaven, do not let me lose her! Give me the brandy, Gustave, quickly," he said, "and run—run for your life. Tell Lady Dartelle that we have found Miss Vaughan, and ask her to send a carriage to the entrance to the woods, telegraph for a doctor, and have all ready as soon as possible."

Adrian would allow no other hands to touch her. He raised her, carried her to the carriage, and held her during the short drive. When they reached the house, and she had been carried to her room, he went to Lady Dartelle and took her hands in his. Tears shone in his eyes.

"Lady Dartelle," he said, "I would give my life for hers! Will you do your best to save her for me?"

"I will," she replied, "you may trust me."

Adrian did not leave the house, but Sir Aubrey Dartelle telegraphed Sir Arthur and Lady Vaughan the glad tidings that the lost one had been found. Dr. Ewald was astonished, when he went down stairs, to find himself caught in a most impulsive and excited manner by the hand.

"The truth, doctor," said Lord Chandon, "I must know the truth! Is there any danger?"

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"I think not. If she is kept quiet, and free from excitement for two days, I will predict a perfect recovery."

On the third day Lady Dartelle sought Lord Chandon. "Miss Vaughan is much better, and is sitting up," she said, with a quiet smile. "Would you like to go up and see her?"

Hyacinth rose when Adrian entered Lady Dartelle's sitting-room. She stretched out her hands to him with a little imploring cry, and the next moment he had folded her to his heart—he had covered her face with passionate kisses and tears. She trembled in his strong grasp.

"Adrian," she whispered, "do you quite forgive me?"

"My darling," he said, "I have nothing to forgive; it was, after all, but the shadow of a sin."

Never had the May sun shone more brightly. It was the twenty-second of the month, yet everyone declared it was more like the middle of June than of May.

Hyacinth and Adrian were to be married in the old parish church at Oakton. Long before the hour of celebration, crowds of people had assembled, all bearing flowers to throw beneath the bride's feet.

Sir Aubrey Dartelle—best man—with Lord Chandon, was already waiting at the altar, and to all appearances seemed inclined to envy his friend's good fortune.

The ceremony was performed, the marriage vows were repeated, and Adrian Lord Chandon and Hyacinth Vaughan were made husband and wife—never to be parted more until death.

Three years have passed since that bright wedding day. Looking on the radiant face of Lady Chandon, one could hardly believe that desolation and anguish had marked her for their own. There was no shadow now in those beautiful eyes, for the face was full of love and of happiness.

One morning Lady Chandon was in the nursery with Lady Vaughan, who had gone to look at the baby. They were admiring him, his golden curls, his dark eyes, the grace of his rounded limbs, when Lord Chandon suddenly appeared on the scene.

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"Hyacinth," he said, "will you come down stairs? There are visitors for you."

"Who is it, Adrian?" she asked.

"The visitors are Mr. and Mrs. Lady Claude Lennox."

She drew back with a start, and her face flushed hotly. "Claude," she repeated. "Oh, Adrian, I would rather not go."

"Go for my sake, darling, and because I ask it."

Her husband's wish was sufficient. She entered the room, and Claude advanced to meet her. "Lady Chandon," he said, "I am delighted to see you."

She was introduced to his wife, and Hyacinth speedily conceived a liking for her. Lady Geraldine was very fond of flowers, and during the course of conversation she asked Lord Chandon to show her his famous conservatories. They all four went together, but Claude, who was walking with Lady Chandon, purposely lingered near some beautiful heliotrope.

"Pardon me," he said, "Lady Chandon, I wish to ask you a great favor. You will like my wife, I think. Will you be her friend? Will you let us all be friends? We should be so happy."

She answered, "Yes." And to this day they are all on the most intimate and friendly terms.

After Claude and Lady Geraldine had driven away, Lord Chandon returned to the drawing-room, and saw his wife standing by the window, with a grave look on her beautiful face. He went to her.

"What are you thinking about, Hyacinth?" he asked.

"I am thinking, Adrian," she said, "that, remembering my great fault, I do not deserve to be half as happy as I am."

But he kissed the sweet lips, and said—

"Hush! That is passed and done with. After all, my darling, it was but the Shadow of a Sin."

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Bertha M. Clay is a pseudonym sometimes used by American publishers when reprinting books written by Charlotte M. Brame; this novel has been published at different times under both names.

Added Table of Contents.

Retained some inconsistent hyphenation from the original (e.g. dewdrops vs. dew-drops; fairylike vs. fairy-like).

Title page, added close quote after "Lady Damer's Secret."

Marriage Guide ad, changed "Gastation" to "Gestation" and "PUPLISHING" to "PUBLISHING."

Page 7, changed single to double quote before "You need not marry him..."

Page 13, changed "to night" to "to-night" and added missing quote after 'Yes; I will go.'

Page 15, changed comma to period after "queen allowed herself."

Page 16, changed "then" to "than" in "more toward magnificence than cheerfulness."

Page 36, changed "thick-notted" to "thick-knotted."

Page 58, added missing "s" to "Darcy's" at end of first line of Chapter XIII.

Page 69, changed "to sure" to "too sure."

Page 77, changed "persuaded" to "persuaded."

Page 79, added missing period after "life and death were in the balance."

Page 83, changed "seen hear" to "seen her."

Page 84, moved letter signature to its own line and added an opening quote for more consistent formatting.

Page 106, added missing quote before "take my word for it."

Page 119, added missing close quote after "dear old friends."

Page 132, changed "correet" to "correct."

Page 137, changed question mark to exclamation point after "If he could only forget that horrid girl!"

Page 153, added missing "an" to "more than an hour."

Page 158, changed "brady" to "brandy."

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