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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOT WITHOUT THORNS ***

Mrs Molesworth

"Not without Thorns"

Volume One—Chapter One.

Sweet Seventeen.

There a girl comes with brown locks curl'd,
My friend and we talk face to face;
Crying, "Oh, what a beautiful world!"
Crying, "Oh, what a happy place!"

The Bird.

La danse au piano est ou très-charmante ou très-ennuyeuse, selon le sort.

A foggy evening in early December. Fogs are quick to gather and slow to disperse in the heavily laden air surrounding an assemblage of tall chimneys; and the manufacturing town of Wareborough, low-lying and flat, seemed to have a special attraction for them. Unprepossessing at its best, Wareborough was peculiarly so at this season and in such weather; it would, indeed, have been difficult to choose a day on which it could have less favourably impressed a stranger than the one just drawing drearily to a close.

There was a good deal of confusion in the streets, for the fog greatly impeded the traffic.

"What a place! How can human beings be found willing to spend their lives here?" thought to himself, with a shudder at the bare idea, a young man seated in a rattling Wareborough fly, whose driver, notwithstanding constantly recurring risk of collision, was doing his best to keep his tired horse up to its usual speed. "Where in the world is the fellow taking me to?" was his next reflection. "It seems to me I have been hours in this wretched shandry-dan."

Just as he was about putting his head out of the window to shout inquiries or directions to the driver, the fly stopped. The gentleman jumped out, then stood still, bewildered.

"Where is the house?" he exclaimed. "Is this Barnwood Terrace? I see no houses at all."

"There's a gate, sir, just by where you're standing," replied the man. "You've some little way to walk up the path. Can't drive up to the door. There's three houses together, and Mr Dalrymple's is the middle one. I'll run up to the door and ring, sir."

He was preparing to descend, but the young man stopped him. "Never mind, stay where you are, I'll find my way. Come for me about eleven or half-past. You stand near our place, don't you? Yes. All right then."

He fumbled away for some time at what he discovered by feeling, to be an iron railing, before he succeeded in finding anything like a gate. He came upon it at last suddenly: it was open. The path fortunately was straight, and the light of a gas-lamp glimmering feebly through the fog showed him, in time to prevent his tumbling against it, a flight of five or six stone steps to be ascended before he could ring the front-door bell of Number 2, Barnwood Terrace. It showed him something more. Some one was there before him. On the top step stood a figure, waiting apparently for admission. It was a human being, but that was about all he could discern as he cautiously mounted the steps; then as he drew nearer, it gradually assumed to him through the exaggerating, distorting medium of the fog the dimensions of an unnaturally tall, curiously shrouded woman. It remained perfectly motionless, whether the face was turned towards him or not he could not tell. Now he was quite close to it, standing on the same step, yet it gave not the slightest sign of having perceived his approach. The young man began to think it rather odd—who could it be? A woman, apparently, standing there alone waiting—was she a beggar? No, even through the fog he could distinguish nothing crouching or cringing in the attitude, the figure stood erect and firm, the shrouding drapery seemed to fall in

rich and ample folds. The new-comer felt extremely puzzled. Then suddenly he resolved to end his perplexity.

"Have you rung?" he asked, courteously. The figure moved a little, but seemed to hesitate to answer. "Shall I ring?" he repeated, "or have you done so already?"

"I have rung, but perhaps not loudly enough."

"I think you had better ring again, for I have been waiting here some minutes," came the reply at last in low, clear, refined tones.

"A lady! How very strange for her to be standing here alone in the dark—what a queer place Wareborough must be," thought the young man; but he said nothing more, and almost before his vigorous pull at the bell could have taken effect, the door was thrown open, revealing a brightly lighted, crimson carpeted hall, and two or three servants in unexceptionable attire.

"Come, this looks more promising," was the reflection that glanced through the stranger's mind as he drew back to allow his companion to enter. The glare of light was almost blinding for a moment, but still as she passed him he managed to catch a glimpse of her face—a mere glimpse however. By what he saw of her features only, he would hardly have been able to recognise her. Still, hurried as it was, his glance satisfied him on one point—she was *very* young, and he felt all but certain, very pretty. But in a moment she had disappeared, how or where he could not tell; so quickly that but for the remembrance of her voice he could have imagined her altogether the offspring of his own fancy. He stood still for a moment or two, feeling somehow confused and bewildered, and very much inclined to rub his eyes or pinch himself to make sure he was awake. Then suddenly he was recalled to himself by hearing his own name sonorously announced, and in another moment he found himself ushered into a large, richly furnished drawing-room, all mirrors and gilding, damask and velvet pile, among a dozen or more well-dressed people of both sexes, one of whom, a lady comely and pleasant looking, advanced quickly to meet him.

"Captain Chancellor, I am so delighted to see you. So glad you have found your way to us already. Henry," turning to a stout good-humoured-looking man beside her, "Henry, this is my old—my long-ago young friend. Captain Chancellor, let me introduce my husband to you, Mr Dalrymple."

The old young friend responded with becoming graciousness to this cordial reception, though not feeling so thoroughly at his ease as was usual to him. He was conscious of having been expected, looked for, talked over probably by the company among whom he found himself, before he had made his appearance. And though thoroughly accustomed to please and be pleased, he was not a vain man, and this curious little sensation of conspicuousness was not altogether agreeable. By way of making him feel himself at home, his host proceeded to introduce him right and left to so many of the assembled guests, that the result was a feeling of increased bewilderment and utter confusion as to their identity. Still to all appearance he proved himself quite equal to the occasion, shook hands heartily with the men, looked amiably at the women and, being a remarkably handsome and perfectly well-bred man, succeeded even during the few minutes that elapsed before the dinner gong sounded in securing to himself the favourable prepossessions of nearly every one in the room.

He had reasons of his own for wishing to impress his entertainers agreeably; his efforts speedily met with their reward.

"I have a surprise for you," said Mrs Dalrymple when her Henry at length allowed the young man a little breathing time. "Guess who is here—ah yes, there she comes—she had just gone upstairs to fetch her fan when you came in. Roma dear, here is Captain Chancellor at last. I must manage to let you two sit next to each other at dinner, you will have so much home news to talk over. You have not met for some months, Roma tells me."

The young lady addressed came forward quietly, with a slight look of amusement on her face, to greet the new-comer.

"How funny it seems to find you here? Who would have thought of you turning up at Wareborough, Beauchamp?"

"Not half so funny as *your* being here, it strikes me," replied the gentleman. "Very lucky for me that it is so of course, but what you can find to amuse you here I cannot imagine." Their hostess had by this time turned away.

"She—Mrs Dalrymple—is my cousin, you know," said Miss Eyrecourt, in a lower tone, with a very slight inclination of her head in the direction of the lady referred to.

"I know that; but people are not obliged to visit their cousins if they bury themselves in such places. I daresay you are wondering at my not seeming more surprised to see you, are you not? The truth is, Gertrude mentioned it in a letter I got this morning, but what the reason was of your coming here she didn't say."

The announcement of dinner prevented the young lady replying. It fell to Captain Chancellor's lot to escort his hostess to the dining-room, but, thanks to her good offices, Miss Eyrecourt was placed at his right hand.

"You were asking the reason of my coming to Wareborough, were you not, Beauchamp?" she began, after calmly snubbing the first feeble effort of her legitimate companion of the dinner table—a Wareborough young gentleman—to enter into conversation. "I don't see why you should think it so extraordinary. I have been at my godmother's—up in the Arctic regions somewhere—in Cumberland, you know—for three weeks. Now I am on my way to Brighton for a fortnight. Gertrude is already there, you know, with the children, and we shall all go home together for Christmas. I don't suppose you ever learnt geography; but if you had, you would know that Wareborough is somewhere between the two points I name, which was lucky for me. Pearson objects to long journeys without a break."

Captain Chancellor smiled. "Then why drag her up to Cumberland in the middle of winter? I can't imagine any motive

strong enough to make you risk her displeasure."

"Can't you?" said Roma, languidly, leaning back in her chair. "Not even god-daughterly devotion? Seriously, Beauchamp, you know Lady Dervock has ever so many thousand pounds to leave to somebody, and I don't see why I should not be that happy person. There is nothing I wouldn't do to get some money—a good comfortable sum of course."

A slightly cynical expression came over Captain Chancellor's face, and there was a suspicion of a sneer in his voice as he replied—

"Really? I didn't know your views had progressed so far. Perhaps this is the real secret of your visit to Wareborough: it is said to be a first-rate neighbourhood for picking up millionaires in."

"Thank you for the suggestion," answered Miss Eyrecourt, calmly; "but I have no intention of the kind. I have no idea of selling myself. When I do get my money I should prefer it without appendages. I shall not try for a Wareborough millionaire at present; certainly not—as long as there is a chance of godmamma Dervock awakening to a proper sense of her duty."

Captain Chancellor's brow cleared a little. Just then Mrs Dalrymple, whose attention had been caught by a stray word or two of their low-toned conversation, interrupted it by an inquiry as to what he thought of Wareborough. He laughed a little as he answered her, that so far he could hardly venture to have any thoughts on the subject.

"I only crossed over from Ireland yesterday," he said. "It was eleven o'clock last night when I reached Wareborough, and the whole of to-day I have been conscious but of one sensation."

"Fog?" inquired Roma.

"Yes, fog," he replied. "And, by-the-bye, that reminds me I had such a funny little adventure when I came here to-night," he stopped abruptly and looked searchingly round the table.

"What is the matter? Whom are you looking for?" asked both his neighbours at once.

"No, she is certainly not here," he replied inconsequently. "Even if my impression of her features is mistaken, there is no girl here dressed as she was. She had a scarlet band round her hair and something silver at one side. What can have become of her?"

"Beauchamp, are you going out of your mind? What are you talking about?" exclaimed Miss Eyrecourt. "Mary," to Mrs Dalrymple, "I am sure his senses are going—a mysterious 'she' with scarlet and silver in her hair?"

"I think I understand," said Mrs Dalrymple, looking amused. "Captain Chancellor must have met my little friend Eugenia Laurence as he came in. I remember hearing the bell ring just before you rang," she continued, turning to the young man—"the first was a very feeble attempt."

"But she is not little, she is very tall, whoever she is," objected Beauchamp.

"Rather, not very. Certainly she is not taller than Roma, but then she is so very thin."

"Thank you, that means I am very fat," observed Miss Eyrecourt.

"Nonsense, you are just right. Eugenia is a mere child. So you made acquaintance with her outside in the fog, did you, Captain Chancellor? How very funny! I wonder she didn't run away in a fright, poor child. I should like to know if you think she promises to be pretty. Roma thinks so, don't you, dear? But you are very hard to please I hear, Captain Chancellor. I must introduce you to Eugenia after dinner. She is a great pet of mine."

This was all the information Mrs Dalrymple vouchsafed on the subject of the mysterious young lady, for before Captain Chancellor had time to make any further inquiry the usual smiling signal was exchanged, and the ladies retired with much stateliness and rustle to the drawing-room.

Mrs Dalrymple, the most good-natured of her sex, was never so happy as when she saw "young people," as she expressed it, "enjoying themselves," and her ideas on this subject, as on most others, being practical in the extreme, a somewhat unexpected sight met the eyes of Captain Chancellor on his re-entering the drawing-room in company with the other gentlemen.

"Dancing," he exclaimed, slightly raising his eyebrows, when he had made his way across the room to Miss Eyrecourt, "and on this heavy carpet. Won't it be rather hard work?"

"Very, I should say," replied Roma, indifferently. "I certainly don't mean to try it."

"Not with me?" said he in a low voice, looking down on her where she sat, with the deep blue eyes he so well knew how to make the most of.

"No, not with you," she answered, coolly. "Carpet dances are not at all in my way, as you might know."

Captain Chancellor looked considerably piqued.

"I don't understand you, Roma," he exclaimed. "If the floor were red hot I should enjoy dancing on it if it were with you."

Miss Eyrecourt laughed softly.

"You would dance vigorously enough in that case, I have no doubt," she replied; "but as for enjoying it, that's quite another affair. Seriously, Beauchamp, I am going away to-morrow, and I don't want to knock myself up before the journey. Besides, what is the use of dancing with me here? Wait for the hunt ball at Winsley, when you come home on leave. You had better make friends with some of these Wareborough people, as you are sure to be here for some time to come. There are at least six or eight passable-looking girls in the room, and Mary Dalrymple is dying to show off her new lion. They want to hear you roar a little; you don't half appreciate the position."

"Who are all these people? Where have they sprung from?" asked Captain Chancellor, ignoring her last remarks. "I counted how many there were at dinner—sixteen I think—but there are several more in the room now."

"Yes; those were mostly papas and mammas. The young ladies come after dinner, and some of the young gentlemen. We have had one or two little entertainments of the kind in the week I have been here. I found them very fatiguing; but then I have no interest in the place or the people. I am not going to be here for months like you."

"And you won't dance?" urged Beauchamp.

"No, really I don't feel inclined for it," she replied decidedly. "And it looks uncivil to go on like this, talking to ourselves so much. Do go and get introduced to some one, Beauchamp. I don't want to offend Mary."

Captain Chancellor walked off without saying any more, but he felt chafed and cross, and by no means inclined to waste his waltzing on a Wareborough young lady. He retired into a corner, and stood there, looking and feeling rather sulky, and trusting devoutly that his energetic hostess might not discover his retreat. It was a large room, with several windows and a good deal of drapery about it: there were heavy curtains, only partially drawn, close to where he was standing, and these for some moments concealed from his view a young lady sitting by herself on a low chair very near his corner.

Her head was the first thing he caught sight of; a scarlet band and a small cluster of silvery leaves at one side, just above a pretty little ear. He could not see her face, but the simple head-dress, the arrangement of the bright wavy brown hair, he recognised at once. He moved his position slightly, drawing a little, a very little nearer, enough however to attract her attention. She looked up—ah yes, he had been right, his instinct had not deceived him; it never did in such matters, he said to himself; she was pretty, very pretty, though so young and unformed a creature. The gloomy expression, softened out of his face as he watched her for a moment without speaking; then gradually a slight colour rose on her cheeks, she looked down quickly, as if becoming conscious of his observation, and the movement recalled him to himself.

"I beg your pardon," he began hurriedly, without quite knowing what he meant. "I did not see you when I invaded your quiet corner. Are you not going to dance?" he went on, as if speaking to a child, for almost as such he unconsciously regarded her, calmly ignoring the fact that he had not been introduced to her. "Don't you like dancing?"

"Oh, yes, at least I think I do," she answered, with some hesitation. "I have never danced much. I don't care for it *very* much."

Captain Chancellor looked at her again, this time with increasing interest and some perplexity. He could not make her out. She was not shy, certainly not the least awkward; but for the slightly fluctuating colour on her cheeks, he would have imagined her to be thoroughly at her ease, rather more so perhaps than he quite cared about in a girl of her tender years, for "she can't be more than sixteen," he said to himself, as he observed her silently, sitting there alone, gravely watching the dance which had now begun. It seemed unnatural that she should not join in it; he felt sorry for her—but yet—it was quite against his principles to risk making a spectacle of himself—he wished she would dance with some one else; he could judge of her powers in a moment then. But no one came near their corner—even Mrs Dalrymple seemed to have forgotten them both. Captain Chancellor was a kind-hearted man, the sort of man, too, to whom it came naturally to try to attract any woman with whom he might be thrown in contact. And then this girl was undoubtedly pretty, and with something out of the common about her. He began to feel himself getting good-tempered again. It was stupid work sulking in a corner on account of Roma; he had had plenty of experience of her freaks before now, much better show her he did not pay any attention to them. Just as he had reached this point in his meditations, a faint, an all but inaudible little sigh caught his ear. It carried the day.

"Don't you find it rather wearisome to sit still, watching all this waltzing?" he said at last. "Though you don't care much about dancing, a turn or two would be a change, don't you think?"

"Yes," the girl answered, raising her face to his, with a rather melancholy expression in her eyes. "Yes, I daresay it would be very nice; but no one has asked me to dance. I hardly know any one here, for it is almost the first time I have been out anywhere in this way."

Her frankness somewhat embarrassed her companion. It is not often that young ladies calmly announce a dearth of partners as a reason for their sitting still, and Captain Chancellor hardly knew how to reply. Condolence, he feared, might seem impertinent. He took refuge, at last, in her extreme youth.

"No one could think it possible you had been out much," he said gently. "At your age, many girls have never been out at all." She looked up quickly at this, smiling a little, as if about to say something, but stopped. "As for not knowing any one here, we both seem in the same predicament, for I am a perfect stranger too. If no one better offers, will you condescend to give me the next dance? This one is just ending."

A bright, almost a grateful glance was his reward.

"I didn't understand that you were asking me to dance with you," she said, half apologetically. "I should like it very

much, but—" here the rather stiff demureness of her manner fairly melted away, and she began to laugh. "You forget I don't know who you are. I haven't even heard your name."

Captain Chancellor started. He felt considerably annoyed with himself. He was the last man to slight or ignore any recognised formality, and he could not endure to be laughed at. He drew himself up rather haughtily, and was just beginning a somewhat stilted apology, when the young lady interrupted him.

"Oh, please don't be vexed!" she exclaimed eagerly. "I hope I haven't said anything rude. It was so kind of you to ask me to dance, and I should like it so much! It doesn't matter our not being regularly introduced, does it?"

"I hope not. We must consider the fog our master of ceremonies: it was under his auspices we first made each other's acquaintance," he replied, with a smile, for her "Oh, please don't be vexed!" was irresistible; "and I think I do know your name. You are Miss Laurence, are you not? Your friend Mrs Dalrymple was speaking about you at dinner, and I know she quite intended asking your permission to introduce me to you. It is easy to tell you my name. It is Chancellor."

"Captain Chancellor! Oh yes; I thought so," she said naïvely; "but of course I was not sure. Now it is all right, isn't it?" for by this time a new dance was beginning, and she was evidently eager to lose no more valuable time.

It was only a quadrille. They took their places, and though Miss Laurence's gravity returned when she found herself facing so many people, an underlying expression of great content was nevertheless plainly visible in her countenance to an observer so experienced and acute as her partner, and the discovery by no means diminished his good, humour.

Volume One—Chapter Two.

Mistakes.

"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet."

Romeo and Juliet.

There was not much conversation between Captain Chancellor and his partner during the quadrille, for Miss Laurence seemed a little afraid of her own voice in so public a position, and bestowed her attention principally on the rest of the performers. Immediately after the square dance, however, there came another waltz, for which Captain Chancellor, waxing bolder as his practised eye followed the girl's graceful and well-balanced, though somewhat timid movements, took care to secure her. His hopes were not disappointed. She danced beautifully; and then, too, how pretty it was to see how she enjoyed it! He forgot all about Miss Eyrecourt and her unamiability.

"How well you dance! I can hardly believe you have not had much practice. With one or two very trifling alterations, your waltzing would be perfection," he exclaimed.

"Do you really think so? I am so glad!" she replied, looking up with a sweet flushed face from the sofa, where he had found a charming corner for two. "I was so afraid you would think me very heavy and awkward. I have hardly ever danced except at home with Sydney. Certainly, I have had plenty of that kind of practice."

"With Sydney?" he repeated, interrogatively, just as one cross-questions a child. "Your brother, I suppose?"

"Oh no; I have no brothers," she answered; and as she said the words, across her hearer's mind there flashed the thought, "A cousin, I'll bet anything. These sweet simple little girls are always spoiled by some odious cousin, or male friend 'I have known all my life,' in the background." But "Oh no," she went on; "Sydney is my sister." Captain Chancellor breathed more freely. "She should have been here to-night; but Aunt Penton was not well, and Sydney thought she should not be left alone; and she *would* make me come. She is so unselfish!" with a tender look in her bright eyes, and a little sigh, as if the remembrance of Sydney's self-sacrifice somewhat marred her own enjoyment.

"Your elder sister, is she not?"

"Oh no; she is a good deal younger—nearly two years younger."

Captain Chancellor's eyebrows went up a little. His companion read his thoughts, though he said nothing.

"I think you fancy I am younger than I am," she explained, with a little blush. "I am nearly nineteen. I suppose I seem younger from having been so little in society. This is the very first time I have ever been anywhere without Sydney, and I disliked it so much, I asked Mrs Dalrymple if I might come early with my father, as he was passing here, and stay with her little girls in the school-room till after dinner, so that I might be in the drawing-room when every one came in."

Captain Chancellor smiled at her confession; but its frankness made it the more difficult to realise that she was not the mere child he had guessed her. "And that was how you came to be standing out there in the fog, 'all forlorn,' then?" he returned. "Do you know you really frightened me? I don't know what I didn't take you for. A Wareshire witch at the least, though I don't know that I was far wrong." (A quick upward glance, and a slightly puzzled expression on the girlish face, here warned him that he was venturing on untried ground.) "But I forgot," he went on hastily, "you don't belong to Wareborough, I think you said."

"Oh, yes I do. You misunderstood me a little. I only said I did not know many people here, that is to say personally—I

know nearly every one by sight. I have lived here all my life, but my father does not allow us to visit much.”

“I have no doubt he is wise. In a place like this, the society must be very mixed, to say the least.”

Miss Laurence looked slightly embarrassed. “It isn’t exactly on that account. My father never speaks of Wareborough in that way. I don’t like living here much, but,” she hesitated.

“But though one may abuse one’s home oneself, one can’t stand any other person’s doing so—above all a perfect stranger, isn’t that it?” said Captain Chancellor, good-humouredly.

“Not quite. A perfect stranger’s opinion can’t matter much, for it can only be founded on hearsay,” replied the young lady, with a smile.

Her powers of repartee promised to be greater than he had expected, and Beauchamp Chancellor was not fond of repartee when exerted at his own expense. But he covered his slight annoyance by an increasingly paternal tone to his young companion. “Believe nothing you hear, and only half you see. You are rather too young to have adopted that motto yet, Miss Laurence; are you not? But after all, I don’t feel myself very guilty, for you own to not liking Wareborough yourself. You don’t really belong to it, do you? I can’t get it into my head that you do.”

The delicately implied flattery had the intended effect. The very slight disturbance of the young girl’s equanimity disappeared, and with an almost imperceptible elevation of the well-shaped little head, not lost on her companion, she replied:

“I don’t quite know what you mean by belonging to Wareborough? Of course, in one sense, we do not; that is to say, our grandfathers and great-grandfathers didn’t live here, but we, Sydney and I, were born here, and it has always been our home.”

“And yet you don’t like it? I suppose you have been a good deal away from home—abroad perhaps?” questioned Captain Chancellor.

“No, I have very seldom been away, and we have never been abroad,” said the girl, somewhat bluntly, but blushing a good deal as she spoke. “It is not from personal experience I can compare Wareborough with other places,” she went on; “it is from what I have read principally.”

“Ah, then, you indulge pretty freely in novels, like most young ladies,” observed Captain Chancellor.

Something in the tone or words jarred slightly on his hearer, but she had no time to define the sensation, for just then Mrs Dalrymple approached them.

“Well, Eugenia, my dear, you are enjoying yourself, I hope? And you, too, Captain Chancellor? I have been admiring your dancing. Henry introduced you, I suppose? Quite right. This dance is just about over. I want to introduce you to the Miss Harveys—charming girls. You must engage one of them for the next dance.”

“A little later in the evening, I shall be delighted to be introduced to any friend of yours, my dear Mrs Dalrymple,” replied Captain Chancellor. “For the next dance, you must excuse me. I am already engaged.”

“Ah, well, never mind. Come to me when it is over,” said the good-natured hostess. “You are not going to dance with Roma, I suppose? What has come over her to-night—can you tell me?”

“Not I. I have long ago left off trying to comprehend women in general, and Roma in particular,” said Captain Chancellor, lightly; but still with a certain constraint in his voice. Then as Mrs Dalrymple left them, he turned quickly to Miss Laurence: “There are refreshments in another room, I believe,” he said. “Won’t you let me get you an ice, or some lemonade, or whatever there is? Or suppose we both go and see?”

“Yes,” said Eugenia, rising as she spoke. “I should like to go into the other room; it is getting a little too hot here.”

She did not care for lemonade, or ices, or anything so material and commonplace. The novelty and excitement of the evening seemed to raise her above all such vulgar considerations as eating and drinking. She was not in the least tired, nor had she discovered that the room was too hot, till she heard Captain Chancellor’s announcement of being engaged for the next dance. Then everything changed to her: she felt like Cinderella at the stroke of twelve.

“I am not going to sit all alone in a corner again with nobody noticing me, and watch him dancing with some one else,” she said to herself. “I believe he is only making an excuse to get rid of me, and very likely he wants to go and talk to Miss Eyrecourt. He told me he knew no one here.” So she gladly accepted the offer of his escort to the next room, quite unaware how visibly the brightness had faded out of her tell-tale face.

It was not all at once that her companion perceived the change; his thoughts seemed otherwise engaged. But when he had found her a deliciously draughty seat, had fetched her an ice, and was about to establish himself beside her, something in her manner caught his attention.

“You are not vexed with me for my little fib, I hope?” he said gently. Just then the music began again. She looked up, grave but puzzled.

“I don’t quite understand what you mean,” she replied. “But never mind about that. The next dance has begun, and you said you were engaged for it.”

His face lighted up with amusement and something else. “But I am not engaged for it. That was the story I told to good Mrs Dalrymple. It is a galop—horrid dance—I was sure you would not care about it, and we can sit here so

comfortably. I told you I knew no one here, and I am too shy to dance with any of the Miss Harveys."

"But Miss Eyrecourt, you know her?" persisted Eugenia, though the gravity was fast clearing off her face.

"Of course I do. She is a sort of a sister of mine. I fancied you knew, for she is Mrs Dalrymple's cousin, and she has been staying here for some little time. You know Mrs Dalrymple very well, don't you?"

"Yes. She is always very kind to us," replied the girl. "I knew Miss Eyrecourt was her cousin, but I didn't know she was any relation of yours, though I have heard Mrs Dalrymple talk of you. Is Miss Eyrecourt your step-sister? How proud you must be of her! She is so handsome."

"Handsome, yes, I suppose she is," he answered, rather absently. "But she is not exactly my step-sister," he went on, rousing himself. "She is—let me see—she is, or was rather, for my brother-in-law is dead, my sister's husband's step-sister. A terrible relationship, isn't it? Nearly as bad as 'Dick's father and John's son,' which I have never been able to master. But Roma and I have never troubled ourselves much to define our precise connection. It seemed quite unnecessary. We have always been a great deal together, and took it for granted we were some sort of cousins, I suppose."

To which Eugenia replied, "Oh, indeed," without repeating her admiration of the young lady under discussion.

"What a pretty name Roma is," she said, suddenly, after a minute or two's silence.

"It is uncommon enough, any way," replied Captain Chancellor. "But in Miss Eyrecourt's case there was a reason for it. She was born there—at Rome I mean."

"Then is she partly Italian?" asked Eugenia. "I could quite fancy she was."

"Because she is so dark? Oh, no; she is not Italian, though, as far as looks go, her name suits her. But in everything else she is the very reverse. I always tell her she should have had fair hair and light grey eyes," said Captain Chancellor, with some bitterness.

"Why?" said Miss Laurence, inconsiderately, regretting the question as soon as it was uttered. "Evidently he dislikes her," she said to herself. "How silly of me to urge him to talk about her."

"I don't think I could possibly make you understand why. A cold, calculating nature would always be an enigma to you," he replied, and the vivid colour which his words called forth on Eugenia's cheeks seemed to confirm his assertion. But he was a little mistaken. Like most essentially transparent characters, Miss Laurence could not endure to be considered easy of comprehension. And to some extent her self-judgment was correct, for without the keynote to her undisciplined, half-developed nature, it was *not* easy to reconcile its inconsistencies—a careless or ignorant touch would too surely make terrible discord of its possible harmonies.

"I do not think you know enough of me to pronounce upon me so positively," she said, a little coldly; but the words and the coldness were so very girlish that they only amused her hearer. He thought it better, however, not to reply to them, though he could not help smiling a little as he hastened to change the subject. He tried for a congenial one.

"Wareborough can't be a very disagreeable place if we judge by Mrs Dalrymple," he began. "She seems to have taken kindly to it, though her unmarried life was spent in a very different part of the country. How hearty and happy she seems!"

Eugenia was fond of Mrs Dalrymple, and liked to hear her praised. "Yes," she answered eagerly; "she is one of the sunniest people I know. But she carries it about with, her. Wherever she was, in Wareborough or anywhere, she would be cheerful and happy."

"Ah, indeed. Yes, I should say she takes things pretty easily," observed Captain Chancellor.

He spoke carelessly—his attention being in reality occupied with observing the pretty way in which Miss Laurence's face and eyes brightened up when she was interested—and again something in his words or tone seemed to jar slightly on the girl's sensitive perceptions, though almost before she realised the sensation, the charm of his manner or handsome face, or both together, had completely obliterated it.

And the evening passed very quickly to Eugenia, for the two or three dances in which Captain Chancellor was not her partner, yet seemed in some indescribable way pervaded by his presence. She watched him dancing with Miss Florence Harvey without a twinge of envy or misgiving, though it was evident that the young lady's fascinations were all being played off for his edification; she did not even feel deserted when he spent at least a quarter of an hour in close conversation with Miss Eyrecourt, for his manner when he returned to her, or an instant's glance when he caught her eye from another part of the room, satisfied her she was not forgotten,—seemed, indeed, intended tacitly to assure her that of his own free will he would not have spent any part of the evening away from her. She could hardly believe it; this strange new homage was bewildering even while delightful; she shrank from recognising it as a fact even to herself, and took herself to task for being "dreadfully conceited." To her extreme inexperience and ignorance of the extent of her attractiveness, it seemed incredible that this "preux chevalier," this nineteenth-century hero, as he appeared to her, should thus distinguish her, should seem so desirous of wearing her colours. And all sorts of pretty hazy dreams began to float across her imagination of enchanted ladies who, barely past the threshold of their windowless tower, had found the fairy prince already in waiting—sweet, silly old stories of "love at first sight" and such like, which, though charming enough in romance, she had hitherto been the first to make fun of as possible in real life.

Poor little girl, she was practically most ignorant; she knew less than nothing of the world and its ways; she had no

idea of the danger there might be to her in what, to a thorough-going man of the world like Beauchamp Chancellor, was but an hour's pleasant and allowable pastime. There was one sharp pair of eyes in the room, however, quite as sharp and probably less spiteful than if they had been light grey. What would have become of Eugenia's vaguely beautiful visions had she overheard some part of a little conversation between her hero and Miss Eyrecourt towards the close of the evening! They were sitting near each other, and there was no one close enough to overhear the remarks that passed between them, which, however, were not many, for Beauchamp's sulkiness had returned when he found himself beside Roma again, and she, though as imperturbably good-tempered as ever, was irritatingly impenitent.

Suddenly Miss Eyrecourt's tone changed. "Beauchamp," she said, and her voice told him he was intended to give his attention to what she had to say.

"Well, Miss Eyrecourt, I am waiting for your remarks," he said, snappishly.

"Don't be cross. It *is* so silly," she began.

"Is that all you have to say to me, Roma?"

"No, it isn't. This is what I want to say—you have danced several times with that little Miss Laurence, Beauchamp." Captain Chancellor's manner changed instantly. He became quite brisk and amiable. "She is extremely pretty."

"And dances charmingly," added the gentleman.

"I daresay she does," said Roma, with perfect composure, "but it isn't only her dancing. You have *sat out* some dances with her too."

"She is exceedingly nice to talk to," observed he.

"I daresay she is," said Roma again; "but for all that, Beauchamp—you may trust me, I don't speak without reason, and you mustn't mind my saying it. I do hope you are not going to be silly?"

Beauchamp smiled—a smile that said several things, all of which, however, were perfectly intelligible to his companion.

"Ah yes," she said philosophically—"ah, yes, sir, you may smile and look contemptuous. I understand you. I understand why you looked so delighted just now when I began to speak about the girl—really, I did not think you could be so silly as *that*, and certainly you have one defence at your command! It is not the first, nor, I dare say, the twentieth little amusement of the kind you have indulged in. You are perfectly aware of the rules of the game, and in a general way, uncommonly well able to take care of yourself. But allow me to warn you that *some* day you may burn your own fingers. You think they are fire-proof? They are no such thing. You are just in the humour and at the stage to do something silly."

"You think so?" he said. "Very well. Wait till you see me again, and then you shall see if you were right."

"Very well. I shall see, and I only hope I shall be wrong. Seriously, Beauchamp, it would be in every way the silliest things of the kind you could do. Neither you nor I can afford to make any mistake of that sort, and you much less than I, for you would be the last, man to make the best of such a mistake once committed. I know all about Miss Laurence. I like her, and she interests me, and it is not only on practical grounds I warn you, though you know I value those sufficiently."

"You certainly do," he remarked, satirically.

"Well? I am not ashamed of doing so," she answered calmly. "But suppose you are 'proof,' as you think, Beauchamp, that doesn't say that child is, does it? And I am getting to feel differently about that sort of thing. I suppose it is a sign of advancing years."

"It certainly is a sign of something very extraordinary," he replied, "to find you, of all people, pitying the weakness of your sex. Something must be going to happen to you, I am afraid."

Through the light bantering tone in which he spoke, Roma detected a certain ill-concealed triumph and satisfaction; the very things she least wished to see. "I have made a mistake," she said to herself, "and done more harm than good." But aloud, she only remarked quietly—"You are determined to misunderstand me, Beauchamp, but I can't help it."

She rose, as if to end the conversation, but before she had time to move away, Mrs Dalrymple and Eugenia, followed by an elderly gentleman, came up to where she was standing. Eugenia was the first to speak. "I am going, Miss Eyrecourt," she said simply. "Papa," with a pretty, affectionate glance at the tall, thin, grey-haired man beside her, "papa has come for me. I wanted to say good-night to you, because I fear I shall not see you again."

The words were addressed to Roma, but the "papa" and the glance which seemed to say, "my father is not a person to be ashamed of, you see," were evidently intended for the benefit of some one else—some one else, who came forward with marked, rather over-done empressment, hardly waiting for Roma's cordial "yes, I am sorry to say it must be good-bye as well as good-night," to be spoken, before he exclaimed regretfully, "Going so early, Miss Laurence? I was quite counting on another dance."

"It will have to be another evening, I am afraid," said Mrs Dalrymple; "all our friends seem to be bent on deserting us early to-night. But I must not scold you, Mr Laurence; it is very good of you to have come for Eugenia yourself. You must be so tired. I can't thank you enough for letting Eugenia join us, and the next time it must be little Sydney too."

Oh, by-the-bye, I must introduce you gentlemen—Captain Chancellor, Mr Laurence, let me introduce you to each other.”

Then there was a little bustle of bowing and hand-shaking, and in another minute, of leave-taking all round, and Roma Eyrecourt had reason to congratulate herself on the successful result of her sisterly warning when she saw Eugenia, bright with smiles and girlish gratification, disappear from the scene on her father’s arm, closely attended on the other side by Captain Chancellor, looking as if the world contained for him no other human being than this white-robed maiden with the scarlet ribbon in her pretty brown hair.

“Poor child,” thought Roma. Then her reflections took a different turn. “Silly Beauchamp,” she murmured to herself, and for a minute or two she remained silent. Then, with a slight shrug of her white shoulders, she restored herself to her ordinary state of comfortable equanimity.

Some little time elapsed before Captain Chancellor re-entered the drawing-room. When he did so, it was in company with his host, who had been doing duty outside, seeing the last of his departing guests. Mrs Dalrymple and Roma were alone.

“A terrible night,” said Mr Dalrymple, cheerily, rubbing his hands as he briskly approached the fire. “Mary, my dear, I am trying to persuade our friend Chancellor to stay where he is for the night, for upon my word I don’t see how he is to find his way home. The fog is as thick as pea-soup.”

“But how will every one else get home, then? Captain Chancellor is not less likely to find his way than other people, is he?” said Roma.

The remark sounded a little ungracious.

“Other people came mostly in their own carriages, and brought one or two extra men with them,” replied Mr Dalrymple, who was matter-of-fact in the extreme. “Besides, no other of our friends came from such a distance; the barracks must be nearly three miles from here.”

“Do stay, Captain Chancellor. It would be far more comfortable, and you can see Roma off for Brighton at twelve o’clock. If you write a note now we can send it to your servant the very first thing to-morrow morning for whatever you want. Do stay,” said Mrs Dalrymple, cordially.

Captain Chancellor demurred a little; Roma said nothing. A servant was despatched on another fruitless search for the fly, which had not yet been heard of, and, after receiving his report, the guest at last gave in, and resigned himself, with suitable expressions of gratitude to his hosts, to passing the night at Barnwood Terrace. This point settled, the little party drew round the fire more closely, in the sociable, familiar way people do for the last few minutes before bed-time, when the house feels snug and self-contained, all outside communication being at an end for the night. Miss Eyrecourt was, perhaps, a trifle graver than usual, but roused up on her cousin’s inquiring if she were tired.

“Oh dear no,” she replied; “I have done nothing to tire myself.” Then, as if anxious to avoid the subject of not dancing, she hurried on to another. “By-the-bye, Mary, I wanted to ask you who that fair-haired girl in blue was. I was so much amused by a flirtation between her and that young—what is his name?—he sat opposite me at dinner.”

“Oh, young Hilton and Fanny Mayne? Yes, they certainly do flirt, and it can never come to anything more. They have neither of them a penny, and he is not shaping particularly well in business, didn’t you say, Henry? Too fond of amusing himself. We knew his parents—such nice people!” etc, etc.

Some little local gossip followed, not particularly interesting to the two strangers, till some remark of Mrs Dalrymple’s brought the Laurences’ name into the conversation. Then both Roma and Captain Chancellor pricked up their ears.

“How tired Mr Laurence looked to-night! I am sure he is doing too much,” said Mrs Dalrymple, compassionately.

“What does he do?” asked Captain Chancellor. “He is not a clergyman; but Miss Laurence said something about his giving a lecture to-night, unless I misunderstood her.”

“Oh no, you are quite right,” answered Mrs Dalrymple. “He was lecturing on somebody—Milton or Shakespeare, or some one of that kind—at the Wareborough-Brook Mechanics’ Institution to-night. It is really very good of him. We went to hear him once. It was most interesting, though perhaps a little too long, and I should have said, rather above his hearers’ comprehension.”

“I don’t know that, my dear—I don’t know that,” put in Mr Dalrymple. “Laurence knows what he is about. At one time perhaps I might have agreed with you—we were inclined to think him high-flown and unpractical, he and those young Thurstons—but we’ve come to change our opinion. Laurence’s lectures have been most successful, and he certainly makes good use of his talents.”

“Are they always on literary subjects?” inquired Roma, languidly.

“No; he varies them,” was the reply. “He gave a set on heat—or light, was it? He is really a wonderful man—seems at home on every subject. How he finds time to get together all his knowledge is what puzzles me!”

“Then, has he any regular occupation or profession?” asked Captain Chancellor.

“Oh dear, yes,” answered his hostess. “He is in business—just like Henry and every one else here. He is an unusually talented man. Every one says he should have been in one of the learned professions, but he doesn’t seem to think so. Whatever he had been, he could not have worked harder. Eugenia tells me he very often sits up till daylight,

reading and writing. He makes the girls work too. They copy out his lectures, and look up references and all sorts of things. He has educated them almost like boys. It's a wonder it hasn't spoiled them. Yet they are simple, unaffected, nice girls. It is only a pity he shuts them up so."

"They will soon make up for lost time in that direction. Miss Eugenia, at least, seems to take very kindly to a little amusement when she gets a chance. Quite right too—don't you think so, Chancellor? She is very pretty, isn't she?" said good Mr Dalrymple.

Beauchamp felt uncertain if his host had any covert meaning in these questions. He felt a little annoyed, and inclined to ignore them; but a very slight smile, which crept over Roma's face, changed his intention.

"Pretty?" he repeated. "Yes, indeed she is; and her dancing is perfection."

The Dalrymples looked pleased; and when Roma soon after got up, saying she felt sleepy, and it must be getting late, Captain Chancellor hoped his last observation had to do with her sudden discovery of fatigue.

He saw her off next morning, as Mrs Dalrymple had proposed. They parted very amicably, for Miss Eyrecourt did not recur to the subject of her warning. The fog had cleared away, and Captain Chancellor felt in very good spirits. Ugly as Wareborough was, he began to think he could manage to exist there pretty comfortably for a few months.

"I must get Dalrymple to introduce me more definitely to the Laurences," he said to himself. "Mr Laurence's philanthropical tastes are not much in my way, certainly; but I like a well-educated man. And his daughter isn't the sort of girl one comes across every day—I saw that in an instant. Ah, yes, my dear Roma; I shall do very well, though your anxiety is most gratifying. Nor will it do you any harm to expend a little more of it upon me. I wonder if Mrs Dalrymple writes gossiping letters about what doesn't concern her, like most women? As things look now, I rather hope she does."

Volume One—Chapter Three.

Sisters.

All hearts in all places under the blessed light of day say it, each in its own language—why not in mine?—
Hayward's *Translation of Faust*.

The short winter's day was already nearly over; though the fog had cleared off, and frost was evidently on the way, it was still dull and dreary. Eugenia Laurence sat on the rug as close to the fire as she could get, feeling unusually out of spirits. She could not tell what was the matter with her, she only felt that it was difficult to believe herself in the same world as that on which she had closed her eyes last night. She had fallen asleep in a bewildering haze of delicious excitement, with vague anticipations of a somehow equally delightful to-morrow; it seemed to her, that never before had she realised the full value of her life and youth, and timidly acknowledged beauty; her dreams had been filled with a new presence—a presence to which, even to herself, she shrank from giving a name; everything about her—past, present and future—seemed bathed in light and colour.

She had awakened with an indefinite feeling of expectancy, and had felt unreasonably disappointed when she found all the commonplace details of her little familiar world very much the same as usual—a good deal less agreeable than usual in point of fact, for she was more tired than a thorough-going young lady would have considered possible as the result of such very mild dissipation as Mrs Dalrymple's carpet dance, in consequence of which she slept three hours later than her wont—of itself a disturbing and depressing consciousness to a girl brought up to consider punctuality a cardinal virtue—and entered the dining-room only to find it deserted by its usual cheerful little breakfast party, and to be told by the servant, that "Miss Sydney" had been sent for early by the invalid aunt, and feared it would be afternoon before she could return home.

"How disappointing!" thought Eugenia, as she sat down to the solitary breakfast, she had little inclination to eat, "when I did so want to talk over last night with Sydney. I shall never go out anywhere without her again. I am not half as sensible as she is. How silly it is of me to feel so dull and unsettled this morning. I shall never want to go out if it makes me so silly. But oh, how I wish I could have it all over again to-night!"

Then she sat and dreamed for a few minutes—dreams which sent a smile and a blush over her pretty face. "Was it—could it be true?" she asked herself, "that he really thought her so pretty—so charming—as his tones and looks seemed to whisper?" She remembered every word he had said, she felt the very grasp of his hand as he bade her good-night. Then with a sharp revulsion came the remembrance that in all probability she would never see him again: he had said something about staying some little time in Wareborough—but what of that? Except for the chance of meeting him again at Mrs Dalrymple's—a very slight one, this was the very first time her father had allowed her to go to anything in the shape of a party at Barnwood Terrace—he might spend years in Wareborough without their ever seeing each other: her father seldom made new acquaintances—hardly ever invited any one to his house. And even supposing anything so extraordinary as that he should do so in this case, would it be desirable, would she wish it? She looked round with something almost approaching disgust at the substantial, but certainly faded and dingy furniture of the room; she glanced out of the window, the prospect was gloomy and unlovely—Wareborough smoke and its begriming influences visible in all directions. No, she confessed to herself, her home was far from an attractive one; all about her would too surely offend, and repel a fastidious man accustomed, as he evidently was, to very different surroundings from those of an ugly little manufacturing town, where money was all in all, culture and refinement comparatively of little or no account. Her own dress even—she got up and looked at herself for a minute or two in the old-fashioned oblong mirror over the mantelpiece—the reflection was not a flattering one; still it could not altogether destroy the charm of the fresh young face, the eyes that could look so bright, though just now "a shadow lay" in them, the rich, soft chestnut brown hair. A little smile crept into the eyes

and softened the curves of the mouth as she looked; perhaps her face really was rather nice, she had certainly never thought so much about it before—but her dress? What was wrong with it? It fitted well, its colour was unobtrusive and even pretty of its kind, the whole was perfectly suitable and becoming for a young girl of her age and position; only yesterday it had pleased her very well, but to-day it utterly failed to satisfy her vague, unreasonable aspirations. Poor Eugenia, the world began to look very unpromising and dreary again! She sat down and began to wish, or tried to fancy she wished, she had not gone to the Dalrymples' the night before—had never had even this little peep of the beautiful, bewildering world outside her quiet humdrum middle-class home—the world in which all the women were graceful and charming, all the men high-bred and chivalrous, with irresistible eyes and sweet low voices like —“Captain Chancellor's,” she was going on to say to herself, but stopped short suddenly.

Something—what she could not have exactly told—perhaps merely the matter-of-fact naming of a name—seemed to startle her a little. Her common sense—in which, after all, she was not deficient, though its suggestions were often overruled by the quickly-succeeding moods of her vehement, impressionable nature—came to the rescue, and told her plainly she was behaving like an extremely silly girl. “Here I am,” she said to herself, with considerable self-contempt, “here I am, wasting all this day—worse than wasting it, indeed.” And with an effort for which she deserved some credit, she set to work to think how best she could at the same time punish and cure her fit of folly.

“I know what I can do,” she decided. “I shall give the rest of the time to copying out those two old lectures of papa's. They are very dry ones—at least, to me—and they are full of technicalities; so I must attend to them closely, or I shall make mistakes. It will please him too, for it was only yesterday he asked me to do them, and he won't expect them so soon.”

It was pretty hard work. She got them done, however, before Sydney's return. Then, feeling somewhat better pleased with herself, but still more depressed than she could account for (she had yet to learn how quickly, to a nature like hers, unaccustomed excitement does the work of physical fatigue), she sat down on the hearth-rug, cowering into the fire, to listen for her sister's ring. The room was small and plainly furnished. Its bookshelves and globes and old cottage piano told their own story; yet, as Eugenia's eyes glanced round it, noticing dreamily every little familiar detail: an ink-stain on the carpet—she remembered it for ever so many years—it had been caused by an inkstand overthrow, one Saturday afternoon that Frank Thurston was spending there; a penknife-cut on the wax-cloth of the table, which had drawn forth stern reprimand from kind “Mademoiselle,” and cost little Eugenia many tears; a picture on the wall—a French engraving of one of Scheffer's earlier paintings, which had taken many a month's joint pocket-money to obtain. (How well she remembered the day it was hung up!) As each well-known object in turn caught her glance, she owned to herself she had been very happy in that little old room. Would a day ever come on which she should wish herself back again in its safe, homely shelter? She could not tell what had put all these strange fancies in her head to-day. What was coming over her? It was too absurd to think that one short evening's experience had changed her so. Oh, if only Sydney would come in! It seemed years since they had been talking together about what they should wear at Mrs Dalrymple's, and yet it had been only yesterday morning. A ring at last—yes, it was the hall bell. Eugenia was darting forward, but a sudden thought stopped her. It might not, after all, be Sydney. It was just about the time a visitor—a stranger especially—would choose for a formal call. Could it be possible that her father—she had known him do odd, unexpected things of the kind sometimes—could he have asked Captain Chancellor to call? He was a much younger man than her father, and would not stand on ceremony in such a case; and she had seen them talking together, and shaking hands cordially at parting. It was just possible. The mere idea set her heart beating, and sent the blood rushing furiously to her cheeks. She opened the school-room door cautiously, a very little, and stood with it in her hand while she watched the servant-maid's slow progress across the hall. The door opened at last. A man's voice—a gentleman's voice. Could it be he?

“Then, if Mr Laurence is not at home yet, can I see either of the young ladies?”

A momentary hesitation on the part of the servant—a quick, light step outside along the pavement—a pleased exclamation from the visitor. “Oh, Sydney, there you are! I was just asking if I could see you or your sister;” and all Eugenia's foolish hopes are crushed flat again. “He” was only Frank Thurston—stupid, uninteresting, every-day Frank Thurston: at no time, save for old habit and association, a special favourite of Miss Laurence's; peculiarly and irritatingly unwelcome just at present, when the one boon the girl had been craving all day—the having Sydney to herself—would be destroyed by his intrusion. How could they talk over Eugenia's adventures with that great boy standing by, listening to all they said, and putting in his censorious comments?—as if his being a newly-fledged curate gave him a right of judgment of things that in no way concerned him! Sydney, of course, might like it, and accept his opinions; but as for herself—in extreme disgust at the disappointment he had innocently caused her, and prophetic indignation at the remarks she felt sure the well-meaning young clergyman would make, Eugenia softly closed the school-room door, and retired to the rug again, in vain hopes of being left in peace till the visitor had departed. But no; such was not to be the case. The voices came nearer—Sydney's sweet, even, and cheerful as usual; Frank's, for him, sounding surely eager and excited. What could he be in a fuss about? In they came; Sydney's fair face glowing with her quick walk in the cold, and with pleasurable excitement.

“Oh, Eugenia dear, I thought I should never get away from poor aunt. She is so fidgety to-day! How lonely you must have been all day! I met Frank as I came in. What do you think he has come to tell us?”

He was in a fuss about something then. Eugenia rather enjoyed it. It was her turn for once to be cool and critical.

“You do look excited, Frank,” she said, provokingly, returning, as she spoke, to the comfortable seat on the rug, from which she had risen to meet her sister. “What in the world is the matter? I thought fuss of every kind was against your principles.”

“There are exceptions to every rule,” said the young man, stiffly. “Not that I am in a fuss, as you call it, Eugenia; but if I were it would be quite excusable.”

His tone brought a slight cloud over Sydney's face. The chronic, petty warfare between these two antagonistic spirits

tried sorely her equanimity. Half unconsciously she turned towards her sister with an expression in her quiet blue eyes that struck home to Eugenia's good feeling.

"I don't mean to be teasing, Frank," she said, gently. "I really should like to know what your news is. It must be good, for Sydney and you both looked so beaming when you came in."

Eugenia seldom needed to try twice when she really wished to please or mollify; even the apparently accidental coupling of her sister's name with his did its work. Frank Thurston's tone was much more gracious as he proceeded to gratify her curiosity.

"Good news!" he repeated; "I should rather think it was good news. I have just heard from Gerald, Eugenia. He is home again—all but home again, at least. His letter was posted at Southampton by himself. He may be here any time now—sure to be in a few days."

"Gerald back again!" exclaimed Eugenia, with considerable surprise. "I had no idea there was any chance of his coming so soon. How delighted you will be to see him again, Frank."

She wished to be cordial, but her tone sounded slightly forced, and evidently did not satisfy the young clergyman. There seemed a little inquiry in his voice and manner as he replied—

"Of course I shall be. But not only I: I am sure your father, for one, will be glad to hear it. Gerald is one of the few men I know who is thoroughly liked and respected 'in his own country.' I am sure he will be heartily welcomed home again to Wareborough. You two used to be very fond of him in the old days. He didn't tease you as much as I did. Dear old fellow!"

"He was very good to Sydney and me—always. We shall all be delighted to see him again," said Eugenia, rousing herself to speak as heartily as she saw was expected of her. "Dear me," she went on, thoughtfully, "it is three years since he went away!"

"He will hardly know us again," said Sydney. "I was scarcely fifteen then."

"Yet you are less altered than Eugenia," observed Mr Thurston.

It was true. The younger girl, though not quite as tall as her sister, might easily have been taken for the elder. She had reached her full height at an earlier age than Eugenia, her figure was rounder, her expression of face less changeable.

"Suppose we change characters—Sydney passing for me and I for her—when Gerald first sees us?" suggested Miss Laurence.

She spoke idly; she was not prepared for Frank's hasty reply.

"No, indeed. I should not like it at all," he exclaimed abruptly. Eugenia raised her head and looked at him; her eyes opened to their widest. He coloured a little. "I mean to say," he went on, hurriedly and rather incoherently, "I mean—it would be nonsense. He could not mistake you, and I don't like practical jokes—I thoroughly disapprove of them," he had quite recovered himself by now. "They are objectionable in every way; they offend against both good feeling and good taste."

Miss Laurence made no reply. She felt no spirit to-day to argue with Frank, dictatorial though he was, and she did not want to vex Sydney again. She only thought the curate a great bore, and wished he would go. Her silence proved her best ally, for, as no one appeared inclined to dispute his last dictum, Mr Thurston's attention returned to other matters.

"I must go," he said, drawing out a shabby silver watch—he was always intending to treat himself to a better one, but there was a good deal of distress in Wareborough this winter—"I have a confirmation class at half-past six, and three sick people to see before that. Oh, by-the-bye, Eugenia, how did your party go off last night?"

"I never know what people mean by things 'going off,'" said Eugenia, rather superciliously. "If you mean to ask me if I enjoyed myself, that is quite another thing."

Frank Thurston laughed. He always felt pleasantly good-humoured and "superior" when Miss Laurence's feathers showed signs of becoming ruffled.

"I suppose I may infer from that that you *did* enjoy yourself," he replied, amiably. "But I mustn't stay to hear your adventures, even if they were in my line, which they are not likely to be. You must be anxious to narrate them to Sydney, however, so I must be off."

He shook hands with both sisters quickly, and left them; but, somehow, Eugenia no longer felt eager to "talk it all over" with Sydney. As the door closed on their visitor, she strolled to the window and stood there without speaking for some minutes, looking out at the garden. Sydney, contrary to her usual habit, had seated herself—out-door wraps, muddy boots, and all—near the fire, and her sister's silence surprised her.

"Did you *not* enjoy yourself last night, Eugenia?" she said at length, with some hesitation.

"I don't know," was the reply. The words were ungracious, but the tone wearied and dispirited.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Sydney again, after waiting to see if Eugenia had nothing more to say.

"Oh no—nothing. I am only cross. Don't mind me, Sydney. I'll tell you all there is to tell when I'm in a better humour. Oh, Sydney!" she broke off, abruptly, "how dreadfully ugly this garden is!" She was still staring out of the window. "I do hate this sort of half-town half-country garden. I wish you hated things too, sometimes, Sydney—it would be a comfort to me."

"Would it?" said the younger girl, quietly. "I am not so sure of that." But she got up from her seat as she spoke, and, crossing the room to her sister, stood beside her at the window. There seemed something soothing in her near presence. Eugenia's face cleared a little.

Certainly the prospect was not an attractive one. A suburban garden is seldom satisfactory, and this one was no exception to the rule. There was about it none of that strange, touching charm of contrast, of unexpected restfulness, which affects one so curiously in some town gardens. It was too far out of the town for that, and even had it not been so, Wareborough, grim yet not venerable, was not the sort of place in which such an oasis could exist. Wareborough dirt was neither mould nor decay, but unavoidable nineteenth-century dirt, fresh from the factories and the tall chimneys. Wareborough noise was the noise, obtrusive and unmistakable, of the workshop and the steam-engine—no muffled, mysterious roar: at no hour of day or night could Wareborough, distinct from its human element, inspire any but the most practical and prosaic sentiments; and Eugenia Laurence was of the nature and at the age to chafe and fret greatly at such surroundings. For she had not hitherto penetrated much below the surface of things: indignant as she would have been at the accusation, poetry and beauty were as yet known to her but in very conventional clothing. She had not yet learned to feel the beat of the universal "mighty heart," nor been moved to tears by "the still, sad music of humanity." And in such a mood as to-day's, this unlovely garden caused her actual pain. Yet there was something to be said for the poor garden after all. It was praiseworthy even while almost provoking to see how very hard the stunted shrubs struggled for existence; a pitiful sort of consciousness seemed to pervade the whole of having known better days, of having in past years been pretty and flourishing, though now slowly but surely succumbing to the adverse influences of the ever-increasing building in the vicinity—the vast army of smuts, the year by year more heavily laden air.

"I wish," said Eugenia, at length, "I wish we either lived quite in the middle of a great town—I shouldn't mind if it were in the heart of the city even, in London, I mean—or quite, quite in the country. Up on the top of a hill or down in the depths of a valley, I don't care which, provided it was out of sight and hearing of railways and omnibuses, and smoke and factories, and—and—"

"And shops?" suggested Sydney. "Shops and perhaps churches?"

"No, I like shops. At least, I like buying nice things. You know I do, Sydney—you are laughing at me," reproachfully. "It isn't nice of you when I am speaking seriously and want you to be sympathising. As for churches," she went on, languidly, "I am not sure if I would rather be without them or not. It is one of the points I have not quite made up my mind upon yet. Don't look so shocked child, I only said churches—I didn't say clergymen; and of course, even up on the top of my hill there would be sure to be a church, with no music, and sermons an hour long."

"Eugenia, what nonsense you do talk sometimes!" exclaimed Sydney, when her sister at last stopped to take breath. "I cannot understand how you, who are really so clever, can go on so. It doesn't matter with me, of course, but a great many people wouldn't like it at all—wouldn't understand that you were in fun."

"'A great many people' left the room ten minutes ago, my dear Sydney," replied Eugenia, coolly. "Don't distress yourself about me. We have each our special talents, you know; perhaps mine is talking nonsense. It is a great gift, but of course, like all great gifts, it requires cultivation."

Sydney did not reply; she turned away, and moved slowly towards the door.

"I must go and take my things off," she said, quietly.

"No, you mustn't; at least, not till I let you," exclaimed Eugenia. "Now, Sydney, don't be tiresome. You are not to get cross; I've been quite cross enough for both. You should be glad to see I've talked myself into a good humour again. Come here, you crabbed little thing!" she pulled Sydney with her down into her old place in front of the fire; "and if you will be good and nice, I'll tell you about last night. Oh, Sydney it was—I can't tell you what it was—it was so delightful. I never thought anything in the world could be half so nice."

She had flung herself down on the rug by her sister, and as she spoke she raised herself on her elbows, her head a little thrown back in her excitement, her bright, expressive eyes looking up eagerly into Sydney's face. Sydney looked full of interest and inquiry; over her face, fair and soft and girlish as it was, there crept an expression of almost maternal anxiety.

"I am glad you enjoyed it so much," she said, sympathisingly. "Mrs Dalrymple was very kind, I suppose. Did you see that nice-looking Miss Eyrecourt again? Is she still there?"

"She was, but I think she was to leave to-day," said Eugenia. Then after a little pause she went on again—"Yes, she is handsome, certainly; but, Sydney, I don't think I like her. But never mind about her. Oh, Sydney, I did *so* enjoy it all."

"I am very glad," said the younger sister again; "but tell me, Eugenia, why did you enjoy it so much?"

It was very strange—now that she had Sydney all to herself comfortably—Sydney, as eager to hear, as ready to be sympathising as the most exacting narrator could demand, it seemed to Eugenia she had nothing to tell. At first the younger sister felt rather puzzled, but before long the mystery was explained—an accidental allusion to the hero of the evening by name, and Sydney understood the whole; understood it, young as she was, far better than Eugenia herself. The discovery by no means diminished her anxiety, the cause for which she, perhaps, a little exaggerated. She knew her sister's fitfulness and impressionability; she suspected, though but dimly, the unsounded depths

beneath. Yet she made an almost unavoidable mistake in judging this vivid, complex, immature nature too much by her own. How could a girl of seventeen, wise though she might be for her years, have done otherwise?

She kept her suspicions to herself, her misgivings also at first, but she did not altogether succeed in concealing her gravity.

"What are you looking so gloomy about, Sydney?" said Eugenia.

"I don't quite know. I can't exactly say why I feel so—not gloomy, Eugenia, but anxious," she replied. "I am not sure that I like that Captain Chancellor, however handsome and charming he is. I don't think it was *quite* nice of him picking you out in that conspicuous way. It must have made people notice you."

"*That* would never trouble me," said Eugenia, loftily; but still the half-expressed doubt in her sister's words seemed to echo some hitherto unacknowledged instinct in herself. Sydney went on speaking—

"I have often felt a sort of vague dread of finding ourselves really grown-up, Eugenia. Papa *can't* enter into things as a mother could, though he is so kind and gentle. We seem to be thrown so on our own resources. I don't, of course, mean so much with regard to myself;" here a faint tinge of pink crept over her face; "I am wonderfully, unusually fortunate; but that does not make my anxiety for your happiness the less; I wish we had a mother, Eugenia."

"So do I," said the elder girl, wistfully. "Even if she had lived a few years with us it would have been different. But not even to be able to remember her! We can't expect papa to see that we are too much thrown upon ourselves, for he has never seen it otherwise. And, of course, Aunt Susan is less than no good. However, Sydney," she went on, in a different tone, "as far as regards this Captain Chancellor, whom, for some reason—I don't know what, I don't think you quite do yourself—you are so afraid of, you may set your mind at rest. I have been thinking very seriously to myself to-day. I thoroughly understand myself and the whole position of things, and I am very well able to take care of myself. I am not going to have my head turned so easily."

Sydney smiled, and shook her head.

"I hope not," she said. Eugenia grew more earnest.

"Don't look so unconvinced," she remonstrated. "Even supposing I were so contemptibly silly, do you think I couldn't stop in time—do you think I would let any one—even you—find it out? But, after all, what is more to the purpose, and will satisfy you better than all my assurances, the chances are very small that I shall ever meet this dangerous person again. So forget all about him, Sydney, and I shall too. By-the-bye, how strange it will seem to have Gerald Thurston here again. I am glad for papa's sake."

"And for our own sakes too," said Sydney, with some indignation. "I think you are strangely ungrateful, Eugenia. Have you forgotten how very, very kind he was to us—to you especially? I know you cried bitterly when he went away."

"Did I? I was a child," said Eugenia, indifferently. But immediately her mood changed. "No, Sydney," she exclaimed, "it *is* ungrateful of me to speak like that; I do remember and I shall always like Gerald. But Frank provokes me into seeming uninterested by the fuss he makes about Gerald, as if such a piece of perfection never existed before. And you're nearly as bad yourself. Now, don't look dignified. I cannot help being contradictory sometimes. Kiss me, Sydney;" for by this time Sydney had risen and was really leaving the room, but stopped to kiss her sister as she was told. "That's a good child, and thank you for your advice, or warning, whichever it was, though I really don't need it as much as you think. I promise to forget all about Captain Chancellor as fast as I can. There now, won't that please you?"

The "forgetting all about him" was not to be done in a minute, she found, though she set to work at it vehemently enough; for the leaving anything alone, allowing a possible evil to die a natural death, as is not unfrequently the wisest policy, was a negative course quite opposed to Miss Laurence's principles. Constantly during the next few days she found herself speculating on the possibility of her meeting Captain Chancellor again, recalling his words, and looks, and tones; but these "follies" she did her best to discourage. Never had she been more active or energetic in her home duties, never more resolutely cheerful. Sydney watched her, wondered, and admired, but still could not feel quite as easy in her mind as before the talk in the old school-room. Eugenia, on the contrary, was eminently pleased with herself, and had thoroughly recovered her own respect. The task set before her she imagined to be all but achieved—the goal of perfect mastery of the impression she now believed to have been a very fleeting one, all but won.

One day at dinner, within a week of the foggy evening, her father turned towards her with a startling announcement.

"Oh, by-the-bye, Eugenia, I was forgetting to tell you. I expect two or three gentlemen to dine here the day after tomorrow. Mr Foulkes, the school-inspector, you know, Mr Payne, and Frank Thurston—there is just a chance of Gerald, but Frank hardly expects him so soon, he has been detained in town by business—and I asked Captain Chancellor, the Dalrymples' friend. He called on me yesterday at my office to get a little local information he required, and I was much pleased with him. He seems very intelligent, and superior to most young men of his standing. It must be dull for him here—very different from a place where there is a large garrison—but he says he likes it better."

Eugenia hardly heard her father's last words: she was conscious only of a rush of tumultuous, bewildering delight. What had become of her strong-mindedness, her self-control, all her grand resolutions? She felt that Sydney was purposely not looking at her; it was almost worse than if she had been. Never mind! Sydney soon would be able to judge for herself as to whether she were, after all, so very silly. In any case this was not of her doing—this unhopèd-for fulfilment of her dreams. Dreams she had not encouraged, had kept down with a strong hand. It had been right to do so; might not this news of her father's be looked upon as her deserved reward? The idea was a pleasant one; it

excused to herself her own extreme, unreasonable happiness.

The rest of the dinner appeared to her a very feast of the gods; she herself was radiant with happiness—it seemed to sparkle about her in a hundred different ways. Even her father was struck with her brightness and beauty. He held her back for a moment as she passed him when she and Sydney left the room, and kissed her fondly—an unusual thing for him to do, and it added to the girl's enchantment.

Only Sydney seemed in low spirits this evening, but she roused herself at Eugenia's first word of reproach, and wisely refrained, from the slightest renewal of her former warning. Eugenia's moods were seldom of long duration. A little cloud came over her sun even before they were joined by their father from the dining-room. Its cause was a very matter-of-fact one.

"Oh, Sydney!" she exclaimed, suddenly. "How can we manage to have a very nice dinner on Thursday? We must have everything good and well arranged, and there are some things cook never sends up nicely. And don't you think we might walk to Barton's nursery-gardens to-morrow and get some flowers? I am sure papa would like everything to look nice."

Sydney professed herself quite willing to speak to cook about exerting herself to the utmost—to walk any distance and in any direction Eugenia wished.

So they were very busy the next day, and on Thursday morning they went to Barton's and got the flowers, as many as they thought they might afford. There were a few camelias among them, and in arranging them for the table, Eugenia kept out two—a scarlet one for Sydney, a white one for herself. But at the last moment the white flower fell to pieces, which so distressed Sydney that Eugenia had difficulty in persuading her to allow her own one to remain in its nest among the plaits of her soft fair hair.

"I don't care for things you don't share, Eugenia. I couldn't be happy if you weren't," she said, with more earnestness than the occasion seemed to call for. And Eugenia laughed at her and called her a little goose, and looked as if she felt little fear that happiness and she would ever be far apart.

Volume One—Chapter Four.

Sisters-in-Law.

"Prithee, say thou—the damsel hath a dowry?"

"Nay, truly, not so. No diamonds hath she but those of her eyes, no pearls but those in her mouth, no gold but that hidden among her hair."

Old Play.

The morning succeeding the day on which Captain Chancellor had seen Roma off for Brighton, found her comfortably seated at breakfast with her sister-in-law in the lodgings which Mrs Eyrecourt had engaged for the month of sea air, generally by a happy coincidence, found necessary in late autumn for "the children." Their visit to Brighton was later than usual this year, having been delayed by home engagements; most of Mrs Eyrecourt's friends had left, and she was beginning to feel anxious to follow their example.

"I am so glad to have you back again, Roma," she said, as she watched her sister-in-law pouring out the coffee. "It has been dreadfully dull the last week or two, and so cold. I shall be glad to be at home again. How did you manage to keep yourself alive in Cumberland?"

"Lady Dervock keeps her house very warm," replied Roma. "The coldness isn't the worst part of it—it is so dreadfully dull and out-of-the way. She was very kind, as I told you, and did her best to entertain me. She invited all the neighbours she has, to come to dinner in turn, but there are not many, and they are mostly old and stupid. Still, it was gratifying in one sense. I have no objection to be considered the woman my dear godmamma delighteth to honour. It looks promising. But I couldn't live there. Ah, no," with a little shudder. "I shall certainly let Deepthorne if ever it belongs to me."

Mrs Eyrecourt looked up quickly. "Lady Dervock may put a clause in her will obliging you to do so," she said. "I have heard of such things. But, seriously, Roma, I do hope you are not allowing yourself to count upon anything of that kind? It would be very foolish."

"Count upon it!" repeated Roma, with an air of the utmost superiority to any such folly. "Certainly not, my dear Gertrude. I never count upon anything. I amuse myself by a little harmless speculation upon possibilities; that's all, I assure you."

"And about Wareborough? How did you get on there? Mary Dalrymple was very kind, of course, and made a great deal of you and all that, I have no doubt. But oh, Roma, how unlucky it was about Beauchamp's turning up there. I cannot tell you how provoked I was."

A look of annoyance came over her face as she spoke, heightening for the time the slight resemblance she bore to her brother. It was not a striking resemblance. She was a small, fair woman, considerably less good-looking than one would have expected to find Beauchamp Chancellor's sister. Her figure, of its kind, was good, and shown to advantage by her dress, which was always unexceptionable in make and material, delicately but not obtrusively suggestive of her early widowhood. She hardly looked her age, which was thirty-one, for her skin was of the fine smooth kind which is slow to wrinkle deeply; her eyes of the "innocent-blue" shade, her hair soft and abundant.

Roma did not at once reply; but looking up suddenly, Mrs Eyrecourt saw that her sister-in-law was smiling.

"What are you laughing at, Roma?" she asked, with some asperity. "It's very strange that you should begin to laugh when I am speaking seriously."

"I beg your pardon, Gertrude—I do, really," said Roma, apologetically. "I didn't mean to smile. I was only thinking how curiously like each other you and Beauchamp are when you are not pleased. Oh, he was *so* cross to me the other night at the Dalrymples'! Only to poor me! He was more charming than ever to every one else. And it was all through trying to please you, Gertrude. I wouldn't dance with him on account of your letter, and whether you believe it of me or not, I do hate making myself disagreeable—even to Beauchamp." There was a curious undertone of real feeling in her last words. Gertrude felt sorry for her, and showed it in her manner.

"I don't want you to make yourself disagreeable, Roma. I only want to save real disagreeables in the future. It is both of you I think of. Certainly this infatuation of Beauchamp's *is* most unlucky; and though you say you are so sure of yourself, still, you know, dear, he *is* very attractive, and—"

"Of course he is," interrupted Roma—"very attractive, and splendidly handsome, and everything that is likely to make any girl fall in love with him. But I am not any girl, Gertrude, and I never *could* fall in love with him. Oh, I do wish you would get that well into your little head! What a great deal of worry it would save you and me! I have a real liking and affection for Beauchamp—how could I not have it, when you remember how we have been thrown together?—but I know his faults and weaknesses as well as his good qualities. Oh, no! If ever I imagine myself falling in love with any one, it is with a very different sort of person. Not that I ever intend to do anything so silly; but that is beside the point. Now, Gertrude, are you convinced? By-the-bye, you should apologise for speaking of poor Beauchamp's amiable feelings as an 'infatuation,' shouldn't you?"

"I didn't mean it in that sense," replied Mrs Eyrecourt, meekly. "I only meant—"

"Yes, I know what you meant," interrupted Roma again. "You meant that, as we are both penniless, or very nearly so, and, what is worse, both of us blessed with most luxurious tastes and a supreme contempt for economy, we couldn't do worse than set out on our travels through life together. Of course I quite agree with you. Even if I cared for Beauchamp—which I don't—I know we should be wretched. I couldn't stand it, and I am quite sure he couldn't. The age for that sort of thing is past long ago. Every sensible person must see that, though now and then, in weak moments, one has a sort of hazy regret for it, just as one regrets one's childish belief in fairy tales." She sat silent for a minute or two, looking down absently, idly turning the spoon round and round in her empty cup. Then suddenly she spoke again. "It is very puzzling to know what is best to do," she said, looking up. "Do you know, Gertrude, notwithstanding your repeated injunctions to me to try to snub Beauchamp without letting it come to a regular formal proposal, and all that, I really believe I should, on my own responsibility (it couldn't cause more uncomfortable feeling than the present state of things), have let it come to a crisis and be done with, but for another, a purely unselfish, reason."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs Eyrecourt, looking alarmed.

"Just this: I think it possible that his fancy—after all, I am not sure that it is anything but fancy, or whatever you call it—for me, may keep him from something still sillier."

"What do you mean?" repeated Gertrude again. "You can't mean that Beauchamp would think of marrying any one still—"

She hesitated.

"Still less desirable than I?" said Roma, coolly. "Yes—that is exactly what I do mean."

"He would never be so foolish!" exclaimed her sister-in-law. "He is too alive to his own interests—too much a man of the world. And think what numberless flirtations he has had! Oh, no, Roma! he would never do anything foolish of that kind, I feel sure."

"I don't," said the younger lady. "He is a man of the world, he is alive to his own interests; but still, Gertrude, remember what we know as a fact—that at this moment, though it should ruin all his prospects for life, he is ready—more than ready, absurdly eager to marry me. So we mustn't count too much on his worldly wisdom, cool-headed and experienced in such matters as he seems. Certainly, contradiction may have had a good deal to do with the growth and continuance of his feelings for me. There is that to be considered; and knowing that, I was idiotic enough to try to warn him."

"To warn him! Oh, Roma; do you mean that there is some one already that he would ever really think of seriously?" asked Mrs Eyrecourt, with great anxiety.

"Not exactly that—at least, not as yet," replied Roma. "What I mean is, that if I succeeded, as I could easily, if it came to the point, in quite convincing him he must altogether give up thoughts of me, he would be very likely to do worse—or more foolishly, at least. I have no doubt the girl is as good as she is pretty—I was taken by her myself—but utterly, completely unsuited to him in every single respect. And for this reason, Gertrude, I was very civil to Beauchamp at the end: I let him come to the station to see me off—we parted most affectionately. I wanted to do away with the bad effects of my warning, which I feared had offended him deeply the night before. But after all, perhaps, the warning was rather encouraging to his vain hopes than otherwise. I do believe he thought I was jealous."

She smiled at the recollection. "The worst of it is," she went on, "if he thinks so, it will probably lead to his flirting all the more desperately, in hopes of my hearing of it. And then if it comes to my being driven into formally refusing

him, what shall I do when he comes to us in February? He told me he is to have six weeks then. And he will go back to Wareborough again after that. Oh dear, oh dear, it is all dreadfully plain to my prophetic vision."

"Roma, do be serious. You don't mean to say—you can't mean, that this girl, whoever she is, is a *Wareborough* girl. Wareborough!" with supreme contempt, "Why, we all thought your cousin, Mary Pevensey, throwing herself away when she married Henry Dalrymple, though he didn't exactly belong to Wareborough, and was so rich. By-the-bye, this girl may be rich; not that that would reconcile me to it," with a sigh.

"But it might somewhat modify the vehemence of your opposition," said Roma, in her usual lazy, half-bantering tone, from which her unwonted earnestness had hitherto roused her. "No, Gertrude; you must not even apply that unction to your damask cheek—what am I saying? I never can remember those horrid little quotations we had to hunt up at school, and I am so sleepy with travelling all yesterday—lay that flattering unction to your soul, I mean. Beauchamp would say I was trying to make a female Dundreary of myself—a good thing he's not here. No, she is not rich. I told you she was utterly unsuited to him in *every* way. I found out she wasn't rich before Beauchamp ever saw her; something interested me in her, I don't know what exactly, and I asked Mary about her."

"Not rich, and Wareborough! Oh, no, Roma; I am quite satisfied. There is no fear in that quarter. It is only one of his incessant flirtations, I am sure."

"If so, it will be all on his side. She isn't the sort of girl to flirt. It would be all or nothing with her, I expect," said Roma, oracularly.

"I can't understand what makes you think so much of it," said Mrs Eyrecourt, fretfully. "How often did you see them together?"

"Only once—that last evening at the Dalrymples! There was a carpet dance. Don't you remember I wrote and told you they *would* ask Beauchamp, when they heard he was coming?" said Roma.

"Only once. You only saw them together once, and that at a dance, where Beauchamp was *sure* to flirt—especially as you snubbed him! Really, Roma, you are absurdly fanciful," exclaimed Mrs Eyrecourt.

Roma took the remark in good part.

"Perhaps I am," she replied; "but it isn't generally a weakness of mine to be so. For all I know, the girl is engaged to someone else, or she and Beauchamp may never see each other again. I don't say I have any grounds for what I fear. One gets impressions sometimes that one can't account for."

"Ah, yes, and I really think, dear, you are a little morbid on the subject. You have had so much worry about Beauchamp," said Gertrude, consolingly. "But as you've told me so much, tell me a little more. Is she such a very pretty girl? There must be something out of the common about her to have attracted you. Who is she?"

"She is a—" began Miss Eyrecourt, but a noise at the door interrupted her. There was a bang, then a succession of tiny raps, then a fumbling at the handle.

"That tiresome child!" exclaimed Mrs Eyrecourt. "Floss," in a higher key, "be quiet, do. Run up stairs—never mind her, Roma; go on with what you were saying." But the fumbling continued. Roma's nerves, perhaps, were not quite in train this morning; however that may have been, the noise was very irritating. She got up at last and opened the door.

"Come in, Floss," she said, good-humouredly, but her invitation was not accepted.

"I won't come into rooms when people call me a tiresome child at the door and I haven't been naughty," said the new-comer, with much dignity and scanty punctuation.

She was a very small person indeed. Of years she numbered five, in height and appearance she might easily have passed for three. She was hardly a pretty child, for her features, though small and delicate, were wanting in the rosebud freshness so charming in early childhood; her eyes, when one succeeded in penetrating to them through the tangle of wavy light hair that no combing and brushing could keep in its place, were peculiar in colour and expression. There was a queer greenish light in them as she looked up into Roma's face with a half-resentful, half-questioning gaze, standing there on the door-mat, her legs very wide apart, under one arm a very small kitten, under the other a very big doll—fond objects of her otherwise somewhat unappreciated devotion. She was a curious child, full of "touchy tempers and contrary ways," not easily cowed, rebellious and argumentative, and no one had as yet taken the trouble to understand her—to draw out the fund of unappropriated affection in her baby heart.

Roma got tired of holding the door open. "Come, Floss," she said, impatiently, "come in quickly."

Floss stared at her for another minute without speaking. Then, "No," she said deliberately. "I won't come in nor neither go out;" and as Roma turned away with a little laugh and a careless, "then stay where you are, Floss," the child shook with indignation and impotent resentment.

"She is really dreadful, Roma," said Mrs Eyrecourt, plaintively. "For some time past nurse tells me it is the same thing every day—out of one temper into another, from morning to night."

"She must take after her uncle," said Roma; "it is all contradiction. Don't bother yourself about her, Gertrude. I'll ring for nurse."

And the matter ended in the poor little culprit being carried off to the nursery in a whirlwind of misery and passion, reiterating as she went that mamma and aunt *made* her naughty when she had "comed down good."

"What has become of Quintin?" asked Roma, when they were again left in peace. "I haven't seen him this morning."

"He is spending the day with the Montmorris boys. He set off quite early, immediately after his breakfast, in great spirits, dear fellow," replied his mother. "How different he is from Floss, Roma!"

"Yes," answered Roma, "he is a nice boy. But it comes easily to people like Quintin to be good, Gertrude. He has everything in his favour—perfect health, a naturally easy temper, good looks, and every one inclined to think the best of him. Whereas poor little Flossy seems to have been always at war with the world. She is so delicate too. My conscience pricks me sometimes a little about that child."

"I don't see that there is anything more to be done for her. I trust to her growing out of these tempers in time," said Mrs Eyrecourt, philosophically—she was always philosophical about Floss when not in her immediate presence. "Speaking of the Montmorris boys, Roma, reminds me we are dining there to-day. That is to say—I accepted for myself certainly, and for you conditionally, the day before yesterday. You are not too tired to go?"

"Oh, no. I daresay I shall feel brisker by the evening," replied Roma. "I suppose it isn't anything very overwhelming, is it? for my wardrobe is getting rather dilapidated—I didn't think I should have been so long without going home, you know. By-the-bye, Gertrude, are you not in deeper mourning than when I went away?"

"Yes, I forgot to tell you. Indeed, I hardly thought you would care to hear—the poor old man had been virtually dead for so long. It is for our old uncle—Beauchamp's and my uncle I mean—Mr Chancellor of Halswood. He died a fortnight ago. It was hardly necessary to go into mourning; he was only my father's uncle. But still he was the head of the family, and I thought it better."

"Who succeeds him?" asked Roma. "Halswood is a nice place, isn't it?"

"Very; but they have never kept it up properly," said Mrs Eyrecourt. "At least, not for many years past. Old Uncle Chancellor has been half in his dotage for ever so long, but still he had sense enough to be jealous of his grandsons. There are two of them; the elder of course succeeds. He has sons; he has been married some years. We know very little of them now. My great uncle was angry with my father for selling Winsedge to your people, Roma; for though it was not entailed, and had come into the hands of a younger son, it had been a long, long time in the family. And that made a coolness they never got over."

"Why did your father sell it?" inquired Roma. "It would have been very nice for you now if it had belonged to Beauchamp. Much nicer than for it to be Quin's, who has got plenty already."

"Yes," replied Gertrude, slowly; "it would have been very nice, but it could not have been. My father was dreadfully in debt, and even selling Winsedge didn't clear him. When he died it was all my poor mother could do to start Beauchamp in the army. Poor Beauchamp! it has been very hard upon him to be so restricted, with his tastes, and his looks, and his feelings altogether. He has never been extravagant, as young men go, but he hates poverty." Roma laughed. "I don't think he knows much about it, so far," she said. "Wait till he is married with very little more than he has now—two or three hundred a year and his pay. It wouldn't be long before love came flying out of *his* window. But, dear me," starting up as a timepiece struck the hour, "how late it is! I must write to tell Mary Dalrymple of my safe arrival. What time is the Montmorris's dinner hour? Seven; oh, I am glad of that; we shall get home early."

The Montmorrises were quiet, steady-going, rather old-fashioned people, who lived in Brighton as evenly and monotonously as they would have lived in a country village. They were not by any means in Mrs Eyrecourt's "set," but they were very old friends of the Chancellor family—old Mr Montmorris, indeed, had been their lawyer for generations, and his firm, in which his eldest son now represented him, still managed the Halswood affairs. Once upon a time there had been a large family of young Montmorrises, but, after the manner of large families, they were now scattered far and wide—"some were married, some were dead," two maiden sisters only, no longer youthful, still representing at home the boys and girls, the "children" of long ago. But their brother—Mr Christian Montmorris, the hope of the family and the head of the firm—had by this time a wife and large family of his own, none of whom had any objection to spending a few weeks now and then at "grandpapa's," on which occasions their father used to "run down" from town as many times a week as he could spare the time, "running up again" by the first train the next morning; for he was a shrewd, clever, energetic man, with some fingers to spare for other pies besides those it was his legitimate office to cook; with a clear head and a sharp eye for a wary venture or a profitable investment. Among other by-concerns of this kind, in which his name did not appear, he was interested in the affairs of the great Wareborough engineering company, in whose employ Gerald Thurston, the curate's elder brother, had spent the last three years in India.

The sisters-in-law were received by their friends with open arms.

"So kind of you to come to us in this unceremonious way. So pleased to see Miss Eyrecourt again. We quite feared Mrs Eyrecourt would have left Brighton this year before you joined her," said Miss Cecilia Montmorris. And then old Mrs Montmorris broke in with self-congratulations that "Christy" had just arrived unexpectedly, and, what was more, had brought a friend with him, a gentleman just arrived from India. "We were quite pleased to see him, I assure you," she continued, addressing Roma in particular, "for a new-comer always brings a little variety; and now that my boys are all away from us we seem to be falling out of fresh acquaintances sadly. Mr Montmorris and I are getting too old for any sort of gaiety," she went on. "It is dull for Cecilia and Bessie sometimes, but they are good girls, very, and they know it won't be always that they will have their father and me to care for. Besides, they have a little change now and then when Mrs Christian takes one of them up to town for a week or two. Bessie is going back with them next week. And you have been away up in the north, I hear, my dear? How did you like that? I used to know Cumberland in my young days."

So she chattered on with the not unpleasing garrulity of gentle, kindly old age. She was a very sweet old lady, and Roma considered herself much more fortunate than her sister-in-law, who had been seized upon by Mrs Christian

Montmorris to have poured into her sympathising ear an account of how dreadfully ill her youngest but one had been the last two days, cutting its eye-teeth. Gertrude smiled and said, "indeed," and tried to look interested; but Roma laughed inwardly at her evident eagerness to change the conversation. Mrs Eyrecourt was not a person in whom the maternal instinct was in all directions fully developed: she loved her handsome little son as much as she could love anything; she honestly meant to do her best by Floss, but on certain points she was by no means an authority. It is, indeed, a question if both Quintin and Floss might not have passed through babyhood guiltless of cutting any teeth at all without her awaking from her happy unconsciousness of their failure in the performance of this important infantine obligation.

So poor Gertrude sat there, looking and feeling very much bored and rather indignant with Roma for the mischievous glances of pity she now and then bestowed upon her. At last, however, the door opened to admit the two gentlemen, whose late arrival had prolonged "the stupid quarter-of-an-hour," and with, a sensation of relief Mrs Eyrecourt turned to reply to Mr Christian Montmorris's greeting, feeling that she had had quite enough of his better-half for some time to come.

Volume One—Chapter Five.

Mutual Friends.

"Que serait la vie sans espérance? Qu'ils le disent ceux qui n'ont plus rien à espérer ici bas."

L'Homme de Quarante Ans.

"Alas! alas! Hope is not prophecy."

"Sorry to keep you waiting—quite against my habit, I assure you. But trains, you see, are worse than time and tide—they not only wait for no one, they very often make people wait for them," said the lawyer, as he shook hands cordially with his mother's guests. "And how is Master Quintin?" he inquired, turning again to Mrs Eyrecourt. "He got no cold bath this morning, I hope? I heard he was going skating with my youngsters."

Gertrude was much more at home in skating and cricket than in babies and eye-teeth, and Quin was always a congenial subject; so seeing her released from her purgatory, Roma looked about in search of entertainment for herself. Old Mrs Montmorris was now busy talking to some one on her other side; it was the new arrival. Roma glanced up at him, he was standing besides his hostess listening attentively to her little soft, uninteresting remarks. He was quite a young man, at which Roma felt surprised; for with the curious impatience of suspense, with which a lively imagination, even on commonplace and not specially interesting details, takes precedence of knowledge, she had unconsciously pictured this friend of the lawyer's as middle-aged, if not elderly. Her surprise made her examine him more particularly. He was not exactly what she was accustomed to consider good-looking, though tall and powerfully made without being awkward or clumsy. His hair, though dark, was distinctly brown, not black, and he somehow gave the impression of being naturally a fair-complexioned man, though at present so tanned by exposure to sun and air, that one could but guess at his normal colouring. From where she sat, Roma could not see much of his eyes: she was wondering if they were brown or blue—when a general movement, told her that dinner was announced.

Old Mr Montmorris toddled off with Gertrude on his arm, Roma was preparing to follow her with Mr Christian Montmorris, whom she saw bearing down in her direction, when his mother turned towards her with an apologetic little smile.

"You will excuse me, my dear, I am sure, for keeping my son to myself. I am very proud of having my boy's arm into the dining-room when he is here—which is not so often as I should like."

Miss Eyrecourt was perfectly resigned, and expressed her feelings to this effect in suitable language. She looked round for Miss Cecilia and Miss Bessie, with whom she supposed she was to bring up the rear in good-little-girl fashion, but this she found was by no means in accordance with the Montmorris ideas of etiquette.

"Miss Eyrecourt," said the lawyer, recalling her truant attention, "will you allow me to introduce my friend Mr Thurston to you?"

So on Mr Thurston's arm Miss Eyrecourt gracefully sailed away, feeling herself, to tell the truth, much smaller than she ever remembered to have felt herself before; he was so very tall and held himself so uprightly, giving her, at this first introduction, a general impression of unbendingness.

"What can I find to talk to him about?" she said to herself, for already her instinct had told her he was not one of the order of men with whom she was never at a loss for conversation. "He has only just returned from India. He won't know anything about the regular set of things one begins with. And I can see he is the sort of man that looks down upon women as inferior creatures, and hasn't tact or breeding enough to hide it. How I wish I could turn him into Beauchamp just till dinner is over. How different it would be! Only the night before last, I was sitting beside him at the Dalrymples! Poor Beauchamp—he is certainly very nice to talk to and laugh with!"

She gave a little sigh, quite unconscious that it was audible, till looking up, she found that Mr Thurston was observing her with, a slight smile on his face. She blushed—a weakness her four-and-twenty years were not often guilty of. "Hateful man!" she said to herself. Yet she could not help glancing at him again, unconcernedly as it were, just to show him she was above feeling annoyed by his rudeness. She found out what colour his eyes were now: they were grey, deep-set and penetrating. Suddenly he surprised her by beginning to speak.

"I am sorry I smiled just now," he said—his voice was clear and decisive in tone—"I saw you did not like it. But I really could not help it. Your sigh was so very melancholy."

"I hardly see that that is any excuse for your smiling," she replied, rather stiffly.

"Perhaps not. I daresay it was quite inexcusable," he said, quietly. "I fear I am a very uncivilised being altogether," he went on. "For the last three years I have been living in an out-of-the-way part of India, where I seldom saw any Europeans but those immediately connected with my work, and you would hardly believe how strange it seems to me to be among cultivated, refined people again."

"Then you are not in the army?" asked Miss Eyrecourt.

"Oh, no, I am an engineer; but only a civil one," he replied. Roma looked as if she hardly understood him. "I don't suppose you know much of my sort of work, or my part of the country," he went on. "The south knows less of the north, in some ways, than the north of the south. It strikes one very forcibly when one returns home to little England, after being on the other side of the world. Still, it is natural you shouldn't know much of the north; for though we come south for variety and recreation, we cannot expect you to find pleasure in visiting such places as the Black Country or the manufacturing districts."

"You are taking a great deal for granted, I think," said Roma, becoming interested. "And why should you not give credit for sometimes having other motives than pleasure to—" "other classes besides your own," she was going to have added, but the words struck her as ill-bred. "I mean to say," she went on, choosing her words with difficulty, a very unusual state of things for her—"don't you think it possible people—an idle person, like me, we will say—ever do anything or go anywhere with any other motive than pleasure or amusement? I think it a great mistake to take up those wholesale notions. As it happens, I *do* know something of the north—yes, of the north, in your sense of the word," for she fancied he looked incredulous. "I only left Wareborough yesterday morning." ("I needn't tell *you* what took me up there," she added to herself, smiling as she remembered how she had teased Beauchamp by her exaggerated account of the motives of her visit to Deepthorne).

"Wareborough!" exclaimed Mr Thurston. Roma was amused by his evident surprise. "How very odd! Wareborough is my home. I hope to be there again by Wednesday or Thursday. But that can't interest you," he went on, looking a little ashamed of his own eagerness; "and of course it isn't really odd. People must be travelling between Wareborough and Brighton every day. One gets in the way of exaggerating trifles of the kind absurdly when one has lived some time so completely out of the world as I have done. It struck me as such a curious little coincidence, for I think you are the first lady I have had any conversation with since I landed. I came by long sea too, for the sake of an invalid friend, so my chances of re-civilising myself have been very small, so far."

"It *was* an odd little coincidence," replied Roma, good-humouredly. "But after all, you know," she added, "the world is very small."

He hardly caught the sense of her remark.

"In one sense, I suppose it is," he said, slowly; "but in another—all, no, Miss Eyrecourt, you are fortunate if you have never felt how dreadfully big the world is! It used to seem a perfectly frightful way off from everything—everybody I cared for, out there sometimes."

He spoke gravely, and with an introspective look in his eyes, as if reviewing past anxieties known only to himself.

"And then," he went on in the same tone, "absence is absence, after all. One can never count surely on finding any one, or anything what one left them."

"Nought looks the same save the nest we made," said Roma, softly. "Don't laugh at me, Mr Thurston—fray don't," she went on, hurriedly. "I am not the least sentimental. I never look at poetry, only sometimes little rubbishy bits I learnt as a child come into my head and 'give me feelings,' as I once heard a little girl say."

"Then they are poetry to *you*," said her companion, kindly—earnestly almost, and a look came into his eyes which she had not seen in them before—a look which gave Roma a silly passing feeling of envy of the woman on whom some day they might rest with an intensity of that gaze. "Let me see," he went on, "I think I too remember learning those verses as a child—

"Gone are the heads of the silvery hair.
And the young that were have a brow of care."

"Isn't that it? I don't think I am likely to find those changes exactly. Perhaps, after all, what I most dread is not actual change—not change from what really *was*—but change from what I have gone on imagining to myself—hoping for, dreaming of. Ah, it would be very hard to bear!"

He seemed almost to have forgotten he was speaking aloud. Roma felt interested, though she could not altogether follow his train of thought.

"It looks rather like a case of the girl he left behind," she said to herself, with her usual habit of making fun of anything approaching "sentiment," and she thought it would be as well to give the conversation a turn. "Are you going to live at Wareborough now?" she inquired, "I wonder if you know my friends there!"

Here broke in the voice of Miss Bessie Montmorris, whose ears, from her seat on Mr Thurston's other side, had caught the word Wareborough. "We had a governess once who afterwards went to live at Wareborough," she remarked, with amusing irrelevancy; the truth was she thought Miss Eyrecourt had had quite her share of the good-looking stranger's attention, and caught at the first straw to draw it to herself. "It was some years ago," she continued.

"So I should suppose," muttered Roma, who was not altogether pleased at Miss Bessie's interruption, and felt

delighted to see by a slight contraction of the muscles of Mr Thurston's mouth, that her murmur had reached his ears.

"Her name," went on Miss Bessie, calmly, "was Bérard—Mademoiselle Bérard. She was French. I remember all about her going to live at Wareborough, for she used to write to us regularly. I can tell you the name of the family she went to. She stayed there some years. I have the name and address written down somewhere, so I am sure I am right," as if her hearers had been eagerly beseeching her for accurate information on the subject—"it was Laurence. There were two little girls, and no mother."

Confirmed story-tellers, it is said, "sometimes speak the truth by mistake." In the same way, exceedingly silly people do sometimes by a happy chance succeed in producing a sensation. Miss Bessie Montmorris, had she been gifted with clairvoyance, could not have hit upon a name as certain to affect vividly both her hearers as the one that had just passed her lips. For the interest of the morning's conversation was still strong upon Roma, and Mr Thurston, for reasons best known to himself, was not in a frame of mind to hear quite unmoved this unexpected mention of his friends by name.

Both started, then each looked surprised at the other for doing so. Mr Thurston was the first to speak—it seemed to Miss Eyrecourt, that he was eager to conceal the slight momentary disturbance of his equilibrium. His words were addressed to Miss Bessie, but Roma felt that she was intended to listen to them.

"I remember your friend, Mademoiselle Bérard, very well, Miss Montmorris," he said. "And an excellent creature she is. The Laurences are old friends of mine. I thought them most fortunate in meeting with Mademoiselle Bérard, for of course motherless girls require extra care. Do you happen to know where she is now? Somewhere in the South of France was her home, I think, was it not?"

He engaged Miss Bessie in recalling how long it was since she had heard from "Mademoiselle," what she had then said as to her plans, etc, and rather mischievously muddled the poor thing with questions exposing the extremely limited state of her acquaintance with French geography. So that in a few minutes Miss Bessie felt not indisposed to retire from the field and gave, subsequently, in the family council, as her opinion of "Christy's friend," that he was a "heavy, prosy young man, quite without conversation."

When she was safely off his hands, engaged in an amicable sisterly discussion with Mrs Christian across the table as to the precise hour at which Mr Beamish, the family apothecary, had called this morning, and about what o'clock to-morrow it was thought probable the last eye-tooth would appear, Mr Thurston returned to Roma.

"After all," he said, smiling. "I quite agree with you, the world is *very* small." Roma laughed. "I certainly did not expect to have an instance of the truth of my quotation so very soon," she said. "I met the Laurences when I was staying at Wareborough just now. I see you know them too."

"Very well indeed," he replied. "You will not wonder so much at my evident interest in what Miss Montmorris was talking about when I tell you that one of the Miss Laurences is engaged to be married to my brother—my only brother. He is a curate at Wareborough. Perhaps you met him too?"

Roma's face expressed extreme surprise, and to any one well enough acquainted with her to read a little below the surface, it would have been plain, that at first, the surprise was not of a disagreeable kind.

"Miss Laurence engaged to your brother?" she repeated, without noticing the latter part of Mr Thurston's speech. "How very strange! Somehow I feel as if I could hardly believe it—having seen her so lately, only the—night before last—" she hesitated. After all, she must have been completely mistaken in her estimate of that girl's character. She must be a flirt indeed, and not a very desirable sort of a flirt either, even according to Roma's not very stringent notions on these subjects, to have looked up into any man's face, be he never so charming, with those bright innocent smiles of hers, in the sort of way she had looked up into Beauchamp's, knowing herself to be engaged to another. And a clergyman, too! Somehow the latter fact seemed to Roma to aggravate the unbecomingness of her dancing half the evening with him, and the still more marked "sitting out," all of which Roma had explained by her extreme inexperience and youth, finding any other theory untenable in the presence of that buoyant girlish bearing, those lovely, honest, unsuspecting eyes. "I think I had fallen a little in love with her myself," thought Roma. "But if she is really engaged, it is a great relief on Beauchamp's account, and indirectly on my own. For Gertrude may be as incredulous as she likes—it is not often he will come across a girl like that, and more than half in love with him already, as, engaged or not engaged, I am *certain* she is."

But when she had reached this point in her meditations, she became aware that Mr Thurston was looking at her in some perplexity, waiting for her to finish her uncompleted sentence. How could she finish it? She could not tell him what she was thinking, that his brother was very much to be pitied, and that Miss Laurence was by no means "what she seemed," but that on all accounts, *her* own and Captain Chancellor's included, the sooner they were married the better. "What a complication," thought Roma, "and how odd that this complete stranger, this Mr Thurston, or rather his brother, should be mixed up in my private affairs in this roundabout way." She felt a silly sort of inclination to burst out laughing: it made her feel nervous to see him sitting there looking at her, waiting for her to speak. Why did he want so much to hear what she had to say? She could not understand the look of restrained eagerness in her face. She must say something.

"It is very absurd of me to feel as if Miss Laurence could not be engaged without its having been formally announced to me," she began. "I only saw her a few times, but I think she impressed me unusually. She is so *very* pretty, so—I don't know what to call it—like a bunch of wild flowers; a perfect embodiment of brightness and *young*-ness, and everything sweet and fresh and—ingenuous;" the last word came with a little halt. It was not lost on her companion; not a tone or a look of Miss Eyrecourt's but had been noted by him with breathless acuteness since Eugenia Laurence had become the subject of their conversation. But he refrained just yet from explaining her mistake to her. "It is

rather curious that Mrs Dalrymple, my cousin, where I was staying—you know her, no doubt, she is a friend of the Laurence's—did not tell me of it, is it not?"

"I am not at all sure that she knows of the engagement as a fact," Mr Thurston replied, quietly. "It has been a sort of taken-for-granted thing among ourselves, but they were both so young, that it was agreed it should not be formally recognised for some time. Indeed, my return home is to be the signal for its actual announcement, as I stand *in loco parentis* to my brother, though not very many years his senior. It is no *secret*, though," with a smile, "most likely I should not have mentioned it had this been Wareborough instead of Brighton. But I fancied you must have thought my manner odd when the Laurences were mentioned. I must set you right on one point, however. From what you say of her I see you think it is the elder Miss Laurence I mean. It is not Eugenia, who is engaged to my brother, but the younger one—Sydney."

"Sydney, a younger sister? Oh yes, I remember; but I never happened to see her. She was away from home nearly all the week I was there. But, dear me, she must be a perfect child. Eugenia doesn't look eighteen," exclaimed Miss Eyrecourt.

"Sydney is almost that. Eugenia has always looked younger than her age. It was by that I recognised her—in your description, I mean."

He spoke rather confusedly, and his own slight embarrassment prevented his noticing the curious mingling of expressions on his companion's face. She did not know if she was glad or sorry to find herself mistaken.

"So I may reinstate Eugenia in my good opinion, and fall in love with her again if I choose," she reflected. "And Beauchamp may do so too, unfortunately, without clashing with the curate; but I am not by any means sure that it would not be clashing with the curate's brother."

She looked up again at Mr Thurston as the thought struck her definitely for the first time. Her wits were quick, her instinct quicker. Why should he have so instantly discovered it was Eugenia she was thinking of? That was a lame excuse he had given of her reference to the girl's extreme youth. Sydney was still younger. Ah, no! her words had been tinged with the charm she had herself felt the influence of in Eugenia; and he, lover-like, had forthwith appropriated the tribute of admiration as his lady-love's, and no one else's! Was she—would she be his lady-love? How would it all end? Roma fell into a reverie, which lasted till she found herself back in the drawing-room again, listening to old Mrs Montmorris's platitudes, and young Mrs Montmorris's pitter-patter conversation till she could almost have fancied the last hour was a dream.

After a while they asked her to sing. She was not sorry to do anything to get over the time till the gentlemen joined them again, for four female Montmorrises without an idea among them were not entertaining. And singing was a pleasure to Roma. It cost her no effort; her voice was sound and true and suggestive, and so well trained that it sounded perfectly natural. She had sung two songs, and was half-way through a third, when she heard the door open and the gentlemen enter. "Hush!" said Mrs Christian. "Hush!" repeated Miss Bessie and Miss Cecilia, and the two Messrs Montmorris obediently seated themselves with audibly elaborate endeavours at noiselessness till the song should be over. Roma felt more than half inclined to stop, and was lifting her hands from the piano with this intention, when a voice beside her whispering, "Go on, please," made her change her mind. It was Mr Thurston. "How could such a great tall creature as he have come across the room so quietly?" thought Miss Eyrecourt to herself; and then she became suddenly alive to the very sentimental nature of the ballad she was singing. It was new to her to feel the least shy or self-conscious; she had sung it hundreds of times before, often with Beauchamp standing behind her chair, but the meaning of the words had never before come home to her as now. There was no help for it, however; she must go through with it now; but she wished Mr Thurston would go over to the sofa and talk to Miss Cecilia. She came to the fourth verse—

The time and all so fairy sweet,
That at each word we did say,
I felt the time for love so meet
That love I gave away.

She caught sight of Mr Thurston's face. It was very grave. Was he thinking of Eugenia? Roma resolved she would never sing a love song again. She got to the last verse:—

We take on trust, forsooth we must,
And reckon as we see;
But oh, my love, if false thou prove,
What recks all else to me?

"Thank you," said Mr Thurston, and his words were echoed from all parts of the room. "I don't think I ever heard that song before," he observed, when the clamour of thanks had subsided again.

"I don't fancy you ever did," replied Roma. "I have only got it in manuscript. It was set to music by a friend of Be—my—my—" She stopped. Mr Thurston was looking at her curiously. For no reason that she could give to herself she felt her cheeks suddenly blushing crimson. What had come over her to-night? Never in all her life did she remember having been so absurdly silly. She made a great effort. "I always tumble over Captain Chancellor's connexion with me," she said, boldly; "it is such an indescribable one. He is my sister-in-law's brother. By the way, Mr Thurston, he is at Wareborough just now—stationed there; you may meet him."

"I shall certainly remember your mention of him if I do," said Mr Thurston, courteously. Then he recurred to the subject of the song. "It is very pretty, both words and music, and it is a great treat to me to hear such singing as yours, Miss Eyrecourt."

"It is the only thing I can do. I am very idle and useless," she said, rather sadly.

"Your one talent? I don't know about that," he replied. "I should say you could do a great many things well if you liked to try. Perhaps it is the thing you best like doing? We are often apt to consider that the only thing we *can* do."

"Perhaps. I daresay you are right," her voice was more subdued than usual. "I suppose there is no law forcing certain human beings to be drones."

"Or butterflies?" suggested Mr Thurston. "Well, or butterflies," she continued, with a smile, "whether they will or not. But," with a little hesitation, and a glance round to make sure that Gertrude was not within hearing, "when one has no special duties, no very near ties—however kind one's friends may be—it is a little difficult, isn't it, to be anything better?"

"Not a little—*very*," he said, kindly, looking sorry for her. "But it may not always be so," in a lower tone.

"That is thanks to my idiotic blush when I mentioned Beauchamp," thought Roma. She felt annoyed, and, rising from her seat, stood by the piano turning over the loose music lying about, without speaking. For a moment Mr Thurston watched her silently, his face had a perplexed look as if he were endeavouring to make up his mind about something.

"Miss Eyrecourt," he said at last. "Will you do me a little favour? Will you tell me something I want to know, and not think it odd of me to ask it?"

"If I can, I will," she answered. "What is it?"

"I want you to tell me," he said, speaking clearly and unhesitatingly now, "I want you to tell me why it was so much easier for you to believe the fact of my brother's engagement to the younger Miss Laurence than to the elder."

In her embarrassment, Roma gave a foolish answer—

"You forget," she said, "that I don't know the younger sister. It is easy to accept anything one is told about a perfect stranger, though I did feel surprised. She is so young."

"Surprised perhaps, but nothing more?" he persisted. "It is just what you say—you know nothing of the one sister, but you do know something of the other; something which made it difficult for you to credit what you thought I told you of *her*. It is that something I want you to tell me. You don't know what a service you may be doing me."

"But I can't tell you," said Roma, becoming more and more uncomfortable. "And I don't think I would if I could. It makes me feel like a spy."

Just then her eye caught the last words of the song she had been singing, lying on the piano beside her!

But oh, *my* love, if false thou prove!

Mr Thurston's glance followed hers. He read the line too.

"You don't understand me," he said, not resenting her hasty accusation. "It is nothing of that kind. One can't talk of 'false,' when there has been no sort of promise claimed or given, directly or indirectly. I shall have no one but myself to thank for it, if it is all over. Only I think I should be much better—less likely to make a fool of myself, in short," with a smile, "if I were not quite unprepared. That is why I want you to tell me what was in your mind. I know it is a very odd thing to ask, but our whole conversation has been odd. Just think; what have I not told you or allowed you to infer, and two hours ago I had never heard your name?"

While he was speaking, Roma had been collecting her wits. "Mr Thurston," she said gravely, "I cannot tell you anything. There are passing impressions and fancies which take a false substance and form from merely putting them into words. Truly, I have nothing it would be fair—to yourself, I mean—to tell you her;" decision was strengthened by the recollection of Gertrude's ridicule of her "absurd fancifulness" this very morning. "I can only say," with a smile, "that I don't agree with my song. There is no need for 'taking on trust.' Go and see for yourself. If you are disappointed, I pity you with all my heart, but if you are deceived in any way it will be your own fault, not *hers*. She is candour itself. Still, don't be too easily discouraged. I wish you well."

"Thank you," he said, for he saw she was thoroughly determined to say no more, and they both moved away to other parts of the room.

Nothing more passed between them except a word or two when they were saying good-night. "We may meet again some day, Miss Eyrecourt—at Wareborough. Perhaps," said Mr Thurston.

"Perhaps," said Roma, "but 'some day' is a wide word."

"Not always," he replied, and that was all. "You seemed to get on unusually well with that friend of Christian Montmorris's, Roma," said Gertrude, when they were shut up together in the carriage on their way home. Her tone was half satisfied and inquisitive: she evidently had not made up her mind if her sister-in-law should be scolded or not. Roma had been debating how much of her conversation with Mr Thurston it would be well to retail to Mrs Eyrecourt, but something in Gertrude's remark jarred upon her, and she instantly resolved to tell her nothing.

"Did I?" she said, indifferently. "Well, there was no one else to get on with; and he had just come from India, so he was rather more amusing than the Montmorrises."

"Is he going back again immediately?" asked Mrs Eyrecourt, but she never waited for the answer. A new idea struck

her. "Oh, by-the-bye, Roma," she exclaimed. "Isn't it odd—just when we were talking about the Halswood Chancellors this morning—old Mr Montmorrison tells me the second son, that is to say rather, the second *grandson*, died last year. Isn't it odd we never heard of it? He seems to have a very high opinion of the new head of the family—Herbert Chancellor; he says Halswood will be a very different place now. The income has increased amazingly; old Uncle Chancellor spent so little; and Herbert Chancellor's wife has a large fortune too, he tells me. Fancy, Roma, their eldest child, a girl, is eighteen. Wouldn't she be nice for Beauchamp?"

"Very," replied Roma, satirically. "She's got money—that's all that needs to be considered."

"You shouldn't speak so, Roma. As if I would ever put money before other things—goodness and suitableness and all that," said Gertrude, in an injured tone. "You're in one of your queer humours to-night, I see. But I daresay you're very tired, poor child! and it was very good-natured of you to come to the Montmorrisones' with me."

Volume One—Chapter Six.

Gerald's Home-Coming.

Fairer than stars were the roses,
Faint was the fragrance and rare;
Not any flower in the garden
Could with those roses compare.

But another had taken delight
In colour and perfume rare.
And another hand had gathered
My roses beyond compare.

Wild Roses.

It was late in the evening when Gerald Thurston at last found himself again at Wareborough. He had written to Frank to expect him by a certain train, or, failing that, not till the following day; but after all he found himself too late to leave town at the appointed hour, and only just in time to catch the afternoon express. He hesitated at first about remaining where he was another night. It would be a disappointment to his brother not to meet him at the station; but in the end, the temptation of reaching a few hours sooner the place containing everything and everybody dearest to him on earth—to him, ugly and repellent though it might be to a stranger, emphatically *home*—proved too strong. And thus it came to pass that he reached his destination pretty late in the evening, and that no familiar figure standing on the station platform in eager anticipation met his eyes, as, in a sort of vague hope that "Frank or some one" might have thought it worth while to see the express come in, he stretched his head out of the carriage window, when the slackening speed and drearily-prolonged whistle told him he had reached his journey's end. He had not expected any one. It was entirely his own fault, he repeated to himself so positively, as to suggest some real though unrecognised and perhaps unreasonable disappointment. It seemed in every sense a cold welcome, and he felt glad to get away from the dingy station, where even the porters were strangers to him, out into the sloppy streets, for now every turn of the cab wheels was taking him nearer home. It was raining heavily, and was very cold. It had been raining heavily and had been bitterly cold too, he remembered, when he had left Wareborough at the same season three years ago.

"It all looks exactly the same," he thought to himself, as he glanced at the gas-lighted shops, the muddy pavements, the passers-by hurrying along as if eager to get out of the rain. "For all the change I see, it might be the very evening I went away, and my three years in India a dream."

He had left the bulk of his luggage at the station, and drove straight to the little house his brother and he had called home since their parents' death, where, with the help of an old servant who had once been their nurse, they had kept together the most valued of their household gods, and where Gerald had for long lived on the plainest fare, and denied himself every luxury, that Frank's university career might not come to an untimely close. All that was over now, however; brighter days had come: Frank had fulfilled Gerald's best hopes, and Gerald himself was now, comparatively speaking, a rich man. He had seen the worst of the material part of the struggle; he had made his way some distance up the hill now, he told himself. He might pause and take breath, might allow himself to dream about a future he had worked hard for, the destruction of which, though he might strive to bear it manfully, would be no passing disappointment, would, it seemed to him, take all the light out of his life.

He was lost in a reverie when the cab stopped. Another little chill fell upon him, when the opening door showed, not Dorothy's familiar face, all aflame with eager anxiety to welcome her boy, but that of a total stranger. A freezingly proper maiden of mature years, who inquired in suspicious tones, eyeing with dissatisfaction the carpet bag he held in his hand, his only visible luggage, "if he were Mr Thurston's brother, for if so there was a note for him on the dining-room chimbley-piece." And into the dining-room she followed him, though evidently reassured by his acquaintance with the arrangements of the house, and stood by him in an uncomfortably uncertain uninterested manner, as unlike Dorothy's hospitable heartiness as darkness is to light, while he read Frank's note.

"I have been twice to the station," it said; "for as you named 4:50 as 'the latest,' I thought I had better meet the 3:55 also. You say so positively you will not come by a later, that I think I must quite give you up. I am dining at the Laurences'. There was a particular reason for it, so I can't get off without a better excuse than the mere ghost of a chance that you may still come to-night. Still, I leave this note, in the remote possibility of your doing so, to ask you,

if you do come, to follow me. They will be delighted to see you, and it would never do for your first evening to be spent alone. Be sure you make Martha get you something. I wish we had Dorothy back."

Gerald remembered about Dorothy now. She had married a few months before. Of course; how stupid to have forgotten it! He had actually a wedding present for her in his trunk.

"No, thank you—nothing," he replied to Martha's inquiries as to what he would have, delivered in a tone suggestive of latent resentment of untimely meals. "Nothing except a glass of sherry—you can get me that, I suppose—and a biscuit; and stay—I shall want a cab in—yes, in ten minutes. Is the boy in?—you have a boy, I suppose? In ten minutes, remember;" for Martha's muttered reply that she "would see" was not very promising.

She was as good as, or rather better than, her words. Within the prescribed time the cab was at the door, and Gerald ready (for a postscript to Frank's note had told him "not to trouble about dressing. It would be too late if he stopped to unpack, and there were only to be one or two gentlemen at the Laurences"), and rattling off again through the plashing streets, along the muddy road leading to the suburb where Mr Laurence lived. It was not a long drive, barely a mile, but to Gerald it seemed hours till he at last found himself standing outside the familiar door, the rain beating down steadily on his umbrella. The servant who opened here was also a stranger to him, and evidently Frank had forgotten to mention his brother's possible appearance, for she stood irresolute, at a loss to account for his unseasonable visit. It was uncomfortable, and for the first time Gerald began to get impatient at this succession of small rebuffs, individually of no-moment, but, all together, sufficient to lower the temperature of his eager hopes and anticipations. A sort of reaction began to set in; for a minute or two he felt inclined not to reply to the servant's inquiry as to whether he wished to see her master, but to turn away and walk home again through the rain—to Martha's disgust, no doubt,—and never let Frank know he had obeyed his injunctions. Then he laughed at himself for even momentarily contemplating conduct which, had he been a boy again, and Dorothy there to give her opinion, she would certainly have described as "taking the pet," and mustering his good spirits afresh, he inquired if Mr Frank Thurston were not dining with Mr Laurence.

"Mr Thurston is here to-night—Mr Thurston the clergyman," replied the young woman, with more alacrity, imagining evidently that this call was on Frank *ex officio*. "He is still in the dining-room with the other gentlemen; but if it is anything very particular, I can tell him he is wanted at once; or if not, perhaps you will wait a few minutes till he leaves the dining-room."

"Yes, that will be better. Do not disturb him till they come out. I am Mr Fra—Mr Thurston's brother," whereupon the damsel became all eagerness and civility—she was young and nice-looking, in no wise resembling the forbidding-looking Martha; "but I would rather you did not say who I am; just tell him he is wanted when he comes out. Where can I wait? In here?" She opened the door of the school-room. "Ah, yes, that will do."

A chain of small coincidences seemed to connect Gerald's return with his departure three years ago; trifling commonplace coincidences which, in a less highly-wrought state of feeling, he would probably not have observed, subtly preparing him, nevertheless, for sharper perception of the changes he had not yet owned to himself that he dreaded. For the least material natures are yet the most vividly impressed by their sensible surroundings, and a background of outward similarity throws out in strong relief immaterial differences and variations we should otherwise have been slower to realise, or, where the interest is but superficial, never perhaps have been conscious of at all.

A curious sensation came over Gerald as he entered the old school-room. Here it was that three years before he had seen the last of the Laurence sisters; it had been almost the same hour of the evening, for nine o'clock, he remembered, had struck while they were all standing there, and Frank had hurried him off, fearing he would lose his train. They had driven to the station by a very circuitous route, that his oldest friends might have his latest good-bye. And Sydney had cried, he remembered, when he kissed her, and Eugenia had grown pale when he shook hands with *her*, and mademoiselle had stood by with tears in her kind black French eyes, and three years had seemed to them all a very long look-out indeed! And now they were over; the winter of banishment and separation was past. Were the flowers about to spring for Gerald? was the singing of birds henceforth to sound through his life? was the fulfilment of his brightest hopes at hand?

Something was at hand. The door had been left slightly ajar, and his ear caught the approaching sounds of a slight rustle along the passage, and of a young, happy voice softly humming a tune. It came nearer and nearer. A sudden impulse caused Gerald to step back behind the doorway; the gas-light was low in the room: it was easy to remain in shadow.

She came in quickly, gave a slight exclamation of impatience at the insufficient light, then came forward into the middle of the room and stood on tiptoe, one arm stretched up as far it could reach to turn on the gas. She succeeded rather beyond her intentions, the light blazed out to the full, illuminating brilliantly her upraised face and whole figure, as she remained for a few moments in the same attitude, uncertain evidently if the flame was too high for safety. Was she changed? No, not changed, improved only, developed, young as she looked, from mere girlhood into early womanhood, of a loveliness surpassing even his high expectations. She was dressed in white, with no colour save somewhere a spot of bright rose; a knot of ribbon or a flower, he did not notice which, on the front of her dress. That was Eugenia all over; he remembered her love of brilliant contrast; however neutral in tint and unobtrusive the rest of her dress, there was always sure to be a dash of bright rich colour somewhere, in her hair, at her collar, round her wrists. Outwardly she was the same Eugenia, grown marvellously beautiful, but the same. And one look into her eyes would, he fancied, tell him all he so longed to know—that in spirit and heart she was still the same transparent, guileless, sensitive creature he had left, innocent and unsuspecting as a child, yet brightly intelligent, vividly imaginative. A rare creature, yet full of faults and inconsistencies; whose nature, however, he had studied closely, and knew well, and knowing it, asked no greater privilege than to take it into his own keeping, through life to guard it from all rude contact that might sully its purity or stunt its rich promise. He had left her, as he told Roma, free as air, bound by no shadow of a tie; yet there were times when he felt it almost impossible to believe that she had not

guessed his secret, guessed it and—hope whispered—not resented it, and even, perhaps, in her vague girlish way looked forward to a day when it should no longer be a secret, when this strong deep love of his should receive its reward.

These were the dreams he had been living in, for three years; these were the hopes that had kept up his courage through much hard and toilsome work—dreams and hopes whose destruction would, indeed, be very hard to bear. But he felt no misgivings now; the mere sight of Eugenia, the delight of her near presence, seemed to have dispelled them like mists. He felt reluctant to break the sort of spell that had come over him since she entered the room; he stood in perfect silence, watching her, as if bewitched. She moved away in a minute or two, satisfied seemingly that the light might remain as it was, and crossed the room to a low cupboard at the other side from where Gerald stood. She pulled out a pile of loose music, and began searching among it for some missing piece. Mr Thurston thought it time to let her know he was there: she might be startled if she saw him suddenly when leaving the room. He came forward into the full light, giving a chair an obtrusively noisy push to attract her attention. She looked up, startled for an instant, but before she had time to realise her fear, he spoke.

“Eugenia.” That was all he said.

The colour came rushing over her face, for the momentary start had turned it somewhat pale. Whether her first sensation was pleasure or annoyance, it was impossible to say. That it was one or other Gerald felt certain, for that this crisis, to which he had looked forward so long and so anxiously, could appear to Eugenia an event of very trifling importance, it would have been impossible for him to believe. It took all his self-control to refrain from any expression of the strong emotion with which his whole being was filled; and he not unnaturally, therefore, attributed some degree of emotion, agreeable or the reverse, to the other chief actor in the little drama whose scenes he had so often rehearsed in imagination. He waited eagerly for her to speak.

“Gerald!” she exclaimed. “How you startled me! What in the world did you come in; in this queer way, for? We quite gave you up when you were not in time for dinner. Come into the drawing-room, or stay, I’ll send for Frank, if you would rather see him alone first. He will be so delighted.”

She was running away, but he called her back. Her last words were cordial enough, though her first had been undoubtedly cross. Few people like being startled; it sets them at a disadvantage, and in a more or less ludicrous position. Eugenia had a peculiar dislike to it; she could not bear to be thought nervous or wanting in self-control, and she felt conscious that her cheeks had betrayed her momentary panic, and this added to her annoyance. She had been very desirous of meeting Gerald Thurston heartily when he came, she wanted to please Sydney and Frank; she had felt so happy the last few days that she wanted to please everybody. It was just a little awkward Gerald’s arriving in this unexpected way when she was preoccupied and perhaps a little excited about other things, but after all it wouldn’t matter. Sydney and Frank would soon make him feel himself at home. So, her momentary annoyance past, she turned back, and willingly enough, when he called to her to stop.

“Won’t you even shake hands with me, Eugenia?” he said.

There was a strange change in his voice from the bright, eager tone in which he had first called her by her name, but she was too self-absorbed to perceive it.

“Of course I will,” she replied, heartily, holding out her hand. “I beg your pardon for forgetting it. But you really did startle me a good deal, Gerald,” she added, looking up with a pretty little air of mingled apology and reproach.

“Did I?” he said, gently. “I am very sorry.”

He had taken her hand and held it, and, anxious now to welcome him kindly, Eugenia did not at once withdraw it.

“Yes, indeed,” she said. “How was I to know you were not a housebreaker, standing there, you huge person. Fancy meeting you again for the first time in such a queer way.”

She was now full of brightness and merriment. So like, so very like, the Eugenia he had left, that he began to recover from the first thrill of disappointment, to think that perhaps there had been no real cause for it. This gay, laughing manner was not exactly what he had imagined hers would be when they first met again; but still it was natural and unaffected, and she had always had rather a horror of “scenes.” And, after all, if he found her as he had left her, should he not feel satisfied? He had had no grounds for suspecting that she in the least returned his feelings, or was even aware of their existence. He was quite patient enough to begin at the beginning: to teach her by gentle degrees to love him; to serve, if need be, the old world seven years’ service for her sake, content with slow progress and small signs of her growing favour. There was but one dread which paralysed him altogether. What if he were too late?

He let go her hand. He was anxious in no way to ruffle the extreme sensitiveness he knew so well.

“You don’t know how I have looked forward to coming home again all these long years, Eugenia.”

Her sympathy was touched. “Poor Gerald,” she said, and for the first time she looked straight into his face, and their eyes met. He had thought he could read so much in those eyes; they were less easily fathomed than he had imagined.

“Eugenia,” he said, very gravely—she could not imagine what he was going to say—“you have grown very beautiful.”

To his surprise, she neither blushed nor looked down. She smiled up in his face, a bright, happy smile that seemed to flood over as with sunshine her lovely face, to add brilliance even to the rich wavy chestnut hair. “I am so glad you think so,” she said, softly. “It makes it more possible to understand *his* thinking so,” was the unuttered reflection that explained her curious speech.

Gerald had no key to her thoughts, therefore the strangeness of her reply struck him sharply, for he knew her to be incapable of small vanity or self-conceit. He looked at her again; she was still smiling; long ago her smile had seemed to him one of her greatest charms; it was so sweet and tender as well as bright, so wonderfully fresh and youthful, and with a certain dauntlessness about it—a defiance of failure and trouble, a fearless, childlike trustfulness. All this Gerald used to fancy he could read in Eugenia's smile; could he do so still? He could not tell, he turned away. He would not own to himself that his instinct had discovered a change; a dreaminess, a strange wistfulness had come over the dear face as it smiled up at him—a subtle indescribable shadow of alteration.

"Perhaps it would be as well to tell Frank I am here," said Mr Thurston, after a moment's silence. "I should just like to shake hands with him in here, and then, if you will excuse my clothes," he glanced down at his grey tweed travelling-suit rather doubtfully—the contrast between it and Eugenia's delicate white evening dress striking him disagreeably, "I might go into the drawing-room for a few minutes to see your father and Sydney. You have some friends with you, though, have you not?"

"Only two or three gentlemen; never mind your clothes," said Eugenia, lightly; and then she went to send a message to Frank, still in the dining-room, deep in a discussion with her father and Mr Foulkes. It was rather unlucky, she said to herself again, as she walked slowly along the passage, this unexpected appearance of Gerald's. Of course it didn't really matter about his clothes, but he did look rather rough, and papa would be sure to introduce him to Captain Chancellor as one of their most intimate friends; indeed, any one might see he considered himself such from his addressing her by her Christian name. Eugenia did not feel quite sure that she liked it; three years made a difference in that sort of thing; still, it might seem unkind, and might vex the others, if she were to give him a hint by calling him "Mr Thurston." With Sydney, of course, it was different—at this point in her meditations she ran against Sydney, just coming to inquire what had detained her so long; could she not find the song she wanted? Captain Chancellor had come in and Mr Payne, and Sydney didn't like the task of entertaining two gentlemen all alone. Eugenia's news threw her into a state of great excitement; she readily undertook the pleasant task of telling Frank, and Miss Laurence returned to the drawing-room.

Gerald was not left long alone. In two minutes he heard his brother's voice, and felt Frank's hand shaking his with boyish vehemence. Sydney was there too—Sydney, just what he had expected to find her, fair and calm and sweet, the same as a woman that she had been as a girl.

"Frank *would* make me come with him," she said apologetically, as she shook hands; "dear Gerald, we are so pleased to have you back again."

Mr Thurston stooped and kissed her, and Sydney accepted it quite simply as his brotherly right. There was no doubt about the cordiality of the welcome of these two young people, nor of that of Mr Laurence, who soon joined them, and Gerald's spirits began to rise.

"Had we not better go back to the drawing-room?" said Sydney, when some minutes had been spent in the eager cross-questioning that always succeeds a long-looked-for arrival. "Eugenia is alone there with those three gentlemen, and she may not like it."

It hardly appeared on entering the drawing-room that their absence had been regretted. Mr Foulkes and Mr Payne, two middle-aged men who rode the same hobbies with agreeably adverse opinions as to the direction and management thereof, were seated comfortably by the fire in animated conversation, but it was not on them that Mr Thurston's eyes rested when they took in the little scene before him. At the other end of the room, before the piano, her fingers idly touching a note now and then, sat Eugenia. Leaning over her with an air of the most complete absorption, stood a gentleman whom Gerald had never seen before. Tall, or appearing so from his somewhat slight build, with clear regular features, fair hair and almond-shaped deep blue eyes, his possession of unusual good looks was undeniable at even the first glance, though what perhaps struck Mr Thurston more strongly, was the extreme, almost exaggerated, refinement of his whole bearing and appearance. Instinctively—so curiously even in moments of intense feeling do such trifles force themselves upon our attention—Gerald glanced down at his own somewhat travel-stained figure and rough attire. "Fop," was the word that rose to his lips with a sudden boyish impulse of resentment, but when he looked again he felt he could not apply it. The refinement might be outward only, but it was genuine and unaffected. While he was still silently observing them, it happened that Eugenia looked up for an instant into her companion's face. It was only a moment's quick passing glance, but it was enough: it told him all. Gerald felt faint and giddy, strong man that he was, and instinctively seemed to clutch at something to steady himself by. It had all passed so quickly, only one person had had time to notice him. Mr Laurence had not entered the room with the others, and Frank had joined the gentlemen by the fire. But one pair of eyes had followed Gerald's with anxious sympathy. Some one pulled his sleeve gently. It was Sydney.

"Will you come and sit down by me for a few minutes, Gerald," she said. "I have such a lot of things to say to you."

He followed her mechanically to the sofa she pointed out, but did not speak. When they were seated, she chattered away for a few minutes about various trifles, that did not call for a reply, till she thought he had recovered the first physical effects of the shock. Then she remained silent for a minute or two. Suddenly Gerald spoke. "Who is he, Sydney?" he asked, not seeming to care what Sydney might think.

She did not affect to misunderstand him.

"His name is Chancellor—Captain Chancellor. I think he is in the 203rd. He is stationed here just now. You know there is generally a company—isn't it called so? I think he spoke of his company at dinner—a small detachment, any way, at Wareborough, belonging to the regiment at Bridgenorth," she replied.

"I know," said Gerald, and relapsed into silence. But he quickly roused up again.

"Chancellor," he repeated—"Captain Chancellor. I have heard that name lately. I know something of him, Sydney, I

am certain I do." Sydney looked eager to hear. "What can it be? No, it is no use, I cannot remember. It may come into my head afterwards. Have you—has—has your sister seen much of him?"

"No, oh no. I never saw him till to-night, and Eugenia has only seen him once before; but—" Sydney stopped.

"But that sort of thing isn't always reckoned by many or few times, eh, Sydney?"

"Whoever loved, that loved not at first sight?"

"You think there's something in that old saying, do you? I can't say, I'm sure. My experience is limited in these matters," said Gerald.

His tone was bitterly sarcastic, almost jeeringly so. It was so thoroughly unlike him that Sydney looked up in surprise and alarm. "Was this the Gerald she remembered so gentle, so delicate, so chivalrous? Ah, no. It must be as she feared. Poor Gerald!"

The distress in her face softened him—still more her words when she spoke again.

"I don't know, Gerald. I can't answer you. I only know that I am *very* anxious about her."

"Don't you like him, then? Do you know any ill of him?" inquired Mr Thurston, with a sort of fierce eagerness.

"Oh, no," said Sydney, quickly. "Not that at all. I like him very well. Of course any one can see he is a gentleman and all that. And papa likes him. He has set himself to please papa, I can see already. It is just that we know so little of him, and Eugenia is *so* pretty, and so—I don't know what to call it. You know how clever she is, Gerald, but even that makes me more anxious about her. She sees everything by her own ideas, as it were. And some day I feel as if she might be terribly, dreadfully disappointed. I believe it would kill her, Gerald," in a lower voice.

"Ah," he said, "I see. She would venture all." His tone was perfectly gentle now. A great throb of manly pity seemed to drown for the moment his bitter, bitter disappointment. Only for the time, there was many a hard struggle before him yet, for this love of his had entwined itself round every fibre of his being, and now—sometimes it seemed to him that the beautiful thing he had so nursed and cherished had turned to a viper in his bosom; that its insidious breath would change to poison every spring of love, and trust, and hope in his whole nature.

No more was said for a few minutes. Then Sydney spoke—she had to call him twice by name before she caught his attention.

"Gerald," she said, "I see papa speaking to Captain Chancellor. Now he is coming this way. I am sure he is going to introduce you and him to each other."

"Very well," replied Mr Thurston. "I have no objection."

He rose as he spoke, and went forward a few steps to meet Mr Laurence, whose intention Sydney had guessed correctly. The two young men bowed and shook hands civilly enough. Then Captain Chancellor, who was always thoroughly equal to these little social occasions, said something pleasant in his soft, low voice, about the new arrival's return home, as if he had known all about it, and had been anticipating Mr Thurston's return with nearly as much eagerness as Frank himself. There was no denying it—there was a great charm about this man; even Gerald felt it as he replied to Beauchamp's well-chosen words. And his face was far from a bad face, Mr Thurston was forced to admit, when he saw it more closely; the want in it he could not readily define.

Beauchamp, too, was making up his mind about this new-comer, and taking his measure in his own way, though from his manner no one would have suspected it. He hadn't felt altogether easy about the absence of male cousin or old friend, in Miss Laurence's case. Hitherto the only thing in the shape of a tame cat he had discovered about the establishment was most charmingly and felicitously engaged to the little sister. So far nothing could be better. But there might be other discoveries to make, and he didn't want to get into anybody's way, or cause any unpleasantness—he hated unpleasantnesses, and the only way out of unpleasantnesses of *this* kind, rivals, and all that, was sometimes a way in which Beauchamp's training had by no means prepared him to go in a hurry—and he quite meant to be very careful, for Roma's warning had impressed him a little after all. He only wanted to get over the next few weeks comfortably in this dreadful place, and had no objection to Roma's hearing indirectly of the manner in which he was doing so. It would be too bad if this great hulking "cousin from India," was going to come in the way of his harmless little amusement. And whether or not there was any fear of this, Captain Chancellor could not all at once make up his mind, though from Miss Laurence's side, so far, it hardly looked like it.

When Gerald Thurston came to say good-night to Eugenia, she noticed that he called her "Miss Laurence." Captain Chancellor was within hearing, and Eugenia felt pleased by Gerald's tact and good taste, and her own good-night was on this account all the more cordial.

Beauchamp observed it all too, and drew his own conclusions.

Volume One—Chapter Seven.

Several People's Feelings.

Oh, for the ill's half understood,
The dim, dead woe
Long ago.

R. Browning.

The rain was over, the evening had turned out fine after all. Captain Chancellor drove away in his fly from Mr Laurence's door, but the Thurston brothers decided to walk.

"I don't spend much on flies and that sort of thing, Gerald," said Frank, as he slipped his arm through his brother's; "you used to be afraid I was inclined to be extravagant in little things, but I can tell you it only wants a hard winter in Wareborough to make a fellow ashamed of all that self-indulgence. Good heavens, Gerald! you don't know, though you do know a good deal for a layman," Gerald smiled to himself at this little bit of clerical bumptiousness, "about the poor, but you don't know what there is here sometimes. I have half-a-dozen new schemes to consult you about. Mr Laurence has a clear head for organisation, but though so practical in his own department, he won't come out of it. Education, education, is his cry from morning till night. I quite agree with it, but you can't educate people or children till you've got them food to eat and clothes to wear. I know I don't expect them to listen to *my* part of the teaching till I show them I want to make their poor bodies more comfortable if I can."

"But Mr Laurence's attention is not given to the very poor. It is more given to the class above them," said Gerald.

"Only because he can't get hold of any others. His *theories* embrace the whole human race," replied Frank, laughing, "but he is wise enough to begin with those he can get hold of. It's a pity he is not a very rich man. He would do an immense deal of good."

"He never could be a rich man, it seems to me," said Gerald. "He is quite wanting in the love of money for its own sake, and I am not sure that any man ever amasses a great fortune who hasn't a spice of this enthusiasm of gold in him. What you will do with the gold when you have it, is a secondary consideration. I do believe there grows upon many men an actual love of the thing itself."

"You're not turning cynical, surely, Gerald?" said Frank, laughingly. "That would be a new *rôle* for you." His ear had detected a slight bitterness, a dispiritedness in his brother's tone, though Gerald had exerted himself to speak with interest on general subjects in order to conceal his real state of feeling.

Gerald laughed slightly. "I am afraid the more one sees of the world and of life the harder it is to keep altogether free of that sort of thing. But tell me about your own plans. What a sweet woman Sydney will be, Frank! I can hardly think of her as grown-up, you see. Have you and Mr Laurence touched upon business matters at all yet?"

"Oh dear, yes!" said Frank, importantly. "It's all as satisfactory as can be. With what you tell me is my share of our belongings, and what Mr Laurence can give Sydney, and my curacy we shall do splendidly. But I strongly suspect, Gerald, that you are giving me more than I have any right to. I believe you have added your own money to mine—I do really. Of course I can't tell, for we never went into these things much before you went abroad, but I'm certain my father didn't leave twice what you have made over to me."

"It's all right, Frank; it is indeed," said Gerald, earnestly. "I am doing very well now and am likely to do better. I shall go over my affairs with you some day soon to satisfy you. I could easily make your income larger, but perhaps it is as well for you to begin moderately. You'll have to restrict your charities a little, you know, when you have a wife to think of."

"Yes, I know that," replied the curate; "but, Gerald, you should look to home too. You will be marrying yourself."

"It is not likely," said Mr Thurston. "I am thirty-one—seven years older than you, Frank; getting past the marrying *age*, you see."

Frank wondered a little, but said nothing, and went on to talk of other things. Suddenly a casual mention of the Dalrymples struck Gerald with a flash of remembrance.

"Is not that Captain Chancellor we met to-night a friend of theirs?" he asked his brother.

"Yes; I believe Mr Laurence and Eugenia met him there, and I am not at all sure that it wouldn't have been a great deal better if they had not done so," replied the young clergyman, oracularly. "Eugenia isn't a bad sort of girl; she is well-meaning, and not stupid, and certainly very pretty; but I must say she is very childish and silly. She is constantly in extremes, always running full tilt against something or other. For my part, I confess I can't make her out. I am uncommonly glad Sydney is so completely unlike her. I didn't at all admire the way she allowed herself to be monopolised by that Captain Chancellor to-night. If they had a mother it would be different, but Mr Laurence would never see anything of that kind if it was straight before his eyes."

"You are rather unreasonable, I think, Frank," said Gerald. "Such things will happen, you know. I suppose there have been occasions on which Sydney too has allowed herself to be monopolised. You would have thought it very hard if any one had objected."

"The cases are thoroughly different," replied the younger Thurston. "I should very much doubt this man's being in earnest."

This was a new view of the subject. Frank said no more, and Gerald did not encourage further remarks concerning Eugenia. He tried to recall all that had passed between himself and Miss Eyrecourt; but the more he thought it over, the more puzzled he became. Her evident self-consciousness when Captain Chancellor's name was mentioned had impressed him with a conviction he had not stopped to analyse, that her relations with the gentleman in question were more than ordinarily friendly ones; and yet again her manner of alluding to Eugenia was perfectly explained by the supposition that the incipient flirtation—how Gerald hated the word!—had come very plainly under her

observation when at Wareborough, yet without arousing any personal feeling of indignation or annoyance. She knew this Captain Chancellor well. Could it be that he was only amusing himself, and that, therefore, from his side, the matter seemed to her of little consequence? Gerald ground his teeth at the thought. Sydney's inexperience of such things had limited her anxiety to the question of Captain Chancellor's worthiness and suitability. Frank's practical, matter-of-fact observation had suggested an even more painful misgiving to his brother, for Eugenia was not the sort of girl to whom a mere "flirtation" was possible. With her it would be all or nothing, and the damage to her whole nature of finding herself deceived could be little short of fatal. The fine metal would be sorely tested in so fiery a furnace. Were not the chances few that any of it would be left, save perhaps bent and distorted beyond recognition?

And this was the end of Gerald Thurston's long-anticipated return home—this was how he awoke from his dreams.

For the next few weeks Gerald had very little leisure. A great accumulation of business matters dependent upon his presence in Wareborough forced themselves on his attention. Had things been as he had hoped to find them, he would have chafed greatly at this; as they were, however, selfishly speaking, he felt glad of hard work, which there was no escaping. He saw very little of the Laurences—he saw little even of his brother. Now and then he asked himself if he had possibly been over hasty and premature, and for a day or two this misgiving tantalised him afresh. It might be as well, he thought, to seek an opportunity of judging for himself, and however things were, it was time to accustom himself to perfect self-command in Eugenia's presence. He had never seen Sydney alone since that first evening. On the one or two occasions he had been in Mr Laurence's house since then, it seemed to him the young *fiancée* had avoided him purposely. "No doubt, poor little soul, she thinks it would pain me to revert to that evening," he thought to himself; "and she doesn't want to tell me that what she suspected then is becoming more and more confirmed, though I can see by her manner it is so." Once Gerald purposely led to the mention of Captain Chancellor's name in talking with his brother. To his surprise, he found that Frank's slight prejudice and dislike had completely disappeared.

"He is a very good fellow of his class," said the clergyman. "Not very much in him, perhaps, but he seems to me honourable and straightforward, and thoroughly gentlemanly. He's a good Churchman too, I'm glad to find. I like him very much—better than I expected. Eugenia might do worse. But, after all, if nothing comes of it, I can't see that he will be in the least to blame. I don't see that he pays her any more attention than he does to Sydney; but then certainly she is a very different person from Sydney," added Frank, with considerable self-congratulation in the last few words. "I am sorry you don't see more of Captain Chancellor, Gerald," he continued. "You have been so busy lately, and he has never happened to be there the one or two times you have dropped in lately."

"No," replied Mr Thurston; "Eugenia was not at home either, the last time. She has been staying somewhere, has she not?"

"At the Dalrymples'. She is there a great deal. But never mind about her," said Frank, rather cavalierly. "Give yourself a holiday now and then, Gerald. Even I find I must sometimes, and my work is not nearly so monotonous as yours. We are going to skate on Ayclough Pool to-morrow. I have promised to take the Dalrymple boys, whose holidays have begun."

"It's rather a long way," said Gerald, doubtfully.

"Only four miles, and the weather is delightful for walking. We don't start till one, so you'll have all the morning. Sydney and Eugenia are coming to watch us. Do come; it will do you ever so much good. You have been dreadfully shut up since you came home," persuaded Frank.

"Very well," said Gerald at last. This might be the opportunity he had been looking for. Frank's opinion of Captain Chancellor had not reassured him, for the young clergyman was in many ways very inexperienced, incapable of understanding Eugenia, and constitutionally predisposed to judge of everything and everybody from his own straightforward point of view.

"Whatever Captain Chancellor's intentions are," reflected Gerald, "he must be a man of a good deal of tact and foresight of a small kind."

It was quite true. "Of a kind," Captain Chancellor's acuteness and perception were unrivalled. He knew exactly how far to go without risking "anything unpleasant." In all his numerous flirtations he had come off unscathed; never had any papa, urged thereto by an over-anxious mamma, taken the terrible step of demanding "his intentions;" his fastidious taste would indeed have been attracted by no girl, however charming, behind whom loomed the shadow of so coarse and hideous a possibility. He made a rule of looking well about him, making himself acquainted with the country, before he indulged in one of his little amusements, and so far he had never found himself wrong. In the present case he had been unusually lucky; fortune literally seemed to play into his hands, or perhaps it had appeared so to him, because at first the difficulties had promised to be great, and he had prepared to meet them with more than ordinary caution and skill. Mr Laurence's house was just the sort of house in which it was far from easy to obtain a friendly and familiar footing. The arrangements were ponderous and formal notwithstanding their simplicity and absence of ostentation; the hours were regular and visitors few. When Mr Laurence expected a friend or two to dine with him, he gave his daughters a few days' notice, and they never pretended to "make no difference;" on the contrary, Sydney consulted the cookery-book, and exhorted the cook; Eugenia arranged the flowers and the dessert, and gave a finishing touch to the positions of the drawing-room chairs. A household of this kind was new to Captain Chancellor, and it took him some little time quite to understand it, and when he did so he hesitated. Was it worth the necessary amount of "*chandelle*?" in this case represented by great tact, quick seizing of opportunity, and considerable patience; for Mr Laurence's dissertations were quite out of his line, his cook not a French one, his wines—well, hardly so bad as might have been expected. But after all, life in Wareborough would be really unendurable without some *passé-temps* of the kind. A happy thought struck him—two happy thoughts. Frank Thurston and Mrs Dalrymple, excellent, admirable creatures both, perfectly adapted for his purpose. So he spent a few days in sedulously cultivating the curate, whose good word was of course, under existing circumstances, an Open sesame to

the Laurence household, and so well succeeded in his design, that gradually all the family got accustomed to his dropping in at odd times just like Frank himself. They got accustomed to it, but did they like it? To Mr Laurence it was neither particularly agreeable nor the reverse; he got into the way of thinking of the new-comer as "a friend of Frank's," a pleasant, rather intelligent young man, who had seen a good deal of the world, and yet was easily entertained. To Sydney, this growing familiarity was the source of much secret anxiety, which yet she saw it best to keep to herself; to Eugenia—ah, what words will tell what it had come to be to Eugenia!—like the flowers in spring, like the sunshine, like life itself.

Then Captain Chancellor called pretty frequently on his old friend Mrs Dalrymple, and made himself very agreeable to her. He told her he really did not know how he should have got through this winter but for her kindness and hospitality; it was no small boon to him to have one person in Wareborough he might venture to look upon as a friend, with whom he might talk over old days, etc, etc. And gradually he led the conversation round to the Laurences, said he was so much obliged to Mr Dalrymple for his introduction to Mr Laurence, really a remarkable man, a man whose acquaintance any one might be proud of; but had it not struck Mr Dalrymple that his daughters were rather to be pitied, not the younger one, of course she was very happy in her engagement to young Thurston, but the elder one, she had really a very dull life? He felt quite sorry for her sometimes, a little kindness was well bestowed on a girl like that, and she was so grateful to Mrs Dalrymple for what she had already shown her. Altogether, he drew so moving a picture of Eugenia's monotonous existence that Mrs Dalrymple felt ready to ask her to take up her quarters permanently at Barnwood Terrace, and ended by setting off that very afternoon to invite Miss Laurence to spend a week with her, for it was just about Christmas time, her own young people were home from school, and there were plenty of other young people ready to join them in the merry-makings wherein Mrs Dalrymple's heart delighted—Eugenia would be so useful with the Christmas tree and all the rest of it. And Eugenia was only too happy to come, and during the fortnight to which the visit extended there were not many days on which she and Captain Chancellor did not meet. It was all done so cleverly, she hardly realised that these constant meetings were not the result of a series of happy accidents, or at least, their being otherwise was never obtruded on her notice, for one of the girl's great attractions in Beauchamp's eyes was the shrinking refinement he, in a superficial way, was able to appreciate and was most careful never to offend. In many ways, however, she puzzled him, set at defiance his preconceived ideas. Sensitive and shy though she was, she showed to him sometimes a confiding frankness which he could not explain as the simplicity of an inferior or uncultivated nature; and it never occurred to him that in judging of Eugenia Laurence his ordinary measure was quite at fault; his boasted knowledge of the world and of women—clumsy impediments in the way of the work, that to understand her rightly he had greater need to unlearn than to learn. "She is certainly quite unlike any other girl I ever came across. She is not the least stupid, yet she could be very easily deceived. She has decided opinions of her own, and yet she is so yielding. In short—she is a charming collection of contradictions," he said to himself. "Perhaps it's just as well I am not likely to be here much longer."

Once or twice during the time that Eugenia was her guest, Mrs Dalrymple got alarmed at the responsibility she was incurring in allowing these young people to see so much of each other. But they seemed so light-hearted and happy, her boys and girls were so fond of Miss Laurence, Captain Chancellor made himself so useful in escorting the merry party to the pantomime, taking the boys to the circus, helping to adorn the Christmas tree, and in half-a-dozen different ways, that Mrs Dalrymple had not the heart to interfere. Besides, what could she do? Eugenia was her invited guest, she could not send her home like a child in disgrace; Beauchamp Chancellor was the son of her oldest friends, she could not shut her doors on him because he was handsome and her young visitor was pretty. Things of this kind must just take their chance, she decided, and in the present case the good lady comforted herself by a peculiar form of argument. Either Beauchamp was engaged to Roma Eyrecourt or he wasn't. If he was, no harm was done; in other words, he, an engaged man, would never think of making love to another girl; if he wasn't, then why shouldn't he marry Eugenia Laurence as well as any one else, if he and she thought they would be happy together? And when the fortnight was over, and Eugenia kissed her and thanked her, and said she had "never been so happy before, never in all her life," Mrs Dalrymple confided to her Henry that if Beauchamp Chancellor didn't fall in love with her she would think very poorly of his taste; and she got quite cross with Henry for looking grave, and warning her that no good ever came of match-making.

Eugenia spoke truly when she said she had never been so happy in her life, for at this time every day seemed to add fresh delight to her already overflowing cup. She had got beyond the stage of looking either to the past or future; she lived entirely in the beautiful present. The tiny shocks of uncongeniality, unresponsiveness—she had never given it a name—which in the earliest part of her acquaintance with Beauchamp Chancellor had occasionally made themselves felt, were seldom now experienced by her; and if they were, her determination to see no flaw in her idol was a special pleader always ready to start up in his defence. It was sure "to be her own fault"—she was "stupid," or "matter-of-fact," or "absurdly touchy and fanciful." She was well under the spell. She never asked herself why she cared for him; she never thought, about his position, his prospects, his intentions; she did not trouble herself about whether he was rich or poor—whatever he was he was her perfection, her hero, her fairy prince, who had wakened her to life, whom she asked nothing better than to follow—

"O'er the hills, and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim;
Beyond the night, across the day,
Thro' all the world..."

She was sinking her all in the venture.

Then there came the day of the expedition to Ayclough Pool.

Ugly as Wareborough was, both in itself and its situation, there were yet to be found, as there are in the neighbourhood of most small towns, some fairly pretty walks a mile or two beyond its suburbs. The Woldshire side was the most attractive, for on this side one got out of the dead level so depressing to pedestrians in search of "a view," and the undulating ground encouraged one to hope that in time, provided, of course, one walked far enough,

one might come to something in the shape of a hill. Nor were such hopes deceptive. There really was a hill, or a very respectable attempt at one, which went by the name of Ayclough Brow, and half-way up which, one came upon the tiny little lake known as Ayclough Pool. There was rather a nice old farmhouse, perched up there too, not far from the Pool, and a chatty old farmer's wife who was fond of entertaining visitors with her reminiscences of "the old days," days when sheep could browse on the Brow without getting to look like animated soot-bags; when it was possible to gather a posy without smearing one's hands with the smuts on the leaves; when Wareborough was a little market town, where the mail-coach to London from Bridgenorth used to stop twice a week, and rattle out again in grand style, horn and all, along the Ayclough Road. Many an accident to this same Royal Mail could the old body tell of, for her husband's forbears had lived on the same ground for generations, and the smashes of various kinds that had taken place at a sharp bend of the road just below the Brow had been the great excitement in the lives of the dwellers in the lonely farmhouse, and the records thereof had been handed down religiously from father to son. More than one unfortunate traveller had been carried up to the farm, as the nearest dwelling-house, there to remain till the fractured limb was sound again, or till the bruised body and shaken nerves had recovered their equilibrium, or, in one or two yet sadder cases, under the roof-tree of the old house, far from home and friends, to end indeed the journey.

There was one story which Eugenia since childhood had listened to with intense sympathy—a really tragic story—notwithstanding the exaggerated ghastliness of detail with which, like all local legends of the kind, in process of time it had become embellished. It was that of a bride and bridegroom, married "the self-same morn," who had been among the victims of one of those terrible overturns. The bride had escaped unhurt, the husband was killed on the spot. They had carried him up to the farm, and then, for the day or two that elapsed before her friends could be communicated with, the poor girl had knelt in frantic agony beside the body, refusing to be comforted, at times wildly persisting he was not, could not be dead. By the next morning, the old farmer's wife used to add in a solemnly impressive tone, "she had heard tell, th' young leddy's hair were that grey she moight 'a been sixty." She had been taken away at last a raging lunatic, said the legend (probably in violent and very excusable hysterics), and of course never recovered her reason. There was no record of her name, the accident had occurred more than a hundred years ago, yet the story still clung to Ayclough Farm, and some people were not over and above fond of passing the bend in the road of a dark night. "'Twas lonesome, that bit of the way, very," said the old woman, and the wind among the trees—there was a good deal of wind up Ayclough way sometimes—made queer sounds like a coach galloping furiously in the distance, and there were people that said still queerer sights were to be seen now and again on the fatal spot.

Altogether there was a good deal of fascination about Ayclough, fascination felt all the more strongly by the Laurence girls, on account of the unusual dearth of the picturesque or of any material food for romance in their dull Wareborough home. A walk to the old farm had always been one of their recognised childish "treats," though Eugenia used to get dreadfully frightened, and hide herself well under the bedclothes when they were left alone by their nurse at night, after one of these expeditions. Sydney used to feel her way across the room in the dark, and climb into Eugenia's cot, and try to reason her into calmness.

"How could the ghost of the young lady be so silly as to come back to the place where her husband had been killed, when it was more than a hundred years ago, and they *must* be both happy in heaven now, like the lovers on the willow pattern plates."

"*They* were turned into birds," Eugenia would remonstrate, but Sydney could not see that that signified; "they were happy any way, and people in heaven must be even happier than birds. She couldn't think what they should ever want to come back for, or suppose they did, why any one should be afraid of them."

Then Eugenia would shift her ground, and defend her terrors by a new argument.

"Suppose ghosts weren't really people's souls, but evil spirits who looked like them? She had read something *so* horrible like that in one of papa's books the other day. It was a poem—she couldn't remember the name—but it was 'from the German.' If it was only light, she would tell it to Sydney."

But Sydney was not at all sure that she wanted to hear it, and she thought papa would be angry if he knew that Eugenia read books he left about, whereupon Eugenia would promise to do so no more, and in the diversion of her thoughts thus happily brought about, Sydney, finding the outside of her sister's bed less warm and comfortable than the inside of her own, would seize the opportunity of returning to her little cot, and in two minutes would be fast asleep, rousing for a moment again to agree sleepily to the entreaty that came across the room in Eugenia's irritatingly wideawake voice, "that she wouldn't tell nurse she had been frightened, or they would never be allowed to go to Ayclough any more."

Volume One—Chapter Eight.

On the Brink.

I love snow, and all the forms
Of the radiant frost;
I love waves and winds and storms,
Everything almost
Which is nature's, and may be
Untainted by man's misery.

Shelley.

Of the many times the sisters had walked to Ayclough they had never had a lovelier day for their ramble than the one

on which they set off with Frank Thurston and the young Dalrymples, to skate on the Pool. It was February, early February, and the Frost spirit, who had been late of coming this year, seemed inclined to make up for the delay by paying a pretty long visit now he had really got as far down south from his own home as Wareshire. He had greatly disappointed his special friends, the school-boys of the community, by not spending Christmas with them, as in the good old days, we are told, was his invariable custom, and the last two Saturdays Arthur and Bob Dalrymple had hardly consented to eat any dinner, so eager were they to make the most of their friend's company on these precious holiday afternoons.

"We expect Captain Chancellor to come with us, Frank," said Sydney, as the little party were setting off from Mr Laurence's door. "He said he would join us at the Brook Bridge at half-past one. He passes that way coming to our house, you know. He dined with us last night, and when he heard where we were going to-day, he said he would like to come too."

"All right," said Frank. "I expect some one too. I persuaded Gerald to promise to come. He never gives himself any play now at all. Ever since he came back from India he has been working far too hard. I don't think he is looking well either. He's not half the man he was before he went to India. Ah, there he comes! You girls must make a great deal of him to-day, for I want to coax him to give himself more relaxation."

Eugenia and Sydney were very ready to do as Frank wished, and when Gerald came up to them he was most graciously received. It was quite true that he was not looking well. Eugenia noticed it very distinctly; he was looking much less well even than on his first return, and her heart smote her for the scanty thought she had of late bestowed on her old friend.

"I am so very glad you can come with us to-day, Gerald," she said. "It is like old times, isn't it?"

"Like, but very different," he thought to himself, but aloud he answered cheerfully, and in spite of himself his spirits began to rise. It *was* like old times to have Eugenia walking beside him, her sweet bright face looking up in his, no one to dispute his claim upon her for the time. But his visions were soon dispelled. A new expression stole into her eyes, a soft flush crept over her face even while he watched it, and following the direction of her gaze to discover the cause of the change, Mr Thurston saw—Captain Chancellor coming forward quickly in their direction.

The two men had never met since the evening of Gerald's return. They had eyed each other with covert suspicion then; they eyed each other with a scarcely more cordial feeling now. A slight, an almost imperceptibly slight, shade, it seemed to Gerald, came over Captain Chancellor's handsome face when he recognised Eugenia's companion. And he was not mistaken.

"What can that fellow be turning up again for?" Beauchamp was saying to himself. "I thought he was comfortably over head and ears in business. I don't fancy him somehow. I wish to goodness he were back in India!"

But notwithstanding this unexpressed hostility, outwardly, as was his habit, Captain Chancellor made himself very agreeable. He seemed to take special pains to be civil and cordial in his manner to Mr Thurston, and Frank felt a little annoyed at Gerald's somewhat ungracious reception of his friendly overtures.

"What a pleasant fellow Chancellor is, really," observed Frank to Sydney. "Poor old Gerald hasn't improved in his manners with being in India, I'm afraid. I don't think he can be well. He is so surly and stiff sometimes now, and he never used to be."

"Poor old Gerald" was only human after all. He was feeling very cross and bitter just now. His one ewe-lamb of a happy afternoon had been stolen from him. He could not all at once respond with careless cordiality to David's civil speeches, but walked on beside Eugenia in grave and moody silence.

Eugenia could not make him out. How could he—how could any one—feel cross or sad on such an exquisite day? She herself was so happy. Everything was so beautiful, she could hardly help singing and dancing as she went along. They were out of Wareborough and its suburbs by now. The feeling, to dwellers in towns so ever-fresh and exhilarating, of "being in the country" was beginning to come over them. The lane along which they were walking was pleasant even at this season—pleasanter, in a sense, than in spring or summer; for though some hardy primroses, some few dog-roses and honeysuckles, were brave enough still, year after year, to show their welcome faces along the banks, it seemed to cost them an effort. They hardly looked at home beside the dingy hedges and smoke-dulled grass. But to-day the fields wore their "silver thatch;" "icy feathers fledged" the hedges; there was no fault to be found with either, in this bright winter clothing. The lane was hardly distinguishable from a real country lane.

"How beautiful it is! Did you ever see a more exquisite day?" exclaimed Eugenia, looking up to the clear green-blue sky through the delicate tracery of the bare branches of the trees. "One could imagine oneself miles and miles away from any town."

She had been walking a few steps in front of the others. As she spoke, she stopped for a moment, and turned round facing them. How pretty she looked! To Gerald it seemed she had never looked lovelier than standing there, in her thick dark-grey cloth dress, with her favourite bit of bright colour—a scarlet knot at her throat this time—reflecting its warmth and brilliance in her eager, upturned face.

"It *is* a lovely day!" said Sydney; "but, Eugenia, you used to dislike winter so—even bright frosty days you used to say were ghastly and mocking, and all sorts of disagreeable things."

"I don't like winter at all," answered Eugenia, falling back into her place, and walking on beside the others. "But to-day is hardly like winter. There is a living feeling in the air, cold though it is—a sort of slight stir and rustle even among the bare boughs."

"The spring comes slowly up the way," said Gerald. "It's very slowly, though. Of course we are only at the beginning of February; still, I know the feeling you mean, Eugenia. I have often fancied I could distinguish a sort of soft expectancy about this time of year."

Captain Chancellor happened to be a little way behind them. Either Gerald imagined him out of ear-shot, or for the moment had forgotten him altogether.

"Yes," said Eugenia; "that's just it. It is the lifelessness of winter I dislike. And a bright still winter's day has light without warmth—an idea that certainly is very ghastly to me. I like life, and movement, and warmth. Almost the loveliest summer sensation to me is that sort of soft, happy bustle that seems to go on among the birds and the flowers and the insects—all the dear creatures. Ah, how beautiful summer is!" She stopped for an instant; then, recurring to her former train of thought, she went on. "Doesn't the idea of a 'crystal sea' seem rather repulsive to you, Gerald? I think it would be quite frightful. Fancy a motionless ocean!"

Beauchamp, and Frank, and the Dalrymple boys were close beside them now. Beauchamp had walked on faster since he saw Eugenia talking with apparent interest to the curate's brother. Her last remark was overheard.

"It would be jolly nice to skate upon!" said Bob Dalrymple.

Eugenia broke into clear, merry laughter.

"I'm afraid you'll not find any skates there, Bob," she said to the boy; and then they both laughed again, as if she had said something immensely funny.

"It takes very little water to make a perfect pool for a tiny fish;" it takes very little wit to satisfy a child's appreciative powers. Bob was only twelve, and Eugenia was apt to grow very like a child herself when in high spirits. Mr Thurston smiled at their merriment; and though Sydney, in Frank's presence, always trembled a little when she saw Eugenia verging on one of the reckless moods, charming enough when "a great many people" were not there, in the present case she could not help smiling too. Only Captain Chancellor looked annoyed. There were certain things that greatly offended his taste. He could not endure to hear a woman discuss religion or politics, he could not endure to hear a woman say anything funny, and then laugh at it. And of all conceivable subjects to joke upon, he most objected to joking on "religious subjects;" he thought it "bad style." As Frank had said, Captain Chancellor was, or at any rate considered himself, "a good churchman," of the class to whom it is not given to discriminate between the spirit and the letter. He hated Dissenters and Radicals—so far, that is to say, as he considered such beings worthy of attention at all. He was not the sort of man to whom it occurred readily, that to the best of rules there may be exceptions. More than once Roma herself had fallen under the ban of his disapproval, both as regarded the subjects she chose for discussion, and her remarks thereupon. But then Roma was a very different person; besides which, in her own set, she had established a name for a certain amount of originality, and this made her to some extent a privileged person.

Mr Thurston, happening to glance in Captain Chancellor's direction, saw, and rightly interpreted, the expression of his face. First, he felt amused, then a little indignant. What right had this man to approve or disapprove of whatever Eugenia chose to say or do? Lastly, an undefinable instinct urged him to turn the conversation, without appearing to do so, for happy Eugenia was walking on merrily, in unconsciousness of any cloud in her vicinity.

"I think, Miss Laurence," said Gerald, "you have got a little confusion in your head between the 'crystal sea' of the Bible and Dante's 'sea of ice,' haven't you? One does get the queerest confused associations sometimes, especially of things one has first heard of in childhood, and I know your literary taste when you were a small person in pinnacles was rather omnivorous, wasn't it?"

Eugenia laughed and confessed it was true. Beauchamp did not seem edified by the conversation.

"Yes, Eugenia," said Frank, "you have taken up a wrong idea altogether. The words 'glass' and 'crystal' are only used to give the idea of purity, not motionlessness or lifelessness. Why, don't you remember the 'water of *life*' being described as 'pure as crystal' in another place? You shouldn't begin criticising scriptural expressions unless you have studied the subject—no one should."

His tone was slightly dictatorial and decidedly clerical. Eugenia's face flushed; she looked up with a somewhat haughty answer on her lips, but to her amazement, and that of every one else, Captain Chancellor said, suddenly, addressing Frank,—

"I quite agree with you, Thurston." Eugenia's face changed from pink to crimson. Gerald, watching her anxiously, thought he had never seen the expression of any face change so quickly, but she walked on quietly without speaking. "If she would but see in time," thought Gerald; "if she would but see in time! He worthy of her! he understand her! As well expect a blacksmith to make a watch, or—or—" He could think of no comparison sufficiently forcible to suit his indignant frame of mind.

By this time they had emerged from the lane on to the high road. They were within a mile of their destination, and the skaters waxed impatient.

"We shall not have a long afternoon," said the curate. "Suppose, Bob, you and Arthur and I push on? We shall walk a good deal quicker than the ladies. Will you and Chancellor follow at your leisure with Sydney and Eugenia, Gerald? I want the boys to have a good afternoon. You don't mind, Sydney?"

So it was agreed. The four left behind naturally fell into pairs; Mr Thurston and Sydney in front, Eugenia and Captain Chancellor some little way in the rear.

Rather to Beauchamp's surprise, for he fancied his uncalled-for remark—in reality greatly the result of the ill-

tempered mood he had felt coming over him ever since he saw that the elder Thurston made one of the party—had offended her, Eugenia seemed by no means averse to this two-and-two arrangement. *He* felt uncomfortable and annoyed. It was the very first time he was conscious of having appeared to this girl in even ever so slightly unfavourable a light, and he felt anxious to destroy the unpleasant impression; he was not likely to see much more of her, and he hated any one to remember him with any disagreeable association. But how to begin the smoothing-over process he felt rather at a loss. To his surprise, Eugenia herself helped him.

“Captain Chancellor,” she said, suddenly, speaking faster than usual, as if to force back some hesitation, “I want to tell you I think Frank Thurston was right in what he said just now, and you were right to agree with him. I do speak at random, sometimes; and I shouldn’t have encouraged Bob to joke as I did. Of course, any one else could see there was no irreverence in my mind; but a child might not, and one can’t be too careful with children. I think I quite understand your disliking it, and I am so sorry.”

She looked up in his face with a deprecating humility, a sweet softness in her brown eyes that he had never seen in them before. Never had he thought her so charming. He did not attend to the exact meaning of her words, most certainly no anxiety as to the nature of the impressions left on the infant mind of Master Bob had troubled him; he was conscious only of an inference of apology in what she said, and of acknowledgment of his superior judgment that was very agreeable to him and very becoming to her. The “I am so sorry” at the end was quite delicious. “Dear little thing,” he said to himself, “it would not be difficult to mould her into one’s own pattern.” And aloud, he said, with the half deferential tenderness so curiously attractive to very young girls,—

“You are too good, Miss Laurence; a great deal too good. I have certainly rather strong feelings—prejudices, if you like—on some subjects, but I really feel it is more than good of you not to have resented my inexcusable expression of them.”

“Don’t say that,” she remonstrated, gently; “I do not feel it so at all. When any one finds fault with me, on the contrary, I feel that it must—that they must—” she hesitated.

“That it must arise from no common interest in you?” he suggested. “And can you ever have doubted *my* feeling such, Miss Laurence? No one, I suppose, is quite perfection; but surely you must know that to me you appear so near it that a word or a tone which I should never notice in another woman, from you acquires importance.”

The words were dreadfully commonplace, but spoken in his peculiarly sweet, low voice, with his deep, expressive eyes looking unutterable things into hers, to Eugenia they sounded most “apt and gracious.” Nor was Beauchamp, for the time being, insincere. He really felt what he said. As he looked at this young creature, so sweet, so *very* pretty, so ready to believe in himself as the embodiment of every manly grace and excellence, a strange, altogether unprecedented rash, of feeling came over him. If he could but throw all to the winds—prospects and position and future and all—and clasp her in his arms and call her his darling, his “one woman in the world,” and carry her off there and then to some beautiful, impossible castle in the air, where there was no “society,” no growing old, no anybody or anything but each other!

It was but a moment’s passing, insane, altogether ridiculous dream, and Beauchamp soon recovered himself, and Eugenia little suspected the cause of his sudden silence, for she was in a sweet dream of her own, the same in which for many days now she had been living, and from which she would not be very easily roused. Each day, each hour, almost, it was gaining more hold upon her; every circumstance, every trifling incident, seemed to bring her more and more under its influence; no shadow of misgiving had as yet dimmed its beauty and glowing perfection.

Yet she was a girl to whom such a description of her enchantment as that suggested by the vulgar words “madly in love” was altogether and essentially inapplicable. We want a word surely to describe this higher, yet passionate love—the love of a pure, enthusiastic, undisciplined nature, dreaming that it has found its ideal, that the days of “gods and godlike men” are not yet over, to whom in such a belief all self-sacrifice, all self-surrender, would be possible, to whom the destruction of its ideal would risk the destruction of all faith beside.

They walked on in silence for a little; then, by a slight quickening of their pace, Beauchamp managed to overtake Mr Thurston and Sydney, who were only a few steps before them, and for the next half mile the four kept together. It was better so, Beauchamp said to himself, for he was beginning to feel a little less confident in his own ability to draw back in time; his recent sensations had startled him considerably, and Roma’s warning persisted in recurring most uncomfortably to his mind. Looking back over the wide range of his so-called “love affairs,” he could not hit upon any which on *his* side had threatened “to go so far.” Roma herself, with all her attractions, had never roused in him a similar storm. He was as determined as ever to win her in spite of all opposition, but he owned to himself that by the time he met her again at Winsley, he might safely boast that his allegiance had been more sharply tested than even she had had any idea of.

Some way further along the road they came to the sharp turn known as Ayclough Bend. Here, a lane to the right led up the hill to the farm, the high road to the left pursuing its course to twenty-miles-off Bridgenorth.

“This is our way,” said Mr Thurston, turning as he spoke in the direction of the lane, but both the girls had come to a stand beside a large stone lying at the side of the road.

“This is the Bride’s stone,” said Sydney, in an explanatory tone.

“Ah, yes, to be sure. Poor bride,” said Gerald, coming back again.

“Who is the bride? Why do you call this her stone?” inquired Captain Chancellor of Eugenia.

She gravely related the story. Even to this day it had a curious fascination for her. “It was on this stone he was thrown when the coach upset. And it is here, they say, she is still to be seen sometimes,” she said with a slight

shudder. "Is it not a sad story?" she added, looking up with such pity in her eyes, that Beauchamp half fancied there were tears not far off. He didn't feel inclined to laugh at her, he was in a rather unusual mood to-day. Still less, however, was he inclined that Gerald or Sydney should have the benefit of his rare fit of genuine sentimentality. So he answered carelessly—

"Very sad, if true, which I should feel inclined to doubt. I have heard the same story at other places. Besides, if it were true, pity would be wasted on the lady. No doubt she married again very speedily if she was so lovely and charming."

Gerald hardly stayed to hear him finish the sentence. He walked on quickly, followed by Sydney, and both looked at each other as they heard Eugenia's voice answering her companion brightly and happily as usual.

"She is bewitched," said Gerald, abruptly, and Sydney by her silence seemed to agree with him. "Just the sort of thing that would have put her out for the day, if Frank had said it to tease her."

They had not seen the expression in Beauchamp's eyes which belied his careless words, giving her, even about this trifle, a feeling that his confidence, his deeper feelings, were reserved for her alone.

"Yes," said Sydney, with a sigh. "But, Gerald, I have come to see that there is nothing to be done. I tried once or twice to speak to Eugenia, some time ago, but it was no use. It only risked my losing her confidence altogether. Besides, what could I say? I know nothing against Captain Chancellor. I cannot even say I suspect anything; and I by no means dislike him. As an ordinary acquaintance I should like him very much."

"You disliked him at first," objected Gerald.

"No, not exactly," said Sydney, thoughtfully. "I was only rather afraid of liking him too readily. I doubted him before I ever saw him, from what Eugenia told me of him; I doubted, I mean to say, his being the sort of person I should have chosen for her. But that sounds very presumptuous. Sisters don't marry to please each other."

"No," said Gerald, with a slight laugh. "In that case Frank's chance might not have been so good."

"But Eugenia *respects* Frank, though they are always sparring with each other. She trusts him too. Ah, there is just the difference," exclaimed Sydney, eagerly. "I don't feel as if I could trust Captain Chancellor with Eugenia. I don't suppose he will beat her or ill-use her," she went on smiling half sadly. "I think he is kind-hearted and easy tempered, and a good enough sort of a man in many ways. But he won't *understand* her, and that sort of misery would be worse to her than any."

"But it would have been a great chance if she had married any one thoroughly congenial and suitable. Very few people do," said Gerald, thinking to himself if there might not in the future be disappointment in store even for the earnest, unselfish girl beside him, good sterling fellow though Frank was.

"I know that," answered Sydney, and then for a minute or two she remained silent. "Perhaps, Gerald," she went on, "to put it quite fairly, a good deal of our anxiety arises from Eugenia's side. I mean it is her own character that makes me afraid. I don't think I should have misgivings about any other girl's happiness if I heard she was going to marry Captain Chancellor. I don't know that I should have been afraid for myself even, (though it sounds an odd thing to say, and I certainly couldn't fancy myself caring for him). You see, Gerald, I expect so much less. With Eugenia it is always all or nothing."

"Yes, I understand," answered Gerald. "It is a question if such a nature *can* escape intense suffering, though I had fancied—but it's no use thinking of that. There are some kinds of suffering which, it seems to me, would be ruinous to Eugenia, which she could not pass through without leaving the best of herself in the furnace. That is my worst fear, Sydney. I have never attempted to put it in words before. I could not have done so to any one but yourself."

"But we can't tell, Gerald," said Sydney, timidly. "We can't tell how what seems the worst training may turn out the best. We can't believe that in the end it will not all have been the best, even our own mistakes."

"The end is a very long way off," said Gerald, gloomily, "and it is sad work for lookers-on sometimes. Of course, I know what you mean, Sydney, and one must at bottom believe it; but still one constantly sees what look very like fatal mistakes, and it is very seldom given to us on this side of the gate to see that good came out of the bad after all."

Sydney did not answer. After awhile Mr Thurston spoke again, this time with evident hesitation.

"I am afraid you may be angry with me for what I am going to say, Sydney," he began, "but I think I should say it. All your fears seem to point one way. I mean to the unlikelihood of Captain Chancellor's satisfying Eugenia—suiting her—but have you never doubted him in any other way?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Sydney in vague alarm.

"Can't you understand? It's a horrid thing to say," said Gerald impatiently. "Are you quite sure he is in earnest? May he not be only what is called amusing himself—flirting, or trifling, or any of those detestable expressions?"

Sydney grew crimson.

"No, Gerald," she said, with immense indignation in her voice. "I certainly never for an instant supposed him capable of such baseness. I am surprised at you, Gerald. It is well you never hinted at anything of this kind before—or perhaps it is a pity you did not. I am exceedingly sorry I ever discussed the matter with you at all."

"You are unjust and unreasonable, Sydney, and unkind too," exclaimed Gerald, with a good deal of wounded feeling. "Don't you see how painful it is to me to suggest such a thing to *you*, who know what you do about me? But I am in earnest, Sydney. It is well you, at least, should be prepared for such a possibility. You cannot suppose that I have any selfish motive in suggesting it. You don't think that, *selfishly* speaking, I should wish it to turn out so? If Captain Chancellor disappeared to-day, and was never heard of again, that would do *me* no good. How could it?"

"I didn't think you had any selfish motive," answered Sydney, gently. "I only thought that—that—naturally perhaps you saw him worse than he is."

"Frank has said the same," replied Mr Thurston, in a but half mollified tone.

"Frank!" repeated Sydney, "Frank! Oh, no, Gerald! He likes Captain Chancellor; he thinks well of him."

"Well, I didn't say he disliked him. He, only looking at the thing in a careless, superficial, way, does not seem to think any blame could be attached to this man if—oh, how I hate these vulgar expressions!—if he simply does go away without, as it is called, 'coming to the point' at all. Frank cannot see that he pays Eugenia any particular attentions. He only thinks her very likely to deceive herself in this sort of thing." Sydney looked dreadfully startled. If Frank thought so, must there not be some ground for this new anxiety? But if so, how despicably false Captain Chancellor must be! How false and how hatefully worldly-wise to have thus, as it were, screened himself beforehand by securing Frank's favourable opinion! For that he had *not* deliberately set himself to gain Eugenia's affections from the first, Sydney could not for an instant allow. What on Eugenia would be the effect of the discovery of such treachery, poor Sydney dared not allow herself to imagine. But no, it could not be. After all, no man could be so coldblooded, so selfish, so wicked, as to crush the happiness out of a fair young life for the sake of a few weeks' amusement. Sydney had read of such things, but was loth to believe in them. Gerald's troubles had made him morbidly suspicious. Frank had spoken hastily, and, after all, Frank was far from being in a position to judge. So she endeavoured to reassure herself, and fancied she had done so.

She was unusually quiet, however, for the rest of the afternoon. The others—Frank and the boys, Eugenia and Captain Chancellor, that is to say—were in the highest spirits. Only Sydney and Mr Thurston seemed uninfluenced by the fresh keen air, the exhilarating amusement.

"I thought your sister could skate too—at least, that she was learning, like you," said Beauchamp to Eugenia, who was just beginning to feel a little at home on the ice. "Doesn't she like it?"

"She skates better than I, a good deal," replied the girl. "I don't know what has come over her this afternoon. She looks so tired and out of spirits!" And as she spoke, she looked anxiously in Sydney's direction.

Captain Chancellor noticed the quick change of expression that came over her face. Five minutes before, he had thought nothing could be lovelier than Eugenia, laughing and merry; now it seemed to him this tenderly anxious expression showed the sweetness of her eyes to greater advantage. What a fascinating face the child had!—never two minutes the same, and each change bringing out some new beauty. He stood watching her, till he almost forgot where he was. She turned suddenly, and caught his gaze; blushed a little, and looked away again. Something in his face puzzled her—a perplexed, uneasy look, that she had never seen there before. Suddenly Bob Dalrymple wheeled up to where they were standing, and came to a halt.

"What a brilliant colour that ribbon of yours is, Miss Laurence!" said Captain Chancellor, abruptly. "Is scarlet your favourite colour? You generally have some of it about you."

"Only in winter," answered Eugenia, lightly. "In summer I can't bear it. My tastes change altogether with the seasons."

"So if you come back next summer, you'd better look out," said Bob, addressing Captain Chancellor, and grinning maliciously. "She won't like you then. It's a good thing you're going before the weather changes." And so saying, he skimmed off again.

"What does he mean?" exclaimed Eugenia, not disguising the shock the boy's words had given her. "You are not going away, Captain Chancellor?"

There was an unconscious entreaty in her voice, that gave Beauchamp a sudden thrill of pain and self-reproach.

"Not just yet, I hope. But my plans are a little—are not quite decided at present," he answered, confusedly. Then, notwithstanding his resolutions, the look in Eugenia's face tempted him to say more.

"You must know, Miss Laurence, how painful, how unendurable it will be to me to leave Wareborough," he said, in a low, hurried voice.

"Will you not come back again?" she asked, very quietly, striving hard to force back the intense eagerness with which she awaited his reply.

"I hope so. I earnestly hope I may be able to do so," he answered; and for the time the hope was sincere. "But I am not my own master. I can't explain all I mean. I am hampered in every direction. But some day, perhaps— No, it is no use—"

He stopped.

Eugenia stood beside him without speaking. He glanced half timidly at her face. Its expression puzzled him. It was getting late now; the rest of the party had taken off their skates, and were coming towards them across the pond, prepared evidently for the walk home. Beauchamp felt desperate. He might not have another opportunity of saying

what he now felt he *must* say.

"Miss Laurence—Eugenia," he exclaimed. She started a little. "I must ask you one thing: Will you think as well as you can of me, even if others may blame me? Will you not judge me by appearances more than you can help? My position is full of difficulty. As I said just now, I am not in any sense my own master; but—if I may hope for nothing else—I would at least like to think you would judge me leniently, even if I hardly seem to deserve it."

He was *quite* in earnest now. He had never spoken so to any woman before. When he had left home this afternoon, he had not the slightest idea he should speak so to this woman to-day. He got his answer.

"You need not ask me to judge you leniently. I do not think it would be possible for me ever to judge you at all. Nothing—no one but yourself could ever make me think ill of you."

She looked up at him with a light in her beautiful eyes as she said these words, that made Beauchamp Chancellor feel strangely unlike his usual equable, comfortable self. Why did she trust him so? Why did she take things so deeply, so in earnest? Why was she not like the ninety-and-nine other girls he had flirted with, and thought pretty, and talked nonsense to, and left none the worse? He felt half provoked with her for being so different, yet a vague instinct whispered to him, that in this very difference lay her peculiar charm.

There were no more *têtes-à-têtes*. It was getting dusk as they walked home, and they all kept together, and the conversation was general. Sydney wondered a little why Eugenia was so quiet, but supposed she must be suffering from some amount of reaction from her high spirits earlier in the day.

Captain Chancellor bade them good-night at their own door. Sydney fancied his manner a little odd—more abrupt, less self-possessed than usual, when he shook hands with her. He did not call the next day, as she somehow half expected, nor the day after, and Eugenia did not seem surprised. She did not look well, Sydney fancied; and when urged by her sister to tell what was wrong, she confessed, to having felt over fatigued since Saturday's long walk.

"She has many and many a time walked to Ayclough and back without being tired," thought Sydney. "There must be something wrong. Can they have quarrelled?"

Possessed with this idea, she watched eagerly for Captain Chancellor's next appearance, and thought it doubly unlucky that Frank's absence from home for a day or two should have happened at this crisis, when through him she might have learnt something of what was the matter, and if anything lay within her power to do for her sister. To a superficial observer, poor Sydney, during these few days, would have looked the more anxious and unhappy of the two. It was as sad as strange to her to believe Eugenia in suffering, and to be in ignorance of the cause.

On Thursday evening the sisters were sitting by themselves in the drawing-room, their father busy writing in his own little room, when there came a ring at the front door bell. Up jumped Sydney, her heart beating considerably faster than its wont, her face full of eagerness.

"That must be Frank," observed Eugenia, quietly.

For the time being, the sisters seemed to have changed characters.

"Frank!" exclaimed Sydney; and though it was five days since she had seen her *fiancé*, at the supposition, her face fell. "Oh, no, it can't be Frank! He was not to return till Friday—that's to-morrow."

But Frank it was. No trace of disappointment was legible in Eugenia's countenance as she welcomed him rather more cordially than usual, whereas Sydney's manner was preoccupied and almost cold. Frank was tired, however, and very glad to be home again; and not being gifted with the quickest perception in the world, discovered nothing amiss. Eugenia rang for tea for him, and he drew in his chair near the fire, and sat there drinking it in comfortable content, telling them all about his journey and adventures, and what a charming little country parsonage he had been staying at—"The very place for you and me, Sydney, when we get old, and past hard work." And Sydney smiled, without seeming to hear what he was saying. Then a new thought struck Frank.

"Oh, by-the-bye," he exclaimed, "did you see Chancellor before he left? He went off quite in a hurry at the end. He told me on Saturday evening he was expecting to go soon, but he thought he would be here through this week. And this evening I got a letter from him from some place or other—Wins—something—his home, I suppose—saying how sorry he was not to have seen me, to say good-bye—some family arrangements, he said, had called him off in a hurry at the last."

"I saw a note in his handwriting addressed to papa on the hall-table. It came by this evening's post. No doubt, it was saying the same thing," said Eugenia.

She almost overdid it; even Frank looked up, struck by the strange unfamiliar monotone in which she spoke.

"But he is coming back again. He is certain to come back again, Frank? Tell me, isn't he quite *certain* to come back again?" asked Sydney, with a quick, painful eagerness in her voice, as if entreating Frank not to answer no.

He stared at her for a moment, he did not understand her. Had he done so, he might have softened the bluntness of his reply, for he was far from callous or hardhearted to suffering in any shape.

"How interested you seem in his movements, Sydney. I have always thought you didn't particularly like him. You've changed your opinion rather suddenly, surely? Come back again? No, it is very unlikely indeed that he will ever come back again. The 203rd is sure to leave Bridgenorth before Captain Chancellor's leave is over, and, of course, the Wareborough detachment will go too. The regiment has been quite its time here. Chancellor was aide-de-camp to his cousin, General Conyers, somewhere in Ireland, till he came here—that's how he happened to be so short a time

here.”

“And where will the regiment go to?” inquired Sydney. The words seemed to form themselves mechanically on her lips; a strange feeling came over her that it was really Eugenia, not herself, who was speaking.

“Goodness knows,” answered Frank. “Oh, yes, by-the-bye, I remember Chancellor saying they were next on the roster for foreign service. He said, a few months would see him in India, unless he sold out. I shouldn’t much wonder if he did. I shouldn’t much wonder if—” he hesitated. For the first time a slight misgiving seemed to come over him; he looked up in some little embarrassment. Eugenia was sitting perfectly still, looking just as usual. He felt reassured.

“If what?” asked Sydney, again with the same feeling of being forced by the intensity of her sister’s anxiety to continue putting these questions against her own will.

“Oh, nothing,” said Frank. “That is to say, it is only a fancy of mine that there may be something between Chancellor and that handsome Miss Eyrecourt. His cousin, isn’t she? I never saw her, but he had rather a constrained way of alluding to her, I noticed, and he had half-a-dozen photographs of her in different attitudes and dresses.”

“I should think it very likely,” said somebody—for the moment Sydney actually did not recognise the voice as her sister’s. “I wonder if papa wants any tea, Sydney. I think I’ll go and see.”

She rose from her seat almost as she spoke, walked quietly to the door, and left the room.

Five minutes later, on some pretext, Sydney followed her—not to Mr Laurence’s study, up to Eugenia’s own room. It was quite dark. Sydney had to feel her way across the floor.

“Eugenia,” she said, softly.

No one answered. She groped her way to the bed. Down at one end a figure was kneeling or crouching, she could not tell which. She felt it was her sister. Round the poor child’s quivering frame stole two clinging, clasping arms; all over her eyes and cheeks and mouth fell tears and kisses.

“Don’t push me away, *don’t*, Eugenia,” entreated Sydney.

There was a moment’s hesitation—a struggle between pride and old habit of love and confidence for the victory. But pride had had more than its share of work lately; it gave in.

“Oh, Sydney,” came at last, with a convulsive grasp of her sister. “Oh, Sydney, how shall I bear it? I don’t blame *him*. *He* couldn’t help it, but I do think my heart is broken.”

Volume One—Chapter Nine.

At Winsley.

Breathe no love to me,
I will give none of mine.

It was late in the evening of the Tuesday succeeding the skating expedition to Ayclough when Captain Chancellor reached Winsley Grange, so late that the only person awake to receive him was a sleepy footman charged with his mistress’s apologies for not having sat up to welcome her brother in person. Beauchamp received the apologies with philosophy, for he was not sorry to defer seeing Mrs Eyrecourt till the next day; he was tired and not quite as comfortable and complacent as usual, and Gertrude’s eyes were dreadfully keen. Then there was Roma too. He had been preparing himself to meet them both, but it was a relief to find he should have a few hours to himself first; he wanted to think things over a little, quietly; he wanted quite thoroughly to satisfy himself of the truth of what he had many times already repeated to himself—that he had certainly acted for the best.

Yes, there could be no doubt that he had done so, he decided, as he sat with his pipe by the fire, after declining the sleepy footman’s offers of “getting him anything”—he had dined in town on his way—he was very well out of it; it wasn’t every man that would have had the strength of mind to cut it short decisively just as a crisis was approaching, for, no doubt, he confessed to himself he *had* been hit, just the least in the world. She, too, would very soon be all right again, poor little soul; and by some curious code of morality of his own, the reflection that the tools with which he had been playing had scratched *him*, though it might be but slightly, greatly lessened the discomfort of the half-acknowledged suspicion that they had cut *her* deeply.

Late as it was, however, he felt he should sleep better if he first wrote a few civil words to her father and to Frank Thurston of apology for, or rather explanation of, his abrupt departure. It must have looked odd, he feared, but he could easily make it all right. Besides, he had told Thurston he should be leaving soon; “family arrangements” had only hastened his movements by a few days; anything was better than the risk of a formal leave-taking, and Gertrude’s letter had just come in the nick of time. So he wrote his notes, and calmly turned the last page of this short chapter in his history, and went to bed believing or imagining that he believed that the little “affaire” was well over, and no one the worse, no results left, as Roma had indirectly prophesied, that would in the least interfere with his old dream of winning *her*—no results, at least, that she need ever discover, or that would be lasting. He would be quite himself again in a day or two; to-night he felt a little out of sorts, and somehow the old dream was hardly as attractive as usual. No wonder, he had not seen Roma for a good while, and she had bothered him a little the last time they met, and he hated being bothered; besides, is it not human nature to have temporary misgivings as to the excellence of the trellised grapes when the sweetest of strawberries within one’s easy grasp have been a familiar sight?

When Beauchamp woke in the morning he felt already a different man. His spirits had recovered themselves amazingly. It was a bright day for one thing, and it was pleasant to glance lazily round the comfortable, familiar room, and feel he was at home again; to catch sight out of the window of the clear blue sky and the beautiful Winsley trees—beautiful even in winter—instead of leaden Wareborough clouds and grim Wareborough roofs. He was really attached to Winsley, and had reason for being so, for to him and his sister, if not the Grange itself, at least its immediate neighbourhood had always seemed home.

The root of the Chancellor family was to be found in quite another part of the country, but the personal associations of Beauchamp and Mrs Eyrecourt were all connected with Winsley. When they were little children their father had succeeded to the adjoining tiny little property of Winsedge, and there they had lived till, shortly before his death, Winsedge was sold to Mr Eyrecourt of the Grange. And before the young Chancellors had had time to realise that their connection with the neighbourhood was at an end, Gertrude's marriage to their former lord of the manor riveted it again more strongly than before, for the premature death of their mother, whose life had been a slow martyrdom of vain devotion to a selfish and extravagant husband, soon left Beauchamp, still a boy, with no near friend but his elder sister—no home but hers. And Mrs Eyrecourt had been very kind to her brother, and, while he lived, had influenced her husband to be the same, winning his goodwill towards Beauchamp in part, perhaps, by that which she herself showed to his step-sister, Roma, when she in turn came to be left motherless and homeless.

Winsley Grange was a thoroughly and really "desirable residence." A long, low, thick-walled, deep-windowed house of no particular architecture, sufficiently picturesque, with its gable ends and lattices, not to disappoint the expectations suggested by its name; old enough for respectability, but not for inconvenience; not too large for the size of the property, nor too grand to be comfortable. To these advantages it united that of a charming situation in the prettiest part of a pretty county, where the society, though undeniably "good," was—thanks probably to the comparatively near neighbourhood of the capital—but very slightly tainted by that spirit of stupid and indiscriminating exclusiveness so liable to flourish among the lords of the soil in more remote and isolated districts.

So it was—considering all things—only natural that Captain Chancellor should like his sister and his sister's house, and be always glad to return to them after absence.

"What a bore these people are coming to-day," he thought to himself, as he went downstairs. "We might have had a comfortable little time to ourselves; that is to say, if I find both Gertrude and Roma in a good humour."

They were both in very good humour, as he discovered almost immediately he entered the breakfast-room. Mrs Eyrecourt received him with even more than her usual cordiality; so warmly, indeed, as to give rise to a slight suspicion in his mind of there being "something in the wind." Roma's manner was cheerful and hearty—so free, apparently, from the slightest tinge of constraint or self-consciousness, that Beauchamp felt puzzled and not altogether pleased, but he took good care to conceal his incipient annoyance, and comported himself as faultlessly and serenely as ever.

"It was very good of you, Beauchamp, to come off so quickly," said his sister. "I hardly expected you would be able to manage it. How did you do about your leave?"

"Oh, quite easily," he replied. "I might have had it, you know, since the New-year if I had liked." Here he surprised a look of curiosity on Roma's part—a look of "I thought as much," too, it seemed to him. It hardly suited him now for her to suspect any rival attraction at Wareborough. Lightly as he treated the remembrance of Eugenia, the idea of making use of her as he had once intended had somehow grown distasteful to him, so he went on quietly with his answer to his sister: "I have been so long away from the regiment, I wanted to be as good-natured as I could, and my only taking half my leave was a convenience to one or two of them. I meant, any way, to have come here next week, but it suited me quite as well to come sooner. I got your letter on Saturday evening, and this is only Wednesday. I did not lose much time, did I?"

"No, indeed," responded Mrs Eyrecourt, very graciously. "I can't tell you how glad I was to find you were coming. It is so very much nicer to have you here when the Chancellors come, particularly as they are our own relations, you know, and they would have been away by next week."

"I can't make out what brings them here, or where you came across them. You condescended to no explanations in your letter—you only said the Halswood Chancellors were coming. I had to think for some time before I could remember anything about them. I had almost forgotten that there was such a place as Halswood," said Beauchamp.

"I had no idea myself of their coming, till the day I wrote to you," replied Gertrude. "You see I wrote to Herbert Chancellor when I saw the announcement of the grandfather's death, to con—"

"Gratulate him," suggested Roma, for her sister-in-law had hesitated a little over her condolences.

"I wrote to him," continued Mrs Eyrecourt, without condescending to notice the interruption, "and of course I said if ever they were in our neighbourhood I should be very much pleased to see them here. Mr Chancellor answered very civilly, and the other day I accidentally heard they were staying at Ferrivale, not twenty miles from here, so I wrote again, making my general invitation a special one, and they accepted it at once. That's the whole story. You will see them for yourself this afternoon."

"But who are 'they'?" cross-questioned her brother. "Mr Chancellor and his wife and all the little Chancellors?"

"There are no little Chancellors. That is to say, only one girl of fourteen or so, besides the eldest daughter, who is out, and the son—there is only one, I thought there were two—who is at Eton," replied Mrs Eyrecourt.

"Oh, indeed; so it is only Herbert and his wife who are coming," said Beauchamp, as if he now knew all about it, for he had got scent at last, and wished to provoke his sister into letting him see all that was in her mind.

"Of course not, Beauchamp; how stupid you are!" exclaimed Gertrude. "Why should Herbert and his wife go about the country paying visits, and leave their grown-up daughter at home? She is past eighteen, and out, I told you. And very pretty," she added, injudiciously.

"Oh, indeed, I understand now," answered Beauchamp, meekly, and looking across the table, the expression in Roma's eyes told him that she knew he now *did* understand.

"Poor dear Gertrude! So *that* is why I was sent for in such a hurry," he observed, when, breakfast being over, Roma and he were left by themselves for a short time. "Couldn't you make her comprehend, Roma, that she might save herself the trouble?"

Miss Eyrecourt was standing by the window, looking over her letters. She seemed perfectly cool and comfortable, in no way embarrassed by finding herself, for the first time for some months, alone with her would-be lover. She looked up at him when he spoke to her, and answered quietly and deliberately—

"No, Beauchamp, I certainly could not do anything of the kind. If you have anything to say to Gertrude, you must say it yourself. I am not going to come between you two in any way. I don't want to meddle in your affairs at all; no advice of mine is likely to do good. Now, Beauchamp," she went on, in a different tone, half remonstrating, half coaxing, "do let us be nice and comfortable together. And do try not to vex Gertrude, that's a good boy. If her plans don't please you, there is time enough to say so, and you need not vex her by seeming determined to thwart her beforehand. Those sorts of schemes generally right themselves—very likely Addie Chancellor is already out of your reach—she *it* pretty, I have seen her. There, now, after all, I have begun advising and warning you, and I vowed I would never do so again."

She looked very handsome this morning. She was, as usual, beautifully dressed, and it was some time since Beauchamp had been in the company of a perfectly attired, perfectly well-bred, self-possessed woman of Roma's order. Beside her, Eugenia Laurence, lovely as she was, rose to his mind's eye as an unformed child. He was in a mood to be very sensitive to Miss Eyrecourt's particular attractions, and something in her manner impressed him pleasantly. She seemed softer and less satirical than her wont. There was a half playfulness, a coaxingness in her way of speaking to him which, in his opinion, became her marvellously.

"And why shouldn't you advise and warn me, Roma?" he asked, softly, going a little nearer her. "You know very well there is no, one in the world I should take advice from half so willingly. Why will you always misunderstand me?"

His tone was growing dangerously tender.

"Oh, silly Beauchamp!" said Roma to herself. Then looking up, "I am glad to hear it," she observed, rather coldly. "Your have thoroughly acted up to the last piece of advice I gave you, have you not? You remember what it was—that night at the Dalrymples?"

As she spoke, Beauchamp, though looking down, felt conscious that her keen dark eyes were regarding him searchingly. He could not pretend not to understand her, little as he had been prepared for this embarrassing cross-examination, and to his intense annoyance he felt himself slightly change colour. It was very slightly, so slightly that no other eyes would have perceived it, but looking up again boldly to brave out this home-thrust, the ready words died on his lips; he saw that Roma was watching him with an expression not very unlike contempt.

"That Mrs Dalrymple has been writing to her, and she wants to show me she won't stand it," thought Beauchamp. He was quite mistaken. Roma knew very little of his life at Wareborough, and, selfishly speaking, cared very little with whom, or to what extent, he chose to flirt. But she did care about the possibly serious results to himself, his sister, and, even indirectly, to herself, of his folly. And she had never been able to forget the bright, sweet face of Eugenia Laurence. She had, however, promised Gertrude to be most discreet in her conduct to Beauchamp. She had no wish to quarrel with him. She was resolved cautiously to steer clear of any sort of "scene." There was no saying in what contradictory way an explanation with her might affect him, and her great desire was that, without any such crisis, he should gradually arrive at a tacit understanding of her complete indifference.

"Not that I ever have believed, or ever shall believe, he really cares about me," she had said to her sister-in-law. "It is half of it contradiction, and the other half the accident of our having been so often thrown together when he had no better occupation. Beauchamp would not be Beauchamp if he had not some little affair on hand, and I daresay I am the only woman who has never in the least appreciated his attentions."

She agreed with Mrs Eyrecourt, that if he would but have the sense to take a fancy to Adelaide Chancellor, it would be the best thing he could do; and she felt not a little provoked with Gertrude for showing her cards so plainly. It could not be helped, however, and now she felt conscious that she too had been foolish in approaching the subject of Eugenia.

"Whatever he has been doing, I cannot make it any better," she thought, "and I may make it worse."

So, though she was certain that he perfectly understood to what she referred, she expressed no incredulity when he calmly assured her he did not know to what special piece of advice she was alluding.

"Very well. If you have forgotten it so quickly, we will hope that in this case the cap didn't fit," she said, lightly.

And then she went on talking about other things with so evident a determination to avoid all subjects of close personal interest, that Beauchamp could not but follow her lead. And she made herself so pleasant that there was no excuse for his growing sulky. He said to himself she was perverse and tiresome—very few fellows would put up with it as he did, and so on; but in his inmost heart he was not sorry that just at present no love-making seemed to be expected of him; for, after all, he did not feel quite as much inclined for it as usual. More than once during the day his

spirits seemed suddenly to desert him. He would find his thoughts straying to the dull house in the outskirts of Wareborough, where, ignore it as he would, he knew full well a girlish heart was growing heavy at his unwonted absence.

“Her father will get my note to-morrow,” he reflected; “and then she won’t expect me any more, and she will soon be all right. Besides, I prepared her for it on Saturday, and she did not seem much surprised. There is nothing to bother about. I have acted for the best, only she is such a queer sort of girl—takes things to heart so. And Roma has evidently not forgotten about her.”

Very evidently Roma had not forgotten about her. Two or three times in the course of the day, she surprised Beauchamp in an absent fit, and disgusted him greatly by inquiring what he was thinking about, what was the matter, what had become of his good spirits, etc, etc, so that by the afternoon, Captain Chancellor had come to feel almost glad that their family party was to be augmented by the expected guests.

As the hour drew near at which the Chancellors were to arrive, Mrs Eyrecourt got quite into a flutter of excitement. Such a state of things was very unusual with her, well accustomed as she was to society and its usages. Beauchamp felt amused. “It is all on my account, I fear, that poor Gertrude is in such a fuss. She is only laying up disappointment for herself. I do wish she would leave me to manage my own affairs,” he thought to himself, though to please her he hung about the house idle all the afternoon, in case of the Halswood party possibly appearing before their time. Gertrude’s excitement was not only on his account, keenly anxious though she was that he and Adelaide Chancellor should impress each other agreeably; there was to Mrs Eyrecourt a peculiar and not unnatural feeling of gratification in receiving as her guests for the first time the head of the family—Mr Chancellor of Halswood himself—and his belongings. For, undoubted as was the position of the Winsley Eyrecourts in their own county and among their own set, that of the owner of Halswood was several pegs higher in the social scale, and Herbert Chancellor had more reason than many people for thinking himself rather a big man. But this second cause of his sister’s “fuss,” Beauchamp’s less excitable, more individually selfish nature neither suspected nor would have sympathised with. It was all very well to “call cousins” with the Halswood people; but Gertrude sometimes bothered herself unnecessarily. In her place, Beauchamp said to himself, he certainly would not have gone out of his way to invite these strangers to take up their abode with them for a whole week. He felt bored even in anticipation. He hoped certainly Roma’s attention would be distracted from teasing him with those silly questions of hers, but he more than half wished he was back at Wareborough.

Things improved, however, to some extent, when the visitors arrived. Mr Chancellor proved to be a pleasant looking, pleasant feeling man, a little too palpably prosperous perhaps, but with sufficient tact and refinement to steer clear of being offensively so; Mrs Chancellor—a still handsome woman, large and fair and languid, was several degrees more a fine lady, than her husband was a fine gentleman, but for this there was the excuse of her having been an heiress, and possessed of a property which she thought far more of than of twenty Halswoods, in days when Herbert had been landless and, comparatively speaking, penniless. And Adelaide, the daughter of this fortunate pair, amiable, pretty, commonplace and silly, was, on the whole, however, rather better than might have been expected. All three were evidently prepared to be pleased, and were graciousness itself to their cousins, and quite sufficiently civil to Miss Eyrecourt, who smiled to herself at the thought of Beauchamp’s desperate position, should it actually prove the case that Gertrude’s scheme was tacitly approved of by the authorities on the other side also.

“It almost looks like it,” she thought, “yet why the Chancellors should wish it, I hardly understand.”

She was not long left in the dark. The party at dinner this first day consisted only of themselves and the three visitors. Captain Chancellor, who had so far shown plainly enough to his sister and Roma, a determination to bestow none of his attentions on Adelaide, talked principally to her mother, and with such good effect that when the ladies retired to the drawing-room, the great lady quite forgot her languor in enthusiastic praise of Beauchamp’s charms.

“It is so odd we have never met before,” she remarked, “for Beauchamp—I must call you both by your Christian names, my dear Gertrude—Beauchamp tells me he has often been staying within a few miles of Wylingham. He knows the Prudhoe-Bettertons, of Prudhoe Castle, I find; charming people. He must not treat us so shabbily when he is next in our neighbourhood. By September, at latest, we shall be settled at home again, and I shall count upon your coming to us—I shall, positively. Beauchamp says he has half promised the Bettertons a few days about then.”

“But we shall be at Halswood then, mamma,” said Adelaide.

“Oh, nonsense, my dear. We shall certainly not be there before Christmas; at least, I devoutly hope not. Halswood is all very well in its way, but at present it is really uninhabitable. You never saw anything so frightful as the state of the house, my dear Gertrude. It wants refurnishing from top to bottom. I *should* like you to see Wylingham.”

Depreciation of Halswood rather jarred on Mrs Eyrecourt’s Chancellor loyalty. But there was no time for her guest to observe any hesitation in her reply, for just then a loud squeal from the other end of the room made all the ladies jump, and effectually distracted Mrs Chancellor’s attention.

“Floss, you naughty child, what are you screaming in that dreadful way for? Why are you not in bed? I told you to run upstairs as soon as we came out of the dining-room? What *is* the matter?” exclaimed Gertrude, at no loss to pitch upon the invisible offender.

There was no answer for a minute. Then, a ball consisting of white muslin, blue ribbons, shaggy hair and bare legs, seemed to roll out from under a sofa into the middles of the room, when it shook itself into form, and stood erect, red-faced and defiant.

“Quin pulled my hair,” was all the explanation it vouchsafed.

Quintin came forward from behind the curtains to answer for himself.

"Well, and if I did, I'd like to know who bit and scratched and kicked?" he exclaimed, wrathfully.

"'Cos you said you'd tell I was hiding in the curtains; tell-tale boy," returned Floss, with supreme contempt.

"And why were you hiding in the curtains? Why didn't you go up to bed when I sent you?" demanded her mother.

"Quin said there was a bear behind the glass door in the hall, and I was frightened it would eat me," replied Floss, her defiance subsiding.

"I only said bears eat naughty children. It says so in the Bible," said Quin, virtuously.

Adelaide began to laugh.

"How silly you are!" thought Roma, regretfully. "I fear Beauchamp will soon be bored by you." But she liked the girl better when she rose from her seat, and asked Gertrude if she might not convoy poor Floss across the dreaded hall. It was more than Roma would have troubled herself to do: she looked upon all children as necessary evils, and considered her niece a peculiarly aggravated form of the infliction.

Gertrude was profuse in her thanks, but Floss hung back.

"I don't like you," she said calmly, looking up into Miss Chancellor's face. "You're too fat, and you've got staway eyes."

Adelaide laughed again, but this time more faintly. An ominous frown darkened Mrs Eyrecourt's face.

"You naughty, naughty, rude child," she began, sternly. Quintin's better feelings were aroused.

"I'll take her upstairs, mamma. Come, Floss," and, already frightened at her own audacity, the cross-grained little mortal clutched at her brother's hand, and the two left the room together. Upstairs Quin read Floss a lecture on the enormity of her offence. Overcome by his goodness in escorting her to the nursery, she hugged him vehemently—getting into fresh disgrace for crushing his collar; but maintained stoutly that "the new young lady wasn't nice or pretty at all, not the least tiny bit."

"What a nice boy Quintin is, and so handsome," began Miss Chancellor, gushingly.

"Yes," said Roma, to whom the remark was addressed; "he's not a bad child, as children go. I detest children."

Adelaide looked shocked.

"Do you?" she exclaimed. "Well, of course," she went on, as if desirous of modifying her evident disapproval, "I daresay it makes a difference when one has not had younger brothers and sisters."

"Do you love yours so much?" inquired Roma. She felt a lazy pleasure in drawing out this model young lady a little.

"Of course," replied Miss Chancellor; "Victoria is much younger than I, you know, but we are great friends. I don't think there is anything she looks forward to as much as to being my bridesmaid. She is rather dark, so I have promised her she shall wear rose colour, or pink, if it is in summer."

Roma looked astonished. "I didn't know," she began, "I had not heard of anything being fixed about your marriage."

Adelaide burst out laughing. "Fixed," she repeated, "of course, not. But I am sure to be married some time or other. Don't you think it is great fun to think about what you will choose for yourself and your bridesmaids to wear? I have decided half-a-dozen times at least."

Roma confessed that the subject was one that had not hitherto much occupied her thoughts.

"You have a brother too, have you not?" she inquired, by way of making conversation.

"Oh, yes, Roger," replied Adelaide. "He comes next to me. He is sixteen, but, poor boy, he is so dreadfully delicate. When he was a little child they never thought he could live, and even now we often think he won't grow up. It is very unfortunate, isn't it, when one thinks of Wylingham and all mamma's property, though of course it would come to me—the money I mean. Wylingham would go to a distant cousin; so stupid of my grandfather to leave it so, wasn't it?"

Her remarks were made with the utmost *naïveté*, in perfect unconsciousness apparently that they could sound heartless.

"And Halswood?" said Roma, repressing the disagreeable sensation left by the girl's words.

"Oh, Halswood doesn't seem to matter so much," she replied. "Papa will have it all his life any way, and there are Chancellors after him. Your—what is he to you?—your cousin?—Captain Chancellor I mean, comes next after Roger."

"Does he?" exclaimed Roma in astonishment. Then she grew very silent; for a few minutes she did not distinguish the sense of Adelaide's prattle, her mind was busy with other matters. For one thing, the Chancellors' policy was now plain to her. Would they succeed? To herself personally she felt that Beauchamp's possible heirship could never make any difference; rich or poor, he could never be more to her than he was. But as for Gertrude—yes, her views would probably undergo a complete change were such a state of things to come to pass.

"She would like me, I daresay, as well or better than any one else for his wife if he were rich, or certain to be so," thought Roma. "But, after all, I strongly suspect the chances are that Beauchamp will marry to please himself and no

one else, and perhaps find in the end that he has not even done that.”

Volume One—Chapter Ten.

“That Stupid Song.”

Amid the golden gifts which heaven
Has left like portions of its light on earth,
None hath such influence as music hath.

I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

Merchant of Venice.

When the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, music was proposed.

“Come, Addie, my dear, let me see you at the piano,” said her father, laying his hand caressingly on the girl’s fair head. “Not that it is quite my place to propose it, by-the-bye; but you see, my dear Mrs Eyrecourt, how thoroughly at home you have already made us all feel ourselves. I want you to hear Addie play.”

“Don’t you sing?” inquired Gertrude, as Miss Chancellor rose, in accordance with her father’s request.

“No, she doesn’t sing,” said Mrs Chancellor, answering for her—“at least, very little. But she *plays!*”

“If she *does* play,” thought Roma, “it will double her chances with Beauchamp.” Then there came a little pause of rather solemn expectation.

Captain Chancellor, as in duty bound, conducted Mademoiselle to the piano, gravely taking up his place behind her, near enough to perform the task of turning over the leaves, for Adelaide was one of those young ladies who are nowhere without their “notes.” Roma, watching the pair closely, thoroughly took in the position. There was no fluster about Adelaide. She drew off her gloves quietly, and selected her piece of music with perfect composure, well satisfied evidently with the impression she was about to make on her audience, Captain Chancellor standing with ceremonious deference, stiff and silent, in his place.

“They don’t know him,” thought Roma again. “Fortunately for their satisfaction in their little arrangement, they don’t know how Beauchamp can look sometimes in such a position. Oh, you most foolish, contrariest of men!”

But even Roma hardly knew how Beauchamp could look at such times. She had never seen him standing beside Eugenia, bending low his handsome head, to catch each varying expression of the beautiful face, each sweet, bright glance of the lovely, speaking eyes, as the pretty fingers softly played the music he loved best, or rested now and then idly on the keys. She was no great performer, but her perception and appreciation were delicate and vivid enough to satisfy even fastidious Beauchamp—fastidious on this point without affectation, for the man’s love for music was deep and genuine. At no time was he so near to forgetting himself, so close to the consciousness of the higher and better things little dreamt of in the philosophy of his ordinary life, as when under its influence. How far Roma’s singing had had to do with his imagining himself in love with her, it might be difficult to say.

So there was reason for Gertrude’s feeling anxious, and Roma curious, as to the sort of “playing” of which Miss Chancellor was capable. She began at last—not noisily, she was too well taught for that; but nevertheless she had not got through half-a-dozen bars, before Roma knew that the less she and the piano had to do with each other in Beauchamp’s presence, the better for Gertrude’s plans.

“If it should ever come to pass that he marries her, he will make her promise to leave music alone,” said Miss Eyrecourt to herself.

And she almost felt sorry for Addie, working away so conscientiously and serenely, slurring no “tiresome bits,” doing her “expressions”—*allegretto*, *rallentando*, and all the rest of them—so precisely according to the letter of the instructions of her “finishing master,” Herr Spindler. She had really laboured hard, poor girl, to attain to her present undeniably great manual dexterity, and there had been difficulties in her way which had called for considerable patience and perseverance. For her hands—plump and short-fingered, though very nice little hands of their kind, and with a fair amount of muscle inside the white cushions—were not the sort of hands to which such wonderful agility as they were now displaying comes all at once or without a good deal of tutoring. It was really very funny to see the two little things scudding up and down after each other as hard as they could go, “exactly like two fat white mice,” thought Beauchamp to himself; and the conceit, for which (not being addicted to the reading of more poetry than that of the day likely to be discussed at dinner-parties) he was not indebted to any one but himself, so tickled his fancy that it enabled him to endure with patience the penance to which he was; subjected, and to thank Adelaide at the close of her performance with becoming graciousness for the pleasure she had afforded them all.

“You must have practised a great deal,” he observed to her.

“Oh, yes; two hours every day till I came out, and an hour every morning even now,” she replied.

“Dear me, I really admire your energy,” he said, quietly, slightly raising his eyebrows, and inwardly trusting he might have timely warning of the special hour at which this praiseworthy young person’s manual gymnastics were to be performed during her stay at Winsley. But Addie perceived no shadow of sarcasm in his softly uttered commendation, and took herself and her ample draperies across the room again to her mother’s side in the happiest possible frame

of mind. These two or three words were all that passed between Captain Chancellor and herself of direct conversation during the evening; yet, before she fell asleep, Addie confessed to herself that her cousin Beauchamp was by far the most charming man she had ever met, "more charming and decidedly handsomer than even Sir Arthur Boscawen or Colonel Townshendly, of the Blues."

Adelaide safely disposed of, Beauchamp felt that he deserved a reward.

"Come, Roma," said he, in a low voice, skilfully making room for himself behind the sofa on which Miss Eyrecourt was sitting alone, "do come and sing. You must have seen I have been very good."

Roma hesitated. She did not feel sure of what Gertrude wished her to do. Just then Mrs Eyrecourt glanced in her direction, and seemed by instinct to understand her perplexity. Beauchamp was beginning to look cross.

"Will you sing, Roma, dear?" said Gertrude, sweetly.

Roma rose at once. "Of course," muttered Captain Chancellor, loud enough for her to hear, "for any one but me."

Poor Roma—her position was not a very comfortable one at present. She knew as well as possible what was passing in Gertrude's mind. Mrs Eyrecourt was proud of her sister-in-law's singing, and she was pleased to have something so excellent of its kind wherewith to astonish her guests; but she would be very far from pleased, Roma felt certain, should Beauchamp be so ill-judged as to show any marked difference in his manner of comporting himself towards the two fair performers. She resolved on taking the bull by the horns.

"Beauchamp," she said, coldly, when she was standing by the piano, looking over her songs, "you will oblige me by not standing beside me while I am singing. It fidgets me more than I can tell you."

Without a word, Beauchamp stalked off. He was deeply offended.

"I have overshot the mark, now, I expect," thought Roma. "The next thing will be, his forcing me to tell him what made me so cross. And I do dread any approach to an explanation with him. I am very unlucky; but what could I do?"

She felt thoroughly uncomfortable, and somehow—from this cause, probably—she certainly did not sing as well as usual. Every now and then, through the sound of the piano and of her own voice, she overheard Beauchamp's remarks to Mrs Chancellor, beside whom he had ensconced himself, and that lady's languid, affected tones in reply. Roma felt a little depressed: it went greatly against the grain with her to say or do anything to chill or alienate Beauchamp, for the old easy brother-and-sister state of things between them had never seemed so attractive to her as now that it was at an end.

"If only he had really been my brother," she said to herself, with a little sigh, and replied so absently and at random to Mr Chancellor's civil little speech of thanks for her song, that he did not feel encouraged to remain at his post by her side.

She felt half inclined to betake herself quietly to her own room for the rest of the evening—no one seemed to want her. For almost the first time in her life she felt a stranger in her father's house; realised, or began to fancy she did, that the tie which bound her to Gertrude was not one of blood. Mrs Eyrecourt seemed already marvellously at home with these hitherto unknown cousins of hers, and as for Beauchamp, whether or not he disliked the daughter, he certainly seemed to find the mother very entertaining!

"I wish I might go to bed," thought Roma again; "but Gertrude would be vexed, and it would look as if something were the matter."

So, more out of listlessness than anything else, she, without being asked to do so, began to sing again. The song she chose this time was the same ballad she had sung that evening at Brighton at the Montmorris's, the evening on which she had met Mr Thurston. The words brought him to her mind. How had he found things at Wareborough? Was it as she had suspected between Beauchamp and Eugenia? Roma felt that she would give a good deal to know. That there was a change in Beauchamp, she was convinced, but of what nature, arising from what circumstances, she could not so easily decide, and she knew well he would do his best to keep her in the dark. Hardly taking in the sense of the words, she sang on half through the ballad. Her voice was more like itself by this time, and the music of the song was lovely: it was impossible for her not to sing it well. Gradually the murmur of the voices in the room grew fainter, then stopped altogether. As usual, when Roma exerted herself, all present succumbed to the charm.

"She sings beautifully—I do not know that I have ever heard, an amateur to equal her," exclaimed Mrs Chancellor with the truthfulness of astonishment, turning round to Beauchamp when Miss Eyrecourt's round and soft, yet clear, thrilling notes died away into silence. But no Beauchamp was there! Even Mrs Chancellor's attractions had failed to keep him from his accustomed place.

Looking up, at the end of her song, to her surprise, Roma saw him standing beside her. But there was an expression on his face which startled her. He looked grave and troubled, Roma could almost have fancied he had grown paler than usual. Something very strangely out of the common must have occurred to disturb his serenity so visibly; what could it be?

"Roma," he said, suddenly, but as if he had completely forgotten the offence she had given him, "I wish you would oblige me by never singing that song. I cannot bear it."

"Cannot bear it? Beauchamp! Your favourite song—the song you yourself got for me? What do you mean?" exclaimed Roma, in extreme astonishment. "Do I not sing it well?"

"Far too well," he replied, gloomily. Then, as he turned away, he repeated his request more strongly. "I really cannot

tell you how much you will oblige me by never singing it.”

“Very well, then, I will not,” answered Roma, quietly. But in her heart she felt not a little puzzled by his unaccountable behaviour.

No wonder—he, himself, was not a little puzzled; more than puzzled, he was extremely out of patience with himself. He had, he felt assured, acted with consideration and foresight towards Eugenia Laurence; with half-a-dozen girls he could name he had carried his flirtations much further, and come out of them comfortably when he saw it was time to do so. What was there about this girl that now even, when he had for ever separated himself from her, impressed him so strangely? Why could he not forget her save as a pleasant passing fancy? Why should he be for ever imagining he saw her face, wistful and reproachful, as it had looked that last afternoon when he had hinted to her the probability of his soon leaving Wareborough? It was together too bad that the remembrance of her should thus annoy him; he felt disgusted with himself for losing his self-control this evening, when, as ill luck would have it, Roma picked out that stupid song, the last he had heard Eugenia sing. And how sweetly she had sung it—he had given it to her, and he had given her, too, his ideas as to how it should be sung, and she had proved an apt pupil. She made no pretensions to singing well; her voice was, of course, not to be compared with Roma’s in power and compass, but it was clear and sweet and bright, like her face and everything about her, and he had found it very charming. He fell into a reverie again when he recalled its tones, then he shook himself awake with some irritation.

“What a fool I am,” he reflected. He was alone again with his cigar by the fire—Herbert Chancellor was no smoker, which was unfortunate for Beauchamp, little inclined as he was at present for solitary meditation—“What a fool I am to bother myself like this. I hope I am not going to be ill. I have not felt so out of sorts for years. It is all Roma’s fault—I shall tell her so some day; she has a great deal to answer for. No doubt, it will all come right in the end with her; I have never really feared but what it would. It would be all right any day if either of us had a fortune; but she is so desperately afraid of vexing Gertrude, and Gertrude’s head, I can see, is now full of that stupid Adelaide, and Roma’s shilly-shallying will have made it far more difficult to bring Gertrude round. I have more than half a mind to leave Roma to herself for a while, and let her fancy I have given up thoughts of it: it would not do her any harm. How very handsome she is looking just now, and how exquisitely she sang that last song! It is too bad—”

Then he fell to thinking what he could do in the direction of distracting his thoughts from his undeserved troubles, seeing that, for the present at least, there was no satisfaction to be got out of Roma. A flirtation with Addie Chancellor was not attractive, and might involve him seriously, watched and guarded as she was. He wished he had not promised Gertrude to stay so long at Winsley; he did not feel at all sure that he would not do more wisely to spend part of his leave elsewhere; he would see about it, very likely something or other would turn up. And, besides, any day might bring things to a crisis with Roma. If not, he could afford to wait a little longer; the best woman in the world was not worth bothering oneself about; and, determined to act upon this comforting doctrine, Captain Chancellor lit another cigar, and having smoked it went calmly to bed. But his sleep was broken, and his dreams uneasy—they were haunted by Eugenia, pale-faced and sad-eyed as he had seen her last. Once it was even worse—he dreamt, he saw her lying dead, and in some unexplained, mysterious way the impression grew strong upon him that he had killed her. He awoke with a start of horror and was thankful to find it a dream—to see, by the faint morning light just beginning to break, the familiar objects in his room, and remember where he was.

“But if this sort of thing goes on,” he said to himself, “I can’t stay here. I must go away—to town even, or to Paris, or somewhere for a change, whether Gertrude likes it or not.”

The next day or two, however, brought something in the way of distraction. Several other guests arrived, of whom two or three of the gentlemen were old and friendly acquaintances of Beauchamp’s, glad to see him again at Winsley—for, unlike many men of his class, he was a favourite with his own sex wherever he chose to be so—and among the accompanying wives and daughters there were some sufficiently attractive for him to find no difficulty in amusing himself in his usual way; on the whole, not to Mrs Eyrecourt’s dissatisfaction. She knew her brother pretty thoroughly. Though her hopes with regard to Adelaide Chancellor had never been alluded to, she felt that Beauchamp was perfectly aware of their existence, and in every smallest detail of his unexceptionably civil behaviour to the girl, she read a tacit defiance of her wishes, a determined opposition to them. Yet she did not despair. She blamed herself for having been injudicious and premature; she owned that Addie, pretty and amiable as she was, was hardly equal to taking her irresistible cousin’s experienced heart by storm. Nevertheless, a little time might do wonders; and in the meanwhile the more general he was in his flirtations the better, and she congratulated herself on her wise selection of guests. She had long ago forgotten her fright about the Wareborough young lady, whose name she had never even heard; all her fears were concentrated in Roma.

Roma was far from happy at this juncture. A painful consciousness was beginning to grow upon her that her relations with Gertrude were not what they had been; for the first time in the several years they had lived together she felt that she was not altogether in her sister-in-law’s confidence; worse than this, that she was no longer thoroughly trusted. And she was at no loss to whose influence to attribute this mortifying change. Scrupulously careful as she was in the regulation of her manner to Beauchamp, that it should not be by a shade more or less familiar than was natural to their acknowledged position of brotherly and sisterly intimacy—indifferent, distant even, as it was now apparently Captain Chancellor’s *rôle* to appear to her—Roma yet saw clearly that Adelaide’s mother, with her sharp worldly eyes, her conventional suspicion of every unmarried woman not fortunate enough to be an heiress, was on the scent of something below the surface between herself and the man Mrs Chancellor had picked out for her future son-in-law.

“It is all Beauchamp’s fault. It is very cruel of him to place me in such a position. I believe he wants these people to think that he dislikes me, and that I—oh, no, he could not be so horribly coarse,” thought Roma, though she grew furious at the idea. “Why won’t he believe simply that I only care for him as a brother, and let us be comfortable as we used to be? And why is Gertrude so weak as to be turned against me when I have told her so plainly how it is?”

And there were times at which she almost wished that things would come to a crisis, and that she might have the

opportunity she had hitherto on every account so carefully avoided of telling Captain Chancellor the plain truth; that to one woman in the world his fascinations were less than nothing. But at present things showed no signs of coming to any such crisis. Beauchamp comported himself to her with exaggerated and obtrusive indifference, and amused himself very comfortably with a handsome Miss Fretville, whose *fiancé* was safe in India, and (rather more discreetly) with pretty Lady Exyton, whose husband was sixty, and, so long as his dinner was to his taste, calmly tolerant of her ladyship's harmless little flirtations.

Had the change been less sudden and obtrusive, Roma would have been only too glad to believe it genuine. As it was, she rightly attributed it to pique—a powerful motive in some natures, for wounded vanity has many of the symptoms and sensations of the genuine malady, often enough deceiving even the patient's self.

End of Volume One.

Volume Two—Chapter One .

Eavesdropping.

Rom. The hurt cannot be much.

Mer. No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough.

It was the day of the Winsley Hunt Ball. The Halswood Chancellors' stay had already considerably exceeded the week originally proposed as its extent; but Gertrude had persuaded them "not to talk of going away" till after the twenty-fifth, the date of this important local event. So they had stayed on, and with them the Exytons and the Gourlays, and ever so many other people, till the Grange was filled to overflowing with fine ladies and gentlemen, and still finer ladies' maids and gentlemen's gentlemen.

Gertrude was in her element, so in his own way was Beauchamp; he had felt much more comfortable since there had been a little more going on, and he had had less time for solitary meditation; and Roma, though he had not seen her for several days except in general society, was so agreeably gentle and subdued, that he began to think his new way of behaving to her was really going to prove a success. At any rate he would try it a little longer, it would do her no harm; and so long as the house was as lively as it had been lately, time did not hang heavy on his hands. There were two or three young ladies among the visitors in whom Adelaide Chancellor had discovered kindred spirits, so Roma was freed from the burden of entertaining the girl, and not sorry to be so; for the first few days during which they had been more thrown together had been quite enough for Miss Eyrecourt. Yet she felt very lonely sometimes; Gertrude seemed to be always surrounded by her guests, and to make her plans and arrangements without consulting Roma in the old way at all, and the understanding between her and Mrs Chancellor was evidently closer and more confidential than ever.

It was a mild spring-like morning: the meet, one of the last of the season, was at some distance from the Grange, and most of the guests had set off early, riding and driving, to be in time for it. Beauchamp—who did not hunt, not being rich enough to do so in what he considered proper style, but who nevertheless rode well enough, and managed to be always sufficiently well mounted to look as if his forswearing the field was to be solely attributed to eccentricity or indolence—had preferred this morning to drive Lady Exyton's ponies, their pretty owner at his side. Addie had borrowed the horse Roma usually rode, and under her father's wing intended to do great things; every one had arranged to go somehow or with somebody except Roma herself, who, fancying that nobody wanted her, and that her sister-in-law would prefer her remaining in the background, had kept out of the way till it was too late for her to be included in any of the arrangements.

It was rather a relief to be alone for a little while. She was, in a general way, fond of amusement and society, accustomed and not indifferent to a fair share of admiration. But lately she had not had heart or spirit to enter into things as usual; Gertrude's coldness had already, it seemed to her, affected the tone of others; she said to herself she was getting old, "nearly five and twenty," and "passée," and ill-tempered, and it would not be long before Beauchamp would congratulate himself heartily on not having been taken at his word by her.

"I almost wish sometimes I could have cared for him as he cares or thinks he cares for me. But it would have been dreadful to have so vexed Gertrude after all her kindness to me. It is bad enough to feel that she distrusts me without my deserving it, but that would have been worse. No; I should not like to care for him; but it is very lonely sometimes."

She was pacing slowly up and down a sheltered terrace walk that ran along one side of the house. On to this walk opened by glass doors several of the rooms most used by the family, the library, the morning-room, Mrs Eyrecourt's little boudoir, and between these glass doors were placed here and there garden seats against the wall. Roma got tired of walking up and down; though still only February it was temptingly mild, so she sat down on one of the seats without observing that the glass door nearest it was slightly ajar. Voices from within reached her, she heard the sound of her own name; then before she had time to realise what she was doing, two or three sentences fell with cruel distinctness upon her ears.

"It is very difficult for me to think it is Roma's fault. She has assured me so earnestly that there was nothing of the kind on her part, I cannot bear to think how she must have deceived me."

The voice was Gertrude's; the tone anxious and irresolute. Then came the answer; it was Mrs Chancellor who was speaking now.

"Ah, yes; that is the worst part of it. I can feel for you, my dear Gertrude; I can indeed. As to the affair itself, had she

only been frank about it, one could hardly have blamed her. A man of dear Beauchamp's attractions, thrown so much in her society—and she, of course she is handsome in a certain style, and her singing is really good, though not *quite* refined enough to suit my taste; but—what was I saying? Oh yes, of course, she, you know, is no longer very young, and has nothing, literally nothing you say, to look forward to? It is only too natural. It is most distressing altogether, and how perplexing for Beauchamp, dear fellow. A moment's folly or weakness and a young man may be ruined, ruined in a sense of course, for life! Ah yes, I see it all, far more clearly than can be possible for one so young and unsuspecting as you, dearest Gertrude. But I do think Beauchamp has behaved beautifully, from what you tell me, *beautifully*. And—"

But just then there came a knock at the door of the boudoir in which the two ladies were sitting, and Mrs Chancellor's maid appeared, or rather, that is to say, the sound of her voice penetrated to Roma still motionless on the garden seat outside, and it became evident to the involuntary eavesdropper that the confidential tête-à-tête was at an end. She had not meant to listen; just when the interruption came she had been on the point of marching into the room and stating what she had heard. Now of course before the servant it was out of the question. She rose from her seat, ran along the terrace and entered the house at the other side; then hastening upstairs she waited at the door of her own room till, as she expected, in a few minutes she saw Mrs Chancellor coming along the passage, followed by the maid, who wished to consult her about some important question of millinery for the evening's adornment.

Then Roma walked deliberately downstairs again, across the hall, down the passage to the door of Gertrude's boudoir, at which she knocked, and in obedience to her sister-in-law's unsuspecting "come in," entered Mrs Eyrecourt's presence with no sign of agitation or uneasiness on her countenance.

"Gertrude," she said, quietly. Gertrude started a little; she had not expected to see Roma, and glancing up at her now she felt instinctively that something must be the matter. Roma's face was so grave, and she looked so dreadfully tall. What could it be? Gertrude laid down her pen—she was in the middle of a letter—and waited in some alarm for what was to follow, feeling perhaps the least little bit in the world guilty, when she remembered what her thoughts had lately been of her sister-in-law. "Gertrude," said Roma again, "I have come to tell you that I heard what you said of me just now; what you said and what you allowed Mrs Chancellor to say of me in this very room not ten minutes ago."

Mrs Eyrecourt grew crimson. There was no evading the charge; it was far too direct and circumstantial. She tried getting angry.

"I needn't remind you of the old proverb about listeners, Roma," she said, with an attempt at haughty indignation. "There was a time when I could hardly have believed you capable of such a thing, even though confessed by yourself; but I must have been mistaken in you in more ways than this. I cannot help your having heard what was said. I am not bound never to say anything about you that you would not like to hear—and to a near relation of my own too! You cannot expect to dictate to me what I am to talk about to my cousin."

"That is nonsense, Gertrude," answered Roma, so gently that the words did not sound disrespectful. "I have no intention of dictating to you. I have not even hinted at finding fault with what you said and allowed Mrs Chancellor to say, though I might perhaps be excused if I thought it hard that I should be so discussed by you with a person whom you have not known a fortnight; and it is nonsense for you to pretend that you think me capable of low eavesdropping. You *know* you don't think so, Gertrude. Of course you know that my overhearing anything was purely accidental, and in your heart, Gertrude, you are bitterly sorry, not only that I overheard what I did, but that there was anything of the kind for me to hear."

Gertrude was silent. "I don't know if I am or not," she said, half petulantly. "I don't want to distrust you, Roma. If you heard all, you must have heard me say I could not bear to think you had deceived me."

"And why should you think so?" exclaimed Roma, more vehemently. "I have *never* deceived you, dear Gertrude. You have been very good to me all these years since my mother died and I was left alone; there has never been any cloud between us, except about this unfortunate infatuation of your brother's. I am not, in a sense, surprised at a woman like Mrs Chancellor thinking of me as she does—she has no reason to like me, and imagines me in her way—but *you*, Gertrude, ah! that is very different! Why should I deceive you as to my feelings to Beauchamp; what good would it do me if what Mrs Chancellor thinks were true, to conceal it from you? Oh, Gertrude, you know it has been all on his side all along; you cannot say I have ever encouraged him in the very least?"

"No-o," said Gertrude, reluctantly. "*Directly*, you certainly have not done so. But I don't know, Roma. I wish you wouldn't ask me. As Mrs Chancellor said once, you may have been deceiving yourself."

"I have not then; I have done nothing of the kind," replied Roma, her dark eyes flashing as no light grey ones could do. "I tell you again, Gertrude, as I have told you a hundred times, I do not care for Beauchamp a straw, not in the way you mean. It is a perfect mystery to me what other women find so irresistible in him. I know him too well I suppose. To me he is the very antipodes of the sort of man I could care for. Selfish, weak, vain. He has good, qualities too of course, I know that as well or better than you do, but his faults and foibles are the *sort* that in a man I could least forget. There now, have I spoken plainly enough to convince you at last? I don't want to offend you, Gertrude," seeing that Mrs Eyrecourt, with true womanly inconsistency, now looked rather sulky at this unflattering depreciation of her Adonis; "you have forced it upon yourself. Good heavens! how unreasonable you are."

"You are forgetting yourself, Roma," said Gertrude, coldly.

"No, I am not. And if I were, would there not be some excuse? I am determined to come to an end of this. Either you must trust me, or if not I will go away. I will be a governess or a housemaid or anything, rather than stay with you if you doubt me. What would you have, Gertrude? You don't want me to marry Beauchamp, yet you are angry because I am not the least atom in love with him? Would you like to be told that I am heart and soul devoted to him, but that

to please you I was willing to sacrifice myself by refusing to have anything to say to him—would that be a pleasant state of things for you? I know very little about the feelings of people in love certainly—I have hardly a right to judge even of myself in such a predicament, but I don't know but what I *might* have been capable of so sacrificing myself, Gertrude, rather than disappoint you after your many years' goodness to me. I am grateful, whatever else I may not be. But such a state of things would have been wretched for you."

Gertrude was touched. The old habit of sisterly trust and confidence was fast returning upon her.

"I do believe you, Roma," she said, after a little silence. "I have never doubted you as much as you think. But it is altogether uncomfortable and anomalous."

"I know it is. For no one more so than for me," replied Miss Eyrecourt. "And my conviction that Beauchamp does not really care for me does not simplify matters. I doubt his being capable of what I call really caring for any one, though I don't know," she added thoughtfully, the expression of his face when he had begged her "never to sing that song again" returning to her memory; "but what can I do, Gertrude? You don't want me to let him propose formally and hear my opinion of him in the plain words I have told it to you?"

"Certainly not," said Gertrude, hastily. "It would be most disagreeable—just now especially; the Chancellors would hear of it, and—altogether—"

"It would be horrid, I allow," answered Roma, consideringly. "A good blow to Beauchamp's vanity might not do him any harm, but he would never forgive the dealer thereof. We could never be all comfortable together again. As for the Chancellors, I don't know that it would much matter. I don't think there is much chance of success in that quarter, Gertrude. Of course it would be a good marriage for Beauchamp, and he is far more likely to be a good husband rich than poor, and Addie is pretty and amiable. It would be all right if *he* saw it so of course, but I don't think he will. However, I don't want to be in the way. I tell you what, Gertrude, I had better go away."

"Go away!" repeated Mrs Eyrecourt, in amazement. "Roma, oh no! that would never do."

"I don't mean for always," said Roma. "I am not so in love with independence as to want to leave you unless you drive me to it—for, of course, as Mrs Chancellor delicately observed, I have 'literally nothing else to look to.' You are my bread and butter you see, Gertrude—for of course the trifle I have is hardly enough to dress upon; and I assure you I don't want to quarrel with you if I can help it." Gertrude winced a little. "If my father's second wife had been an heiress like his first, things would have been different. No, I didn't mean going away for always—only for a few weeks, till Beauchamp is away again."

"He would be sure to suspect the reason, and would be angry," objected Mrs Eyrecourt.

"Not he; I could manage it so that neither he nor any one else could suspect the reason. I shall probably be telegraphed for in a few days. I had a letter from my godmother this morning, which paves the way beautifully for a sudden summons. She is a good old soul. I shall write to her at once. Beauchamp is all right for the present. He is trying a new plan with me, and before he discovers its vanity I shall be safe out of his way."

"Roma," said Gertrude, penitently, "you are very good and unselfish."

"No, I'm not. Neither the one nor the other," said Roma, cheerfully. Her spirits had quite returned to her now that Gertrude was herself again. "Kiss me, Gertrude, and I will forget that you ever doubted me. What's that noise? Some one listening again? It is certainly not I this time."

She walked quickly to the window and looked out. The glass door was still ajar, but no one was to be seen. "It must have been my fancy," she said, returning to Mrs Eyrecourt. But just then an unmistakable rustling was heard along the passage. "There is Mrs Chancellor coming back again. I must go before she comes in. You won't tell her any of what we have been talking about, Gertrude? You will not let her know of my having overheard what she said?"

"Of course not. How can you ask me, Roma? I shall never mention you to her again at all if I can help it," answered Mrs Eyrecourt, and almost before she had finished speaking, Roma had disappeared through the glass door, only just in time to escape Adelaide's mother, who entered in great tribulation concerning the non-appearance of the flowers from Foster's, ordered for the completion of Miss Chancellor's ball-dress.

"What to do, I really don't know, my dear Gertrude," she began in a tone of sore distress. "The whole effect of the dress depends upon them. And we have felt anxious about the dress already. Pink is rather an experiment for Adelaide at a ball, for she does flush, you know, and on this account I have hitherto prohibited it. But she had so set her heart upon it I agreed to try it, and I have been trusting to these flowers—water-lilies, all white, you know—to soften the colour."

"And has she no other ball-dress ready in case they don't come?" inquired Mrs Eyrecourt, not sorry that Mrs Chancellor's thoughts were thus diverted from the former subject of their conversation. "I didn't know she was thinking of pink for to-night—at a Hunt ball, you see, against the scarlet coats—"

"Of course," interrupted Mrs Chancellor. "Dear me, that makes it worse and worse! How could Adelaide and Fraser be so stupid? But there is her white tulle. I do believe there would be time to alter the trimming, and it is a lovely dress. Would you, dearest Gertrude, mind coming up with me to look at it? I should be so thankful for your opinion."

Dearest Gertrude had no objection, and as the two ladies passed along the corridor upstairs, they met Roma coming out of her own room with a book in her hand.

"Can you tell me where the second volume of 'Arrows in the Dark,' is to be found, Gertrude?" she asked innocently,

as they passed her.

The slight noise near the window of the boudoir had not after all been Roma's fancy. Eavesdropping was in fashion to-day at Winsley.

When Captain Chancellor had driven Lady Exyton safely home again from the meet, and deposited her at the hall door, she begged him to go round with the ponies to the stable to explain to her groom a little matter in the harness requiring immediate adjustment. His errand accomplished, he strolled back to the house again by a roundabout route through the terrace garden. Here he suddenly came upon his niece, intently engaged in ascertaining how many new little worms she could chop up one big one into, her nursemaid, seated on a garden bench at a little distance, being safely engrossed with crochet.

"What are you doing, you nasty cruel little girl?" exclaimed Beauchamp, in considerable disgust.

In a general way Floss rather affected her uncle: such an address, however, roused all her latent ire.

"I ain't nasty. And you're cwueller to shoot pwetty birds and bunnies. Worms is ugly, and they doesn't mind cutting," she replied, defiantly.

"How do you know? You wouldn't like to be chopped up into little bits, would you?" remonstrated Captain Chancellor, with a vague feeling that somewhere in his memory, could he but lay hold of it, there was a verse of one of Dr Watts's hymns appropriate to quote on the occasion.

"No," returned Floss calmly, "I wouldn't, 'cause I'm not a worm. Worms doesn't mind. I *know* they doesn't. I know lots of things," she continued, mysteriously peeping up into her uncle's face with her green eyes; "lots and lots that nobody more knows."

"Do you?" said Beauchamp, carelessly. "Let's hear some of your secrets, Floss."

"I'll tell you one if you won't tell nobody," said the child. She was evidently burning to communicate it, or she would not so quickly have forgiven her uncle's insulting greeting.

"All right, I won't tell nobody."

"Listen, stoop down, Uncle Beachey. Low down; now listen and I'll whisper," said Floss. Then to his amazement—he had expected only some childish confidence or complaint—she whispered into his ear the words, "Aunty Woma's going away." Beauchamp started back. "Roma is going away," he repeated. "Nonsense, Floss. You don't know what you're talking about."

"I do, I do," exclaimed the child, in her eagerness to prove herself right, throwing all reserve to the winds, "she said so to mamma. I heard her, and mamma said she was good, and I know she's going."

"How did you hear her? Where were you?" questioned Beauchamp.

"I was under the sofa—in there, in mamma's room," said Floss, pointing in the direction of the boudoir. "My ball went in, and I went in too, and mamma thought I came out again, but I didn't. I hid under the sofa for nurse not to see me, and it was a long time—hours, I should think—before she finded me," she continued triumphantly.

"But how did you hear your aunt was going away—did nurse tell you?" asked Captain Chancellor, somewhat mystified.

"No, in course not," exclaimed Floss, contemptuously. "Nurse doesn't know. Aunty Woma came into the room and spoke lots to mamma. She said she would make something for mamma, but mamma wouldn't have it; and then she said she would go away, and mamma said she was good, but you would be angwy, and Aunty Woma said, 'No; you wouldn't expeck.'"

"'Wouldn't expect?' What can the child mean? Wasn't it *suspect* she said, Floss?" a brilliant light flashing upon him.

"Yes, suchpeck," agreed Floss. "It was suchpeck; and what could it be aunty said she'd make for mamma, Uncle Beachey?" she continued, evidently disposed now to regard her hearer as an interpreter of the jumble in her brain. "It was something like *sat in flies*."

Captain Chancellor stared at the child without speaking. He saw, or thought he at last saw, through it all. He turned to go, but a thought occurred to him.

"Floss," he said, very impressively, "it wasn't good of you to listen to what your mamma and aunt were saying. They would be very angry if they knew."

"Oh, don't tell. Uncle Beachey, you said you wouldn't tell nobody," said the little girl beseechingly.

"I'm not going to tell. But remember, Floss, you must be sure not to tell any one else, not nurse or any one, do you hear? It doesn't matter for me, but other people might scold you."

"Then I won't tell," decided Floss. "And do you think Aunty Woma will go away, Uncle Beachey? I hope she will. I like her best when she goes away, for then she can't call me a tiresome plague, and she bwings me a pwesent when she comes back."

But Uncle Beachey did not answer her inquiries. His mind was full of curiously mingled feelings; indignation against

Gertrude, triumph over Roma, whose real sentiments he now imagined he had discovered; determination to be, as he expressed it to himself, "made a fool of no longer." And below all these he was conscious of a strange, indefinable feeling of indifference to it all, of unwillingness to move decisively in the matter, as he told himself he must. Now that the long-coveted prize seemed within his reach, half its attractiveness appeared to have deserted it.

"There has been a great deal of unnecessary to-do about it all," he said to himself. "Of course I always felt sure that in the end I should marry Roma, and I have no doubt we shall get on very well. But it takes the bloom off a thing to have all this uncertainty and delay about it."

Volume Two—Chapter Two.

Plain Speaking.

"The fiery maiden-nature flashing forth."

City Poems.

Roma's spirits rose considerably after her conversation with her sister-in-law. She did not look forward with much anticipation of enjoyment to the evening's amusement—balls at four-and-twenty are very different from what they are at eighteen—still she felt more like her usual cheerful sensible self than she had done for some time.

"How *very* pretty your dress is, Miss Eyrecourt," said Adelaide, cordially, perhaps a little enviously, when the two young ladies happened to find themselves side by side shaking out their plumage after the four miles' drive, in the temporary cloak-room, at the Winsley "Unicorn."

"I do so admire black, and those foxgloves are really lovely. So very natural! I never, saw them worn before. I am not at all pleased with my dress," she went on discontentedly. "I have worn it once before, and I think one never feels comfortable in an old dress. I wish I had had my new pink after all. I don't believe there will be many scarlet coats. Only two of our party have them."

"There are sure to be a good many; and really your dress is exceedingly pretty," replied Roma, consolingly. "It looks perfectly fresh."

"Does it?" said Miss Chancellor, turning herself round, the better to observe the effect of her long sweep of drapery. "I'm glad you think it looks nice. I am engaged for the first dance to Captain Chancellor. I almost wish I wasn't! Do you know, Miss Eyrecourt, though I think he is charming to look at, I cannot get on with him. I never can think of anything to say to him, and yet just see how Miss Fretville goes on with him, and mamma thinks him delightful too."

Roma smiled. "Miss Fretville and you are two very different people," she replied kindly, for the girl's unaffectedness pleased her. "You will find that he dances beautifully, any way, which is the principal consideration to-night. Here he comes," for by this time the whole party were in the ball-room, and the first dance was on the eve of commencing.

Captain Chancellor made his way quickly to where the two girls were standing.

"Our dance, I believe, Miss Chancellor?" he said to his cousin, then, somewhat to Roma's surprise—his late conduct had not prepared her to be thus honoured—he turned towards her.

"Will you keep number ten for me, Roma," he said; "I shall count upon it, remember!" and before, in the moment's hurry, she had time to make any excuse, or even to decide that it would be well to do so, he had left her, and in another minute was whirling round the room, with the substantial Adelaide in his arms.

Miss Eyrecourt felt a little uneasy. Something in Beauchamp's manner had struck her as peculiar: then, too, number ten was—as she knew by the arrangement of the card—the last dance before supper; evidently he had chosen it on purpose. There was no help for it, however; she must trust to her tact to steer clear of anything undesirable, but she almost wished she had pleaded illness or some excuse, and remained at home.

What a pity it all was! Long ago in the old comfortable days, how she had enjoyed dancing with Beauchamp, especially at these Winsley balls, where they knew everybody, and it was sociable and friendly, and people were not too fine to enjoy themselves. How nice it would be, thought Roma, if there was no such thing in the world as falling in love, real or imaginary.

Could it be true, as Beauchamp had so often told her, when he was vexed, that she was different from the rest of young ladyhood, cold, and self-contained and unwomanly? If so, was it not a pity she had not taken the best that came in her way, with out waiting in a vague belief that something better might possibly be yet to come? Portionless though she was, she had refused two or three very fair proposals before now, refused them for no reason except the little-sympathised-in one that she "did not care for" the men who had made them to her. But now, at four-and-twenty, there were times when she questioned the wisdom of her decisions, when she doubted if, after all, it was in her to care for any real flesh-and-blood lover, as long ago in the romantic girlish days it had seemed to her she could. She might have been fairly happy with Sir Philip Bartlemore for instance, buried in politics over head and ears though he was. Lady Bartlemore seemed comfortable and content, and every one spoke of her as fortunate in her married life; or with that undoubtedly disinterested and truly uninteresting Mr Fawcett, the Rector of Ferrivale, towards whom for some time Roma had vainly tried to coax into existence a warmer sentiment than respect—she would have gone on respecting him till now, she felt quite sure, and she would have had a home and ties of her own, whereas now she was of no particular use to any one, and the cause of disunion and trouble among her nearest friends. Had she made a mistake in not acting up to the practical, worldly-wise philosophy she always professed to believe in? There was no

saying, and little use now in trying to decide; so Roma turned her attention to the present, danced as much as she felt inclined, laughed and talked with such of her partners as were worth the trouble, and made fun to herself of the others, till nine dances had come to an end, and she was startled by Beauchamp's voice beside her claiming her for the tenth.

"I am glad it is a waltz," she said cordially, judging that a return to the old easy terms would be her best temporary policy. "It is ages since we have had one together, and we understood each other's paces so well. I have not been very lucky to-night; so far as dancing goes, that is to say. My partners have belonged more to the order of 'those that talk.' How have you been getting on?"

"! oh, I don't know. Well enough," replied Captain Chancellor somewhat absently. "Lady Exyton dances well to look at, but she's rather *too* light and too small for me. Blanche Fretville again is a thought too big, and she bounces rather."

"You are as difficult to please as ever, I see," remarked Roma, rashly.

Beauchamp looked at her: his eyes and the consciousness of the mistake she had made, caused her colour to deepen. Her vexation with herself increased.

"Yes," he replied, quietly, but with meaning in his tone, "I am. No one should know that better than you, Roma."

Just then, to her relief, the music began. "Are you ready?" he asked, and in a moment they were off.

It is something for poor creatures such as most of us are, to be able to do anything perfectly, even so altogether small a thing as dancing! There is a real satisfaction while it lasts, in feeling that the thing we are doing could not be done better. And this agreeable consciousness was always Roma's when waltzing with Beauchamp. They were a perfectly well-matched pair; their movements as harmonious as the blending of two voices in a duet. Once, long ago, Roma had said to Beauchamp that whatever he had done to offend her, it would be beyond her power to refuse to forgive him after dancing with him. It had been a passing laughing remark, and he had forgotten its ever having been made. Still, some instinctive desire to gain for himself every possible advantage in what was before him, had probably had to do with the details of his conduct this evening.

The waltz came to an end—all too soon, for more reasons than one, for Roma. She had not been able to make any plan of defence; she could only trust to her tact and quick-wittedness. Captain Chancellor seemed in no hurry to get rid of her. She was afraid of appearing anxious to leave him; symptoms of such a feeling on her part might only precipitate what she hoped to evade. So they promenaded up and down the room among all the other couples, saying little to each other, Roma all alert for the first chance of escape. Suddenly a door hitherto closed was thrown open; a general movement in the new direction ensued. Beauchamp started.

"Supper!" he exclaimed. "By-the-bye, I forgot. Will you excuse me, Roma, for a moment?"

She was only too ready; her hand was withdrawn from his arm almost before the words were out of his mouth.

"Never mind about me," she said quickly. "I see Gertrude over there. I can make my way to her quite well alone."

She did not know if he heard what she had said or not, in a moment he had disappeared. And, alas! for the vanity of human expectations, Gertrude was no longer to be seen "over there." Nearly every one had by this time left the ball-room; the few who were still in process of filing out were not of Roma's acquaintances. She began to feel rather uncomfortable and deserted, and a little indignant with Beauchamp. One or two couples glanced at her as they passed, with some surprise.

"What can Miss Eyrecourt be standing there alone for?" said a girl who knew her by name only, to the gentleman she was with.

"Better ask Captain Chancellor," replied the young man. He was the son of one of the managers, formerly head clerk, of the Winsley Bank, and his acquaintance with the "county" was decidedly limited. As might have been expected therefore, his knowledge of its private arrangements was minute in the extreme, now and then indeed suggesting suspicions of clairvoyance.

"Who is he?" asked the girl, a stranger to the neighbourhood, to whom five minutes before Mr Thompson had pointed out Miss Eyrecourt, condescendingly, as "one of our belles—has been, that is to say."

"He is a sort of a connection of hers," he replied, "that is to say, a brother of Mrs Eyrecourt's. He and she—Captain Chancellor and Miss Eyrecourt, are engaged to be married, though it is not *generally* known. There he is," he added, lowering his voice, for at that moment, as if in confirmation of his statement, Beauchamp, conspicuous by running against the supper-seeking stream, passed them, on his way back to the ball-room.

"Oh, indeed!" replied Miss Smith, with the sex's usual keen interest in such matters. "I am glad you told me. It is such fun to watch engaged people."

She communicated the fact in all good faith to her next partner, who happened to be one of the officers in the cavalry regiment stationed in the neighbouring town. This gentleman, not personally acquainted with either of the two people it chiefly concerned, mentioned it again casually as an undoubtedly well-authenticated piece of local news to a brother officer, whose wife, an old school-friend of Mrs Dalrymple's, happened to be writing to that lady the next day. The object of her letter being to ask for an introduction to the family at Winsley Grange, the major's wife naturally alluded to the engagement as a "just announced" occurrence, not forgetting, on the principle of "the three black crows," to add, what she probably really thought she had been told, that "she understood the marriage was to

take place almost immediately.”

Roma was sitting quite alone in the empty ball-room, when, to her great surprise, Beauchamp rejoined her. She had not liked his deserting her so unceremoniously, but this unexpected reappearance alarmed her: still she determined to seem to suspect nothing out of the common.

“So you haven’t forgotten me after all, Beauchamp?” she said good-humouredly. “You needn’t have come back for me though, I don’t care about any supper.”

“Don’t you really? Come now, that’s quite a fortunate coincidence,” said Captain Chancellor, seating himself deliberately beside her, “for as it happens I don’t want any either. We can spend the interval that less ethereal beings than you and I, Roma, devote to vulgar eating and drinking in a little congenial conversation.”

“But your partner?” objected Roma; “that is to say, the lady you took in to supper. What will she be thinking of you?”

“I didn’t take any one in to supper,” replied Captain Chancellor, composedly. “The reason I deserted you so unceremoniously was only that I had promised Lady Exyton to tell Vandeleur where she was to be found, and I had forgotten.”

Roma, who was really rather hungry, began to long for the comparative safety of the crowded supper-room. How she wished now she had not told that useless little fib about not wanting anything to eat.

“What is the matter?” asked Beauchamp, presently. “What are you looking so unhappy about?”

“I am tired,” she answered hastily. “I have got a little headache. I wish I could get a cup of tea, but I suppose there would be no chance of such a thing so late in the evening.”

“Every chance,” replied he; and for one happy moment Miss Eyrecourt thought he was going to volunteer an expedition in search of it. “If you will wait till the supper is over I will guarantee your getting it. I am so sorry you are tired, Roma, but I have not thought you looking well for some time. You may have fancied I did not notice your looks or think about you, but if so you have been mistaken.”

There was the unmistakable tone of a prelude in this little speech. Roma grew desperate, as a last hope she tried to offend him.

“I am not obliged to you for noticing my looks,” she said haughtily—“still less for commenting upon them. There are few things I dislike more than remarks of the kind. I am tired, as I told you, Beauchamp, and I want to sit here quietly by myself. It will oblige me very much if you will go away and leave me alone.”

Captain Chancellor had risen from his seat and stood before her, looking down on her flushed face, waiting quietly till she had come to the end of her not very civil speech. He was perfectly cool. Roma hardly understood the expression of his face, but she felt that, so far at least in the interview, he had the advantage of her.

“You needn’t think you will make me angry, and get rid of me in that way, Roma,” he said coolly. “You have tried that plan successfully several times, but I understand you better now, I am glad to say. Yes, I understand you thoroughly now at last, and I will have no more mystifications and shillyshallying.”

It was a peculiar sort of love-making. There was a tone of triumph in his way of speaking that irritated Miss Eyrecourt even while it bewildered her.

“What do you mean, Beauchamp?” she asked, really at a loss to understand what he was driving at.

“You know what I mean,” he answered; and Roma could see that he put some force on himself to keep down his rising irritation. “You know perfectly what I mean. Not many hours ago you told Gertrude you were willing to make a sacrifice of yourself for her,” (this was what after much cogitation Captain Chancellor had made out of Floss’s “satin flies,” and the look of utter astonishment on Roma’s face told him that his shot had hit the mark); “have you forgotten that you were sacrificing some one else as well as yourself? All these years, Roma, I have waited, if not always patiently, at least, more so than many men would have done,” (“yes,” thought Roma, “and amused yourself very agreeably between times,”) “and now I think I deserve my reward. I have always suspected what I now know, that Gertrude was the real difficulty; but for this suspicion your conduct would certainly have been most incomprehensible to me, still till to-day I hardly realised that she could carry her unjustifiable tyranny so far, or that you could so tamely yield to it.”

Here and there during this speech Roma had softened a little to her would-be lover, had even pitied him a little when it dawned upon her that the truth she had no option now but to tell him in unmistakable words might after all cause him some real pain: but the confident belief in the irresistible nature of his own charms, calmly inferred in his closing words, provoked her out of such weakness. She felt no difficulty now in hardening her heart.

“How you have got your knowledge, Beauchamp, of what passed between Gertrude and me to-day certainly baffles my comprehension; but, however you have done so, you must allow me to tell you that it is a very garbled version of the real conversation that has come to you,” began Roma.

“I don’t believe it,” interrupted the young man, hotly. “You are trying to mystify me again. Can you deny that Gertrude’s interference has gone the length of driving you from Winsley while I am there?”

“Certainly I deny it,” she replied. “It is perfectly true that Gertrude and I agreed together that it would not be unadvisable for me to leave Winsley for a time.”

"For the time of my being there?" he interrupted again.

"Well, yes, if you force me to say so, that was the time we proposed for my absence. But *Gertrude* was not the originator of the plan. It was my own wish."

"Indeed!" he said, incredulously. "And if not to propitiate Gertrude, what on earth was your motive?"

"The foolish one," she returned, getting very angry, "of wishing to spare myself the pain of saying, and you the pain—or rather, perhaps, I should say, the mortification, of hearing what I would much rather never have been driven to put into words."

"And what may that be?" he asked, growing paler than was his wont, but with a sneer on his face that made Roma, in her exaggerated indignation, marvel that ever she could have thought him handsome.

"The truth," she replied, vehemently, "the plain state of the case—namely, that there is one woman who does *not* think you irresistible; who would not marry you, hardly, I think, to save her life; who pities the woman that does marry you—vain, selfish, shallow as you are!" She stopped, breathless with excitement.

"Thank you," said Beauchamp. He was still standing before her, to all outward appearance composedly enough, but still with the same disfiguring sneer over his handsome features. "Thank you," he repeated, slowly. "One is never too old to learn, I suppose. I thought I knew something of women; till to-night I thought I knew something of *you*—I imagined you refined, gentle, and womanly, but you have undeceived me. Still, of course, pray understand how sincerely I thank you for your plain speaking; the only pity is that you have so long deferred it, out of regard, no doubt, for the pain—oh no, by-the-bye, I am too shallow to be capable of feeling pain, mortification I think you kindly called it—it might cause me."

He turned to go. The intensity of wounded feeling from which he was suffering, the utter unexpectedness of the blow, had given him for the time a sort of dignity, a power of retort new to him. Never before, perhaps, had Roma been so near admiring him as now, when the mixture of truth in his sarcastic words stung her so deeply. A sort of remorse seized upon her—she felt that she had gone too far. Poor Beauchamp! he might be all she had taunted him with being, but had he deserved such treatment at her hands?

"Beauchamp," she exclaimed, appealingly, "Beauchamp, don't go like that. Forgive me. I have said more than I meant. You have been mistaken all along. You don't really care for me in *that* way. Some day you will see you have never done so. Oh, do let us be friends in the old way; you don't know how I wish it!"

At the first sound of her voice he had stopped short and half turned round. A foolish, wild idea flashed through his mind that possibly he had been premature in believing her, that now at the last moment, when she judged him all but lost to her, he was yet to see this proud woman at his feet. But in a moment her words undeceived him.

"Thank you again," he said, coming nearer her, and speaking in a low voice, for just then some of the younger people—those who cared more for dancing than supper—began to straggle back into the ball-room, "but you must excuse me for saying—as plain speaking is the order of the day—that I can't echo your wish. Even 'vain, selfish, shallow' people have feelings, you know, sometimes, of a kind." Then, with a complete and sudden change of voice, he added aloud, "Shall we go to the supper-room now, and see what we can get? It must be getting less crowded." And with the habitual instinct of not leaving the woman in an awkward or unprotected position, he offered Roma his arm, which she, wounded beyond expression, yet not without a certain feeling of gratitude for his consideration, was fain to accept.

Surely a more uncomfortable pair never walked arm-in-arm across a ball-room! They made their way in silence, meeting of course face to face the returning stream, feeling themselves agreeably exposed to the critical remarks of the many to whom, at least by sight, they were well known. Entering the supper-room, to her relief, Roma descried Gertrude and some of her party still seated in a corner, and she lost no time in joining them with some plausible excuse for her tardy appearance. But it is to be feared she never got the cup of tea on which she had so set her heart.

The rest of the evening passed like a dreary farce. It was all Roma could do to smile and talk sufficiently as usual to prevent Mrs Eyecourt's suspicions being aroused; for as yet she could not decide how much or how little of what had passed it would be well for her to confide to her sister-in-law. She felt unspeakably thankful when at last she found herself at home again, safe in the solitude of her own room, free to think over quietly the painful occurrences of the evening, and to decide what now was best for her to do. But when she tried to think it all over she found herself too tired and dispirited to do so reasonably or sensibly; worse still, when she gave up the attempt and went to bed, she could not sleep, and when, after tossing about for two or three hours, she at last fell into an uneasy doze, it was only to awake with a start and the indescribably wretched feeling familiar to us all that something was the matter, and that she must at once arouse her faculties to recall its details.

Light was beginning to break, however; she found she must have slept longer than she had imagined. Yes; it was nearly eight o'clock. She got up and dressed without ringing for her maid, who had sat up late for her the night before, and thinking that the fresh morning air might refresh her, she spent the next hour in a brisk walk round the park.

When she came in again, and was hastening to take off her hat and cloak, she passed Captain Chancellor's room. The door was open, and just inside she caught sight of his man-servant engaged in strapping a portmanteau. Roma stopped short; the servant happening to look up, perceived her standing in the doorway.

"What time is your master leaving, Barlow?" she asked, coolly, as if she knew all about it.

"Half-past ten, ma'am," was the reply. "At least, the dog-cart is ordered for then."

Roma passed on to her own room, feeling very unhappy. She had no anticipation of Beauchamp's acting so precipitately, and she could not bear to be, even unwillingly, the cause of annoyance and vexation to her sister-in-law. What could she do? There was no use trying to see Gertrude, she would certainly not be awake enough to take it all in, and persuade her brother to reconsider his plans. Much as she shrank from seeing Captain Chancellor again, Roma now wished she could do so; there was just a possibility that she might be able to stop his leaving so hastily, especially if she reminded him of her own determination to go away from Winsley for a time. She went down to the dining-room with a half-formed determination to try what she could do. None of the guests had as yet made their appearance, but at one end of the long table stood a cup of coffee already poured out, and other signs that some one intended breakfasting at once. It did not look promising. Miss Eyrecourt hung about uncertain what to do, but just as she was deciding that it would be better for her not to interfere, Captain Chancellor walked in.

For the first moment he did not see her, but sat down hastily to his breakfast. Then happening to look up, he caught sight of her, and started visibly. Roma felt very uncomfortable; till she was actually in it she had not realised the awkwardness of the position. Now, however, her good sense came to her aid.

"Beauchamp," she said, trying to speak as much as possible as usual, though her voice trembled a little, "I want to ask you something."

"Be so kind as to tell me what it is as quickly as possible," he said, stiffly. "I am leaving immediately."

"There are two things I want to ask you," she went on hurriedly. "The first is, will you forgive me for having hurt you more than I need have done last night. I don't suppose I could have avoided hurting you to some extent, but what I had to say I might have said differently. In short, Beauchamp, I am afraid now that I lost my temper, and I am very sorry for it."

"The provocation was certainly very great," returned Captain Chancellor, bitterly. "Still you must excuse me for saying that I do not see any need for the subject's ever being reverted to again. We are not likely, you will be glad to hear, to see much more of each other for the future: it is not much to ask you to drop the subject now and for ever."

Roma's face flushed. "I only wish I could forget it at once and for ever," she answered with much hurt feeling in her tone. "It is far from generous for you to answer me so." Beauchamp remained perfectly silent. "However," she continued, "I cannot believe that you will continue to feel so bitter as you do now. What I most wanted to see you for was to beg you not to leave so hastily. There is no need for it. I am going away in a day or two. It will be very hard upon me if you go away in this sudden way, for of course, Gertrude will be frightfully annoyed, and altogether it will be most disagreeable."

She purposely exaggerated her personal feeling in the matter, as, under the circumstances, the strongest appeal she could make to him.

Captain Chancellor looked up quickly. "I am not surprised you should think so of me," he said; "but you are mistaken. I explained everything to Gertrude last night; she knows of my leaving. She is most anxious you should not think of going away at present, as she will tell you herself. But my time is up. I must go."

He rose from his seat.

"Are you going back to Wareborough?" asked Roma, feeling remorseful and yet indignant.

"Certainly not," he answered sharply, evidently suspecting some meaning in her question. "Wareborough is about the last place I am likely to go to—wretched hole that it is. I am only too thankful to have seen the last of it."

He spoke, it seemed to Roma, with unnecessary vehemence. But there was no time for anything more to be said. He shook hands formally and was off, and Roma walked slowly upstairs again to her own room, vexed with herself, vexed with Beauchamp, yet sorry for both.

Half-an-hour later Gertrude sent for her. Mrs Eyrecourt was wonderfully gracious. "It is very unlucky, dear—dreadfully unlucky, just what we have all along dreaded so, but most certainly not your fault. And I don't think there will be any fuss about it. Beauchamp said something 'confidentially' to Mrs Chancellor last night about the probability of his being called away suddenly by letters this morning. A friend of his—that Major Thanet, you know, Roma, really is ill—at Torquay or somewhere, and Beauchamp will most likely join him. And he has promised to visit the Chancellors at Wylingham very soon. So after all it may all turn out for the best. They leave to-morrow. And I have been thinking, Roma, considering all—you will be the better of a change, and of course you won't go to Deepthorne now—I don't see why we should not go to town sooner than we intended. We can have that house in a fortnight for either two or three months."

"Very well," said Roma. "I am quite willing to do as you like." Then, after a moment's silence she added, "I am glad Beauchamp is not going back to Wareborough. I was a little afraid of that at first."

"Of what?" asked Gertrude, lifting her eyebrows. Then as a remembrance of Roma's former fears returned to her mind, "On account of that girl, do you mean? Oh dear no, I have no fears in that quarter now. You must have exaggerated what you noticed when you were there."

"Perhaps so," said Roma, quietly.

At Wareborough.

"The certainty that struck hope dead."—J. Ruskin.

These three weeks had passed drearily enough at Wareborough. Not with everybody, of course. Frank Thurston for one was in a far from unhappy state of mind—his marriage with Sydney Laurence was to take place in a few weeks; thanks to Gerald's generosity no difficulties had come in its way, and the prospects of the young people were bright enough to satisfy all reasonable requirements. Sydney, in her calm way, was happy too. She belonged to the class of women who to some extent identify the husband with the home, and the selecting of this home, the discussion of the rival merits of the two or three little houses which happened at the time to be vacant in that part of Wareborough where they were to live, was deeply interesting to her. Still more delightful to her was the furnishing and adorning of the tiny habitation. Her taste was good, her common sense and discrimination wonderful, and she had the happy knack of never apparently opposing her lover, even when his ideas as to the drawing-room curtains, or china dinner-service, hardly accorded with what she considered suitable, or threatened to exceed the sums respectively appropriated to these purposes. Yet in the end and without the exercise of any conscious diplomacy, Sydney generally got her own way. Eugenia on these occasions wondered at, admired, often almost lost patience with her sister.

"You are really spoiling Frank, Sydney," she would say. "I don't believe he half appreciates you."

But "Oh, yes, he does," Sydney would answer with a quiet smile, for nothing that Eugenia could have said in those days would have had power to draw forth any but the gentlest reply from the sister whose whole soul was filled with an intensity of unexpressed, inexpressible sympathy in the suffering which Eugenia was doing her utmost to conceal.

Since the night when they had learnt the certainty of Captain Chancellor's departure, his name had never been even indirectly alluded to by Eugenia. It was not that she was naturally reserved or too proud to confide in her sister, but just at the first shock she felt that her only strength lay in silence—once let the barriers of her reticence be broken down, she trembled for her already overtaxed powers of self-control. And besides she shrank from the not improbably adverse view which Sydney might take of Captain Chancellor's behaviour.

"She does not know him as I do; she could not understand him," thought Eugenia. "I could not, even by her, endure to hear him blamed or judged in the common conventional way, for whatever others might think of him, I believe him to be blameless. My faith in him is unshaken."

And so she believed it to be, not discerning that in this morbid shrinking from any discussion of the subject even with Sydney, there lay concealed an unacknowledged misgiving as to the soundness of the foundations of her trust.

So she kept silence, and flattered herself that no one but Sydney could possibly suspect that anything was amiss. It was not difficult for her just at present to keep a little more than usual in the background, the young fiancée being naturally the nine days' centre of observation. And even if Miss Laurence did look hardly in her ordinary spirits, people did not much wonder at it.

"It must be a trial to the two sisters, especially to Miss Laurence, poor girl, to think of being parted, even though Mrs Frank Thurston, that is to be, will only be a few streets off," observed one kindly-hearted Wareborough matron to Mrs Dalrymple during a morning call when the Laurence family happened to come on the tapis; to which Mrs Dalrymple, who was feeling anything but happy about Eugenia's altered looks, agreed with almost suspicious eagerness. For Mr Dalrymple, with true masculine magnanimity, had already given symptoms of having a stock of "I told you sos" in readiness for the first suitable opportunity, and had Eugenia been less preoccupied, her friend's increasingly demonstrative affection and constant reiteration of "how *very* well she was looking," could not but have roused the girl's own suspicions.

Curiously enough, in these days Eugenia seemed to turn with satisfaction to Gerald Thurston.

"How very much Gerald has improved again of late," she remarked one day naïvely to Sydney. "For some time after he came home, I thought India had spoilt him. He seemed rough and careless, as if he had got out of the way of women's society, and was turning into a moody old bachelor. But now he has got back his nice, gentle, understanding way. He seems to know by instinct when, when—" she stopped and hesitated—"when Frank and his chattering are almost more than I can bear," had been in her thoughts, but she recollected herself in time to change it—"when one is tired and disinclined to talk or anything," she said, wearily, and Sydney had hard work to force back the expression of sympathy which she felt would not at this stage be welcome.

"Yes," she answered simply, "Gerald is very good and kind."

She would not have been the least offended had Eugenia finished her sentence as had been on her tongue. How she pitied her no words could have told, and many a time Frank's unconscious cheerfulness jarred even on Sydney herself, poor child, feeling almost as if the contrast of her own happy content was a crime against Eugenia's shattered hopes.

She pitied Gerald too. It was worse for him now, she said to herself, than if all had been as she had expected. True, he might then have realised more acutely the sharpness of his disappointment, have suffered unselfishly from his misgivings as to the worthiness of her choice; "but still," thought Sydney, in her sensible way, "it would have been over and certain—a thing that was to be, and he would have been beginning to get accustomed to it."

But now though Eugenia in the body was still among them, the heart and soul—the very life it seemed just now, had gone out of her. All the freshness and brightness had been sacrificed—whatever possibilities the far-off future might yet conceal, the Eugenia of Gerald's first love, the Eugenia of his absent dreams, was gone for ever, could never be his. She *had* never been his, it was true, but Sydney's womanish faith in the "what would have been," was

indefensibly great. Correspondingly deep was her unspoken disappointment, her vehement, almost fierce indignation against the cause of all this trouble, the wanton destroyer of her sister's youth and happiness. Had she come upon the subject with Frank, he would, she knew, have either refused to believe in Eugenia's suffering, or have blamed her as herself the originator of it.

"But he doesn't understand her, and that man threw dust in his eyes. Supposing even that Eugenia *was* easily deceived, allowing her to be, as Frank says, impressionable and extreme, does that excuse *him*; cold-hearted, unprincipled, selfish man of the world that he must be, to have robbed my darling of her happiness."

But all these feelings, little suspected under her quiet exterior, Sydney kept to herself.

Late one afternoon, about six weeks after Captain Chancellor had left Wareborough, the sisters on their way home from a long and rather fatiguing shopping expedition, happened to pass Barnwood Terrace.

"Don't you think we might go in and see Mrs Dalrymple for a few minutes?" suggested Sydney. "She has been twice to see us since we have called on her, and she is always so kind."

"Very well; if you like I don't care," replied Eugenia, and Sydney hastened to ring the bell before she could change her mind. The girl was jealous for her sister that no occasion should be given for either kindly or spiteful gossip, and it was well for Eugenia that she had so discriminating a friend at hand; for in the preoccupation of her perplexity and trouble, it would never have occurred to her that any regard should be paid to the possible comments of the little outside Wareborough world.

Mrs Dalrymple was at home, and as cordially delighted as usual to see her two friends, yet Sydney was at once conscious of a slight underlying constraint in her manner, perceptible chiefly perhaps in the kind-hearted woman's extra effusiveness and palpable endeavour to be quite as easy and cheerful as her wont.

"She has something on her mind," thought Sydney, "something she is uncertain about telling us," for the girl had no great opinion of Mrs Dalrymple's power of reserve, and every time that their hostess introduced a new subject of conversation Sydney trembled, she hardly knew why, and glanced furtively in her sister's direction. Eugenia sat quietly, unconscious of anything unusual in Mrs Dalrymple's demeanour, now and then putting in a remark on one or other of the various topics touched upon. She was at that stage of very youthful suffering at which a sort of calm often falls upon the inexperienced subject of it; in reality a simple physical reaction, but which she told herself, with a childish yet morbid satisfaction, must be "the apathy of despair." Her life, she told herself, was over; she had sounded the very depths of suffering, she had experienced the worst, the very worst; only one possible aggravation of what she had endured was conceivable to her; yet not so either, for her heart refused to listen to the faintest suggestion of so monstrous an idea as that of her having been deceived in her hero. Could it be possible that he had never been "in earnest," that he did not really care for her, that the softly hinting words and looks more eloquent than words had meant nothing? Oh no, no, it could not be; though all the world should swear it to her, she would refuse to believe it.

"For if I ever came to think so, I should die," she said to herself, with the innocent arrogance of youth which cannot believe that ever a human being's sufferings equalled its own, or that the worst anguish is not that which kills, but that which is lived through. For in those natures which have the deepest capacity for suffering there is usually an appalling reserve of strength and endurance, and to such, dying is not so easy of achievement, as, fresh from their baptism of woe, they are apt to imagine. And Eugenia did not yet know either that there is a "living," compared to which this ignorantly invoked "dying,"—a girl's hazy, sentimental notion of it, that is to say—were but child's play.

So Eugenia sat quietly beside Sydney in Mrs Dalrymple's luxurious drawing-room—a room full of associations to her—calm in the belief that she had known the worst; that her unapproachable, unsurpassable sorrow had, as it were, set her apart from the rest of the world; that for the future the only life remaining for her was that of unselfish, self-devoting interest in the lives and interests of others. For this was the rôle that Eugenia, ever extreme, imaginative, and incapable of the sometimes so salutary resting on one's oars, the taking one's life and its lessons day by day soberly and trustingly, instead of insisting on unravelling the tangled thread oneself—had now already marked out for herself, and, true to her new ideal, she tried to listen with interest to Mrs Dalrymple's commonplacisms, to answer brightly and smile cheerfully at the proper times. She imagined the shock to be over, the doomed limb already severed, and that she had known the acutest agony; when, alas, she woke from this dream to find that the worst was yet to come, that what she had endured was but the first shrinking of the tender flesh from the cold steel of the surgeon's knife.

Her attention, in spite of her efforts, had flagged a little; she was recalling in fancy the many times Beauchamp Chancellor and she had been together in this room, from that first evening that now seemed so long ago, when he had found her standing alone at the door in the fog, and had asked her to dance without knowing her name. Suddenly something that Mrs Dalrymple was saying recalled her to the present. Their hostess had been asking Sydney, as her intimacy with the girls excused her in doing, some questions as to the proposed arrangements for her marriage.

"I do hope it will be fine weather at the time," she had been saying. "Not merely on the day itself, of course, though one naturally likes some sunshine for a bride, but for the honeymoon. You will enjoy your tour so much more if it is fine."

"Yes," agreed Sydney. "But of that we must take our chance. April is never to be counted on."

"No, and yet it is such a favourite month for marriages," replied Mrs Dalrymple. "I hear of—let me see—three among my near friends, which are fixed for this April,—a niece of Henry's, one of the Conroys. I forget if you have ever met them here? She is marrying a Mr Mildmay Jones, in the Civil Service, and going out to India. Then there is your marriage, Sydney, and another I only heard of yesterday. You remember my cousin Roma, Roma Eyrecourt," (here it

was that Eugenia's attention was attracted), "of course you do—she was here last December, you know."

She stopped, as if waiting for Sydney's reply, for to her the question had been addressed. In reality, poor woman, she felt unable to screw up her courage to make the announcement which she yet knew it would be cruel and impossible to withhold.

Little shivers of cold began to creep over Sydney. She felt inclined to shake Mrs Dalrymple—why could she not either have held her tongue or said it out quickly without this unnecessary torture of suspense? For Eugenia was listening: there she sat, Sydney seemed to see without looking at her, in an unnatural tension of expectation, her eyes, which had somehow grown to look larger of late, fixed on the speaker.

"No," said Sydney, in a weak, faint, almost querulous voice, quite unlike her own.

"No, I *don't* know her. I didn't see her when she was here."

"Ah, no, by-the-bye you didn't," said Mrs Dalrymple, and something kept her from turning to Eugenia, the one who did know her cousin, as would have been natural, "I remember. But though you don't know her, you know Captain Chancellor very well. I can't tell you how surprised I was to hear of those two being really engaged. Of course it has often been spoken of, but I long ago made up my mind it would never be. I could get no satisfaction out of Roma when she was here, but I certainly didn't think it looked like it. Beauchamp Chancellor never gave me the slightest reason to expect it—rather the other way indeed. Really I don't think I ever was so surprised."

"And the marriage is to take place very soon, I think you said," inquired Sydney, with the same strange sensation she had had once before of being a mere machine asking questions at her sister's bidding.

"Yes, very soon, I believe," Mrs Dalrymple went on again in the same nervous, hurried manner. "Next month—about the same time as yours. I have not heard the whole particulars yet. My letter was not from Roma herself, but from Mrs Winter, a friend of mine who is staying near there just now. I must write and congratulate them both, I suppose, though—I hope they won't ask us to the marriage, however; I certainly don't want to go."

There was silence for a few moments. Then both Mrs Dalrymple and Sydney were startled by the sound of Eugenia's voice. She spoke in a quiet, rather dreamy tone, as if the sense of her words was hardly realised by her—but of the peculiarity of her manner only Sydney was aware.

"Will you kindly give our congratulations too, when you write, Mrs Dalrymple, please—mine especially. I saw Miss Eyrecourt several times, and we all know Captain Chancellor very well, you know."

"Certainly I will, my dear Eugenia, with the greatest pleasure," replied Mrs Dalrymple, with rather injudicious empressement. A very little encouragement would have drawn out the whole of her smouldering indignation against Beauchamp and womanly fellow-feeling with Eugenia's wrongs, but without some hint from the sisters that the expression of her opinion would not be considered indelicate or intrusive, even Mrs Dalrymple felt that in this case, as in most others, the less said the better, and held her peace accordingly.

A minute or two passed, but no more allusion was made to the news which had so disturbed their hostess's equilibrium. And before there was opportunity for the discussion of any other subject, the sisters, moved by a common instinct, discovered that it was getting late, and that they had already overstayed their time. Mrs Dalrymple could not resist kissing them both affectionately as they said good-bye, but this was the only expression of sympathy on which she ventured.

It was already twilight out of doors. Still not so dusk but that Sydney stole timid glances at her sister's face in wistful anxiety as to what there might be there to read. But it seemed all blank: she might have stared at her with open inquiry, Eugenia would have been unconscious of it. She walked along quite quietly, replying mechanically to the little commonplace observations Sydney hazarded from time to time; but for the curious expression, or rather curious absence of expression in her usually changeable, speaking face, her sister would have suspected nothing but that Eugenia was in a more than usually silent mood this evening. As it was, Sydney felt bewildered and uncertain, vaguely apprehensive, yet not satisfied that there was new cause for any increase of her anxiety.

"Possibly," thought Sydney, "this definite news may do her good. It may show her what a poor creature he is after all, and may rouse her to shake herself free of the remembrance of him altogether."

She hardly understood that to Eugenia such a reaction, healthy and "sensible" though it might be, was impossible. Through all her despair and misery Eugenia clung with instinctive self-regard to her delusion; over and over again she repeated to herself in almost the same words, the poor little formula of faith in her lover which she told herself and really imagined she believed. It was her safeguard at this time, and well for her that she could hold to it; for what to some girls would have been merely a passing though sharp mortification, would to her have been a loss of self-respect extensive enough to have shaken the whole foundations of her character.

Very near their own house the sisters were overtaken by Frank Thurston. He walked beside them to the door, but seemed to hesitate about entering.

"Aren't you coming in, Frank?" asked Sydney.

"It is hardly worth while," he replied, eyeing regretfully his but half consumed cigar. "I have only five minutes to spare. Suppose you walk up and down with me, Sydney, instead of my coming in. It's going to be a beautiful evening."

Sydney glanced at Eugenia.

"Yes, do, Sydney," said Eugenia.

Sydney fancied she could discern in this a longing on her sister's part to be alone, if but for a quarter of an hour.

"Very well, then, I will stay out with you for a little, Frank," she agreed, and Eugenia entered the house by herself.

When she got into the hall, for the first time she became conscious of feeling different from usual, strangely weak and giddy and very cold. Afraid of the servant's observing anything amiss, she abandoned her intention of rushing upstairs at once to her own room, and went instead to the drawing-room, where she knew she would find no one. There was no light in the room but that of a large, brightly burning fire. Eugenia drew a low seat close to it, and in a minute or two when the warmth had penetrated a little through her thick dress, she seemed to feel better. Still, however, she was only half restored; she felt that going upstairs would be quite beyond her powers, so she sat still, vaguely relieved that Sydney did not appear with kindly but unendurable expressions of anxiety as to what was wrong.

How long she had sat there she did not know, when the door opened quietly and some one came in. Eugenia looked up. It was not Sydney. It was Gerald Thurston!

"Oh," thought poor Eugenia, "oh, if only I were up in my own room! Oh, how can I sit and talk to Gerald!"

Then, however, there came a slight sensation of relief that it was Gerald and not Frank! She stood up to shake hands as usual when he crossed the room to where she was, but the giddy feeling returned, and she sat down again rather abruptly.

"I have been with your father in his study for the last hour," explained Gerald. "He has asked me to stay to dinner and go with him to his lecture at Marny Mills to-night, so you must excuse my clothes."

"Oh, certainly," said Eugenia, smiling. "It wants more than half-an-hour to dinner-time still," Gerald went on, speaking faster than usual—the truth being that this tête-à-tête with Eugenia, the first since the memorable evening of his return, was by no means to his taste—"don't let me be in your way. I should not have come into the drawing-room, but your father had some letters to write, and I thought I was in *his* way. I met Sydney flying upstairs as I came across the hall, and she told me I should find a book and a fire in here."

"There are some library books and new magazines over there on that side-table," replied Eugenia, moving her head in the direction she meant. "But you are not in my way," she went on indifferently. "I wasn't doing anything."

She shivered perceptibly as she spoke. Then she stooped to reach the poker, and began nervously stirring the fire.

Mr Thurston stopped on his way to the side-table. He came back to the fire-place and took the poker out of Eugenia's hands. Even in the instant's contact he felt their icy coldness.

"Let me do that for you," he said gently. In her nervousness Eugenia had already done the very thing she would have wished not to do. She had stirred the glowing red into a vivid blaze, which fell full on her face. Something in it must have looked different from usual, for before she could turn away, Gerald spoke.

"Eugenia, what is the matter?" he exclaimed impulsively. "You are as cold as ice—you must be ill."

She felt his eyes fixed upon her: extreme annoyance gave her momentary strength.

"Don't, Gerald, please, don't," she said, half beseechingly, half petulantly. "There is nothing the matter. I may have got a chill, that is all. But please don't look at me. I do so dislike it."

She rose, resolved to put an end to his scrutiny. "I *will* get across the room," she thought. She made two or three steps feebly but determinedly, wondering vaguely what had come to her feet, they felt so powerless and heavy; then, it seemed to her, she stepped suddenly down, down into unfathomable depths, into darkness compared to which midnight was as noon-day. "I am dying," she thought to herself before her senses quite deserted her. "What will *he* think, how will he feel when he hears it?" And it seemed to her she called aloud with her last breath. "Beauchamp! oh, Beauchamp!"

In reality the words were a barely audible whisper, which would certainly have been unintelligible to ears less jealously sharp than those of her one hearer.

"My darling," muttered Gerald, "so it is his doing, is it?"

The first two words made their way to Eugenia's not yet quite unconscious brain. Afterwards she thought she must have dreamt that Beauchamp had answered her cry.

She had never fainted before. She could not at all understand the painful coming back to life; to finding herself after all—instead of awaking in the mysterious country across the river of which we know so little, so terribly little—in the old way again, lying on the drawing-room sofa, with a keen cold current of air blowing in her face.

"Where am I?" she said, as people always do say in such circumstances, glancing round her, apprehensively. But before Gerald had time to reply, her wits had sufficiently recovered themselves to take in the position.

It had not been much of a faint after all; her young life had not required much doctoring to regain its balance for the time. Mr Thurston had merely carried her to the window, and opened it to allow the fresh air to try what it could do. Then, laying her on the sofa, he was glad to see she was coming round again without his requiring to summon the assistance which he felt certain she would shrink from.

The room was bright with fire-light, and the cold air still blew in freshly. Eugenia lay still for a minute or two, gazing before her. Then she tried to rouse herself, and after a moment's hesitation, seeing she could hardly manage it, Gerald put his arm round her, and helped her to sit up. He need not have been afraid of annoying her. She took his help with the most perfect simplicity, as if he had been her brother.

"Thank you, Gerald," she said, softly, "you are so kind. You have always been kind to me, ever since I was quite little," and half unconsciously she allowed her still throbbing head to lean for a moment on his shoulder. It was rather hard upon him—the perfect sisterliness of the little action made it all the more so. A sudden fear came over him that she would feel how fast his heart was beating, and would be startled into consciousness. So, very gently, under pretence of arranging the sofa cushion, he removed the arm that was round her. She did not seem to observe it.

"Are you better now, Eugenia?" he said, kindly. "I don't know if I did right in opening the window, for I believe it must have been a chill that made you faint. But I am no doctor, and a good blow of fresh air was the only thing that occurred to me."

"I am sure it was the best thing to do," she answered; "I am not cold now. I don't think it was real cold. It must have been the feeling of fainting coming on. I never fainted before, and I have always thought it *so* silly," she added with a little smile. "I am all right now, I shall go upstairs in a minute, Gerald." Appealingly, "You won't tell anybody?"

"Not if you promise me to tell Sydney, and see the doctor if you have any return of it, or don't feel quite well in any way."

"Very well, I will promise that," she replied, meekly enough. "It was very good of you not to call any one and make a fuss." Then, after a moment's hesitation, the hot colour rushing over her pale face, she added in a lower voice, "Gerald, didn't I say something?"

There was no use parrying her inquiry. Sorely against his will, Gerald found himself obliged to accept the position of her confidant.

"Yes," he said, simply; Eugenia did not perceive that it was sternly as well.

"Ah, I thought so," she murmured. "I know I can trust you, though sometimes one prefers to trust no one. Don't misunderstand me," she added quickly, becoming alive to the grave expression of his face; "in *one* sense, I should not care if everybody knew what you suspect. No one need be ashamed of I can't explain. I mean, I don't want pity. I am not to be pitied, and *no one* is to be blamed. Only, people who only know half cannot understand, so I feel that my strength just now lies in silence."

Mr Thurston looked at her very anxiously, the hard look melting out of his face.

"Take care you do not overrate your strength," he said gently.

Eugenia smiled, but said nothing. Then she stood up, and was about to try if she could walk, when Gerald stopped her.

"Wait one instant," he exclaimed, and before she had the least idea what he meant, he was back again with a glass of wine.

"Drink that, or at least half of it," he said. "I found it on the sideboard. It must be getting near dinner-time."

Eugenia did as he told her, and then he let her go.

"Good night; I don't think I shall come down to dinner, and thank you again very, very much, and—and please *remember*," were her last words.

Ten minutes later Sydney appeared, dressed for dinner, with a rather troubled face. She was anxious about Eugenia, she told Gerald; it looked as if she had caught a chill somehow—she had persuaded her not to come down again, but to go straight to bed.

"But talking of chills," she went on, hastily, "this room is enough to freeze one. What can it be? Why, actually, the window is open. My dear Gerald, what can you be made of to have sat here without finding it out?"

Mr Dalrymple was dining with a bachelor friend that evening. It was pretty late when he got home to his wife, but he found her wide awake, and evidently in better spirits than she had been for the last day or two.

"Well, my dear Henry," she began, "I am happy to tell you that for once your fears have been exaggerated. The Laurence girls were here to-day, and I told them—quite naturally, just in the course of conversation, you know—the piece of news I had heard. And I assure you, Eugenia took it beautifully; was not the least surprised or upset; begged me to send her congratulations, and so on. She cannot have been impressed by Beauchamp Chancellor as you thought, for she is a girl that shows all her feelings. It is quite a relief to me. I feel quite happy about her now."

"Do you?" said Henry, with cruel satire. "I'm glad to hear it. Only I suspect your feelings are not at this moment shared by her family. Mr Le Neve was dining at Hill's to-night, and a couple of hours ago he was sent for in a hurry to the Laurences. He said he would look in again, and so he did, and told us the patient was Miss Laurence—Eugenia, I mean. And I can tell you *he* is far from easy about her. My own idea is she's in for brain fever. Be sure you send round first thing in the morning to inquire."

Poor Mrs Dalrymple was crushed at once.

"Don't you think Mr Le Neve is rather an alarmist?" she ventured, timidly.

But Henry was very unfeeling. "I can't say I do," he replied, leaving his wife to her own reflections, which considerably interfered with her night's rest.

Volume Two—Chapter Four.

Reaction.

... The sorrows of all humanity
Through my heart make a thoroughfare.

G. Macdonald.

Things, however, did not turn out quite so badly as several people anticipated. Eugenia's illness did not result in brain fever, though for a week or two it was serious enough to affect considerably the spirits of her little circle of friends, and to justify Mr Le Neve in looking rather grave.

"Not that there is anything to be surprised at in it," he assured her father and Sydney; "there are a great many cases of the kind about just now," and he went on to murmur something about "the season," "the changeable weather," and other scapegoats of the kind always ready at hand to bear the blame of any illness not altogether to be accounted for or easily defined.

But greatly to the relief of every one concerned, before long Eugenia began to mend, and it was then decided that what she had been suffering from had been nothing worse than "a feverish cold," and the less observant of her friends made themselves quite happy about her again. Their rejoicing, however, proved somewhat premature. When the girl came downstairs and began to go about again as usual, it became very evident, that though she had escaped an acute illness, she was far from having regained her ordinary strength. Sydney watched her anxiously, trusting at first that a few days would bring improvement, but on the contrary, at the end of a week, Eugenia seemed paler and more feeble than when she first got up. She would not own to being ill; she was only tired, she said—tired of the long winter, for spring was slow in coming that year; she would be all right when the summer came again, and Sydney must not trouble about her.

"Besides, dear," she said plaintively, "though I don't want to be selfish, you know the idea of losing you so soon *is* rather overwhelming to me," and the tears which seemed now-a-days nearer at hand than formerly, rushed to her eyes.

"If you are not looking better by the end of April than you do now, I shall put off my marriage," returned Sydney.

"And what would Frank say? Think how he would hate me! As it is, I believe he thinks my being ill at all is a piece of my usual perversity," said Eugenia, half playfully, half sadly. "I daresay it is true. I have always given you a great deal of trouble, Sydney, and by rights it should have been the other way. I should have looked after you."

"So you have. Neither of us could have got on without the other, and Frank knows that," replied Sydney, consolingly. "But, Eugenia, I mean what I say; so you had better be quick and get well."

She was willing enough to do so—at least to become sufficiently like herself to escape observation and be left alone. She did her very utmost to seem well, fought valiantly to keep up a satisfactory show of good spirits, in which endeavour the unselfish fear of damping Sydney's happiness by obtruding her own sorrows materially assisted her. She was docile and submissive to all, perfectly ready to take the tonics which Mr Le Neve prescribed for her, to try Frank Thurston's masculine panacea, "more exercise and fresh air," or her father's old-fashioned remedy of "bark and port wine." Her gentleness was almost too much for Gerald's self-control; he left off coming to see them so often, on the pretext of extra business, but found he did not gain much by so doing, for at home his brother nearly drove him wild by his calm speculations as to the possibility of Eugenia's going into a decline; "their mother was very delicate, you know, and Eugenia is more like her than Sydney," and even more irritating remarks on how much she was improved, "so much better-tempered and equable than she used to be."

One day when Sydney had been out by herself, paying the usual bi-weekly visit to their father's old maiden aunt, their only relation in the neighbourhood, she was told, by Eugenia on her return that Mrs Dalrymple had been to see her. This was certainly no very unusual occurrence, for during the last three weeks their friend's visits had been by no means of the proverbially angelic character; but to-day, by Eugenia's account, she had come on a special errand.

"They are going away from home somewhere—they haven't quite decided where—next week," said Eugenia, "and they want, me to go with them. But I told Mrs Dalrymple that I did not think it was possible, though of course it is exceedingly kind of them. Oh, Sydney, dear," she continued, interrupting the remonstrance which she saw in her sister's face, "I *don't* want, to go. Our last three weeks together, for they wouldn't be back till a few days before the 29th! And how could you get all finished by yourself without me?"

"There is very little more to do," said Sydney, sitting down beside Eugenia and looking at her anxiously, "almost nothing in fact, except the last preparations of all, which cannot be begun till a few days beforehand, and you would be back by then. It isn't as if it was going to be a grand marriage. And to speak plainly, Eugenia—you mustn't be offended—even if there were a great deal to do, you couldn't, as you are just now, help me. Indeed you would be rather in my way. I cannot bear to see you doing anything when you look as if the least breath of air would knock you over." Eugenia did not at once answer. She turned away her head. Then she said resignedly—

"Very well, if my father, too, wishes me to go, I will," but the pleasure which Sydney was about to express was destroyed by Eugenia's next speech. "It is as I thought. I am no use to any one. My own life is over, and I am not wanted to help in any one else's."

This was the first allusion she had made in all these weeks to the bitter sorrow she had passed through. Sydney was touched and distressed.

"You must not speak so, Eugenia," she said. "We all want you. We want you to be your own bright self again. Don't think me unfeeling for thinking it possible you may be bright again. I know I have no right to speak, for I have been exceptionally free from trial, but you have been so brave and good lately, Eugenia. I cannot bear to see you so desponding. I am sure it will do you good to go away. It will make me feel so much happier about you."

"Very well, then, to please you, I will," said Eugenia, more vigorously, and as Mr Laurence was only too thankful to give his consent to the proposal, Mrs Dalrymple triumphantly carried the day.

Ever so many places had been thought of as likely to be pleasant at this season, and one after the other rejected as undesirable. One was too far away, another too crowded by invalids, a third disagreeably exposed to east wind. Their time was too short for them to entertain the idea of any of the usual wintering places across the Channel, and Mrs Dalrymple objected to the south of England as too distant also. So in the end they pitched upon a pretty little watering place, not more than a three hours' journey from Wareborough, where there was a good choice of walks and drives for Mr Dalrymple, and a certainty of comfortable quarters at the best hotel.

Their destination was a matter of perfect indifference to Eugenia, whose only interest in the journey was the feeling that she was pleasing her friends, and whose only strong wish was to get it over, and find herself at home again, free to yield to the lassitude and depression against which it became daily more difficult to struggle.

"If they *would* but leave me alone," she constantly repeated inwardly; and though she hated herself for the feeling, there were times at which she realised that even Sydney's absence would be in some ways a relief. The constant and but thinly veiled anxiety in her sister's eyes, the incessant endeavour on her own part to lessen it by appearing as bright and energetic as of old, were at times almost more than the girl could endure or sustain; and when she found herself at last fairly started on her little journey with the Dalrymples, she became conscious that she had done wisely to consent to accompany them. Mrs Dalrymple's kindly fussiness was infinitely less trying than Sydney's wistful tenderness; it was far easier to keep up a cheerful, commonplace conversation with her friend's husband than to sit through dinner at home with the feeling that her father and sister were stealthily watching to see if she ate more to-day than yesterday, or if she entered with greater vigour into the passing remarks. With her present companions she felt perfectly at ease; had she had any idea of what an accurate acquaintance with the actual state of things had been arrived at by the worthy couple, her comfortable freedom from self-consciousness would have speedily deserted her.

Nunswell quickly got the credit of her improved looks.

"I really think she is growing more like herself already," said Mrs Dalrymple, with great satisfaction, to her husband. "We could not have chosen a better place for her; it is so bright and lively here, and the bracing air is so reviving." Very probably the bracing air really had something to do with it! Eugenia was only nineteen, and this had been her first trouble. Her life hitherto had been exceptionally monotonous and uneventful; a few months ago the prospect of a visit to Nunswell would have been to her far more exciting and delightful than to most girls of her age and education would be that of a winter in Rome, or a summer in Switzerland: even now therefore, notwithstanding the blight which had fallen over her youthful capacity for enjoyment, she was not insensible to the pleasant change in her outward life from the dull routine of Wareborough; the little amusements and varieties almost daily arranged for her by her hosts; the general holiday feeling. She had not yet got the length of owing to herself that she did, or ever again could, enjoy in her old way, but the reflection which now often passed through her mind, "how happy this would have made me a year ago," showed that she was on the high road to recovery.

Nunswell was beautifully situated, and rich in "natural objects of attraction." Eugenia had travelled so little that even the scenery of her own country was known to her only by description; it was now for the first time in her life that she woke up to a consciousness of her power of appreciation of natural beauty. Yet the waking was a sad one; her very first real perceptions of the beauty she had hitherto but dimly imagined came to her tinged with the sense of discordance between the outer and the inner world, of mistake and failure, which takes the brilliance out of the sunshine, the sweetness out of the birds' songs.

"None of it is real," thought Eugenia. "It is only where there is no soul—no heart, that there is happiness," for being still weakened in mind and body by her recent illness, having nothing to do but to rest and amuse herself, and no one to talk to, she was inclined to be rather plaintive and desponding, and to imagine the path she was treading to be one of altogether unprecedented experiences.

Still, there was no question but what her spirits were better, her general appearance far more satisfactory than when she left home, and Mrs Dalrymple's bulletins to Sydney became cheering in the extreme.

They had been a fortnight at Nunswell, when one morning at breakfast Mr Dalrymple made an unexpected announcement. He had been reading his letters—business ones for the most part, forwarded from his office at Wareborough—over some of them he had frowned, others he had thrown aside after a hasty glance, one or two had brought a satisfied expression to his face. Mrs Dalrymple and Eugenia had no letters this morning, but in deference to Mr Dalrymple's occupation, they had been sitting in silence for some time, excepting a few whispered remarks as to the quality of the coffee or the prospects of the weather. Eugenia was some way into a brown study when she was recalled by her host's suddenly addressing her.

"Here's some news for you, Miss Laurence," he exclaimed, looking up with a smile from the perusal of his last letter.

"We are to have a visitor this afternoon—a great friend of yours. Quite time, too, that you should have a little variety—you must be getting tired of two old fogies like my wife and me."

Eugenia had started when he first began to speak—it did not take much to startle her just now—then as he went on, her colour changed, first to crimson, which fading as quickly as it had come, left her even paler than usual. Mrs Dalrymple darted a reproachful look across the table at her husband, and began to speak hastily, in terror of what he might not be going to say next.

"Why can't you say at once who it is, Henry?" she exclaimed with very unusual irritation. "It is quite startling and uncomfortable to be told all of a sudden 'somebody' is coming in that sort of way. I am sure I don't want to see any one, and I don't think Eugenia does either. We have been very snug together, and Eugenia is not strong enough yet to care for strangers. Really, Henry, you are very thoughtless."

The last few words should have been an aside, but Mrs Dalrymple's vexation at the sight of the pallid hue still overspreading the girl's face, overmastered her prudence.

"It didn't startle me, dear Mrs Dalrymple—really it didn't," interposed Eugenia, hastily. "That is to say, I was only startled for an instant, and it was not Mr Dalrymple's fault. Anything does it—even the door opening—since I was ill, but I am beginning to get over it. But you are quite right in thinking I don't want any one else—I have been *quite* happy with you and Mr Dalrymple."

"But you have misunderstood me, Mary," said Mr Dalrymple, looking rather contrite. "I never spoke of strangers. I said particularly it was a friend of Miss Laurence's I was expecting. It is Gerald Thurston. I have a note from him proposing to see me here this afternoon, and if we are not engaged, he speaks of staying at Nunswell till Monday. He is on his way home from Bristol, where he has been on business, and he wishes to see me, and I want to see him. I am sure you can have no objection to his joining us for two days, either of you?" he ended by inquiring of his two companions.

"Objection to Gerald Thurston!" repeated Mrs Dalrymple. "Of course not. I shall be very glad to see him. I only wish you had said at first whom you meant. You don't mind, Eugenia?"

"I?" said Eugenia, looking up quickly. "Oh, dear no—I am very glad. I like Gerald Thurston very much. He is very kind and good."

"And exceedingly clever, and uncommonly good-looking," added Mr Dalrymple, warmly. "Take him for all in all, I don't know where there is a finer fellow than Thurston."

"So my father says," agreed Eugenia. "Indeed I think every one that knows him thinks highly of him."

She was anxious to be cordial, and really felt so towards Gerald. Of late she had come to like him much more than formerly, and the extreme consideration and delicacy which he had shown the evening her illness began, had increased this liking by a feeling of gratitude. Nevertheless there had grown up unconsciously in her a somewhat painful association with Gerald since that evening, and she had not seen enough of him to remove it. "He knows," she said to herself, and she shrank from meeting him again.

But it was much pleasanter and easier than she had expected. Gerald, intensely alive to all she was feeling, behaved perfectly, and spared her in a thousand ways without appearing, even to her, to do so at all. The two days proved the pleasantest they had passed at Nunswell: Mr Thurston knew the neighbourhood well, and drove them to some charming nooks and points of view, somewhat out of the beaten guide-book track, which they had not hitherto discovered. Mrs Dalrymple openly expressed her gratification and surprise.

"I always knew Gerald Thurston was very clever and superior and all that sort of thing, you know," she said to Eugenia, "but I had no idea he could make himself so agreeable."

Eugenia herself was a little surprised. The truth was she had never before, since his return from India, seen Gerald to advantage: in her presence hitherto he had been always self-conscious and constrained, stern and moody, if not morose. Now it was different. A feeling of extreme pity, of almost brotherly anxiety for her happiness, had replaced the intenser feelings with which he had regarded her; he had no longer any fears for himself or his own self-control in her presence—that was all over, past for ever like a dream in the night; he could venture now to be at ease, could devote himself unselfishly to cheer and interest her in any way that came into his power. And under this genial influence the bruised petals of the flower, not crushed so utterly as had seemed at first, began to revive and expand again, to feel conscious of the bright sunshine and gentle breezes still around it, though for a time all light and life had seemed to it to have deserted its world.

"I had no idea Gerald was so wonderfully understanding and sympathising," thought Eugenia. "If I have a feeling or a question it is difficult to put in words, he seems to know what I mean by instinct;" and encouraged by this discovery, she allowed herself to talk to him, once or twice when they were alone together, of several things which had lately been floating in her mind.

Trouble and disappointment were doing their work with her; she was beginning to look for a meaning in many things that hitherto she had disregarded or accepted with youthful carelessness as matters-of-course with which she had no call to meddle. But now it was different: she had eaten of the fruit of the tree; she had ventured her all in a frail bark, and it had foundered; it had come home to her that life and love are often sad, and sometimes terrible facts, and her heart was beginning to swell with a great pity for her suffering-kind. It was all vague and misty to her as yet; it might result in nothing, as is too often the end of such crises in a growing character, but still the germ was there.

"Gerald," she said to Mr Thurston, suddenly, after she had been sitting silent for some minutes. (They were in the

gardens of the hotel at the time. It was Sunday afternoon and a mild April day; Mr and Mrs Dalrymple had gone to church again, but Eugenia and Mr Thurston had been tempted by the pleasant weather to play truant.) "Gerald," said Eugenia, "I wish there was something that women could do."

Mr Thurston turned towards her. She now looking straight before her with a puzzled yet earnest expression on her face.

"Something that women can do?" he repeated, not quite sure of her drift. "I thought there were lots of things. Most women complain of want of time."

"So do I sometimes. I am never at a loss for occupation—that's not what I mean," she replied. "What I mean is, I wish there were bigger things—more useful things for women to do."

"You have not been infected with the Women's Rights mania, surely?" inquired Gerald, rather unresponsively.

"Of course not. Don't laugh at me, Gerald. You can understand me—if you choose. I should like to feel I was of some use to somebody, and lately I have felt as if no one in the world would be the least bit the worse if I were out of it." Here she blushed a little. "Now don't you see if I were a man I could set to work hard at something—something that would be of use in some way. Put it to yourself, Gerald; suppose—suppose you had given up thoughts of—of being very happy yourself," (here the blush deepened to hot crimson), "wouldn't you naturally—after a while, you know—wouldn't you set to work harder than ever at whatever you felt was your own special business—the thing you felt you were most likely to be of use in? Now a woman has no such field open to her."

Internally Gerald had winced a little, two or three times, while Eugenia was speaking. Externally, he sat there looking colder and more impassive than usual. He had loved this girl, had set her up on the pedestal of ideal womanhood that somewhere or other exists in the imagination of every man not wholly faithless or depraved; she had fallen, it is true, in a sense, from this height, she had proved herself in his judgment to be but as the rest of her sex—childishly credulous, ready to mistake the glitter for the gold, honeyed words for heart devotion—yet still he cared for her, was tenderly anxious for her welfare. But of all things Gerald hated sentimentalism!

"There are plenty of Protestant sisterhoods," he said, drily. "How would one of those suit you?"

Eugenia made no reply. After waiting a moment or two, Mr Thurston turned towards her again. To his surprise he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Eugenia," he exclaimed, softened at once, "have I hurt you? I did not intend it. I assure you I did not, in the least."

"No, I know you didn't," she said, struggling to smile and to speak cheerfully. "I am very silly. I can't help it. I have got so silly and touchy lately, the least thing seems to vex me. But you did hurt me a little, Gerald. I was in earnest in what I said, though you thought it missyish and contemptible. I have been trying to see how I could grow better and less selfish, and you don't know how hard it is, for no one seems to understand. And, oh you don't know, you who are so strong and wise, you *don't* know how hard it is to be good when one is very unhappy."

"Don't I?" muttered he, but she did not catch the words.

"If I could be of use," she went on again, after a little pause. "And why can't I be? There must be plenty of misery in the world. Why can't I make some of it a little less?"

"You can," he answered, gently. "I don't think I quite understood you. I thought you were envying men's work and despising your own sphere—a very common and often excusable mistake. I see now there was a more unselfish spirit in what you meant."

"I don't know that," she answered, doubtfully, but brightening up nevertheless. "I do think I should like to make some people happier, or a little less unhappy, and in some ways perhaps better too. For surely very often being happier would make people better, would it not? But I am selfish too—I want to get something to take me out of myself—something that I can get interested in by feeling it is of use."

"Don't you help your father sometimes?" inquired Gerald. "Haven't you a good deal to do in looking after things at home?"

"No—very little indeed. The house has got into a jog-trot way of going on, and papa won't have changes. What little there has been to do hitherto, I am afraid Sydney has done," said Eugenia, blushing a little. "Of course I don't intend to neglect that sort of thing, but there is very little to do. I do help my father whenever he will let me, by copying out things and hunting up references and quotations. But it isn't often he wants help."

"And would he not let you help him more if you asked him?"

"He might, but it would only be to please me," replied Eugenia, despondingly. "No, I am afraid it is true—I am no use to anybody. Once, I remember, ever, ever so long ago," she went on, as if ten or twenty years at least were within easy grasp of her memory, "I had visions of becoming frightfully learned, of studying all my life long, and getting to the bottom of everything. What a little goose I was! Just because I had learnt Latin and German and a few other things more thoroughly than most girls! I wonder sometimes if, after all, all the trouble papa took with us has been much good to us. Look at Sydney; what will be the use of it to her, marrying at eighteen? And as for me, if I were really clever I suppose I should go on working away, absorbed in the work without thinking of any result. But I can't, Gerald. It doesn't satisfy me. I want to see and feel a result."

She looked up in his face, her bright, earnest eyes full of inquiry. "Can't you help me?" they seemed to say.

Could he? A tantalising vision rose before him of how at one time he had looked forward to doing so—how well he understood her, and the special phase through which she was passing! Was it too late? Was there yet a chance that by much patience and by slow degrees he might win to himself this girl whom no one understood as he understood her, whose very faults and imperfections were dear to him? The thought seemed to dazzle and bewilder him, but a glance at Eugenia made him dismiss it. She sat there beside him, in such utter unconsciousness, such sisterly reliance on his friendship, that he felt it would be cruel to her and in every sense worse than useless to disturb the existing state of things. The far off, dimly possible future must take care of itself; and after all—she could never be quite the same Eugenia to him again.

So he answered her very quietly and soberly, as she expected.

“You cannot judge of things quite justly at present, I think,” he said, after a little pause. “I have had the same sort of feelings myself sometimes, though, of course, my life has been too busy to tempt me to yield to them much. But they will pass away again, you will find. You will come to feel that nothing well done is ever useless. And, in the meantime, there is no fear but what things will turn up for you to do. I could put you in the way of some,” he continued, with a smile, “though I don’t know if they would be quite to your taste. Frank sometimes takes me to task a little for some of my ideas, so we should have to be careful.”

“I am quite sure I should agree with you,” said Eugenia, eagerly. “I know you do an immense deal of good, Gerald. Papa says so, and I have often wanted to ask you about it, but I didn’t like.”

“There is exceedingly little to tell,” he replied, simply. “I am no theorist, and I limit my attempts to what I think I see a chance of doing.”

Then, perceiving that her interest was really aroused, he told her something of what he was trying to do, and promised some time or other to tell her more.

Eugenia felt happier than she had done for long, that evening. Her respect for Gerald Thurston was rapidly increasing.

“I have never before done him justice,” she said to herself; “I am most fortunate to have him for a friend.”

Gerald, on his way back to Wareborough, felt very glad that he had seen her again.

“It was the best thing to do to get over the uncomfortable feeling,” thought he. “She trusts me now thoroughly, and I may be of use to her.”

And Sydney, who had been a little puzzled by Gerald’s visit to Nunswell, was greatly delighted by his cheerful looks and satisfactory report of her sister.

“After all,” she thought, hopefully, “it may all come right in the end. Who knows?”

Volume Two—Chapter Five.

As Fate would have it.

La femme qui ne cesse pas d’aimer celui qui l’a fut souffrir, parvient à l’aimer encore davantage.
Let time and chance combine, combine.
T. Carlyle’s *Adieu*.

Who knows, indeed! Gerald left Nunswell on Monday morning, and for the rest of that day Eugenia’s thoughts were principally occupied in reflecting over all he had said, and wishing he had stayed longer and said more. She got up on Tuesday morning in the same spirit, and resolving to strike before the iron of her new determination to struggle against despondency and depression had had time to cool, she went out into the gardens armed with one of the few books she had brought with her, Schlegel’s “*Philosophie der Sprache*,” which she had been studying under her father’s direction just before her illness.

“I will force myself to read a certain quantity every day,” she decided, as she ensconced herself on the same garden seat on which she and Gerald had sat on Sunday afternoon. All around her reminded her of their conversation, of his few words of encouragement and advice.

“Trying must always be some good, whether one sees it or not, I suppose,” thought Eugenia, and with this somewhat vague but certainly innocuous piece of philosophy she set to work at her self-appointed task.

She found it harder than she had anticipated; considerably more so than it used to be; she did not make allowance for the effects of her illness, and entirely attributed the difficulty she met with to “stupidity” and “forgetfulness,” and thereupon ensued a fit of self-disgust.

“I to think myself clever, indeed!” she thought, “or able to be ever of use to any one. The first thing I have to do, it seems to me, is to get rid of my self-conceit. Why, I have forgotten more German in a month than I learnt in five years.”

She was not, however, to be easily baffled. She read and re-read each intricate sentence till its meaning became clear; till, too, her head ached and her eyes grew weary, and she was at last obliged to stop and rest before she had got half through the allotted portion. Her retreat was in a retired part of the gardens; hitherto she had been undisturbed by passers-by; suddenly, as she sat leaning back, her eyes closed, her whole appearance that of

extreme weariness and languor, two gentlemen passed within a few yards of her. They were not speaking as they approached, but she heard their footsteps and opened her eyes for a moment, to close them again quickly when she saw that the two figures were disappearing in another direction.

"What an exquisitely pretty girl," observed one of the two when they were out of earshot, "but how fearfully delicate she looks. I don't think I ever saw such a transparent complexion. Did you notice her? She seemed to be asleep, and yet she looks as if she were some way gone in a decline. How extraordinary of her friends to let her fall asleep in the open air in April. How frightfully imprudent."

"I didn't notice her," replied his companion, carelessly. "It's not likely she is in a consumption, however. Consumptive people don't come to Nunswell; it's too cold. But if your feelings are interested, Thanet, I am quite willing to wait while you turn back and waken her. And you had better give her a little lecture on the subject of her imprudence at the same time, hadn't you?"

"Nonsense, Chancellor," replied Major Thanet, rather irritably. "If you had been on your back for three months, and suffering as I have been, you would understand what it is to have some feeling for your fellow-creatures. A year ago I should have laughed at such notions as you do now, I daresay," he continued, more amiably, "but don't make fun of me till you have had a touch of rheumatic fever yourself," "I have no wish to try it, thank you," said Captain Chancellor, lightly. "I am quite willing to take your word for it that, it is the reverse of agreeable. But a minute ago you would have it the young person must be half way gone in a decline, and now you say she's in for rheumatic fever. We had better have a look at her, really: you said she was awfully pretty, didn't you?" Major Thanet grunted a but half mollified assent. He was still too lame to walk without the help of his friend's arm, so when Captain Chancellor turned to retrace their steps, he made no objection, though feeling still annoyed by what he considered his companion's ill-timed "chaff."

The girl was not asleep this time. She was reading, and did not look up till they had passed. Her attitude was still the same; she was half sitting, half lying on the bench, her head resting wearily on one hand, while the other held her book. Major Thanet looked at her, as they walked slowly past, with considerable interest.

"She is a lovely creature, whoever she is," he remarked to his companion when they had walked on a little further. "Don't you think so? She looks delicate, but hardly so much so as I fancied at first. It must have been the effect of her closed eyes."

Captain Chancellor did not answer. Major Thanet was a much shorter man than his friend, and he stooped slightly in consequence of his illness. So he had not seen his companion's face since they had passed the invalid girl. Now, however, he looked up, surprised at his silence, and a little irritated by his remark eliciting no reply.

"What are you thinking of, Chancellor?" he exclaimed. "Didn't you see the girl? Don't you?"

But his sentence was never completed, so much was he startled by what he saw in his friend's face.

Captain Chancellor was deadly pale, paler by far than the girl whose pallor had attracted Major Thanet's attention. An expression of extreme disquiet had replaced his ordinary air of comfortable well-bred nonchalance, and his voice sounded hoarse and abrupt when at last he spoke.

"There is a sheltered seat on there, I see, Thanet," he said, pointing to a sort of arbour a little in front. "Do you mind my leaving you for a few minutes? I shall not be long, but—but—I *must* run back for a moment."

"Certainly, certainly, by all means," replied Major Thanet, good-naturedly, though feeling not a little curious. "One of the irresistible Beauchamp's little 'affaires,' cropping up rather inconveniently, I fear, if what they say of his engagement to that very dark-eyed Miss Eyrecourt be true," he said to himself; adding aloud, when Captain Chancellor had taken him at his word, and deposited him in the summerhouse, "Don't hurry, my dear fellow, on my account. If the worst comes to the worst, I expect I can toddle back to the hotel with my stick."

"Thank you. I shall not be long," repeated Beauchamp, hardly knowing what Major Thanet had said, and setting off, as he spoke, at a rapid pace, in the direction of Eugenia's seat.

But as he drew nearer to her, his steps slackened. After all, what had he to say to her? Was it not even possible he had been mistaken in her identity? And supposing it were she—that this fragile shadow were the blooming girl he had left, not without some misgiving and regret, only a few weeks ago—why should he suppose he was to blame for the change? She had never looked very strong; she might have had any ordinary illness, that had nothing to say to him or her possible feelings towards him. Girls, now-a-days, didn't die of broken hearts; that sort of thing was all very well in novels and ballads, but was seldom come across in real life, and more than half-inclined to turn back again to his friend with some excuse for his eccentric behaviour, Captain Chancellor stopped short. But before he had time to decide what he should do, a faint, low cry, that seemed somehow to shape itself into the sound of his own name, arrested him. He was nearer the garden bench than he had imagined: in his hurry and confusion he had approached it by another path; a step or two in advance and Eugenia stood before him. She had recognised him after he had passed with Major Thanet the second time, had sat there in an indescribable conflict of emotions—of fear and self-distrust; of vague, unreasonable anticipation; of foolish, irrepressible delight in the knowledge of his near presence; of bitter, humiliating consciousness that such feelings were no longer lawful—that he was now the betrothed, possibly even the husband, of another woman.

"Why did I see him? What unhappy fate has brought him here—to revive it all—to begin again all my struggles—just when I was growing a little happier and more at peace?" she had been crying in her heart. And then her ears had caught the quickly—approaching footsteps—the firm, sharp tread which she told herself she could have known among a thousand, and she forgot everything; forgot all about Roma Eyrecourt and his sudden departure, her own misery, his apparent indifference; remembered only that at last—at last—she saw him again, stood within a few feet

of the man she had been doing her utmost to banish for ever from her heart and thoughts. One glance, all the labour was in vain—all the painful task to begin over again at the very beginning!

He was the first to break silence. It would have been a farce to have done so with any ordinary conventional form of greeting; her agitation, as she stood there, pale as death, trembling from head to foot, grasping convulsively at the rough woodwork of the bench for support—her poor “Philosophie” lying on the ground at her feet—was too palpable to be ignored; to have attempted to do so would have been to insult her. And Beauchamp Chancellor was not the man to stab deliberately and in cold blood, however indifferent he might be to suffering which fell not within his sight. And just now, in full view of Eugenia’s altered features and pitiful agitation, all the latent manliness of his nature was aroused; for the time he almost forgot himself in the sudden rush of tenderness for the girl who, he could no longer doubt, had suffered sorely for his sake; whose guileless devotion contrasted not unpleasantly with the still fresh remembrance of Roma Eyrecourt’s scornful indifference. So it was in a tone of extreme and unconcealed anxiety that he spoke.

“You have been ill, Miss Laurence,” he exclaimed; “I can see that you have been dreadfully ill. Good heavens, and I not to know it! And I have startled you by coming upon you so unexpectedly. What can I do or say to make you forgive me.”

Eugenia was recovering herself a little by now; some consciousness of what was due to her own self-respect was returning to her; she made a hard fight to regain her self-possession.

“There is nothing to forgive,” she answered, trying to smile, though her quivering lips and tremulous voice were by no means under her control. “I have been ill, but not ‘dreadfully.’ When one is usually strong, I suppose even a slight illness shakes one’s nerves. I am still absurdly easily startled.”

The last few words came very faintly. The same bewildering sensation of giddiness that she had felt once before in her life came over Eugenia; a horror seized her that in another moment she would again lose consciousness altogether—what might she not say, how might she not betray herself in such a case, to him—to this man who belonged to Roma Eyrecourt, not to her? She was standing by the end of the bench; she turned, and tried to reach the seat, but she could not see clearly, every object seemed to dance before her eyes, she would have fallen had not Beauchamp darted forward, caught her in his arms, and almost lifted her on to the bench. His touch seemed to inspire her with curious strength, the giddiness passed away; she sat up, and shrinking back from his supporting arm with an unmistakable air of repugnance, whispered—for she had not yet voice to speak—“Thank you, but *please* go away, Captain Chancellor. I am quite well again now.” Considerably mortified, Beauchamp sprang back. He was at all times easily nettled and prone to take offence, and in the present case the unexpectedness of the repulse made it additionally hurting. He stood still for a minute or two, watching Eugenia, as she sat in evident discomfort and constraint under his scrutiny. Then he spoke again—“I would have left you at once, Miss Laurence,” he said, stiffly, “if you were fit to be left, but you really are not. If you will tell me, however, where I can find your friends I will go in search of them, and not trouble you any more with my unwelcome presence.”

She looked up wistfully into his face.

“I have offended you,” she said. “Oh, what shall I do? I don’t know what to do. Oh, why did you come here? You make it so difficult—so dreadfully difficult. I don’t blame you—I know you could not help it: but I have been trying so hard to forget you, and you won’t let me. You have no right to put yourself in my way; it is cruel and unmanly of you,” she went on, with a quick fierceness in her tone; “you know how weak and ignorant I am. Why can’t you leave me? But, oh, what have I been saying?” And with a sudden awakening to the inference of her words, an overwhelming rush of shame, bewilderment, and misery, she hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

This was altogether too much for Captain Chancellor. He flung himself on the seat beside her, clasped her in his arms, lavishing upon her every term of lover-like endearment.

“Eugenia, my dearest, my own darling!” he exclaimed, “I cannot bear to see you so. Why should I keep away from you? Fate is too strong for prudence. We cannot be separated, you see. I will break every tie, I will crush every obstacle that can come between us. Look up, my dearest, and tell me you will be happy, and will trust yourself to me.”

She did not repulse him now; she was too exhausted and worn out to struggle. She hardly realised the meaning of his words, but for this short minute she allowed herself to rest in his arms, with a vague feeling that it was only for this once—he must go away, he must marry Roma; it must be, he could not break his word; and she, Eugenia, would never see him again; she would not live long now, she had no strength to struggle back to common life again, as she had nearly succeeded in doing; it would be better for her to die quietly, and then it would not surely matter to any one that she had for this once smothered her maidenly dignity, had allowed the promised husband of another to hold her in his arms, to call her his dearest, to kiss her pale cheeks, and swear he would never give her up.

Suddenly an approaching footstep startled them. Only a very few minutes had passed since Beauchamp had first returned to her, but to Eugenia it seemed hours. Captain Chancellor got up from the seat and stood quietly beside her, as if engaged in ordinary conversation. The new-comer was only a stranger who passed by without noticing them, but the interruption recalled Beauchamp’s thoughts to outside matters.

“I think perhaps I had better go,” he said, reluctantly, “but I cannot leave you to find your way back alone. My friend, Major Thanet, is waiting for me a little further on. He is lame, and cannot walk home alone. Would you mind remaining here a very few minutes till I have seen him safe back to his room, and then I can return here for you?”

The anxious tenderness of his words and manner was very sweet, to Eugenia, but she resisted the temptation. She had had her moment of weakness, but that was now past and gone. Still, this was not the time or place for saying what had to be said, nor had she now strength for any discussion. So she merely answered gently, so gently that any

possibility of offence was out of the question—

“Please not. I mean, please don’t come back for me. It is better not. I am quite able to go home alone now; but if you would rather,” (in deference to a shake of his head), “you might leave a message at the hotel, asking Mrs Dalrymple’s maid to come for me. She will not be surprised; she often goes out with me, and she knows this seat.”

“I will do so,” he replied. “So you are with the Dalrymples!”—and Eugenia detected, and was not surprised at, a slight shade of annoyance in his tone.

“Yes,” she replied, simply.

“But—but that will not matter?” he inquired, hesitatingly. “You are your own mistress. You will see me? I shall try to see you in an hour or two again. There will be no difficulty about it?”

He had turned to leave her, but waited an instant for her answer.

“Oh, no, there will be no difficulty. I will see you, or write to you,” she said, a little confusedly.

Her last words struck him rather oddly, but he attributed them to her nervousness and embarrassment; and, fearful of increasing these, he left her, as she desired.

And for the next quarter of an hour, till the maid came for her, Eugenia never took her eyes from the path down which Beauchamp had disappeared. “I shall never see him again,” she said to herself; “never, never. I must not. He must not break his word for me. Oh, I hope—I do hope I shall not live much longer.”

When she got back to the hotel, Eugenia found the Dalrymples both out. Mr Dalrymple she knew was off for the day on some expedition; but his wife, she found on inquiry, had left word for her that she would be in in half an hour. So Eugenia went up to her own room, and sitting down, tried to decide what was best to do. She only saw two things clearly,—she must not risk seeing Beauchamp again, and she must confide in Mrs Dalrymple.

“There is no help for it,” she said to herself. “Even if I told her nothing, she is sure to meet him, and she could not but suspect something. It would never do to let her find it out for herself. Why, Roma Eyrecourt is her cousin! No, I *must* trust her; and I must get her to let me go home at once. I cannot stay here,—I cannot.”

Mrs Dalrymple, returning from her walk, was met by a request that she would at once go to Miss Laurence’s room. She felt a little startled.

“What is the matter? Miss Laurence is not ill, surely?” she said to her maid, who was watching for her with Eugenia’s message.

The young woman, a comparative stranger, answered that she did not know; she had not thought Miss Laurence looking very well when she came in, but she had not complained. Eugenia’s face, however, confirmed her friend’s fears.

“You are ill, my dear child,” she exclaimed at once. “Have you got cold again, do you think? You were looking so well this morning.”

“I am not ill,—truly I am not,” replied Eugenia. “But, dear Mrs Dalrymple, I wanted to see you as soon as you came in, to ask you to be so very, very kind as to let me go home at once,—to-day if possible.”

“Go home to-day! My dear Eugenia, it is out of the question. You must be ill,” said Mrs Dalrymple, considerably perplexed, and half-inclined to think the girl’s brain was affected.

“No, no; it isn’t that. Oh, Mrs Dalrymple, I can’t bear to tell you! I have never spoken of it to any one,—only to one person at least,” she said, correcting herself, as the remembrance of her conversations with Gerald returned to her mind. “But I am sure I can trust you, and you will understand. It is—it is because Captain Chancellor is here that I want to go.”

“My poor child!” said Mrs Dalrymple, very tenderly, drawing Eugenia nearer her as she spoke; and though she said no more, the girl saw how mistaken she had been in imagining that no one had guessed her secret, and a painful flush of shame rose to her brow at the thought.

Then, after a moment’s pause, her friend spoke again.

“You are sure of it?” she inquired. “You are sure that he is here,—actually here? May you not have made, some mistake?”

“Oh, no; I am sure, quite sure,” repeated Eugenia, earnestly. “He is certainly here, staying at Nunswell. For all I know, in this very house.”

Mrs Dalrymple sat silent again for a little, apparently thinking it over.

“I don’t quite understand it,” she said at length; “what he is doing here just now, I mean. I thought he was at Winsley. But all the same,—though of course it is most unfortunate, most peculiarly unfortunate,—the very thing of all others I should most have wished to avoid for you,—all the same, my dear child, I confess I hardly see that it would be right or wise for us to allow it to interfere with our plans. Of course, if you go home, we shall go too. That does not matter; it would make very little difference to us. But don’t you think, Eugenia, it would be just a little undignified,—not to say cowardly,—to seem afraid of him,—to run away whenever he appears? I should like him rather to see, or to think, that

he is no more to you than he deserves to be. Don't be offended with me. I have felt for you and with you more than I can express all through."

She waited rather anxiously for Eugenia's answer. It was slow of coming. Mrs Dalrymple began to fear she had gone too far; she could not understand the look of embarrassment on Eugenia's face.

"Yes," she said, at last; "you are quite right. It would have been cowardly to have run away had it been as you think, though I dare say I should have wished to do so all the same. I am a coward, I suppose; at least, I entirely distrust my own strength. And I have reason enough to do so," she added, in a lower tone, hardly intended for her companion's ears. "But it isn't quite as you think. It is not only on my own account I want to go away. It is not only that I have *seen* him—Captain Chancellor, I mean. I have spoken to him. He saw me this morning in the gardens, and came back to speak to me; and—and—if I stay here he will insist on seeing me, and it may be very painful for us all."

"I *don't* understand," exclaimed Mrs Dalrymple. "What can he want to see you for? What can he have to say to you,—he, engaged to Roma Eyrecourt?"

"I can't tell you. I am so afraid of making you angry, for of course she is your cousin," said Eugenia, in great distress. "But still I thought it best to be quite open with you. He forgot himself,—for the time only, I dare say," she continued, with an irrepressible sigh and a sudden sense of bitter humility. "He saw that I had been ill, and I think he was dreadfully sorry for me, and I was alone, and somehow I suppose I was frightfully undignified, and unmaidenly even,"—the harsh word, though self-inflicted, bringing a painful blush with it. "I dare say it was all my fault, but any way he offered to give up everything for my sake, to break all ties and obstacles."

"And you accepted such a proposal?" exclaimed Mrs Dalrymple, indignantly, for, after all, "blood is thicker than water," and the imagined insult to her kinswoman, of such treatment, struck home.

"No, oh, no; of course not," replied Eugenia, eagerly. "That is what makes me want to go. I had not time—we were interrupted—I could not make him understand that such a thing was impossible,—impossible in every sense,—for him,—for me. Could I, do you think, marry any man who, for my sake, had broken his word to another woman,—had perhaps broken *another* woman's heart? Oh, no, no. You do not think I could? I would rather die!"

"And do you think he really meant it?" questioned Mrs Dalrymple. "Certainly I have not seen much of him of late years, but I used to know him well, and I must say it is not the *sort* of thing I should have imagined him doing. He must be either a better or a worse man than I have supposed—possibly both."

Eugenia did not reply to the last observation: perhaps she did not hear it. But she answered Mrs Dalrymple's question.

"I do think he meant it. And I think he will continue to mean it unless it is at once discouraged," she said; "at once, before he has time to do anything rash with regard to Miss Eyrecourt. It will not be enough for me to refuse to see him—I must go away. While I stay here, any unlucky chance might bring us together again, like this morning. And I cannot trust myself, now that he knows—for he *does* know," she turned her face away, "that—that I do care for him, that I would make any sacrifice for him except doing wrong, or letting him do wrong. Though, indeed, I must not boast: no one knows how hard it is not to do wrong, till one is tried."

"My poor child," said Mrs Dalrymple, quite as tenderly now as at the beginning of the conversation. And then she added, "I wonder what we should do. I wish Henry were back."

"When do you think he will be back?" asked Eugenia, influenced not so much by her friend's wifely belief in Mr Dalrymple's diplomatic powers as by her own anxiety to obtain his approval of her at once leaving Nunswell.

"I don't know. Not before evening," replied her friend.

"And something must be done—should be done before post-time," said Eugenia. "He said he would call to see me; would it do for me to write a note to be given him when he comes? It will be so difficult to say it. Oh dear, oh dear!"

She got up from her seat, and walked to the window and back again, her hands clasped, in restless misery. There came a knock at the door.

"A gentleman to see Miss Laurence, if you please, ma'am," said Mrs Dalrymple's Bertha, importantly. "This is his card. He asked for the young lady staying with you, ma'am."

Mrs Dalrymple took the card mechanically, and glanced at the name as if there were still any possibility of mistake.

"Captain Chancellor," the two words stared her in the face, and down in the corner in little letters—"203rd (East Woldshire) Regiment."

It all looked so straightforward and aboveboard: there was no apparent consciousness of conduct or intentions "unbecoming an officer and a gentleman." And yet the girl he was calmly proposing to treat with ignominy and indignity was her own cousin; the girl for whose sake he proposed so to dishonour himself actually a guest in her own charge! Mrs Dalrymple felt more and more perplexed. How could the young man have the audacity to send up his card in this brazen-faced way? Surely there must be some strange mistake. A sudden thought struck her. She turned to Eugenia, standing pale, and with great, wistful eyes, beside her.

"He does mean it, you see," whispered the girl.

"Yes, I see," replied the matron. Then turning to the servant: "Bertha, say to Captain Chancellor we shall see him immediately," and when Bertha had departed on her errand, "Eugenia, my love," she said gently, "I think it will be

best for *me* to see him.”

“Very well. Thank you very much,” replied Eugenia, yet with a wild, unreasonable regret that she had been so taken at her word, that fate had not *forced* her into seeing him again, into the very danger her better nature so dreaded and shrank from.

Volume Two—Chapter Six.

Sunshine.

... All hearts in love use their own tongues:
Let every eye negotiate for itself,
And trust no agent.

Much Ado about Nothing.

Captain Chancellor was standing by the window when Mrs Dalrymple entered the room. As the sound of the door opening caught his ear, he turned sharply round with a look of eager expectancy on his fair, handsome face, which did not escape the notice of Eugenia’s self-constituted guardian, and notwithstanding his habitual good breeding and self-possession, he did not altogether succeed in concealing the disappointment which was caused him by the sight of his old friend’s substantial proportions in the place of the girlish figure he had been watching for. He was eager to see Eugenia again. Unimpulsive though he was by nature, little as he had dreamt but three short hours before of ever again seeing her, of holding her in his arms and calling her his own, he was now almost passionately anxious for her presence. Away from her, he had found it difficult to realise, to justify to himself, this rash, unpremeditated deed he had done—a deed at variance with all his preconceived ideas, all the intentions of his life. But beside her, in the light of her sweet eyes, in the sense of her loveliness, of her delicate grace—above all, of her clinging trust in and entire devotion to himself, he felt that all his scruples and misgivings would vanish into air. He would feel satisfied then of what he tried to believe he felt satisfied of now, that being what he was, a man and not a statue, a “gentleman” who (in his own sense) held honour high, and would scorn to take advantage of a woman’s weakness, he could not have acted otherwise. Fortified thus, he could brave all,—his friends’ probable “chaff” on his weakness, “to think of Chancellor’s throwing himself away after all for a pair of bright eyes;” his sister’s certain disapproval, Roma’s possible contempt. These, and more practical disagreeables, in the shape of poverty, comparatively speaking, at least; the loss of the personal luxuries which even with his limited means had, as a bachelor, been within his easy reach; the general, indescribable descent from the position of a much-made-of young officer without encumbrances, to that of a struggling captain in a line regiment with a delicate wife and too probable family—all these appalling visions already fully recognised, Beauchamp had forthwith set to work to make up his mind to. But he was thirsting for his reward. He was in a very good humour with himself. For the first time in his life he had acted purely on an impulse, and this impulse he imagined to be a much nobler one than it really was. He did not exactly call his conduct by fine names to himself, but in his heart he longed to hear Eugenia do so. He loved her tenderly, he said now to himself that he certainly did so, yet not hitherto so vehemently that he could not have put his love on one side in acknowledgment of weightier considerations. He had been shocked by the change in her appearance, and to some extent took blame to himself in the matter, yet, even while doing so, a slight, a very slight tinge of contempt for her weakness and transparency, mingled itself with his concern and self-reproach. She was not certainly of the stuff of a “Clara Vere de Vere;” there was an amount of undisciplined, unsophisticated effusiveness about her, hardly in accordance with his notion of “thorough-breeding,” yet such as she was she was infinitely sweet; he was only longing to have her beside him to tell her so, to clasp her in his arms again, and kiss the colour into her soft white cheeks.

So it was really very disappointing, instead of Eugenia, to be brought face to face with Mary Dalrymple. He made the best of it, however—in a general way he was very clever at doing so. He came forward with his usual gently pleasant smile, his hand outstretched in greeting, murmuring something about being so pleased, so very pleased to see Mrs Dalrymple again. She hardly appeared to take in the sense of his words.

“How do you do, Captain Chancellor?” she said as she shook hands. Afterwards he fancied there had been a very slight hesitation in her manner before doing so, but at the time his complete unsuspectingness prevented his imagining the possibility of such a thing. “It is quite an unexpected pleasure to meet you here.”

“Yes,” he answered cautiously, uncertain to what extent Eugenia might have taken Mary into her confidence, and feeling his way before committing himself; “yes, I thought my turning up would be a surprise you.”

“I thought you were still at Winsley,” said Mrs Dalrymple, also feeling her way.

“Oh dear no,” he replied. “Winsley is all very well for a fortnight, but six weeks of it would be rather too much of a good thing. I left Winsley some time ago. I am here now with an old friend of mine. Major Thanet, who has been very ill with rheumatic fever, and came down here to recruit.”

“And are you returning to Winsley again soon?” inquired Mrs Dalrymple, her suspicion increasing that they were playing at cross purposes in some direction.

“Oh dear no,” he said again. “My leave is about up—I got a little more than my six weeks on Thanet’s account. I am due at Bridgenorth next week.”

“At Bridgenorth,” repeated Mrs Dalrymple. “Oh, indeed; and do you remain here till then?”

“Upon my word I can’t say,” replied Captain Chancellor, with an approach to impatience in his tone. “I certainly didn’t come here to sit being catechised by Mary Pevensey all the afternoon,” he said to himself, waxing wroth at Mrs

Dalrymple's cross questions and Eugenia's non-appearance. Then suddenly throwing caution to the winds, "To tell you the truth," exclaimed he, "my plans at present depend greatly upon yours."

"Upon ours—may I ask why?" inquired Eugenia's chaperone quietly, and without testifying the surprise her visitor expected.

"Because upon yours depend those of your visitor—at least so I suppose," answered Beauchamp, coolly. "Miss Laurence is staying with you. If she stays here till next week, I shall stay too; if she goes I shall probably go too."

"Where?" asked Mrs Dalrymple, looking up at him with a puzzled yet anxious expression on her comely face.

"To Wareborough! to ask her father to consent to her engagement to me," he replied stoutly. "I shall either see him or write to him at once from here."

"But—" began Mrs Dalrymple, coming to a dead stop.

"But what?"

"You can't marry two people."

"Certainly not. Has any one been telling you I intended doing so," he replied, beginning, in spite of his vexation, to laugh.

"Yes," answered Mrs Dalrymple, naïvely. "At least, not exactly that. But I was told some time ago that you were to be married to my cousin Roma next month, and of course I believed it. Eugenia thinks so too."

"Eugenia thinks so too," repeated Captain Chancellor, his face darkening. "How can she possibly think so? And whoever told her such an infernal falsehood, I should like to know?" he went on angrily, for it was unspeakably annoying to him that any shadow, however distorted, of his late relations to Roma should thus follow him about—should dim the brightness of the little-looked-for consolation that had offered itself.

Mrs Dalrymple was by no means taken aback by this outburst. "It was I that told Eugenia," she said simply.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Beauchamp at once, his manner softening. "Of course you, too, were misinformed. I wonder—" he hesitated.

"You wonder by whom?" said his hostess. "There is no reason why I should not tell you. It was Mrs Winter who mentioned it to me in a letter, as having been announced, or at least generally believed, at the Winsley Hunt Ball. And I had no reason to disbelieve it. To tell you the truth, it seemed to me to explain things a little."

Captain Chancellor did not inquire to what things she alluded. He took up the first part of her speech.

"Who is Mrs Winter, may I ask? I don't think I ever heard of her."

"She is an old friend of mine," replied Mrs Dalrymple. "Her husband is Major in the 19th Lancers, now at Sleigham. She wrote to thank me for having asked some of my friends near there to call on her—your sister especially—and in this letter she mentioned Roma's just announced engagement."

"But I am surprised you took such a piece of news at secondhand, my dear Mrs Dalrymple," said Beauchamp. "Had it been true, Roma would have been sure to write to tell you."

"I don't know that she would," replied Roma's cousin. "We do not write very often, and I know she has a large circle of friends. You might as well say it was strange of me not to write to congratulate her. I did think of doing so, but other things put it out of my head. Eugenia Laurence's illness for one thing—I was very anxious about her—and to tell you the real truth, Beauchamp," she went on, with a sudden change of tone, and addressing him as she had been accustomed to do in his boyhood, "I did not feel very able to congratulate either you or Roma as heartily as I should have wished to do in such circumstances, considering all I had seen and observed during your stay at Wareborough. I believe now I may have done you great injustice, and I fear poor dear Eugenia had suffered unnecessarily through me. But I think you will both forgive me," and she smiled up at him with all her old cordiality.

Captain Chancellor smiled too, with visible consciousness of no small magnanimity in so doing.

"All's well that ends well," he answered lightly, "though certainly in such matters it is best to take nothing on hearsay, and to be slow to pronounce on apparently inconsistent conduct," he added rather mysteriously. "I must confess, however, that I can't understand Miss Laurence believing this absurd report—if she had done so till she met me again even, but after our—our conversation this morning?" he looked inquiringly at Mrs Dalrymple.

"Yes, she believes it at the present moment," replied she. "You said something which seemed to confirm it—about 'breaking ties,' or something of the kind."

"Did I?" he said, colouring a little, and not altogether pleased at so much having been repeated by Eugenia to her friend. "It is a little hard upon one to have to explain all one's expressions at all sorts of times, you know. Of course what I said referred entirely to what my friends may think of it—Gertrude for instance—the imprudence and all that sort of thing. Of course till Gertrude sees Eugenia, it is natural for her to think a good deal about the outside part of it—prospects and position, you know. There is the strong prejudice against Wareborough and places of the kind, in the first place."

In saying this he forgot for the moment whom he was speaking to; or if he thought of her at all, it was as Mary

Pevensey, not as Mrs Dalrymple, the wife of the Wareborough mill-owner. She looked up quickly, but she had long ago learnt indifference to such allusions on her own score. Eugenia's position, however, might be more open to discomfort therefrom.

"Then I advise Gertrude to get rid of all such prejudices at once," said the Wareborough lady, somewhat sharply.

Captain Chancellor did not reply. He might have smoothed down the little awkwardness by some judicious hint of apology, but he was not inclined to take the trouble; he was beginning to think he had had quite enough of his old friend for the present. She had shown a somewhat undesirable readiness to place herself *in loco matris* towards Eugenia, one of whose attractions, to his mind, lay in the fact that marriage with her entailed upon him no Wareborough or other matron in the shape of mother-in-law.

He got up from his chair and strolled to the window. "It looks very like rain," he observed amiably. "May I see Miss Laurence now, Mrs Dalrymple?"

Mrs Dalrymple looked uneasy—it was quite as bad as, or rather worse, she thought, than, if her twelve-year-old Minnie were grown up! In that case, at least, she could feel that the responsibility was a natural and unavoidable one, and, if she behaved unwisely, no one would have any right to scold her but Henry; but in the present instance—suppose Mr Laurence took it in his head to blame her for allowing matters to go so far without his consent? On the other hand, her soft heart was full of compassion for Eugenia, and eagerness to see her happy. Captain Chancellor read her hesitation.

"You need not feel any responsibility about it," he said. "To all intents and purposes I assure you the thing is done. I have already written to Mr Laurence," he took a letter out of his pocket and held it up to her, "and really it is too late to stop my seeing Eugenia. My chief reason for wishing to do so is to clear up the extraordinary misapprehension you told me of. It is only fair to me to let me put all that right. And it would be only cruel to her to leave things as they are. She is not strong, and I can't bear her to suffer any more." The genuine anxiety in the last few words carried the day.

"I didn't think of not explaining things to her," said Mrs Dalrymple, rising irresolutely from her seat as she spoke. "I could have done that. However, I daresay it is better for you to see her yourself."

"I am quite sure it is," said Captain Chancellor. "And to confess all my wickedness to you, had you prevented my seeing Miss Laurence here openly, I should, I assure you, have done my best to see her some other way. You could not have put a stop to either of us walking in the gardens, for instance?"

He smiled as he paid it; there was a little defiance in the smile. Mrs Dalrymple sighed gently, and shook her head.

"You were always a very self-willed little boy, Beauchamp," she remarked, as she at last departed on her errand. Then she put her head in again at the door with a second thought.

"You will not blame me if Eugenia does not wish to see you at once?" she said. "She has been very much upset this morning, and perhaps it may be better to let her rest a little, and see you this evening."—"And by then Henry will be back," she added in her own mind, with a cowardly sense of satisfaction that in that case her lord and master would go shares in the possible blame.

"By all means beg Miss Laurence to do just as she likes," replied Beauchamp, urbanely. "I can call again at any hour this evening she likes to name, if she prefers it to seeing me now."

His misgivings, however, were of the slenderest. When he was left alone, he strolled again to the window, and stood looking out, but without seeing much of what was before him. He was thinking, more deeply perhaps than he had ever thought before; and when at last he heard the sound of the door opening softly, he started and looked round, not without a certain anxiety. But it was as he had expected, Eugenia herself,—and, oh, what a transfigured Eugenia! Never yet had he seen her as he saw her now. Notwithstanding the still evident fragility of her appearance, there was about her whole figure a brightness, a soft radiance of happiness impossible to describe. Her brown hair seemed to have gained new golden lights; her eyes, always sweet, looked deeper and yet more brilliant; there was a flush of carnation in her cheeks over which lugubrious Major Thanet would have shaken his head, which Beauchamp at the moment thought lovelier than any rose-tint he had ever seen.

She came forward quickly,—more quickly than he advanced to meet her. He seemed almost startled by her beauty, and looked at her for a moment without speaking. He could hardly understand her perfect absence of self-consciousness, her childlike "abandon" of overwhelming joy.

"Beauchamp, oh, Beauchamp," she exclaimed, as their hands met, "she has told me it was all a mistake, and, oh, I am so very happy!"

So she was, unutterably happy. Life for her, she felt, could hold no more perfect moment than this, and that there could be anything unbecoming in expressing her happiness, above all to him to whom she owed it, who shared it, as she believed, to the full, never in the faintest degree occurred to her. She did not think her lover cold or less fervent in his rejoicing than herself; she trusted him too utterly for such an idea to be possible to her, even had there been more cause for it than there really was. For, after the first instant, Captain Chancellor found it easy to respond to her expressions of thankfulness and delight; found it too by no means an unpleasing experience to be hailed by this lovely creature as the hero of her dreams, the fairy prince whom even yet she could hardly believe had chosen her—a very Cinderella as she seemed to herself in comparison with him—out of all womankind to be his own. And, even if a shade more reserve, a trifle more dignity, would have been better in accordance with his taste, his notion of the perfectly well-bred bearing in such circumstances, after all, was there not every excuse for such innocent shortcoming, such sweet forgetfulness? She was so young, he reflected, had seen nothing, or worse than nothing, of

society,—for far better for a girl to be brought up in a convent than in the mixed society of a place like Wareborough, —it was only a marvel to see her as she was. And deeper than these reflections lay another consciousness of excuse in his mind, which yet, even to himself, he would have shrunk from the bad taste of putting into words,—the consciousness that it was not every girl whose bridegroom elect was a Beauchamp Chancellor!

“What a child it is!” he murmured to himself, as he stroked back the sunny brown hair from the white temples, and looked smilingly down into the liquid depths of the sweet, loving eyes. There would be a great deal to teach her, he thought to himself; some things perhaps he must help her to unlearn; but with such a pupil the prospect of the task before him was not appalling. Suddenly there recurred to him the memory of the misapprehension of his words of which Mrs Dalrymple had told him. This must be set right at once,—his *fiancée* must be taught to view such things differently, to recognise the established feelings of the world—his world—on such matters.

“Eugenia, my dearest,” he began, rather gravely, and the gravity reflected itself in her face as instantly as a passing cloud across the sun is mirrored in the clear water of the lake beneath, “I want to ask you one thing. How could you distrust me, misinterpret me so, as Mrs Dalrymple tells me you did?”

“I never for an instant distrusted you,” she answered quickly. “At the worst—at the very worst—I never doubted you. I believed you were bound in some way,—bound by ties which in honour you could not break; but, Beauchamp, I never blamed you, or doubted that we should not have been separated had it been in your power to avoid it. Distrust you? Oh, no; I knew too well. I judged you by myself.”

“My darling!” he replied, kissing her again. Her sentiments were very pretty, very romantic, and so forth, and not objectionable considering she was a woman, but still hardly to the purpose. And, woman though she was, she must learn to take less poetical and high-flown, more conventional and “accepted,” views of things. Yet notwithstanding his pleasing sense of masculine superiority, he had winced a little inwardly while she spoke. For a moment there flashed before him an impulse of perfect honesty and candour, a temptation to tell her what small ground she had had for this innocent faith of hers,—a sort of yearning to be loved by her for what he was, and no more.

“But, no,” he decided, “it would not do. If she once heard about Roma, she would never forget it. It would spoil all. If she did not resent my admiration for Roma, she would resent my having amused myself and her at Wareborough with what I never then dreamt would end seriously with either of us, at the very time I was counting on all coming straight with the other. She would never believe that I really cared for her, as most certainly I do. No, it would never do. Her head, poor dear, is cram-full of belief in first love and only love, and all the rest of the school-girl creed, and I am sure I don’t want to disturb it, or to awake any nonsensical jealousy.”

For that the green-eyed, hydra-headed monster lies *somewhere* sleeping in every woman’s heart, Captain Chancellor doubted as little as that there are fish in the sea or smouldering fires in Mount Vesuvius. And that no wife has a right to peep behind the closed door of her husband’s previous life, or to resent exclusion therefrom, was another of his not-to-be-disputed axioms. So he only smiled and called her his darling, and put away from him the momentary impulse to risk all by confiding to her the true history of the events and feelings of the last few months.

“But in another sense you distrusted me,” he went on after a little pause, speaking gravely again and with some hesitation, as if fearful of hurting her; “how could you reconcile my—my manner to you this morning with what you were then believing about me?”

“I didn’t reconcile it,” answered Eugenia, naïvely; “I only thought, as I had done before, that honour and inclination were pointing different ways;” here she stopped abruptly and blushed crimson. “It sounds dreadfully conceited to say this,” she added, “but you asked me, and I *must* tell you everything now, must not I? I was so bitterly sorry for you, and, oh, so miserable myself.”

It was a little hard to say anything but sweet words to this, but Beauchamp persevered.

“But don’t you see, dearest, had it been as you thought, I could not have broken my pledge without the grossest dishonour? Perhaps you hardly understand how these things are looked upon in the world, you are so young and innocent, and perhaps a tiny little bit too romantic,” here he stroked her cheek fondly, “but you will learn that there are some things men of honour *cannot* do, not even to win such a darling as you.”

The crimson, hardly yet faded from the girl’s face, deepened almost painfully. She was silent for a moment, and when she spoke it seemed to cost her a little effort.

“I am ignorant, very ignorant,” she said gently. “But there are some things it doesn’t require years or experience to know. I trust you will not find me ignorant in these. Don’t think I thought you capable of breaking your word—not even for me,” with a little smile and an attempt at playfulness, “but I thought—” she hesitated; “I have read that even the noblest and best may be terribly drawn two ways sometimes—there may come to the best of us tremendous temptations, may there not? Could the best people ever get to be the best if they had not felt temptation more strongly than others? And then, too, though one hardly likes to say so, there do seem sometimes to come times when ordinary rules—not real right and wrong of course, but our way of interpreting them—seem to fail one; when keeping one’s word in one direction would be breaking it more unpardonably in another. Oh no, no, if I could put in words what I felt for and thought of you this morning, you would see I did you no dishonour.”

There was a pathetic appeal in her tone as she uttered the last few words; she had said more than she intended, carried away by her subject, and the remembrance of the battle of feelings she herself had so recently fought her way through. Captain Chancellor was a little puzzled, a little annoyed, and a little surprised. It was not quite so easy to assert his superiority as he had imagined. Instinctively he sheltered himself by taking it for granted.

“My darling,” he said again, “don’t distress yourself. Don’t imagine I meant to blame you. I only meant there are things and ways of looking at things which your innocence cannot have had experience of. But this need trouble

neither of us now—you will never be alone now, even in thought. You will always trust me, dearest?”

“Yes,” whispered Eugenia, softly, “and you will teach me all I don’t know, and teach me to be better too, more worthy of you.”

Captain Chancellor was enchanted. There was a docility about this sweet Eugenia of his, which he might have sought for long and vainly among more sophisticated maidens. She looked more irresistibly lovely than ever at this moment; there was a tender dewiness in her eyes which might turn into tears were it not kissed away, so he lost no time in averting the possible catastrophe. And Eugenia accepted his caresses and smiled her happiness, and stifled far, far away, down in the very furthest off corner of her heart, a little silly, absurd pain, an infinitesimal feeling of disappointment that she had not been *quite* perfectly understood—stifled it so determinedly that she thought she had forgotten its having had even a momentary existence.

It was not till she was alone again—Beauchamp having departed to post his letter to her father—alone with her happiness, feeling almost overwhelmed by Mrs Dalrymple’s congratulations and affectionate excitement (for Mary was too kind-hearted to obtrude the wet blanket of her somewhat uncomfortable sense of responsibility), that there recurred to Eugenia the remembrance of the expressions made use of by her lover, which had helped to continue the mystification regarding his relations with Miss Eyrecourt.

What could he have meant, she said to herself, by his allusions to ties which must be broken, obstacles to be overcome? She knew of none; her father, she felt satisfied, would never dream of opposing her wishes, would do all in his power to promote her happiness.

“I will ask Beauchamp to-morrow,” she thought, and then again discarded the idea. She had a certain shrinking from alluding, however slightly, to the misapprehension which had cost her so much. Could it be that his friends had other views for him, and would be disappointed by his choice? “It maybe so,” she thought; “I am neither rich nor grand. I should not wonder if his relations wish him to marry Miss Eyrecourt; or, possibly, he is afraid that his marriage may interfere with his getting on in his profession. *That* he need not fear, I would never consent to be in his way. That is not my idea of a good wife,” and she smiled confidently, as many another untried girl has smiled, at the thought of all she could do and suffer, and make the best of, for his sake. None of her reflections cast any shadow on her joy.

“We love each other, that is all that matters. And if there are any difficulties in the way, which I should know of, he will tell me, and if he does not, I can trust him.”

The very next morning there came, forwarded from Wareborough to Mrs Dalrymple, a letter from Mrs Winter, in which after the usual feminine amount of irrelevant matter, she went on to say, “I have often wondered how soon you found out the incorrectness of the report about Miss Eyrecourt’s engagement to Captain Chancellor. Indeed, it has been rather on my mind to set it right with you, but the very day after I last wrote I was called away to nurse my mother, and the last six weeks have been entirely spent in the sick-room,” etc, etc. “And besides, as you are so nearly connected with the young lady, you are quite sure to have heard it was only, a piece of local gossip.”

Eugenia smiled when her friend showed her the letter.

“How queerly things are twisted up together,” she said, but she was happy enough now to forget all the past, save as enhancing the present. She was perfectly satisfied with Beauchamp’s explanation (he did not feel called upon to make it a very ample one) of his inconsistent conduct: his misgivings as to the wisdom of marrying on his limited means, his ignorance of the real state of her feelings towards him, his anxiety to take no such step without the approval of the sister to whom he owed so much—all good reasons and founded on fact as far as they went.

“I hope your sister will like me,” said Eugenia, thoughtfully. “It is with her Miss Eyrecourt lives, is it not? I think I liked Miss Eyrecourt, at least I think so *now*,” with a smile and a blush which made her lover congratulate himself on his reticence.

Mr Dalrymple and Major Thanet both opened their eyes when they heard the news.

“Well, my dear,” said the former, oracularly, “I trust you will never have reason to regret your share in the affair;” but to the young people themselves he was “mean” enough to be profusely congratulatory.

“Just like a man,” thought poor Mrs Dalrymple. “If Henry were the least given to clairvoyance, and that sort of thing, I should really think he went off yesterday on purpose that he might be able to put the responsibility on to me.”

Captain Chancellor’s friend did not mince the matter. He had scented one of Beauchamp’s little “affaires,” but the actual dénouement so suddenly announced to him by his companion was rather startling.

“Going to be married,” he exclaimed; “and this morning you had as much idea of anything of the kind—at least in *this* quarter,” pointedly, “as—as,” the gallant officer hesitated, at a loss for a sufficiently forcible expression, “as I have of marrying the man in the moon.”

Beauchamp laughed shortly and contemptuously. Major Thanet’s perceptions were not of the quickest.

“Are you sure you know what you are about, my dear fellow?” he inquired confidentially.

“Perfectly, thank you,” answered Captain Chancellor, and the tone of the three words was unmistakable. So Major Thanet took his cue, and not being behind the rest of the world in his capability of “bearing perfectly like a Christian the misfortunes of another,” resigned himself with a cigar, and a sigh over “Chancellor’s infatuation,” to the apparently inevitable, and being introduced to Eugenia a day or two after by her fiancé, congratulated her with as much graceful fervour as if no piece of news of the kind had ever in his life afforded him such unmingled satisfaction.

Eugenia thought him charming, seeing him through the flattering medium of his position as one of Beauchamp's oldest friends, and was a very little surprised that the cordiality of her expressions regarding him hardly appeared as gratifying to her lover as she could have expected.

"Am I too outspoken, Beauchamp?" she ventured to inquire. "You don't think me 'gushing,' I hope?" with a little smile, but some anxiety, and his answer, "Never to *me*," was scarcely reassuring.

"I will try to learn to be more dignified and—and more reserved, or whatever it is my manner is wanting in," she said, penitentially. And then the tiny cloud cleared off Beauchamp's face, and he told her she could never in *his* eyes be nearer perfection than she was already, and all was sunshine again—sunshine almost too brilliant and dazzling, with a want of the steady glow about it which tells of the settled maturity of summer; reminding one rather of the flashing radiance of uncertain April "with his shoures," "April, when men woo"—sunshine, nevertheless, which brought back the roses to Eugenia's cheeks, and added new radiance to her beautiful eyes.

Volume Two—Chapter Seven.

Fait Accompli.

Things without all remedy
Should be without regard: what's done is
done.

Macbeth.

And thus it came about that Eugenia returned home to Wareborough the week before her sister's marriage, a very picture of radiant happiness.

"How little we imagined what was to be the end of my visit to Nunswell! Do you remember how dreadfully unwilling I was to go?" she said to Sydney, when they were alone together for the first time the evening she came home.

And Sydney smiled back to her, and tried her best to be sympathising in joy as in sorrow, and Eugenia was too intensely happy to discover that there was any effort required on her sister's part, or that it was not entirely successful.

Contrary to the usual course of true love at the critical stage when fathers are applied to, and ways and means have to be considered, there occurred no difficulties threatening to overthrow Eugenia's new-found happiness; or rather perhaps, such as there were, were smoothed away by her friends' kindness. Her father, at all times indulgent in intention, had had his somewhat undemonstrative affection quickened into activity by his anxiety during her illness, and was too delighted to see the change in her to lay much stress on the fact of Captain Chancellor's very limited means. And Beauchamp on his side was somewhat agreeably disappointed by Mr Laurence's generosity.

"I am not a rich man," said Eugenia's father, "and now that my children are grown up I sometimes take blame to myself that I am not a richer, I might have been so perhaps, but though nearly all my life has been spent in this place where money-making is the great object, I never caught the fever," here he smiled, and Captain Chancellor wondered in his own mind what on earth any one could find of interest in Wareborough, setting aside "the great object" to which his future father-in-law alluded thus contemptuously. "I am not ambitious," continued Mr Laurence, "either for myself or my children," Beauchamp stared a little, "but I am very anxious to see them happy, and nothing but very grave objections would make me interfere with their wishes. I am perfectly satisfied with Sydney's choice, and, though of course I have had much less opportunity of knowing you than has been the case as regards Frank Thurston, I trust, I think I may say I believe, I shall feel the same with Eugenia's."

He looked at Captain Chancellor with a half-inquiry. The young man, though not feeling particularly flattered, bowed silently. But catching sight again of Mr Laurence's eyes, the sort of appeal, of wistful anxiety in their expression, came home to him and awoke his better nature. It was impossible to take offence at the plain speaking of so straightforward and single-minded a man as Eugenia's father, eccentric though he might be, so Beauchamp answered gently and respectfully—

"I hope with all my heart, my dear sir, that you will indeed feel so. I think I can answer for myself that I shall do my best, my very best, to make her happy."

He held out his hand to Mr Laurence as he spoke, as if in ratification of the treaty. The older man took it and shook it, after the manner of Englishmen in moments of strong feeling, vigorously. Then they both looked at each other again.

"He's by no means an unrepresentable father-in-law, Wareborough-bred though he is," thought Beauchamp, feeling sufficiently pleased with himself to see other people in a rose-coloured light.

And "I do not wonder at Eugenia," was the reflection that passed through her father's mind.

For Beauchamp looked his very best just now. There was a kindly light in his blue eyes, which added greatly to their attractiveness, a slight air of deference had replaced his usual calm, somewhat supercilious self-possession; he looked altogether younger and brighter and heartier.

He felt rewarded for the amiability and tact (a quality on the possession of which he rather prided himself) he had shown, when Mr Laurence proceeded to touch upon practical matters. The sum he named as the yearly allowance he intended to settle on Eugenia exceeded Captain Chancellor's expectations, if indeed he may be said to have had any;

for when habitually calculating, self-considering persons act upon impulse, throwing prudence to the winds, their recklessness is apt to exceed that of more impetuous natures—a certain mortification at having disregarded their accepted rule of conduct renders the remembrance of the inconsistency unpalatable; for the time being they bury all practical considerations out of sight. So Beauchamp was perfectly sincere, and Mr Laurence could see that he was so, when he exclaimed—

“You are very generous, very generous indeed. I had no idea of anything so liberal. Indeed, to tell the truth, I fear I gave little thought to this part of the matter at all,” (for now that his rashness had not turned out so badly, after all, he began to be rather proud of it). “I suppose,” with a smile, “I thought only of Eugenia herself. But of course—for *her* sake—I don’t hesitate to say I am very glad of what you tell me—very glad indeed.”

And the interview ended with mutual satisfaction.

“Yes,” thought Beauchamp, as he returned to the drawing-room, where Eugenia was awaiting the result of the tête-à-tête in “papa’s study,” not, it must be confessed, with any great amount of anxiety, for her faith in her father was great, her ignorance of money matters unlimited—“Yes,” thought Captain Chancellor, “we shall be able to scrub on. After all of course it will be only what Gertrude calls ‘genteel starvation.’ How she used to ring the changes on that for Roma’s benefit! But Eugenia will have quite as much as *she* would have had, and with much less expensive tastes. And in the old days, when I was determined to marry Roma, I used to make out it would not be so very bad. Of course there is the difference in other ways, position and connection and all that, to be taken into account, but after all—”

“After all” things looked well enough for him to respond very cheerfully to Eugenia’s, eager inquiries, to add a few more drops of bliss to her already brimming-over cup, by his praises of her father’s generosity.

As must be expected, however, in all human affairs, there came by-and-by tiny clouds to temper the brilliance of Eugenia’s sky, slight pricks of disappointment to make themselves felt amidst the luxuriance and fragrance of the flowers she had grasped so eagerly. The first of these that she perceived was the want of cordiality in Gerald Thurston’s manner when he, as he could not avoid, congratulated her on her engagement. She had looked forward with some eagerness to seeing him, had counted upon his sympathy, had even rehearsed a little girlish speech referring gratefully to his kindness to her in her trouble, her hope that he would extend his friendship to Beauchamp as well as continue it to herself. But when she met him, and heard his few formal words of good wishes, her pretty expressions died upon her lips; she felt herself blushing painfully, and demeaned herself—at least so she afterwards declared to Sydney—as if she had done something she was ashamed of and that he was reproaching her. And Sydney did not smooth her ruffled plumage. Eugenia’s complete misapprehension of Gerald irritated her sometimes almost unreasonably, and just now the irritation was increased by pity for the new disappointment she imagined him to be enduring. So when Eugenia complained of Mr Thurston’s “brusqueness” and coldness, Sydney answered stiffly and unsympathisingly that she thought it a pity Eugenia judged people so much by “mere outside manner.”

“You have known Gerald long enough to know how good and true he is, and how interested in our happiness. I don’t see that one’s friends are obliged to go into ecstasies over the news of one’s engagement. Marrying, in nine cases out of ten, is the death of all previous friendships and connections.”

“But it should not be, it need not be,” interposed Eugenia, eagerly. “It will not be so with me, you will see, Sydney,” and had it been any other day in the world than the one it was—the eve of Sydney’s marriage, the last, the very last of the sisterly life together in the old home—she would have felt inclined to reproach her for her want of faith, her commonplace axioms. As if marriages in general could furnish grounds for prophecy as to the probable influence of marriage on the wife of a Beauchamp Chancellor!

The next morning’s post brought disappointment Number 2, in the shape of a letter from the hero himself.

He had left Wareborough a few days before, being obliged to report himself at Bridgenorth, but had done so with the promise of returning for Sydney’s marriage. Between his future sister-in-law and himself there was no great congeniality; circumstances had from the outset of their acquaintance prejudiced her against him, and he, even had he known this to be the case, would hardly have thought it worth his while to try to win her liking. In his own mind he set her down as a nice little thing, well fitted to be a clergyman’s wife, and “not bad looking;” and had he received the very undesirable “giftie” of seeing himself with Sydney’s eyes, his astonishment at her presumption would have been extreme. He had agreed to make one of the wedding guests, therefore, out of no special regard for the bride, but because it seemed to be expected by Eugenia and the others; not being, to do him justice, of the aggressively cross-grained order of individuals who, when pleasing people or doing what seems expected of them comes in their way, are forthwith seized with a desire, at whatever inconvenience to themselves, to avoid the suspicion of amiability by taking another road. Nevertheless, when Beauchamp found himself prevented making one at the feast, he by no means took it greatly to heart or felt any inclination to “beat his breast” with chagrin. That he did not do so, which was pretty evident from the tone of his letter, was what added the sting to Eugenia’s sharp disappointment; for that the obstacle in the way of his joining them was insurmountable there could be no doubt.

A more inexorable power than even the Ancient Mariner, with the “long grey beard and glittering eye,” had forbidden the presence of Eugenia’s lover at the wedding. He had intended leaving Bridgenorth late the previous evening, sleeping at an hotel in Wareborough, and presenting himself at Mr Laurence’s house the following morning in time to see his beautiful Eugenia in her bridesmaid’s bravery and to accompany the wedding party to the church. But two hours before he was to leave the barracks he received a letter which completely changed his plans. It was from his sister, in answer merely, he thought on first seeing the address, to the one he had sent her announcing his engagement to Miss Laurence. He had awaited it with some anxiety; he opened it with considerable misgiving. First of all he came upon a smaller envelope enclosed in the larger. The letter it contained proved, to his surprise, to be from Roma.

"My dear Beauchamp," it began—

"Gertrude has told me the news about you. I am surprised, and yet I am not. Miss Laurence is beautiful and clever and good. What more can I say in the way of congratulation? Perhaps even this much is more than you will care to receive from me, but we are very old friends, Beauchamp, and I am completely in earnest in saying I hope you will both be very happy. If Miss Laurence remembers me, or if you care to tell her who I am, will you tell her, too, that I shall look forward to knowing her, and to really 'making friends,' if she will let me?—Believe me,—

"Yours affectionately,—

"Roma Alice Eyrecourt."

It was a pleasant little letter to receive, pleasant in a special sense to Beauchamp, for it was evident to him that Roma had exerted herself—her tact and discrimination—to render it so, and the reflection soothed his still sore feeling towards her. He felt, too, that she really meant what she said and expressed, and he was right in thinking so. Roma was very sincere in her good wishes.

"So this is the end of it," she had said to herself, after doing her best to pour oil on the waters of Mrs Eyrecourt's extreme disgust and unreasonable indignation. "Well, certainly, though I think it one of the most foolish marriages I ever heard of, which is saying a good deal; though I think them in every particular, except good looks, utterly unsuited to each other—and the chances are it will not take them long to find that out for themselves—yet I must say I never liked Beauchamp as much, or thought as well of him, as just now that he has done this most, foolish thing. And, though I am perfectly certain there is not the ghost of a chance that it will be so, I really do earnestly hope they may be happy."

Then another remembrance occurred to her—"That infatuatedly faithful Mr Thurston, how will he take this, poor man, I wonder?" she thought, smiling slightly as she recalled him, for it is a curious fact that women can never pity Corydon's woes—"He would love, and she would not," without laughing at him a little too, even though he be, apart from Phillida, by no means a ludicrous or contemptible personage.

Beauchamp smiled as he read Roma's sisterly little letter. Then, not without reluctance, he put it aside and took up Mrs Eyrecourt's. The first part was pretty much what he had expected, or at least feared. She began by saying that the news of his engagement had so completely taken her by surprise that she really did not know what to say—perhaps, as he had so entirely avoided consulting her in this most important step, the less she said the better—after which preamble, as might have been expected, she went on to say a great deal. She did not write unkindly or coldly, she was most careful in the few allusions she could not avoid making to his fiancée, to say nothing exaggerated or in bad taste—nothing which could arouse his masculine spirit of contradiction or defiance. Such as it was, and judged "according to the lights" of the woman who had written it and the man to whom it was written, it was by no means a bad letter, hardly even a selfish or one-sided or "wholly worldly" production. The first vehemence of Gertrude's wrath had been expended on poor Roma, a convenient safety-valve, and, thanks to her sympathy and patience, had considerably subsided before Mrs Eyrecourt had arrived at pen and paper. So her brother was fain to confess "there was a good deal of truth in what Gertrude said," and he sighed quite pathetically as he came to this conclusion. Only, and he brightened up again at this, she had not yet seen Eugenia; no doubt once she did so it would be all right. Miss Laurence had but to show herself, and the victory would be achieved; she would find no resistance—it would be a case of simply "walking over the ground" of Mrs Eyrecourt's prejudices. For Gertrude was not a small woman in the sense of any petty jealousy of another's attractions. She was nearly as sensitive as Beauchamp himself to beauty, and upon this he determined to trade.

"I shall not attempt defending myself or the wisdom of what I have done," he reflected. "I shall say nothing at all but that she must wait till she sees Eugenia. Then if she takes a fancy to her she will make a pet of her, enjoy taking her out and all that sort of thing, and it will all be as smooth sailing as possible. Of course Eugenia will throw herself completely into my side of the house, and not bother about Wareborough. That is the beauty of marrying a girl who has seen nothing and is better than her surroundings."

So, sanguinely mused Captain Chancellor, and all the while there was news at the end of his sister's letter which had escaped his observation, news which was to alter the whole colour of his future, which, so far as regarded Mrs Eyrecourt's friendly feelings to Eugenia, could not possibly have come at a worse time. He thought he had read it all, but, taking it up again, he saw that there was a lengthy postscript, written hurriedly, and here and there almost illegibly.

"I was just closing this for the bag," ran the postscript, "when the afternoon letters came. I am so thankful I did not go out; I was very nearly doing so, and then I should have missed the post. There is most distressing news from Halswood. You will hardly believe it, Beauchamp, it seems so frightfully sudden, but it is really true—Herbert Chancellor is dead. My letter is from Addie, poor darling! They are in a terrible state of course. It was some sort of fit or stroke, and he such a young man! But you remember how stout he was growing when they were here. They had only gone to Halswood for a few days to see about re-furnishing it, and poor Addie says her mother will never be able to endure the place again. They want you to go there *at once*, to help them in all sorts of ways. They have no one to look to but that poor sickly boy, Roger, and of course you are the natural person. I must say I feel gratified at their remembering this. They would have written or telegraphed to you direct, but did not know your address, and Addie said she tried to telegraph to me but could not explain. The funeral is to be on Friday, so you have no time to lose. I am going, too, to poor dear Mrs Chancellor as soon as I can, so we shall meet at Halswood to-morrow or the day after."

Then came a second postscript:—

"I almost hesitate now about sending the first part of this letter, but perhaps it is as well to let it go. But do not let

anything I have said hurt you, dearest Beauchamp. We can talk over all so much more satisfactorily, and I am sure you will believe I am only anxious to advise you for your good."

Captain Chancellor started to his feet, threw the letter aside with an impatient exclamation, opened the door, and shouted to his servant to get him a Bradshaw at once and to hurry on with his packing; then returned to his room, deliberately filled and lighted his pipe, and set to work to collect his ideas. First of all he must write to Eugenia, explaining his unavoidable absence on the morrow, then he must find out the next train to Crumby, the great junction whence he must make his way to Halswood. It was very unfortunate, he thought to himself; peculiarly so at this crisis. He was really sorry to hear of Herbert's death—the kindly, prosperous man so suddenly struck down—it was very melancholy and uncomfortable, and, he repeated, most peculiarly unfortunate that it should have happened just now. He understood Gertrude perfectly well; her "accidental" allusion to "that poor sickly Roger," her sudden change to "dearest Beauchamp," and promise of "advice."

"Advice!" exclaimed Captain Chancellor, "what 'advice' do I want? The thing is done—'fait accompli'—and no more to be said about it. Can't she understand that? However, if she doesn't, I'll take care that she does without loss of time."

Then he wrote to Eugenia the letter which chilled her with its apparent indifference, feeling himself the while a rather badly-used person and very much inclined to quarrel with Gertrude.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed, as he glanced again over Mrs Eyrecourt's letter. "'Poor darling Addie!' If anything could be wanting to make me more in earnest about Eugenia—supposing, that is to say, that there were any possibility of drawing back—it would be the sight of that fat girl, with her silly giggle and doll's face."

So Sydney Laurence's wedding-day came and went. It was spent by Beauchamp Chancellor amidst the afflicted family at Halswood; poor Addie, who had truly loved her father, treating him to tears instead of giggles, her widowed mother to lamentations over her desolate state—"these two enormous properties and no male relation to relieve her of the burden of their management," and embarrassingly broad hints of her wishes "that Addie were married to some one she could look upon as a son, some one her dear father would have approved of," till Beauchamp found himself devoutly wishing he had made any excuse under heaven or earth to have avoided this painful visit to his relatives. For he was really sorry for them all; for poor Roger, whom he now saw for the first time—about whose delicate health there could be no doubt, and whose heart seemed broken by this great sorrow—perhaps most of all, and would have been glad to have cheered them.

"They are all so fond of you, Beauchamp," said Mrs Eyrecourt, when they were alone together, the evening after the funeral—Captain Chancellor was to leave the next morning—"they seem to look to you so naturally. It is really very gratifying to find that Herbert had made you Roger's guardian. He is terribly delicate, poor boy!"

"He *is* delicate, no doubt," said Beauchamp, rather shortly, "but these delicate boys sometimes turn out perfectly strong men."

"Sometimes," said Gertrude, doubtfully. "He may do so, of course, but if he were my son I should be very unhappy about him. I should be very glad to see him grow stronger, poor boy, for his own sake and his mother's, but it looks to me very uncertain. That is just the trial, Beauchamp—the trial to me, I mean, of your position now—its uncertainty. Of course I cannot pretend that your interests are not for nearer and dearer to me than Roger's,"—she was too wise to attempt to speak any but her true feelings to one who knew her so well as her brother, even had she been addicted to protestations of disinterestedness, which she was not—"I cannot pretend that it would not be very delightful to me to see you the head of our family, the owner of this beautiful place, but my great dread for you is that of an uncertain position. If I could but have secured for you what would have placed you above very much caring how things here turn out! That is my great wish. That is what Mrs Chancellor has the comfort of feeling with regard to her daughters' future, whether Roger lives or dies."

"Everything is uncertain," observed Beauchamp, "and there are some contingencies it is perhaps better not to think about." Mrs Eyrecourt looked at him inquiringly and a little suspiciously: she did not understand this new tone of philosophy of his. He went on speaking: "Not that I quite know what you are alluding to when you speak of placing my future above uncertainty?"

He had a pretty shrewd notion what she was thinking of; her last few words had shown him that he was in for the "talking it over," the "advice" she had volunteered, and he felt anxious to hear all she had to say and have done with it. Gertrude hesitated.

"Suppose we take a turn outside, up and down the avenue—it looks tempting, and it is woefully gloomy indoors," said Beauchamp, glancing round the room in which they were standing. It was a depressing room, a library crowded to excess with dingy volumes—many of them doubtless of great value, all of them originally handsome and well-bound, but bearing about them an unread, uncared-for look, filling the air with that faintly musty smell perceptible in libraries seldom entered but by servants, where fires are only lighted periodically to "keep out the damp," where the sweet summer air but seldom enters. Of all rooms, a library lived in and loved, where the books are dear old friends, the window-seats little sanctuaries for quiet thought or earnest study—of all rooms perhaps, such a one is the most delightful. But the library at Halswood had been deserted and disregarded for many a long day. The Chancellors were not a studious or scholarly race, still they were not without refinement and cultivation; but for many years past Halswood had been the home of a half imbecile old man whose only acute intelligence had been that of hoarding, and the traces of his long neglect were everywhere visible.

Outside, pacing up and down the long avenue, whose grand old chestnuts were the boast of the country-side, things certainly looked more attractive.

"It *is* a beautiful old place," said Beauchamp, stopping suddenly, and looking about him appreciatively, "though the house is desperately ugly. It looks as if it had been cut out of the middle of a street and stuck down here in this

beautiful park by mistake. And the portico looks as if it, again, had nothing whatever to do with the house. I hate those great pillars so!—they look so meaningless. When was this house built, Gertrude, do you know?"

"Quite recently—that is to say, at the end of the last century," said Gertrude, "when everything was hideous. The old house was very picturesque; more like an enlarged edition of Winsley. Still, this house is a very *good* one, Beauchamp. Some of the rooms—the drawing-rooms—are very fine."

"Oh yes, it's well enough inside. No doubt it might be made very habitable," replied her brother, indifferently. Then, with an effort, "What is it you want to say to me, Gertrude? Oh yes, by-the-bye, I remember. I was saying just now I did not quite understand your allusions to my future—to something you had had in your mind about it."

"I did not intend to say it," replied Gertrude; "it was only accidentally I said what I did. Of course you must see what I mean—what a bright future of assured comfort and ease, whatever happens or does not happen here, would be before you if you chose."

"Yes, I see what you mean now," answered Beauchamp. "There is no use beating about the bush, Gertrude. Once for all I tell you plainly that if I hadn't a halfpenny in the world I could not marry Adelaide. I could not stand her a week. I should run away from her, and then where should we all be? No, truly, if any idea of this kind has increased your opposition to my marrying elsewhere I beg you to dismiss it. *That* I never could have done."

Gertrude sighed. "You do not yourself know what you would or would not have done had there been no other influences about you, Beauchamp. I don't understand you. First there was Roma, now, barely two months after that was made an end of, you want me to approve of your engaging yourself to another girl. You are very changeable and inconsistent."

Beauchamp had had a second thought about the expediency of quarrelling with his sister. So, though her accusation annoyed him, as he felt she had some grounds for making it, he kept down his vexation and answered quietly—

"I am sorry to have appeared so to you. As regards Roma, I own that I quite see now that that was a mistake from the beginning; the less said about it the better.

"As regards my present engagement—" he hesitated. "No, Gertrude, I don't expect you as yet to *approve* of it, but I hope you may do so in time. Wait till you see Eugenia."

"Seeing her cannot possibly alter the fact of your imprudence, though it may explain it," answered Mrs Eyrecourt, coldly. "Remember all I wrote to you. Oh, Beauchamp, do think what you are about! Even for *her* sake you should do so. You are not the sort of man to make the best of an unsuitable marriage when the time comes for you to awake to its being so."

"I am perfectly awake already to everything that can be said about it," replied Captain Chancellor, a little sullenly. "The long and the short of it is that she isn't rich; that is the only 'unsuitableness' you can possibly suspect."

"Not the only one, though of course it is an important one," said Gertrude. "You have rushed into this so rashly that I have every reason to suspect the whole affair. She is young and pretty; that is about all you can bring forward."

"We shall have enough to live on. You need not be afraid I intend to make any of my friends suffer for my imprudence," answered Beauchamp, hastily. They were approaching very near the edge of a quarrel now.

"Then you allow it is imprudent?" exclaimed Gertrude, quickly. But Beauchamp saw his mistake and changed his tone.

"Yes," he said, "yes, in one sense I suppose I do. But, prudent or imprudent, Gertrude, it is *done*, absolutely and irrevocably. I have a great deal to thank you for in the past, and I shall be very sorry if my marriage causes any coldness between us. I shall thank you very much if you will be kind to my wife—she will have a good deal to learn and will appreciate kindness. But you must decide how things are to be between us."

"Oh, of course I don't mean to *quarrel* with you, Beauchamp," answered Mrs Eyrecourt, stiffly. "It is rather late in the day for that sort of thing. I shall be glad to see your wife when you are married, but I can't make any promises of romantic friendship and so on. I hope you will be happy, and I shall of course show any kindness I can to—Miss Laurence when she is my sister-in-law; but you must take into account the great disparity between her and me—of age and other things—and don't expect impossibilities. It is best to speak plainly, you know, and then you will not expect too much. I shall do all in my power, I assure you."

"Thank you," said Beauchamp, but without much gratification in his tone. He felt dissatisfied and uncomfortable, vexed with Gertrude, and yet more vexed that he could not exactly blame her. Her sentiments were neither exaggerated nor unreasonable; they were very much the same as what he had himself often expressed on similar subjects. Yet she had managed to take the bloom off his prospects, to insinuate a very unpleasant misgiving that after all he had *not* known what he was about. Gertrude read his feelings pretty correctly, but she derived little satisfaction from so doing. The thing was too far gone, she feared; of course there was the chance of the proverbial slip before the marriage actually took place, but so slender a contingency was not to be taken into account.

"No," thought Mrs Eyrecourt, "it is sure to go through. Undesirable things always do, and these Wareborough people know what they are about."

In her heart she was not without some feminine curiosity about Eugenia herself, her belongings, and the history of the whole affair, but the tone she had taken up would not allow her to show any such undignified interest. So Beauchamp and she walked up and down for a few minutes in silence; then Gertrude discovered it was growing chilly

and returned to the house, leaving her brother to his cigar and solitude.

Volume Two—Chapter Eight.

Lookers-on.

Ah, love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
...
Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss?

Swinburne.

Mrs Eyrecourt drove her brother to the station the next morning in Addie's pretty pony-carriage, which had been sent from Wylingham for the two or three weeks the Chancellors had originally intended to spend at Halswood. Gertrude was gentle and affectionate, anxious apparently to prove to Beauchamp the truth of her words that, whatever she might think of his conduct, it was too late in the day for any talk of quarrelling or coldness between them. She studiously avoided the subject of the previous evening's conversation; only just at the last, when their drive was all but at an end, she asked one question.

"You did not tell me, Beauchamp, when it—when your marriage—is likely to be?" she said, with some hesitation. "Is any time fixed? Do you think it will be soon?"

"Yes," answered Captain Chancellor, promptly; "I hope it will be very soon. Next month, if I can get leave, or in June. Long engagements are senseless when there is no reason for them."

"Only it is not always the lady and her friends are so obliging about making their preparations in a hurry," observed Mrs Eyrecourt. It was the first snappish remark she had allowed herself, and she regretted it instantly, though Beauchamp did not allow her to see that it had nettled him.

"No," he said, coolly; "but then few girls are so free from home ties as Eugenia. Her life will be very lonely now, for her only sister is married, and I don't see why there should be any delay."

The truth was that the subject of the time for their marriage had not yet been alluded to. He had answered his sister on the spur of the moment, from a sort of wish to prove to her how definite the thing was, how useless any remonstrance or interference would be, and it had not at the moment occurred to him that by what he had said he had given occasion for any inference of undignified haste on the part of Eugenia's family.

"Then I suppose it is possible—or probable even—that I shall not see you again as a bachelor?" said Gertrude, trying to speak lightly.

"That depends on your own movements. I have promised Mrs Chancellor to run down to Wylingham for a couple of days before long. Perhaps you may be with them?"

Mrs Eyrecourt shook her head. "I don't think so," she replied. "We go to town next week, and I cannot leave Roma alone there. Besides, I rather doubt their going back to Wylingham. I expect Mrs Chancellor will go to the sea-side next week. Roger is not the least fit for school again, and they say sea-air suits him."

"Poor boy!" said Beauchamp; and they were both silent for a minute or two. Then he spoke again. "Mrs Chancellor will let me know if she changes her plans, I have no doubt. But in any case, Gertrude, I shall see you before long? You will come to the marriage?"

"Shall you wish it? I should not like to be invited merely out of civility," said Mrs Eyrecourt. "And, besides, there will probably be a great many of Miss Laurence's relations at it. They may not care about any more."

"Nonsense!" said Beauchamp, wondering inwardly at the extraordinary attraction the making suffering saints of themselves seems to have for even otherwise sensible women; "nonsense, Gertrude! Of *course* I shall wish it, and of course Eugenia will too. And she has very few relations, as I have told you. Certainly I shall expect you."

"Very well, dear Beauchamp; we shall see," replied his sister, with unwonted meekness, and so they parted.

Gertrude had done one thing by what she had said to her brother—she had hastened the very catastrophe she was most anxious to avert. When Captain Chancellor, a few days after his return from Halswood, went over to Wareborough for a night, it was with the determination to hurry on matters as fast as possible, and to fix the earliest date practicable for his marriage. He hardly understood why he did so, and, if he tried to find a reason for this impetuosity, pretended to himself that it was the proper thing in the circumstances. That he was really influenced by any doubt of himself, any misgivings as to the result, in his case, of a long engagement, the course of which might see events greatly affecting his future, he would not allow even to himself. And there was, perhaps, some excuse for his deliberate self-deception, for no sooner was he in Eugenia's presence and under the influence of her beauty and sweetness than every shadow of a cloud disappeared from his horizon.

So it was decided that they should be married in June. Eugenia was so completely under her lover's influence that whatever he proposed seemed to her wisest and best; and though some suggestions were mooted by Mr Laurence as to the advisability of the young people's "seeing a little more of each other" before entering on that most solemn of bonds, companionship for life, there was no one at hand to support him in such an old-fashioned idea, and Captain Chancellor's opinion that the deed "were well done quickly" encountered no important opposition. For Sydney and

her husband were away on the clerical honeymoon of four weeks barring a Sunday, and only returned home, to begin life in their modest little house in a Wareborough terrace, in time to learn that all was settled, down to the day itself and the number of the bridesmaids.

"As good as married already, you see, Sydney," said Frank. "Well, I only hope it will not prove a case of 'repenting at leisure'—that's all I've got to say."

"Frank," exclaimed the young wife, in surprise and alarm, "what do you mean? You have *always* spoken as if you liked Captain Chancellor and thought highly of him. That has been one of my great comforts."

"So it has wanted comfort, has it, the poor little thing?" said Frank, affecting to pat Sydney consolingly. "Why didn't it say so before?"

"Don't, please, dear Frank," she said, earnestly, gently disengaging herself and smoothing the hair his hand had disarranged; "don't laugh at me when I am so serious in my anxiety about Eugenia."

"I am anxious about her too," returned her husband, "but don't mistake me. I am far from meaning to infer that I don't think well of Chancellor. He's by no means a bad fellow, but neither is he a piece of manly perfection, as I fancy Eugenia imagines. She really is so silly, Sydney, so extreme and exaggerated, I am afraid she is sure to have a grand smash some day. She rushes into things so frantically, and it would be perfect waste of breath to try to make her hear reason. And think how little she and Chancellor really know of each other."

"You don't need to remind me of that," said Sydney, sadly. "Still I hardly see that a longer engagement would have mended matters. They could not have seen much of each other now he is at Bridgenorth, and after all—"

"After all, all marriages are a good deal of a toss-up," said Frank, lightly, "ours of course excepted. But don't fret yourself about Eugenia. She and everyone else must learn their own lessons, I suppose, and I don't see that there is anything to be done to help her."

Sydney sighed and said no more. There was a mixture of truth in what Frank said, but yet on this one subject the sympathy between herself and Gerald was greater than she found in her husband, only, unfortunately, her knowledge of her brother-in-law's secret forbade her appealing to him for comfort or advice. So she was fain to keep her fears to herself and try to see her sister's future as hopefully as she could.

And time went on; the days and weeks flew rapidly by and the marriage-day drew near. On the Sunday preceding it Captain Chancellor came over from Bridgenorth for a few hours. It seemed to Eugenia that he looked out of spirits.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked anxiously, when they were alone together.

He looked a little surprised at her inquiry.

"What makes you think there is?" he answered, it seemed to her evasively. "No, there is nothing the matter—except, oh yes, by-the-bye, I must not forget to tell you—you will be sorry to hear my sister cannot be with us on Thursday after all."

"Your sister, Mrs Eyrecourt," exclaimed Eugenia. "Oh, I am so sorry!"

She hardly liked to ask the reason of this sudden change of intention; Beauchamp was far from communicative about his family affairs, and Eugenia knew little of Mrs Eyrecourt beyond her name.

"Yes," he replied, "it is a pity. I only heard from her this morning. And oh, by-the-bye, she enclosed a note for you, not knowing your address."

He felt for his pocket-book, which contained the note. It was a mere civil expression of apology for being obliged at the last to give up thoughts of being present at the ceremony; it began "Dear Miss Laurence," and ended "Yours sincerely." The reason given for her unavoidable absence was "the serious illness of a near relative." Eugenia looked puzzled.

"A near relative—" she said, inquiringly. "Some one on Mr Eyrecourt's side of the house, I suppose."

"Mr Eyrecourt is dead," said Beauchamp. "Oh yes, I know, but I mean it must be a relation of his who is seriously ill. If it were a relation of *yours*, it might be rather awkward, might it not? What should we do?"

"Put off the marriage?" suggested Captain Chancellor, laughing, but not heartily. "Would you like that, Eugenia? Well, as it happens, the person in question *is* a near relation of mine too—the nearest male relation of my own family in the world. You remember my telling you of the sudden death of a cousin of mine about two months ago—Mr Chancellor, of Halswood? This boy who is so ill now is his only son."

"Is he *very* ill?" asked Eugenia.

"Yes," answered her fiancé, with a slight shortness in his manner, giving the girl the impression that he disliked being questioned on the subject. ("How fond he must be of his poor young cousin!" was her simple interpretation of his unresponsiveness.) "Yes, I fancy so. I don't suppose he can live long."

"Then," persisted Eugenia, her colour rising to her cheeks in spite of her endeavour to be perfectly calm and "sensible," "then should you not be with him, Beauchamp? Would it not be better—more—more seemly, perhaps, really to put off our marriage?"

She made the suggestion in all good faith and unselfish anxiety in no way to add to what she now imagined must be the cause of her lover's constraint and depression; she was little prepared for the effect of her words.

Captain Chancellor had been standing at a little distance from her, idly fingering a book that lay on the table while she read Mrs Eyrecourt's note. As she spoke he turned round, crossed the room quickly to where she sat, and stood before her with a dark look on his fair face, an angry light in his blue eyes.

"Are you in earnest, Eugenia? Do you mean what you say?" he exclaimed, in a hard, unpleasant tone. "Do you know that what you have said is a most extraordinary thing for a girl to say to—to the man she is going to marry, two days before the time fixed for doing so? Do you really mean that you are ready to catch at any excuse for putting off our marriage indefinitely? Perhaps you *really* mean that you would like to put it off altogether—if so, you had better say so."

A more suspicious or sophisticated girl would have taken fright at this strange distortion of the simple meaning of her words, might have guessed it to be a ruse on the part of her fiancé to throw upon her the blame of what he himself was not brave enough to do in a straightforward fashion; a girl of a haughtier spirit than Eugenia would have felt nothing but indignation at the unmerited reproach, and in nine cases out of ten the "lovers' quarrel" certain to ensue would have ended in something the reverse of "very pretty." But Eugenia was too single-minded in her faith and devotion to feel anything but astonishment and distress.

"Beauchamp," she exclaimed, in a voice brimming over with tender reproach, her brown eyes filling with tears, "oh, Beauchamp, how can you speak so to me? You know, you *must* know, I only meant exactly what I said. I was afraid of being, as it were, in your way just at this crisis, when you may feel you should be with your cousin. I didn't know there was anything 'extraordinary' in what I said. I wanted to be unselfish."

"But it isn't unselfish to propose such a thing to me in that cool way, as if it would cost you nothing at all," said Captain Chancellor, with a sudden change of tone. "Oh, my darling, you do look so frightfully pretty with the tears in your eyes! Oh, you cold-blooded, aggravating little creature! Do you think that all the cousins in the world may not fall ill and die for what I care when I have you beside me? Don't you think it possible I may want to be married whether you do or not?"

He had thrown his arms round her by now, was looking down into her face with all the old "irresistibleness" of eyes and lips, every trace of annoyance melted like snow before the sun.

"Yes," she whispered, her mouth still quivering, "I suppose you do, or," with an attempt at playfulness, "you wouldn't have asked me. And I don't *want* to put it off, Beauchamp, for it isn't as if you were living here and I could often see you. Then I shouldn't mind. But every time you go away I can't help fancying something may go wrong and you may never come back. And it would be dreadful for you to go away—ever so far off, isn't it?—just now. I should feel dreadfully superstitious about it,"—she gave a little shiver—"oh, it would be miserable!"

"Yes, and all the trousseau, and the remarks of Mrs Grundy and Mr Jones Robinson!" said Captain Chancellor.

"*Those* things would not trouble me much," said Eugenia, quickly. "I wish you would not think all women are like that, Beauchamp."

But he was in a good humour again by now, so he stroked her pretty hair fondly and told her, whatever being "like that" might mean, he certainly did not think any other woman was like her. And she smiled and was quite happy again, and asked him to promise never to look at her so coldly or speak so harshly, which he did.

"But something must have put you out a little, Beauchamp," she went on, waxing bolder. "I thought so when you first came in. Are you much troubled about your cousin?"

"I am sorry, very sorry, both for him and for his family," replied Captain Chancellor. "But do believe me, Eugenia, there is nothing wrong."

And with this she had to be content. Not that she distrusted him; his tone sounded perfectly sincere, and she did not in the least suspect him of wishing to deceive her. She only fancied that he did not like to cloud the present to her by folly sharing with her his sorrow and anxiety, and this seemed to her a mistake.

A little silence ensued, for Eugenia would not press her inquiries further. Suddenly Beauchamp spoke again.

"I am really losing my head to-day," he said. "I had another letter to tell you of, that I received at the same time as my sister's." He felt in his pocket again. "Ah yes, here it is."

He glanced at it for a moment, then put it into her hands. It was from Roma, written in a very different tone from Mrs Eyrecourt's stiff little note, and, though nominally addressed to Beauchamp, evidently intended for them both.

"An idea has struck me," wrote Roma, "that though Gertrude cannot now be at Wareborough for your marriage, I might manage to be there instead of her, if you and Eugenia (I may call her so, may I not?) would like it. I do not like the idea of no one of your own side of the house being present. We leave town on Tuesday—Gertrude, as she will have told you, and the children, to join the Chancellors at Torquay, and I to go north again for a month. This is sooner than we had intended, so I have not made any plans for my journey, but I am sure Mary Dalrymple will take me in, if you will ask her about it. Please answer by return, and then I can write to her myself. I do hope my proposal will not be unwelcome."

"How very nice of her!" exclaimed Eugenia, with sparkling eyes. "I am delighted she is coming. Of course we should have asked her at first if we had known she would care to come. I am so pleased, are not you, Beauchamp?"

"Oh, yes, I don't mind. I have no objection to her coming," said Captain Chancellor, indifferently and somewhat absently. He had taken another letter from his pocket and had been glancing over it while Eugenia read Roma's note. Now he folded it up and put it away, but the perusal of it seemed to have brought a little cloud again to his face.

"Beauchamp, you are very ungrateful. You don't deserve your cousin—Miss Eyrecourt I mean—to be so good to you," said Eugenia, reproachfully.

"Don't I? I fancy I fully deserve all the goodness I get from *her*," replied Beauchamp, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone which made Eugenia tell him he had certainly been rubbed the wrong way by some one or something, he was so moody and captious, which little scolding he took in good part and exerted himself to a greater appearance of amiability, till the few hours of his visit were over and he was due again at Bridgenorth.

It was Mrs Eyrecourt's letter that had irritated and excited him. In it she told him of Roger's unmistakably hopeless state, mingling regrets that he could not be with the poor boy, "who is so fond of you, you know," with hints of her sisterly interest in the vast change impending in his own prospects. "I cannot pretend not to think of what is coming as it affects you, dearest Beauchamp. I fear I have always been inclined to be ambitious for you, and now when my pride in you seems likely to have the gratification of seeing you in such a position as the head of your house has always had the *power*, if he had the will, to fill, I fear I shall not be easily content. I shall expect great things of you. But I am forgetting—I must not run on as if I still held the first place with you. Other ties and influences must now naturally come before mine. And oh, how earnestly I trust I may agree with you that you have done wisely just now! I own that I felt hurt at your having so completely refrained from consulting or confiding in me, but I have tried to put aside all such personal feeling and to believe you may have had reason for acting so strangely to me. So do not imagine that I am the least prejudiced, and remember always that your interests can be dearer to no one than to your sister."

It was all very reasonable and natural and sisterly, and no doubt Beauchamp should have felt properly grateful and gratified. But all the same the immediate effect of the letter was to make him very cross; and but for Eugenia's simplicity and unsuspecting sweetness, this last visit to Wareborough might have been a last indeed. And had such a catastrophe occurred, it is hardly to be supposed that Mrs Eyrecourt would have taken it much to heart.

Nothing of the kind came to pass, however. Thursday arrived, a bright, sunny day; the guests respectively made their appearance, and Eugenia Laurence was married to Beauchamp Chancellor without more ado, finding it, when it came to the point, a harder matter to say farewell to father and sister and to "home," even though only a dingy old house in a dull Wareborough street, than she had at all been able to anticipate. And it was in tears after all that the bride, whose fondest hopes were realised, who believed herself to be most happy among women, left her father's house, henceforward to be to him very desolate.

"Why can't people get over all their crying beforehand and in private, I wonder," said Mr Thurston, rather gruffly, as he stood among the other guests to watch the departure of the hero and heroine of the day. He spoke half to himself, but the young lady standing beside him made answer to his remark.

"It is no real test of feeling to cry when one is excited. I fancy it is a mere physical result of the sort of fuss a girl is kept in for some time before. Where a bride is *really* unhappy she would probably exert herself to hide her feelings."

"Then you think Eugenia Laurence—I beg her pardon, Mrs Chancellor—is *really* happy? At least that is the inference from what you say," inquired Gerald.

"I did not mean to imply anything," answered Roma, lightly. "I only said her crying or not crying had nothing to say to her real feelings. But if you want to know my real opinion—I am almost a stranger to her, remember—I do think she is very, perfectly happy."

She raised her keen but kindly dark eyes to Mr Thurston as she spoke, and looked him full in the face. "Far better for him to have done at once and for ever with all sentimentalism about her," was the thought in her mind. "She is thoroughly and pathetically in love with Beauchamp and has never cared a straw for Mr Thurston, and the more completely he realises this the better for every one concerned." Nevertheless she rather expected to detect some sign of remaining soreness—he had been so very deeply in earnest about the girl, the Eugenia of his dreams, when she had last seen him that night at Brighton at the Montmorrises—to find him shrink from her unpalatable expression of belief in the perfect happiness of Beauchamp's wife. She was disappointed. Mr Thurston only looked grave, and his voice was completely free from effort or constraint when he spoke again.

"I am very glad, very thankful that you think so," he said. "I am very much in earnest in my hopes that she will be happy, that she has chosen well for herself. And of course, though you know her slightly, you must know him—Captain Chancellor—well, therefore your opinion has great weight with me."

His eyes, the deep-set, penetrating grey eyes, whose expression, now she saw them again, seemed curiously familiar to her—were fixed on her this time. Roma felt uncomfortable; it was not easy to allow one's words to be taken for more than their value under the scrutiny of Gerald Thurston's gaze. A slight look of embarrassment crept over her face. "Yes," she began, "Beauchamp and I are very old friends; very good friends too. I have a great regard for him. I think he has a great many good qualities but—I did not exactly mean—I don't quite—" she floundered more and more desperately as she became conscious of the increasing gravity of her hearer's expression, then suddenly she came to a dead stop.

Mr Thurston did not appear to pity her confusion. He remained silent for a minute, as if half expecting her to speak again, then he said, quietly—

"I wish you would not be afraid of telling me what you really do mean. We seem fated to be confidential with each other at rather short notice, don't we? And I don't think you will consider my interest in what we were speaking of

unnatural.”

“No, indeed I do not,” returned Roma, cordially. “And I should be very sorry for you to misunderstand me or attach more weight to what I may say or not say than it is worth. Only when I said I thought Eugenia perfectly happy, I suppose I meant that she thinks herself so.”

“But thinking herself so is being so, is it not?” said Gerald, smiling slightly.

“Yes,” said Roma, doubtfully, “I suppose it is. But, to speak quite plainly,” she went on, growing tired of beating about the bush and not altogether relishing Mr Thurston’s pertinacity, “what I really mean is that I should not consider the fate of being Beauchamp’s wife the happiest in the world. But Eugenia thinks so, and long may she continue to do so.”

She spoke with a little impatience. Gerald felt puzzled.

“But you like him, don’t you?” he said. “He has been almost a sort of brother to you, has he not?”

“Yes, I like him and I think well of him. I wouldn’t for worlds have you imagine I do not. But I think Eugenia in many ways too good for him, and if she ever wakes to this the chances are she will not do him justice *then*, any more than she does now.” She spoke sadly and seriously. Mr Thurston understood her now, and saw that no shadow of personal feeling had influenced her former speech. His face, too, was grave as he answered her.

“But is she certain to awake?” he said.

“Of that you can judge better than I,” answered Roma.

“And, after all, sooner or later everyone must awake,” he went on, as if speaking to himself.

“Except those who have never been asleep,” said Roma. “The longer I live the more thankful I am that I was born an eminently practical person, in no way inclined to exaggerated belief in any one. There is not a grain of tragedy in my composition.”

“I remember your saying something of that kind to me the first time we met,” said Gerald. “I was rather sceptical then, and I don’t know that I am in a more believing frame of mind now. I don’t think you quite know the meaning of your words.”

“Oh yes, I do,” said Roma, laughing. “However, the subject is not worth discussing.”

Gerald saw she did not care for more talk about herself, and when he spoke again it was in a different tone.

“Are they—Captain Chancellor and his wife—likely to be much in your neighbourhood?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I hardly think so. Their plans are rather uncertain, I fancy,” replied Roma, remembering the frail, fast-waning life which alone stood between Beauchamp and a very different future to that anticipated by Eugenia and her friends. “Of course as long as he stays in the army they must go wherever he is sent. Still, no doubt I shall see them sometimes, and,” she hesitated a little, “if my friendship is worth having, you may be sure Eugenia shall have it, such as it is. I think I have fallen a good deal in love with her myself,” she smiled, and then blushed a little, as she remembered to whom she was speaking.

“Thank you,” said Gerald, as fervently as if he had been seeking the goodwill of a new relation for a young, inexperienced sister.

Roma stayed two days at Wareborough before continuing her journey north. She saw Mr Thurston again once or twice, but their talk was confined to general subjects, and Eugenia was not mentioned, save casually, by either of them.

Volume Two—Chapter Nine.

A Short Honeymoon.

And the sunshine you recall—
Ah, my dear, but is it true?
Did such sunshine ever fall
Out of any sky so blue?
Half I think you dreamed it all.

M. Brotherton.

They were in Paris. It was oppressively hot, glaringly sunny. Under any other circumstances Captain Chancellor would have grumbled outrageously at the heat and the dust and the glare, but in a bridegroom of barely a fortnight, greater philosophy and good temper were to be expected. So he contented himself with groaning within reasonable bounds, and laughing a little at Eugenia’s extraordinary energy and powers of enjoyment, for to her, the untravelled, impressionable English girl, it was all beyond expression charming and intensely interesting. She felt herself in veritable fairyland, she had never before imagined that life could be so enchanting. There was novelty and fascination for her at every step, even the sound of a foreign tongue heard for the first time with the dainty crispness of Parisian accent was delightful to her ears; the shops were not shops, but bewildering masses of lovely things

arranged to perfection; the churches, above all, were so beautiful, the music so sublime, that Eugenia wondered how any one living within their reach could ever feel anything but "good."

That her husband thoroughly sympathised in her enjoyment she of course took for granted, and for some time nothing occurred to shake her in this happy belief. It was true to a great extent that he did so, though true in a sense that would have been perfectly incomprehensible to her had any one attempted to explain it. But after a little time Beauchamp began to get rather tired of Eugenia's untireableness. It is entertaining enough to act spectator to a country cousin's ecstasies, especially if the country cousin in question be a refined, intelligent, and very beautiful girl; but of this amusement, as of most others, Captain Chancellor began to find it was possible to have enough. Then he had a morbid horror of any approach to "gushingness," and there were times at which it appeared to him that, but for her grace and beauty, Eugenia might have fallen under the ban of this terrible charge. And most of all, perhaps, his young wife annoyed him more than once by asking him questions he was obliged to confess he could not answer—questions about some "stupid old picture or other," which in reality his taste was far too uncultivated to admire, though he would, have shrunk from confessing to such a barbarism; or she would let her thoughts drift, back to the old days—days about which, English girl though she was, she had read, much and imagined more—and her eyes would sparkle and colour glow, and sometimes even a tear or two would make its unbidden appearance as she recalled in fancy the glittering old-world pageants, the tremendous tragedies, the extraordinary fluctuations of national weal and woe of which this Paris—wonderful, beautiful Paris—had been the scene. And at such moments she would look to her companion for sympathy in her enthusiasm, would refer to him, perhaps, for more accurate information about the subject or event momentarily uppermost in her mind; and once, when with a little disappointment—arising not from the failure of the information, but from the evident want of sympathy, she turned away somewhat sadly, the few words, which escaped her, "I wish papa were here!" irritated Beauchamp more than he afterwards liked to remember, for his answer had been chilling in the extreme.

"I am really not a walking biography or history, Eugenia," he had said. "And, besides, I think it is pedantic and affected of you to chatter so about such things. It's not at all in your line, I assure you."

Afterwards he tried to soften what he had said.

"I did not mean to speak unkindly to-day when we were at the Luxembourg," he began. "You know that I should never wish to do so, don't you, dearest? I must confess I have two especial *bêtes noires*, and I could not endure to see the least taint of either in my wife."

"What are they?" asked Eugenia, quietly.

"Learned women and gushing young ladies," he answered. "Now don't be hurt, dear. There is nothing of the kind about you really, only you see I want you to be *quite* perfect."

Eugenia did not answer at once. When she spoke her voice did not sound quite like itself.

"I knew you had sometimes thought me too demonstrative," she said; "'gushing' I suppose is the only word for it, but I do *so* dislike it! But as for thinking myself 'learned'—oh, Beauchamp, you cannot mean that! I, that every day of my life am more and more deploring my ignorance! How could you think me capable of such folly?"

"I did not think you capable of it," answered Beauchamp, slightly nettled. "I only said your manner might make other people think so if you did not take care. And there is another thing I want to say to you, Eugenia. It is really not absolutely necessary for you to tell everybody we meet that you have never been in Paris before. Those people I introduced to you to-day, for instance—Miss Fretville and her brother—I heard you telling them you had not only never been here before, but that you had never been out of England. What business is it of theirs? Why in the world should you expose our private affairs to every casual acquaintance?"

"I had no idea what I said could vex you," said Eugenia, humbly, but with considerable astonishment. "Indeed, I could hardly have avoided it. Miss Fretville asked me if I did not think some street or other wonderfully improved by some new buildings—I forget what—and if I did not think the Empress had grown much stouter, and ever so many little things like that—you know the sort of things people make talk about at first—and I was obliged to say I had not been here before. Surely it would have been worse to have pretended I knew about things I had never seen? It is no crime never to have been out of England."

There was a little spice of self-assertion in the last sentences which hardly accorded with Captain Chancellor's notion of wifely submission.

"Crime!" he repeated. "Nonsense! You know quite well what I mean, only you are so exaggerated. Of course any one that knows you and the quiet way you have been brought up and all that, would not be surprised at your having seen so little; but there is a sort of bravado in decrying one's antecedents unnecessarily, which appears to me the extreme of bad taste."

"*Truly*, Beauchamp, I don't understand you," said Eugenia earnestly. "I am very sorry for having annoyed you,"—here her voice for the first time faltered a little—"I will try never to do so again in the same way, but—but I do think you fancy things a little. I was not thinking of my 'antecedents' in any way. I simply answered what I was asked. But I am very sorry—very, very sorry I vexed you." The words came very brokenly now and the brown eyes grew suspiciously dewy.

"Never mind about it any more, then. There is nothing to look miserable about, you silly child," said Beauchamp, beginning to think he had, perhaps, spoken too strongly. "Tears in your eyes! Oh, Eugenia, I believe you know you are irresistible when you cry! But don't, dear, you really mustn't. You would not wish me to be afraid of telling you any little thing that I should like you to alter?"

"No, of course not," answered Eugenia, stifling her wounded feeling and endeavouring to smile in return for his caresses. "Of course not, but only—"

"But only you are a silly child," said her husband, interrupting her. "By-the-bye, Eugenia, I have been quite surprised to hear how well you speak French; your accent is excellent. No one would suppose you had never been out of England unless you told it."

"We had a French governess," said Eugenia, "and it is very easy to learn to speak French fairly. Papa cared more about German. Of course German is more of a study than French; it opens the door to so much; so many books suffer in the translation."

"Quite a mistake to put German before French," said Captain Chancellor, decidedly. "French will carry you all over the Continent, and any girl who speaks it easily will do very well. There are plenty of English books to read on any subject that comes within a woman's sphere."

Eugenia had it on her lips to give her husband some of her father's opinions on the vexed question he had referred to, but on second thoughts refrained. Beauchamp would be certain to disagree with her, might, not improbably, ridicule her notions as high-flown and exaggerated, would-be "strong-minded" and altogether absurd, and such ridicule she had not yet learnt to bear with equanimity. So she said no more, and during the remainder of their stay in Paris she conducted herself on all occasions of sightseeing with the nearest approach to amiable impassiveness to which she could attain.

A sudden end came to the honeymoon. One morning there came to Beauchamp a letter in his sister's handwriting. He opened it, glanced at its contents, then, happening to look up and seeing that Eugenia was looking at him with some anxiety—for a certain eagerness in his manner had roused in her a suspicion that the letter was of unusual interest—he said something indistinct about returning immediately and hurriedly left the room. Eugenia felt a little startled, a little curious, and a very little hurt that her husband's first impulse when anything of more than ordinary interest occurred to him should be to shun rather than seek her sympathy. It never entered her mind to guess the nature of the news contained in Mrs Eyrecourt's letter. Once or twice when they first left home she had asked Beauchamp if he had heard how "that poor boy his cousin" was, but Captain Chancellor had seemed to shrink from the subject; and out of regard to this feeling of his, she, influenced also by a suspicion that but for her he would have been beside the invalid, had refrained from further allusion to it, and in the excitement of the last few weeks she had almost forgotten ever having heard of Roger at all. So she finished her breakfast without any serious misgiving, enjoying, with a zest so keen as to be a little surprising to herself, a letter from Sydney full of home news, news of their daily doings and commonplace life, the life which but a few months before, Eugenia Laurence had despised as dull and dreary beyond endurance!

Then she sat down to answer Sydney's letter at once, feeling as if she could do so more cheerfully and satisfactorily while the home feeling was fresh upon her. For sometimes lately—quite lately—it had cost her a little effort to write to Sydney; why, she had never tried to define.

She had only written half a page when Beauchamp rejoined her. She looked up quickly, then went on with her letter, afraid of appearing to force his confidence. But even the glance, momentary as it had been, had shown her a new expression in her husband's face, a look of repressed excitement such as she had never seen there before. Her instinct had been right; something had happened. At all times acutely sensitive to any fluctuation in the human atmosphere surrounding her, a sort of thrill now seemed to vibrate through every nerve. Spite of herself the hand shook that held the pen, and a large blot fell on the paper before her. A little exclamation escaped her; she glanced up quickly and found that Captain Chancellor was looking at her fixedly; looking at her, but with an absent, preoccupied expression, as if hardly seeing what was before him. A feeling of increased apprehension came over her; it was a relief when at last he spoke.

"Eugenia," he said, solemnly, all unconscious of her state of nervous expectancy, and with something in his tone as if he were preparing to suit himself to the comprehension of a child—an almost imperceptible increase of importance and condescension which puzzled and slightly jarred her—"Eugenia, I want to speak to you, and I must have your full attention. Oblige me by putting away your writing."

She obeyed him silently. Then, with her beautiful eyes looking up in his face half-timidly—for her expectation was mingled with vague apprehension that in some way or other she might again have unknowingly vexed him—she waited to hear what he had to say.

There was a good deal to explain. She knew so little of his family affairs, was so utterly unprepared for what she had to hear, that once or twice when he first began to speak she interrupted him with some necessary question, obliging him to go over the ground again more intelligibly. He chafed a little at this, though doing his best to restrain his impatience; so Eugenia, after a minute or two, listened in silence, listened without a movement or an exclamation, or even a glance of surprise or interest, to all he told her of his family's position and possessions, of the former remoteness of his own chance of succession, of the premature death of Herbert Chancellor and now of that of his sickly son, of the consequent complete change in his own circumstances and the different life that now lay before them both. There was a mixture of feelings in Beauchamp as he spoke. He in a sense enjoyed the telling it. He dwelt with a certain gusto upon some of the details, he was conscious of a pleasure, a sort of lordly gratification, in spreading out before the dazzled vision of this innocent little wife of his, the wealth, the position, the many "good things" which were now to be his, and through him hers. He really loved her; he was glad to have so much to bestow, and the thought of her gratitude for his future indulgence, her appreciation of his past disinterestedness (for "I knew how it would all be some little time ago," he said, "but I judged it better to keep silence for the time") was very sweet to him. But with these not unamiable, if not very lofty, feelings, there mingled others less harmless. Mrs Eyrecourt's letter had not been without some covert stings, some half-expressed allusions to "what might have been" and what was, and these, though Beauchamp would have repelled them with indignation to her face, were, as usual, not

without their uncomfortable effect upon him. And he, to do him justice, was conscious of the unworthiness of harbouring even the shadow of regret for what he had done. He wanted to get rid of it; he had come to Eugenia eager to sun himself in her innocent delight; to realise that, look where he would, he could not have found a sweeter wife, or one so certain to appreciate himself and all he had done and meant to do.

"Only," he had said to himself, "I must make her understand that it would be frightfully bad taste to seem elated. She herself is so refined I can make her feel this with the merest hint, but those people of hers! There must be no writing off to them about it—I must have no drawing any closer these objectionable Wareborough ties."

When he had finished all he had to say he waited for a minute, expecting Eugenia to speak. To his surprise she remained perfectly silent. He could not see her face; she had turned it away from him as he was speaking.

"Eugenia," he said, with some impatience, "what is the matter with you? Have you not understood what I have been telling you?" and as he spoke he laid his hand on her shoulder and made her turn so as to face him. The mystery was explained—Eugenia was in tears.

"Crying!" exclaimed her husband. "What extraordinary creatures women are! Now what in the world can you be crying about." This unexpected reception of his news was really infinitely more irritating to him than the "elation" he had in imagination deprecated. "Surely," he went on, as a thought occurred to him, "surely you are not crying about Roger? You never saw him, you know, and for that matter—" for Beauchamp by no means desired to appear deficient in decorum and good feeling himself—"for that matter I scarcely knew him either. Of course it is very sad; but, after all, sad things are always happening—it's the way of the world. But you must not take other people's troubles to heart so, Eugenia."

"But I am not crying about Roger," said Eugenia, forcing back her tears and wishing she could honestly attribute them to sorrow for the poor boy's death. "Of course I am very sorry for him, at least for his people, but it wasn't that that made me cry."

"Then what was it?" said Beauchamp, coldly.

"It was—I can't exactly explain—" she began, looking as if she was ready to cry again. "I think it was a sort of feeling of disappointment that our life is going to be so different from what I thought it would be. I had planned it all," her voice faltered; "I thought I would show you how well I could manage, and that we should be so happy without being rich."

Captain Chancellor got up from his chair and walked impatiently to the window.

"Really, Eugenia," he said, contemptuously, "I had no idea you were so utterly childish. I had no idea any woman *could* be so silly."

His tone roused her a little.

"Wiser people than I have thought the same," she answered. "When people really care for each other it draws and keeps them closer together to have to consult each other about everything, always to act together, even perhaps to suffer together. It is in prosperity that they drift apart—when there is no need for either to deny himself or herself for the other."

Captain Chancellor gave a little laugh; he was recovering his good humour, however.

"All very well in theory; all very pretty and romantic," he said; "but I can assure you, my dear child, it is *very* seldom the case in practice. Why, don't you remember the old proverb about what happens 'when poverty comes in at the door.' There are few truer sayings."

Eugenia did not answer, but her tears were at an end. Beauchamp, satisfied evidently that his superior wisdom had checked her folly, went on to talk of his plans. They must leave Paris at once, to allow him to be in time for poor Roger's funeral, which was to be at Halswood; and, after advising his wife to hasten her packing, he went out to make some inquiries about their journey.

When she was alone again Eugenia returned to her unfinished letter. She read over the last sentence she had written; it was in allusion to something Sydney had mentioned: "I am so pleased to hear that Frank gave you that little table on your birthday. You will think more of it even than if you had got it at first. How pretty your drawing-room must look now the curtains are up!"

The wife of the rich owner of Halswood sighed as she read over the simple words. Then she hastily added two or three lines to the letter, folded and addressed it, and ringing for the waiter gave it to him to post, as if eager to get it out of her sight. This was what she added to her letter:

"Beauchamp has just told me of a complete change in our plans. Another death has taken place in his family, that of the young cousin who was so ill, and we must return"—"home" she had written, then had changed it to "to England"—"at once. Our whole future will be altered by this poor boy's death. Beauchamp says he must sell out and live at Halswood. I forgot to ask him where Halswood is exactly, but I hope it will be easy of access from Wareborough. I had looked forward so to being at Bridgenorth for the next few months and seeing you and papa constantly! Perhaps you had better say nothing about this change except to papa and Frank, as people talk so about anything of the kind. I will write again as soon as I can."

Captain Chancellor had forgotten his intended caution against unseemly or vulgar "elation," but it had not been required.

Two days later Mrs Eyrecourt was awaiting the arrival of her brother and his wife at Winsley. She had returned there herself the previous day, for as soon as "all was over" as regarded the invalid boy's earthly career, his mother and sisters had left Torquay for the house of some of Mrs Chancellor's own relations, and Gertrude's presence was no longer required. There was barely time for Beauchamp, as chief mourner, to reach Halswood, but he had managed to arrange to spend one night at Winsley, leaving his wife there till he could rejoin her. She had pleaded for "home" for the week or two of his enforced absence, having discovered, to her delight, that Halswood was but a few hours' journey from Wareborough, but this proposal had not found favour with her lord and master.

"You have never seen my sister yet," he said. "It is quite time you met. I am very anxious for you to make her acquaintance, for you could not possibly have a better or more judicious friend. Time enough for seeing Sydney again. You have not been away from each other a month yet."

He did not speak unkindly, but something in his tone warned Eugenia to say no more, and to keep to herself her alarm at the thought of a fortnight's tête-à-tête with her pattern sister-in-law, for Roma she found, to her disappointment, had not yet returned from her visit to the northern godmother.

"She is very pretty, extremely pretty, Beauchamp," said Mrs Eyrecourt, cordially, when alone with her brother for a few minutes the evening of their arrival.

Captain Chancellor smiled and looked pleased.

"And of course," pursued Gertrude, "she has everything at present in her favour. No one will be inclined to be hypercritical on so young a creature. But that sort of thing only lasts its time. *Your* wife, Mrs Chancellor of Halswood, should show she has something more in her than youth and beauty, if she is to assist you to take the position you should. Tact will do a great deal in these cases; it is wonderful how much. I wonder if Eugenia has much tact. Is she quick at taking up things? You know how I mean."

Beauchamp's brow slightly clouded over—a remembrance of his little lectures in Paris crossed his mind uncomfortably. He had never been able to persuade himself that Eugenia *had* thoroughly entered into the spirit of his advice.

"She is certainly clever naturally," he replied, evasively, "and I suppose she is what is called well-educated. Her father is a very talented man, in an odd, eccentric way, and education is his hobby. He has taught his daughters all sorts of things—almost as if they were boys."

"Ah, indeed," said Mrs Eyrecourt, regretfully. "I am sorry to hear that. One must certainly be *somebody* for oddity to pass muster. However, at your wife's age present influence is everything. I remember you said she had very few relations, and those she has she need not see much of. On the whole I confess, Beauchamp, you might have done worse if you *were* determined to do a thing of the kind."

She smiled as she spoke, and though for a minute Captain Chancellor was half-inclined to tell her that her criticism of his wife was impertinent and uncalled for, he thought better of it, partly moved thereto by hearing the rustle of Eugenia's approaching dress; so he too smiled, and murmured some words expressive of gratification at his sister's favourable opinion.

Just then Eugenia entered the room. She had taken off her travelling dress, and looked fair and sweet and graceful in the white muslin that had replaced it; and the half shy, half deprecating air which hung about her on this her first introduction to her husband's relations seemed to add to her great beauty. Both brother and sister turned towards her as she came in.

"Gertrude must see how lovely she is," thought Beauchamp. "I wish she could see Eugenia and Addie Chancellor side by side."

And "What a pity she has not a little more presence and 'style!'" thought Mrs Eyrecourt, who could think vulgar words though incapable of uttering them.

But as neither expressed their thoughts aloud, unbroken peace and harmony were the order of the evening.

Volume Two—Chapter Ten.

Only Floss!

Minds that have nothing to confer
Find little to perceive.

Wordsworth.

As Eugenia came downstairs the next morning, she met a small person toiling upward, one foot at a time. Eugenia loved children. She stopped at once and knelt down beside the little creature, the better to get sight of the face half hidden by the tangles of wavy hair.

"And who are you, dear?" she said, kindly. "One of my little nieces, I suppose." She knew that Mrs Eyrecourt had children, but was ignorant how many or of what ages.

"I don't know," said the little girl, rather surlily. "I'm only Floss;" and she seemed eager to set off again on her journey upstairs.

"Floss? What a nice funny little name!" said her new aunt-in-law, detaining her gently. "Is it because you have got such pretty flossy hair that they call you so?"

"I don't know," said Floss again, but more amiably than before. "I didn't know my hair was pwetty. *Yours* is," touching Eugenia's bright brown tresses as she spoke. "It shines so nice in the sun;" for it was a brilliant summer morning, and some sunbeams had found their way through the quaint pointed windows, lighting up the oak-panelled hall and wide, shallow-stepped staircase where the two were standing. "I like your hair," pursued Floss, waxing confidential. "I don't like light hair, nor I don't like black."

"Don't you, dear? Why not?" asked Eugenia, amused at the oddity of the child.

"Don't tell," said the little girl, cautiously. "I don't like light because mamma's is light, and that other fat girl's; and I don't like black because Aunt Woma's is black, and nurse's."

Eugenia was a little taken aback. Could the child be "quite right," she wondered.

"Let me see your face, little Floss," she said, pushing back the fair hair from the broad white forehead and raising the child's head a little towards her. "Right!"—of course she was right. There was no want of intellect, or humour either, in the well-shaped little features and green-grey, twinkling eyes.

"You have got a nice face, Floss. Will you give me a kiss?" asked Eugenia. "But, do you know, when I was a little girl I didn't say I didn't like anybody."

"I didn't say that," returned Floss. "I was only speaking of people's hairs. I like you. You're not fat, like that girl! Are you my new aunt? Nurse said my new aunt was coming. Sometimes I like nurse; but, do you know, she does pull my hair so when it is vewy tuggy! Will you tell me about when you was a little girl?"

"Yes, dear," said Eugenia. "You shall come to my room, or perhaps you and I will go out into the garden together. Now I must run down quick to breakfast."

She left the child with a kiss, but when she got to the dining-room door, happening to glance back again, there was the shaggy head pressed against the bannisters, the funny eyes peering down after her.

"What a queer little girl!" thought Eugenia. "I wonder if her mother was like her at her age? How odd it sounds to hear a child talking about not liking her nearest friends. I wonder if Mrs Eyrecourt and Roma dislike children?"

On the whole Eugenia had felt agreeably disappointed in her sister-in-law. Gertrude looked so young and pretty compared to what she had expected; there was nothing formidable about her.

"I dare say we shall get on very well," thought the bride, quite satisfied with this reasonable anticipation. With all her impulsiveness she had never been given to sudden or vehement friendships, Sydney had been to her all that she wished for in this direction; but she was sincerely anxious to please her husband by responding cordially to whatever friendly overtures this sister of his, of whom he evidently thought so highly, might seem disposed to make. So far only one thing had repelled Eugenia; Mrs Eyrecourt had seemed almost to forget the night before what a complete stranger Beauchamp's wife still was to all their family interests and connections.

"Or perhaps," thought Eugenia, with a little pang, "she takes it for granted that I know more, that he has told me more than is the case. She may not know," she added to herself, as if to suggest a ground of consolation, "how little opportunity there was for anything of the kind before we were married. And, after all, it was natural they should have a good deal to talk about, only seeing each other for one night and so much having happened since they met, and three are always an awkward party."

Still no doubt she had felt a little lonely; and, inexperienced as she was, she had missed vaguely what she hardly knew she had expected—the being "made-of," perhaps, as he would have been at home had Beauchamp taken her there for her first bridal visit instead of to Winsley—the sort of pleasant little temporary prestige that seems to come naturally to every young wife in the first blush of her new life. None of this had met her at Winsley. Tired as she was, she had dug deep down into one of her trunks to find the pretty simple bride-like dress which Sydney had begged her to keep fresh for the momentous occasion of "being introduced to Captain Chancellor's friends;" but, so far as her two companions were concerned, it had seemed to Eugenia she might as well have kept on her travelling dress—better perhaps, for it was dark grey and would have seemed more in accordance with Mrs Eyrecourt's deep mourning attire, which, it did strike her sister-in-law, she might for the first evening of their arrival have laid aside.

And all through dinner and through the evening that succeeded it, the conversation had not been about things in which the young wife could have easily taken part; about their travels, what they had seen etc, nor even about their future in a sense allowing her to make inquiries or remarks. It had been all about Halswood and the Chancellors and other people more or less concerned in the late changes in the family, but of whom Eugenia had never heard. And she had gone to bed at last tired and depressed, with a vague sort of feeling that she was a stranger and outsider, and a foolish, childish, vehement revolt against the life before her.

"I hate the very name of Halswood!" she said to herself, as she sadly unfastened the dress she had put on with some amount of pleasurable anticipation; "I have a conviction I shall not be happy there. I wish with all my heart that poor boy were alive again and that nothing of all this had come to Beauchamp."

Her good sense, however, and previous experience prevented her expressing any of this to her husband; and her heart smote her a little when he kissed her as fondly as ever the next morning, and told her she had looked very pretty the night before, "he liked that dress." Only he spoilt it a little by going on to remind her that she must see about mourning at once. Gertrude would advise her what to get and where to order it.

"Indeed she was a little surprised you had not thought of it in Paris. You could easily have left your orders and been fitted," he said; "but, of course, as Gertrude remembered, you would not have known what dressmaker to go to, so perhaps it is as well as it is."

Eugenia resisted the inclination to tell him that she felt quite equal to the management of her clothes without Mrs Eyrecourt's assistance, and the momentary irritation passed away and she laughed at herself for having felt it. It was a bright morning, the view from her window was lovely, she had slept well, and she was only nineteen! It came naturally to her to take a more hopeful view of things than the night before, to make excuses for what had then appeared to her very wounding neglect, to think it after all possible that life might not be without its roses even at Halswood! Almost immediately after breakfast Captain Chancellor had to leave.

"It is such a lovely day, Beauchamp," said Mrs Eyrecourt, "don't you think it would be nice to drive to the station in the pony-carriage? I dare say you would like to drive him there, would you not?" she continued, turning to Eugenia. "My ponies are very good."

"Thank you," answered Mrs Chancellor, "I should *like* it very much, but I cannot drive." She coloured a little, not so much from annoyance at having to confess her deficiencies, as from the consciousness of her sister-in-law's eyes being fixed upon her in a sort of smiling, good-natured criticism. "I don't know anything about horses," she went on, in her nervousness falling into the unnecessary candour against which her husband had warned her. "I have never ridden or driven in my life. My father has no horses. We have never been accustomed to anything of the kind at Wareborough."

"Oh indeed," said Mrs Eyrecourt, urbanely.

But Captain Chancellor got up from his seat with a quick movement, which his wife had already learnt to interpret only too truly. This time, however, she fancied her eyes must have deceived her, for when he spoke his voice sounded as calm and softly modulated as usual.

"Yes," he said, cheerfully, "that's one of the accomplishments you must take up, Eugenia. You must give her some lessons, Gertrude. I don't think you will find her a bad pupil; she has plenty of nerve, and that's the great thing."

Gertrude looked a little surprised, almost, Eugenia fancied, a *very* little disappointed, at her brother's pleasant tone. But she recovered herself instantly.

"I shall be very glad indeed to teach Eugenia anything I know," she said, amiably. "Not that I am half as good a whip as Roma."

Eugenia hardly heard what she said, for the quick thrill of pleasure and gratitude that had shot through her on hearing her husband's words had completely changed the current of her thoughts.

"How good and kind of Beauchamp to speak so of me," she said to herself. "I wish I could remember not to show myself to disadvantage in that stupid way. I wish I were more dignified and reserved."

She only saw him alone for an instant before he left. They were standing in the hall waiting for Mrs Eyrecourt, who was going to drive her ponies herself, as, probably, she had in her heart intended to do from the first.

"Beauchamp," began Eugenia, eagerly, but in a low voice, looking round to see that no servant was within earshot, "Beauchamp, I did think it so kind of you to speak that way about my learning to drive. I was so afraid what I said might have annoyed you, like that day at the Luxembourg, for you see I haven't got accustomed to not being over-communicative, but I really will—"

"Don't speak of it," he interrupted, angrily, turning from her abruptly. "I expect next to hear you say you never saw silver forks and spoons before. How you can be so unutterably childish and silly, and so regardless of *my* feelings, Eugenia, passes my comprehension. Ah, Gertrude," with a sudden, but complete, change of tone, as Mrs Eyrecourt appeared on the staircase, "there you are! I was just thinking of hurrying you; we have no time to spare," and he hastened forward to hand his sister into the carriage.

Too startled at first to be fully conscious how deeply she was wounded, Eugenia mechanically followed them to the porch, stood there till they had driven off, smiling and nodding farewell.

And this was her first parting from her husband!

When the pony-carriage was out of sight Eugenia went up to her own room, and, locking the door against all possibility of intrusion, wept the bitter tears of youth when it first experiences what it is to be repulsed and scorned by the one it had deemed all sympathy and devotion, when the first terrible suspicion creeps in that it has been deceived in its idol. For none of the small jars in Paris had ended like this; she had felt them acutely at the time, but they had invariably *been* smoothed over again. But that Beauchamp should have spoken so harshly, so woundingly, just as he was leaving her, when there could be no opportunity of removing the sting his words had left—it was too cruel, and Eugenia's tears flowed afresh.

In one respect she did him injustice. Before she was out of his sight her husband had repented of his harshness; the white, wounded look that had come over her sweet eager face followed him all the day, and had he not been afraid of Gertrude's making fun of him he would have turned back at the lodge and begged Eugenia to forgive him before he left her. Still, at the same time, he remained fully satisfied that he had had cause for annoyance, and he quite believed that in the end Eugenia, like the rest of her sex, would be none the worse for a few sharp words.

By-and-by it occurred to Eugenia that her sister-in-law's criticism of her red eyes was by no means to be desired. She

set to work to bathe them, therefore, and then, the more effectually to remove their traces, she put on her hat and went out for a stroll. How pretty it was out of doors! The house, quaint and irregular, with its gables and latticed windows, was thoroughly to Eugenia's liking; the grounds well kept, but not too modern in appearance to suit the ivy-grown Grange; the beauty of the midsummer sky, the fragrance of the sweet fresh summer-morning air, every object which caught her eye, every breath which wafted across her face seemed full of harmony and content.

"How I wish I could feel happy too!" thought Eugenia.

And, after all, what a very small thing had caused her unhappiness, what a mere trifle had roused Beauchamp's displeasure! That was the worst of it, she thought; if so very little made him angry, how could she hope to avoid incessantly irritating him? Yet he was not an ill-tempered man exactly—not so much ill-tempered as exacting and prejudiced.

"We have lived in such different worlds," said Eugenia to herself, "that I suppose it is no wonder we do not at once understand each other's feelings on all subjects. Perhaps in a little while I shall manage better, and, of course, before his sister little things may annoy him that would not otherwise do so, and it is nice of him to wish her to see everything about me in the best light. If only he had not gone away angry with me!"

Thus she tried to soften and excuse what had so pained her. She would not, even to herself, allow that she felt more than a passing disappointment; that Beauchamp himself was beginning to reveal a character less admirable, less lofty than her ideal, she was as yet far from owning. The triviality, and vulgarity even, of some of the prejudices and apprehensions he had avowed, she instinctively refrained from dwelling upon. She could not have understood them had she done so, for the excuses for her husband's smallnesses—the struggling, anomalous circumstances in which the childhood and youth of the brother and sister had been spent, the triumph of Gertrude's successful marriage and her determination that Beauchamp's career should be a brilliant one—all these were unknown to Eugenia. She saw that he was considerably under his sister's influence, much more so, indeed, than she had expected; but she attributed it to habit and association, knowing little of the greatness of the obligations which he owed to Mrs Eyrecourt.

And even had the whole history been related to her, all the details explained, it would have been of little service. Eugenia was far from the stage of being able to pity or judge leniently where she could not sympathise; and, indeed, any suggestion that there were deficiencies in her husband's nature for which she must learn to "make allowance" she would still, at this time, have repelled with indignation; the hard lesson before her could be learnt by herself alone, and the hardest part would be that of recognising the good yet remaining in her lot, though the manner and form of it should be utterly different from the imagined bliss of her girlish dreams.

She was walking slowly up and down the terrace on the south side of the house—the same terrace which had been the scene of Roma's unintentional eavesdropping—when a voice from behind startled her, a small, eager, childish voice.

"Aunty 'Genia," it said, "Aunty 'Genia, I've wunned away from nurse and I want the stow about when you was a little girl," and from round the corner, running at full speed, appeared Floss, breathless and shaggier even than her wont.

"You've runned away from nurse, Floss?" said Eugenia, seating herself as she spoke on a garden bench beside her, and lifting the child on to her knee. "I don't know that you should have done that. We had better find nurse first, or she won't know where you are."

"I don't want her to know," replied Floss, opening her eyes and establishing herself more securely in her present quarters; "that's why I wunned away."

She evidently was prepared to resist all recognition of established authority by her new friend; but nurse, less easily deluded than the tiny rebel had imagined, at this juncture fortunately made her appearance, proving by no means loth to accept a half-hour's holiday.

"I will bring Miss Floss in myself," said Eugenia. "You can show me the way to the nursery, can't you, Floss?"

And nurse retreated, murmuring hopes that Mrs Chancellor would not find her charge too troublesome, and inwardly not a little astonished at the whimsical infant's unwonted sociability.

Floss's next proceeding was to peer up deliberately into her aunt's eyes, pushing Eugenia's hat back a little off her face, the better to pursue her investigations.

"What are you looking at, Floss?" asked her aunt. "I don't like my hat at the back of my head; the sun makes my eyes ache."

"Your eyes is wed," observed Floss with satisfaction, quite ignoring Eugenia's mild remonstrance. "You've been cwying. Why do you cw? Aunt Woma never does."

"Doesn't she?" said Eugenia. "Perhaps she does, only you don't see. Most people cry sometimes, when they are sorry."

"And are you sowwy? I am sowwy if you are," said the child, with a change to tenderness in her tone which Eugenia had not expected. "Have you been naughty and has somebody scolded you? I am vewy often scolded," and she shook her head with a curious mixture of resignation and indifference.

"But you are a little girl, poor little Floss, and I am big," said Eugenia, feeling the tears not very far off, however, notwithstanding her self-assertion; "big people aren't scolded like children. Big people are sorry about other things."

"Then I don't want to be big," said Floss, decidedly. "Now tell me about when you was little. How many dolls had you, and was your cat white or speckly like mine?"

"I had a great many dolls," replied Eugenia, "but they weren't all mine; they were *between* with my sister. But we had no cat."

"What a pity!" said Floss, sympathisingly. "Wouldn't your mamma let you?"

"I had no mamma," said Eugenia; "only a papa and a sister."

"A papa," said Floss, consideringly. "I don't know if papas is nice. *Mammas* isn't, not always. How big was your sister—as big as Quin?"

"How big is Quin?"

"*Vewy* big," said Floss, importantly. "He's past nine. He's away at school now."

"And don't you love him very much?"

"Yes, he's a nice boy, only nurse says it's a chance if school doesn't spoil him. How could school spoil him? Mamma spoils him, nurse says."

"I think nurse shouldn't say so many things," observed Eugenia, sagely. "But never mind about spoiling. Well, my little sister was very fond of me and I was very fond of her, and we learned our lessons together and had lots of dolls."

"What was their names?" said Floss, nestling up closer on her aunt's knee, in evident anticipation of something very delightful.

"Their names?" said Eugenia. "Why, let me see. There was Lady Evelina, she had blue eyes and light hair, and Lady Francesca, her sister, who had black eyes and hair; and then there were Flora and Lucy and Annette, all smaller dolls. And there was one doll we were very proud of, which a lady brought us from Paris, and we never called her anything but Poupée. And we had one dear old-fashioned wooden doll, with a merry face and red cheeks. We called her Mary Ann Jolly, and I almost think we loved her the best of all. Dear me," she broke off abruptly, almost forgetting the presence of the child on her knee, "how strange it is to remember all these things! How silly and happy we were! So long ago!"

For "long ago" seem at nineteen the few short years dividing us from what we then call our childhood; though, further on our course, we look back and see that the childishness, the ignorance, the unreal estimates of ourselves and others were still clogging our steps, hindering our true progress—as, indeed, to a greater or less extent is the case to the very end of the toilsome journey. Happy those who keep beside them to that end some others of the companions who started with them at the first, the truthfulness and trust, the earnestness in the present, the yet not inconsistent faith in a far-off better future—a future when much of what perplexes us now shall be made plainer, when we shall be stronger to work, more unselfish to love.

For a moment Eugenia sat silent. But "Tell me more, aunty, please!" begged Floss, tugging at her dress. And Eugenia set to work and delighted the little creature with a minute biography of each individual doll, ending up with a promise that when Floss came to pay her a visit, "some day," such of the venerable ladies as were yet in existence should be unearthed from the box in the garret of the Wareborough house, (where not so very long ago Eugenia had one day caught sight of their once familiar faces), and produced for the little girl's inspection.

By the end of the half-hour agreed upon with nurse there were few traces of tears on Eugenia's face, and Floss's kiss and hug of ecstatic gratitude left a brightness behind them which somewhat surprised Mrs Eyrecourt, returning home with slightly contemptuous anticipation of the task before her of "looking after Beauchamp's wife; a girl who has seen and knows nothing, and is certain to be crying her eyes out because he has had to leave her."

Eugenia was on the lawn at the front of the house when Gertrude drove up.

"Such a delightful drive we have had," exclaimed Mrs Eyrecourt, throwing the reins to the groom and joining her sister-in-law. "I am so glad I went. It was quite a comfort to see Beauchamp start in good spirits. He has a painful task before him."

"Yes," said Eugenia, not indeed knowing what else to say. She was almost entirely in ignorance of the family connections, was unacquainted even with the names of the dead boy's sisters, and not perfectly sure if his mother was alive or not. But she would not let Gertrude see how little she knew. "I have been amusing myself with your little girl, Mrs Eyrecourt," she went on, changing the subject; "we got on so well together. I have just taken her back to nurse."

"You are very kind," said Gertrude, "but really you must not trouble yourself so. Floss is a most peculiar child. I think she is happier with her nurse than with anyone else, and I find that being taken notice of spoils her temper, so I do not have her much downstairs. I am so sorry I cannot stay out longer just now to show you the gardens and what there is to see, but I have several letters to write. And oh, by-the-by, that reminds me, Beauchamp wished me not to let you forget to order your mourning. Under the circumstances, you see, of Beauchamp's being poor Roger's heir, your mourning will have to be deeper than would be ordinarily worn for a second cousin."

"Yes," said Eugenia again. "I was thinking of writing about it to-day."

"Indeed," said Gertrude, a little surprised, "where were you thinking of ordering it? I was going to say I would write to

my dressmaker (I think her the very best) and ask her to send down a list of what you should have. Your commoner dresses I suppose you leave to your maid!"

"I have no maid at present," said Eugenia. "The one who was partly maid to Syd—to my sister and me—is remaining with my father as his housekeeper. I am going to have a niece of hers for my maid—a very nice girl, whom I have known all my life. She is at Wareborough now, learning a little from her aunt, and she will be ready for me when we go there on our way to—"

"Bridgenorth," she was going to have said, forgetting the complete reversal of all their plans, but remembering it in time to stop short.

"To Halswood?" suggested Gertrude. "Wareborough can hardly be called on the road to Halswood. Halswood, you know, is near Chilworth, quite three hours from Marly Junction. But as to your maid—I hardly think you will find an inexperienced girl sufficient *now*. It is quite different from if you had been going to live quietly at Bridgenorth. Beauchamp will of course send in his papers at once, and he is pretty sure to get leave till he is gazetted out. I daresay I can help you to find a good maid without much difficulty."

"You are very kind," said Eugenia, in her turn, "but I should not like to give up Barbara's niece without a trial. As for my mourning dresses I think it will be best to write to the dressmaker at home who has always worked for me. I can at least get from her what I want at first."

"A Wareborough dressmaker!" exclaimed Gertrude, lifting her eyebrows. "My dear Eugenia, you must excuse me, but I don't think that sort of thing will please Beauchamp. He is so *very* particular."

"I know he is," replied Eugenia, quietly, "and therefore I always study to please him. He likes all the dresses I have, and no one can be more particular than I am about their fitting well. The person I speak of made this one," touching the pretty lavender dress she was wearing, "and the one I had on last night. Don't you think they fit well?"

"I really have not particularly observed," said Gertrude, less cordially. "I dare say they do, but fitting is not everything."

"Certainly not," said Eugenia, "and of course I know a Wareborough dressmaker cannot make things as fashionably as a London one. But Sydney and I have taken pains to get this person to make our things in the way we like, and I do not care about being *too* fashionable. I don't think it is good taste."

Mrs Eyrecourt smiled, but her smile was not a very pleasant one, and she did not repeat her offer. She was far from thinking it worth her while to enter into any discussion with this very daring young person on even so trifling a subject as dress; but in her own mind she resolved to give her brother a hint as to the expediency of at once and for ever separating his wife from the influences of her former home.

"She is pretty enough to do very well if she had more manner and experience," Mrs Eyrecourt allowed, with the impartiality on which she prided herself. "But she is really incredibly ignorant, and less docile than I expected. Ah, Beauchamp, you have made a sad mistake!"

The half-hour with Floss in the morning proved to have been the pleasantest part of Eugenia's first day at Winsley. Mrs Eyrecourt was, of course, civil and attentive, but though, had she met her in other circumstances, Eugenia might have bestowed upon her a fair share of liking, it seemed impossible to Beauchamp's wife to feel perfectly at ease with her; she felt herself, as it were, constantly on the defensive, and felt, too, that Gertrude was as constantly occupied in taking her measure, criticising what she considered her deficiencies, and noting her observations and opinions. It was far from comfortable. Never before, perhaps, in all her life had Eugenia been so painfully self-conscious, never before had her latent antagonism been so fully aroused; and what was, perhaps, in great measure the cause of both, never before had she known the meaning of—"ennui." This sort of life, the being treated with the formality due to a visitor, unsoftened by intimacy or association, was to her intolerably dull. She tried to read, but her attention seemed beyond her control, and there was no one at hand to compare notes with, even if she did succeed in becoming interested; for though Gertrude rather affected literary tastes, and talked a good deal of the advantage and desirability of "keeping up with the books of the day," her ideas of the hooks of the day hardly coincided with Eugenia's, and to the girl's inexperience her sister-in-law's narrow-mindedness on many points seemed unparalleled. On some subjects Gertrude could talk with intelligence and even originality, but on few of these subjects was Eugenia much at home. She had never been inside a London theatre, the best singers of the day she knew but by name, she had never seen the Academy! Gossip or even mild scandal was utterly lost upon her, for she was a complete stranger to the section of the fashionable world in which Mrs Eyrecourt lived and moved and had her being, in which it was her fondest ambition to shine. Gertrude was not much given to exerting herself for the entertainment of her own sex at the best of times, but with respect to her sister-in-law she had really intended to do her utmost, and finding that she did not succeed did not add to her amiability. There would have been some amount of pleasurable excitement in taking Eugenia by the hand in the sense of patronising her, and it had been in this direction that Captain Chancellor had reckoned sanguinely on his sister's goodwill, not taking into account the one obstacle to this comfortable arrangement—Eugenia's decided objection to anything of the kind, which from the first Mrs Eyrecourt was quick to perceive and indirectly to resent. In this particular, as in many others, Beauchamp had read his wife's character wrong, had been unable to estimate the past influences of her life. He had mistaken docility for weakness; the humility and self-distrust engendered by her great love and faith had seemed to him mere consciousness of ignorance and inexperience—a state of mind, to his thinking, eminently becoming in the untrained girl he had honoured by selecting as his wife.

It happened, unfortunately, too, that just at this time there was considerably less than usual "going on" in the Winsley neighbourhood. Of the adjacent families whom Gertrude thought fit to visit some were still in town, some had illness among them—nearly all, from one reason or another, were *hors de combat* with respect of dinner-parties,

picnics, croquet, and the like. And in a general way the neighbourhood was remarkably sociable and friendly, and would have been very ready to make a nine days' pet of the pretty bride, provided Mrs Eyrecourt had given it to be understood that such attention to her sister-in-law would be agreeable to herself, for Gertrude managed to "queen it" to a considerable extent over society in her part of the county.

"You will have rather an unfavourable idea of Winsley in one respect, I fear, Eugenia," said Mrs Eyrecourt, one day. "I mean you must think it very dull. But nearly all our neighbours are still away. A month or two hence it will be quite different."

"I don't care about gaiety much, thank you," replied Eugenia. "I have never been accustomed to it, and I can feel quite as happy without it."

"You are very philosophical," said Gertrude. "But I am surprised to hear you say you have not been accustomed to that sort of thing. I always understood that up among the Cottonocracy there were all sorts of grand doings; overwhelmingly magnificent dinner-parties and balls, and so on."

"I dare say there are," replied Eugenia, "but we never went to them. My father very seldom let us go anywhere, except to intimate friends like Mrs Dalrymple."

"Oh indeed!" said Gertrude, and in her own mind she thought, "These Laurences considered themselves too good for Wareborough society, it appears. How absurd people are!"

On the whole, the pleasantest part of Eugenia's days at Winsley was the half-hour in the morning when Floss joined her in her stroll in the garden, or on wet days in her own room. The stories went on at a great rate, and after she had exhausted all those relating to her own childhood Eugenia had to ransack her memory, and sometimes even to set her inventive powers to work. All seemed equally delightful to Floss. The child had never been so happy in her life, and to Eugenia the consciousness of having gained the little girl's affection was very sweet.

End of Volume Two.

Volume Three—Chapter One.

Roma's Sentiments.

And if thy wife and thou agree
But ill, as like when short of victual.

T. Carlyle, *The Beetle*.

Il m'est impossible de ne point tous féliciter.

Les Misérables.

Captain Chancellor had been away more than a fortnight. During that time Eugenia had received several short notes from him, most of which contained pretty much the same information, that business matters at Halswood had proved more complicated than he had expected, that there was so much to arrange and settle he found it impossible to return to Winsley as quickly as he had intended, but that he trusted Eugenia was comfortable and happy with his sister; indeed he felt sure she would be so, and so on. There was never any allusion to the little scene which had occurred the morning he left, and from the tone of his letters it was so evident to Eugenia that long before the remembrance of it had ceased acutely to distress her, her husband had forgotten all about it, that she on her side refrained from mentioning it.

"It will be best never to refer to it," she thought to herself. "Only when Beauchamp returns I shall be doubly careful, so that he may see how anxious I am to please him even in trifles."

More than once it had happened that the same post which brought Eugenia a short note from her husband brought Mrs Eyrecourt a much lengthier epistle from him. This was the case one morning about this time. It was a dull, close day, and Eugenia, always sensitive to such influences, had been hoping earnestly while dressing that her letters might bring news of Beauchamp's speedy return. The disappointment was great when she opened the thin letter addressed to her, dated this time from Bridgenorth, and found that another fortnight must pass before he could rejoin her.

"I came on here yesterday," he wrote, "having got through the most pressing part of the business at Halswood, and hoping to get my leave, which is up next week, extended at once, for my papers were sent in last week. But I find as I am here I must stay till the middle of the month, when I hope to get away for good."

"Another whole fortnight," sighed Eugenia. "Oh dear, how I do wish Beauchamp had let me wait for him at home instead of here. It would have been so different. I could have seen Sydney every day."

The tears rose unbidden to her eyes at the thought of the contrast between such a state of things and her present position, but she checked them back quickly, as looking up she saw that Gertrude was watching her. She went on reading her letter, though she already knew its few words by heart, holding it so as to prevent her sister-in-law seeing how short it was.

"You have a letter from Beauchamp, I suppose," said Gertrude. "So have I—a tremendous one, isn't it?" she fluttered

half a dozen sheets through her fingers for Eugenia's benefit. "I really can't read it all till after breakfast. It is all about Halswood. I was anxious to know how he finds everything, and so Beauchamp has sent me all the details—the particulars of the whole, the rents of the great farms, how the entailed *money* property is invested, and I don't know all what, but all so interesting to me of course, knowing it so well. It isn't exactly *womens'* business certainly, but then I have had a good deal of business to look after in my time. The womenkind of men of property should be able to help their husbands and sons, you know."

She went on speaking as if Eugenia were an ordinary uninterested visitor, either really forgetting, or affecting to do so, that to the woman before her of all women in the world Beauchamp Chancellor's interests must be the closest and dearest. The blood seemed to boil in the young wife's veins, but recent experience had not been lost upon her, and her power of self-control had increased greatly in the last few weeks.

So she answered, quietly, "Yes, they certainly should, and so should other people's wives too. It is one of my father's hobbies that women of all classes should be better educated, so that they may be better able to help men, and sometimes to work alone even."

"Oh, I wasn't referring to that sort of thing. I hate all that talk about women's rights, and so on: it is very bad taste," exclaimed Gertrude, contemptuously. "I don't know, and don't want to know anything about the women of any class but my own. But of course there is nothing unfeminine in managing one's own business matters when one understands how. I have almost been brought up to it, you see, always having lived on our own land—and I certainly need all I know now, with Quintin's long minority before me and Beauchamp at the head of the Halswood affairs too. He is sure to be always consulting me. That reminds me I must be quick, for I must answer his letter before luncheon, and it will take me a good while."

She went on with her breakfast, but happening to move aside the large envelope of her brother's letter, her eye fell on another, which, with a little exclamation, "From Roma, I didn't expect to hear from her to-day," she took up and read.

"Roma is coming home to-morrow," she announced to Eugenia, in a minute or two. "A week sooner than she expected."

"Is she really? I am so glad!" exclaimed Eugenia, thankful for any interruption to the present uncongenial tête-à-tête with her sister-in-law, doubly thankful that it came in the shape of a person she was already inclined to like.

"Why, have you ever seen her? Oh yes, to be sure, she stayed a night at Wareborough and was at your marriage. I forgot you had seen her," said Mrs Eyrecourt.

"I saw more of her last winter," said Eugenia, "at the time she stayed a week or so with Mrs Dalrymple—just when Beauchamp first came to Wareborough,"—"and I met him in the fog, and all the world was changed to me," was the unspoken conclusion of her sentence.

"Oh yes; I think I remember something about it," said Gertrude, indifferently. "Dear me, was that only last winter? What changes in so short a time!"

She sighed softly. Somehow the sigh was irritating to Eugenia; her instinct told her that the reflections accompanying it would not have been gratifying to her to hear. But she little guessed what they actually were. "If I had foreseen it all," thought Gertrude, "I certainly would not have been so eager to prevent Beauchamp's marrying Roma," (for that this would have come to pass had *she* chosen to encourage it, no power on earth, no protestations of the young lady herself, however earnest, could ever make Mrs Eyrecourt cease to believe): "it would have been far—oh, infinitely better than *this!* Though of course even now nothing could have been so perfectly suitable as Addie Chancellor," and then poor Gertrude sighed.

"I am very glad too Roma is coming," she said, amiably, becoming conscious suddenly of the audibleness of her sigh, and feeling a little shocked at herself. "By-the-bye, Eugenia, she sends her love to you and hopes to find you still here."

"Thank you," replied Eugenia, rather coldly. But in her heart she did feel very glad of the news. She hoped many things from Roma's advent. Roma was kind and womanly and sensible. She had known Beauchamp all his life, and must understand him thoroughly. *Her* advice Eugenia would not feel inclined to scorn. Roma could never be patronising; hers was by many degrees too large a nature for anything so small. And though clever mostly in a worldly sense perhaps—clever and satirical and dreadfully *au fait* of everything—Eugenia did not feel in the least afraid of her. Though she had been everywhere and seen everything and knew everybody; though her education had reached far, in directions where Eugenia Laurence's had never even begun, yet she was not conventional, not spoilt, not incapable of sympathy with the great human universe outside her own immediate sphere. Such at least was Eugenia's ideal Roma—Roma with the bright dark eyes, ready words, and kindly smile.

And Mrs Eyrecourt was very glad too. Roma would help her, she hoped, to entertain this pretty, uninteresting wife of Beauchamp's, whom she found such heavy work; for Roma was great at this sort of task—she had quite a knack of getting stupid people to talk, discordant ones to agree, doing it too, with so much self-forgetfulness and tact, that the credit of this comfortable state of things usually fell to Gertrude's own share.

"Such a charming hostess! so unselfish and considerate for every one."

It was not much to be wondered at that so warm-hearted and unselfish a creature had not found the charge of her husband's young sister a burdensome one. And as, even in this crooked life, goodness sometimes is recompensed, Gertrude Eyrecourt met with her reward. Everybody—*her* everybody—praised her for her sisterly behaviour to homeless Roma; and Roma herself, whose capacity for gratitude was both wide and deep, thanked her constantly,

though tacitly, by doing everything in her power to please her, resolutely refusing to see her smallnesses and selfishnesses, admiring her and respecting her judgment—and now and then too by determinedly disagreeing with her.

Both Mrs Eyrecourt and her guests found their hopes fulfilled. Roma's return improved the state of things immensely. She came home in great spirits, having enjoyed her visit far more than she had expected, yet declaring, and with evident sincerity, somewhat to Eugenia's surprise, that she felt delighted to be at home again.

"Who do you think was my travelling companion part of the way?" she said, when the three ladies were sitting together the first morning after her arrival. "He got in at Marley, and saw me into my train at the junction—he was going on to town. Do guess who it was—he is a friend of yours, Eugenia. Why, how stupid you both are! You are generally so quick at guessing, Gertrude."

"I!" exclaimed Mrs Eyrecourt, looking up, as if aware for the first time that Roma had been speaking to her. "I beg your pardon, I thought you said the unknown was a friend of *Eugenia's*."

"Well, and if I did, is the world so big that by no conceivable chance two people living at opposite ends of the country could happen to have any mutual acquaintances?" said Roma. "To hear you speak, Gertrude, any one would think you had never been five miles from home. Like a nun I remember seeing when I was a child, in a convent in Switzerland, who thought, but wasn't quite sure—the mere idea even of such an adventure seemed to overawe her—that when she was quite a little girl she had once been at Martigny, six miles from home. Why, Gertrude, I thought you prided yourself on being something of a cosmopolitan. Were you never at a place that long ago, when nobody but Miss Burney's heroines ever went anywhere, used to be called Brighthelmstone, and did you never dine with certain friends of yours there, who never get new dresses unless they are guaranteed to be of the fashion of twenty years ago, dear old souls?"

She spoke playfully, but there was a sharpness in her raillery which Mrs Eyrecourt did not love. She could not endure being laughed at, and she felt annoyed with Roma for making fun of any of *her* friends, be they never so funny, all of which Roma knew, and had dealt out her words accordingly, for she had not been half an hour at home before she knew exactly how the wind blew as regarded the young wife, and she was on the alert to show Gertrude she need not look to her for sympathy in her prejudice.

But to Eugenia it was actual pain to witness the annoyance or discomfiture of another. A sort of instinct made her try to change the conversation.

"Did you say that the Swiss nun had never in her life been anywhere?" she asked Roma. "Why had she been always in a convent? I never knew children could be sent to convents except as pupils."

"This girl was an orphan, and she had some money, and she had come to look on the convent as her home," said Roma; "she wasn't quite a lady; her father had been a rich farmer. I daresay she was happy enough, but it made a great impression on me as a child. It seemed so dreadful to be shut in between those four high walls when the world outside was so beautiful. I shouldn't have pitied her half so much if the convent had been in an ugly place."

"I don't know," said Eugenia, with a dreamy look in her eyes; "I think it would be something to have the sky and mountains to look out at if one were miserable."

The expression of her face struck Roma with a slight pain. It was not thus she had looked on her wedding-day, even when blinded with the tears of her farewell. Through those tears Roma had been able to pronounce her "perfectly happy."

"Is it Gertrude's fault, I wonder," thought Roma, with quick indignation, "or can she be stirring already in her slumber? And only six weeks married."

But it was not Roma's way to dwell on unpleasant suggestions. The meeting troubles half-way was an amusement which had never much recommended itself to her. So she answered brightly—

"Miserable, why should we think about being miserable? But all this time you are forgetting my travelling companion. As you won't guess who he was, I suppose I must tell you. It was Mr Thurston, your brother-in-law's brother, Eugenia. The stranger, the new arrival from India, Gertrude, that we met at dinner at the Mountmorrises'."

"I was just thinking it must be he. He goes up and down that line so much. Did not you like him very much, Miss Eyrecourt? I do exceedingly. And he is so clever and thorough. The only thing not nice about him is, he is a little—funny—I don't know what to call it."

"Funny? Do you mean humorous?" said Roma, looking at her with some amusement. "It did not strike me particularly."

"Oh no," replied Eugenia. "I don't mean that at all. I mean he is a little odd—uncertain. Sometimes he is so very much nicer than others. He gets queer fits of stiffness and reserve all of a sudden, and then one can make nothing of him. But oh," she exclaimed, checking herself suddenly, "I shouldn't criticise him in this way, for he has been so very good to me."

"I don't think you have said anything very treasonable," said Roma. "I can understand what you mean. He is a sensitive man—almost too much so. He looks as if he had had troubles too, though he is cheerful and practical enough. There is something about him unlike most of the men one meets—they are as a rule so very like each other, or else there is something about me which draws out the same sort of remarks from nearly every young man I meet."

"Really, Roma, I wish you would not talk such nonsense," said Gertrude, rising as she spoke. "I do think you should be more careful in what you say. You are getting into a way of thinking *you* can do or say what you like, which strikes me as the reverse of good taste. I confess I do not like your travelling all the way from Marley with a person of whom you know next to nothing. I hardly even remember meeting this Mr Thurston at the Mountmorrises', and whether we did or not, that sort of introduction entails no more."

"But you forget that I said he was a connexion of Eugenia's, Gertrude," said Roma, quietly but very distinctly.

Mrs Eyrecourt's tone softened.

"I did not notice what you said particularly," she replied, as she left the room. "Of course Eugenia will know I did not intend to be so rude as to speak disparagingly of any of her friends."

Roma smiled. "All the same, Gertrude, like many other people, *is* rude when she is cross," she remarked to Eugenia, for they were now by themselves. "Eugenia," noticing the puzzled expression of her companion's face, "why do you look so 'funny?' Are you shocked at me?"

"No," said Eugenia, "but I am not sure that I quite understand you."

"I am not worth much study, I assure you," said Roma, contentedly. "You will understand all there is to understand very soon. Suppose we go out a little. By-the-bye, doesn't that child trouble you? I saw her out there with you for such a time this morning."

"Floss," said Eugenia, "trouble me? Oh no. I like her. I should have been very dull without her."

"So you have been dull? I was afraid of it. I saw the look on your face when I said how glad I was to be back at Winsley again."

"Oh dear! I wish I could keep looks from my face," exclaimed Eugenia, pathetically. "Please forget about it. I should be so sorry to look as if I were not happy here. Beauchamp is so anxious that Mrs Eyrecourt and I should get on well. He is very fond of his sister, unusually so, isn't he?"

"So he should be," replied Roma. "He owes her so much: so do I. She has been very good to us both."

"How?" asked Eugenia. "Of course I know she cares for Beauchamp, and—and takes great interest in him and all that, but still I don't quite know how you mean."

Roma looked surprised. "Has Beauchamp never told you how Gertrude has all her life been almost like a mother to him?" she said. "And to me too," she added. "I wonder he never told you."

"There has been so little time," said Eugenia, hesitatingly; "but I wish you would tell me. I want to understand things better."

There were no secrets involved. Roma was ready enough to give Beauchamp's wife a little sketch of the past. When it was finished Eugenia sighed.

"Thank you," she said. "I am glad to know it; I wish I had known it before. Perhaps it might have given me a different feeling to Mrs Eyrecourt, and I might have managed to make her like me. As it is, I fear she does not. Oh, Roma," she went on, for the first time addressing Miss Eyrecourt by her Christian name—"oh, Roma, I wish I understood better. I am afraid I am not fit for the life before me. People seem to look at things so differently from what I fancied. I don't always understand Beauchamp even. I vex him without in the least meaning it. You know him so well, do you think you could help me at all? I am so terribly, so miserably afraid of his coming to think he has made a mistake."

The large brown eyes looked up beseechingly into Roma's; the piteous, troubled expression went straight to Roma's heart.

"You poor child!" she exclaimed impulsively, but checking herself quickly she went on in a different tone.

"You must not be afraid. Things always seem strange and alarming at first. Try and take them more lightly and don't be too easily daunted. I *do* know Beauchamp well, and I can assure you that, like many men, his bark is worse than his bite. You are more likely to annoy him by trying too much than too little to please him. He likes things to go on smoothly, and he can't understand exaggerated feeling of any kind. I don't think he is difficult to please, but he has got a certain set of ideas about women and wives—many men have, you know, but they modify in time. Only I suppose it is necessary to some extent to *seem* to agree with one's husband whether one does thoroughly or not—just at first, you know, before people have got to understand each other quite well."

"I am afraid that sort of thing would be very difficult to me," said Eugenia, sadly. "You see, I have always been accustomed to saying all I felt, to meeting sympathy wherever I wanted it. In some things I found it in my father; in others in my sister."

"You have been exceptionally happy," said Roma.

"Yes," returned Eugenia, "I have indeed. We always see our happiness most clearly when we look back. I fear I have been too tenderly cared for. Perhaps," with a faint laugh, "perhaps I am a little spoilt." Roma smiled, but did not answer immediately. They were walking slowly up and down the terrace. Suddenly she turned to Eugenia with a question.

"Do you dislike the idea of Halswood—of living there, I mean?"

"Yes," answered Eugenia, frankly, "I do *very* much. I dislike the whole of it—the being rich, and all that."

"Would you really rather Beauchamp had not succeeded to the property?" asked Roma again, with a glimmer of amusement in her dark eyes.

"*Far* rather," returned Eugenia, with much emphasis.

"You extraordinary girl!" exclaimed Roma, now laughing outright; "what *would* Gertrude think if she heard you?"

"Perhaps she wouldn't believe me," said Eugenia, sagely. "But it is quite, quite true. Still I would not say so to her. I hardly think I would say so to Beauchamp even. It is the sort of feeling that he could hardly—that very few people could enter into."

"Very few indeed, I should say," replied Roma. "But, Eugenia, do you know I think you must try to get over the feeling. Solemnly, I assure you that I should have felt far more anxious about your future—yours and Beauchamp's I mean—had he remained poor. You don't know what it is. You don't know how very few people can resist the deterioration of that struggling, pinching life."

"We should not have been so very badly off," said Eugenia, far from convinced that she was mistaken.

"Yes, you would," persisted Roma; "for Beauchamp's tastes are all those of a rich man. He is so fastidious, and as a bachelor he has been able to indulge his fastidiousness to a great extent. Oh no, no, you are quite mistaken, Eugenia! I assure you you should be very thankful you are rich. It takes—a very different man to Beauchamp to make a good *poor* husband," she had it on her lips to utter, but stopped in time. Eugenia did not notice the interruption. She seemed to be thinking deeply.

"It seems to me so much more difficult than being poor," she said. "But you must know some things much better than I. I will try to think it is best."

"Yes, do, it will give you a much better start," said Roma, cheerfully. "And remember my advice, to take things lightly and not to be too sensitive. Not very lofty sentiments, are they? But there's some sense in them. Everything seems to be compromise, after all. Nobody is quite good or quite bad, and most people and most lives are made up of a great many littles of both. That is the extent of the philosophy to which my four-and-twenty years' experience has brought me?"

"It is very sad, / think," said Eugenia.

"But it might be worse?" suggested Roma.

Then they both laughed, and whether or no Roma's philosophy much commended itself to her, Eugenia certainly went about with a lighter heart and brighter face than had been hers during the last few weeks.

And the latter part of Mrs Chancellor's visit to Winsley certainly proved a notable exception to the old proverb that "three are no company," for the three ladies were very much better company than the two had been, and Eugenia no longer counted the days to her departure, and openly expressed her hopes that when Beauchamp returned, he would arrange to stay a little while: with his sister; which expression of cordial feeling naturally gratified Mrs Eyrecourt, and disposed her to regard her young sister-in-law in a more favourable light. Roma looked on and smiled, and enjoyed the present comfortable state of things, thinking to herself nevertheless that it was not on the whole to be regretted that the two counties respectively containing Halswood Hall and Winsley Grange were at a considerable distance from each other.

Captain Chancellor came back a fortnight after Roma's return, and a week later he took his wife to her new home. They did not travel thither by way of Wareborough, as Eugenia had hoped, but this disappointment she made up her mind to bear with philosophy. And Beauchamp, who had acted by his sister's advice in the matter, appreciated his wife's good behaviour to the extent of promising that once they were settled at Halswood, and had got the place into some sort of order, she should invite her father and Sydney and Frank to come to visit her in her own home. Eugenia mentioned this to Sydney in her next letter, but the smile with which the curate's wife read the message was a rather sad one.

"Dear Eugenia!" she said to herself; "I am afraid she is going to be far away from us—farther than she or any of us thought. But I trust she will not miss us."

Volume Three—Chapter Two.

Home.

And sometimes I am hopeful as the spring,
And up my fluttering heart is borne aloft,
As high and gladsome as the lark at sunrise;
And then, as though the fowler's shaft had pierced it,
It comes plumb down, with such a dead, dead fall.

Philip Van Artevelde.

It was late in the evening of an August day when Captain Chancellor and his wife reached Halswood. Beauchamp had been anxious to complete the journey at once without any halts by the way, but to do this it had been necessary to

leave Winsley very early in the morning, in consequence of which Eugenia was very tired. A certain excitement had kept her up during the first part of the journey, an excitement arising from mingled causes, but of which the anticipation of the glories of Halswood about to be revealed to her was a much less considerable one than would have been generally credited. Till they had passed Marley Junction, the ugly familiar station where everybody coming south from or going north to Wareborough and Bridgenorth always changed carriages, Eugenia had not been without a childish hope that she might catch sight of some home face; Frank perhaps, or more probably his brother, or not impossibly her father even. A sort of warm thrill of pleasure passed through her at the thought; it was more than two months since she had seen any one of the friends among whom her nineteen years of girlhood had been passed, and before her marriage she had never been away from her father's house for more than a fortnight—some amount of home-sickness was surely to be excused. All the way to Marley she felt as if she were going home in reality; the sight of a tall chimney, the dirty smoke-begrimed red of the streets of brick houses of the first little manufacturing town through which they passed made the tears come into her eyes. Her husband noticed their dewy appearance and remonstrated with her on the folly of sitting close beside the window, "with that abominable smoke and filthy smuts flying in." He got up and shut the window, remarking as he did so that railway lines to civilised places should really not be cut through these atrocious manufacturing districts; he trusted nothing would ever necessitate his entering Wareborough or Bridgenorth or any of these Wareshire towns again.

Eugenia said nothing, and changed her seat to the opposite side of the carriage as she was bidden. She had felt no temptation to confide to her husband the real cause of the emotion he had not even imagined to be such, but her eyes did not immediately recover themselves, and Marley once left behind, her spirits fell. Every mile of the unfamiliar country through which their journey now lay seemed to increase her painful sense of loneliness and strangeness.

"Oh," thought she, as they at last reached Chilworth, the nearest point to Halswood. "Oh, if only this were Bridgenorth, and we were going to the little house, or even to the lodgings we used to talk of living in there, and Sydney perhaps waiting to welcome us."

The tears got the length of dropping this time. She made no effort to conceal them, for by now it was too dark for her husband to see her face.

No sensation of any kind was perceptible at the little station on their arrival. Under the circumstances, of course any demonstration of rejoicing at the home-coming of the new lord of the greater part of the adjacent soil would have been the extreme of bad taste, and there was nothing by which a stranger could have guessed that the lady and gentleman who got out of the train and quietly passed through the station-gate to the carriage waiting outside were persons of more than ordinary local importance, save perhaps a certain extra obsequiousness on the part of the very unofficial-looking station-master, and a somewhat greater than usual readiness to bestir himself on the part of the solitary porter. Mrs Chancellor, however, was far too self-absorbed to notice anything of the kind; it had never occurred to her to think of herself and her husband as objects of interest or curiosity to the outside world, and had the joy bells been ringing and bonfires blazing she would probably have turned to her companion with an inquiry as to the cause.

There was a momentary delay as she was getting into the carriage—Captain Chancellor turned back to give some additional instruction respecting the luggage. Eugenia standing waiting could not fail to notice that the brougham was a new one, and that everything about it, including the deep mourning livery of the men-servants, was perfectly well-appointed.

"What a nice carriage this is, Beauchamp," she said, when the door was shut, and they were rolling smoothly and swiftly away.

"Yes," he replied, not ill-pleased by her admiration; "I wrote for it when I first came down here. There was nothing fit for use. Herbert Chancellor never brought any carriages down here—not of course that they would have been mine if he had. Yes, it is a first-rate little brougham. Did you notice the horses? Oh no, by-the-bye it was too dark."

"I did not notice them. The lamps lighted up the carriage, and drew my attention to it. The horses were more in the shade. Not that I should venture to give an opinion on them. You know how dreadfully ignorant I am of such things."

"You will soon pick up quite as much knowledge of the kind as you need. I loathe and detest 'horsy' women. Roma even, if she were any one but herself, I should say had a shade too much of that sort of thing. But on the other hand, of course, it doesn't do to be in a state of utter ignorance about such matters."

"No, oh no," said Eugenia. "I quite know how you mean. I want to understand a little more about a good many things that I have not come in the way of hitherto."

Beauchamp's tone had been pleasant and encouraging. Eugenia's impressionable spirits began to rise. If she could but be sure of always pleasing her husband! If she could but feel that in all difficulties, great and small, she might appeal to him, certain of sympathy, certain of encouragement! It might come to be so—married life she had often heard, was not to be tested by the outset. Circumstances so far had certainly been somewhat against her. It might be that this coming to Halswood, so dreaded by her, was to be the beginning of the life of perfect union, of complete mutual comprehension which she had dreamt of.

A glow of new hopefulness seemed to creep through her at the thought—from very intensity of feeling she remained silent, wishing that she could find words in which to express to her husband a tithe of the yearning devotion, the ardent resolutions ready at his slightest bidding to spring into life. In a minute or two he spoke again.

"Are you tired, Eugenia?" he said. "What makes you so silent?"

There was a slight impatience in his tone. He wanted her to be bright and eager, and delighted with everything. He

had by now almost got over his fear of "undue or underbred elation" at her good fortune, on his wife's part, and when alone with him some amount of demonstrative appreciation of what through him had fallen to her share, would not have been objectionable. But, as was usual with her, when carried away by strong feeling of her own, Eugenia perceived nothing of the restrained irritation in Beauchamp's voice.

"Tired," she said, with a little start, "oh, no; at least I may be a little tired, but it isn't that that made me silent. I was only thinking."

Her voice quivered a little. A sudden fear of hysterics came over Captain Chancellor. Some women always got hysterics when they were tired, and Eugenia was so absurdly excitable. A word or a look at any moment would make her cry.

"Thinking," he said, half rallyingly, half impatiently; "what about? Nothing unpleasant, I hope? though there certainly is no counting on women's caprices."

"I can't possibly tell you *all* I was thinking," she began, still speaking tremulously. "I was thinking how I do hope we shall be happy together in this new life, how I trust you will be pleased with me always, how I hope you will let me come to you with my little difficulties and anxieties, and—and that we may be at one always in everything, and not grow apart from each other. Oh, I can't half say what I feel. I think—I think, I sympathise a little with the wife in the 'Lord of Burleigh,' I feel frightened and ignorant, and a little lonely. But oh, Beauchamp, if you will help me—don't you remember that beautiful line—

"And he cheered her soul with love.

"If we always keep close together, I shall not regret anything."

By this time she was in tears. Beauchamp was no great reader of poetry. He "got up" what was wanted for drawing-room small talk, and that was about all. But, as it happened, he knew the poem—the story of it, at least, to which she alluded, and had more than once made great fun of it.

"Catch any woman of the lower classes being such a fool. Founded on fact, not a bit of it. She died of consumption, you may be sure," was the opinion he had expressed.

So, being a little "put out" to begin with, and by no means in the humour for a sentimental scene—tears, and all the rest of it—Eugenia's somewhat incoherent speech, the allusion at the end of it especially, met with by no means a tender or sympathising reception.

"Really, Eugenia," he began, and at the sound of the two words all the new hopefulness, the revived tenderness, the warmth died in the girlish wife's heart—a cold, dull ache of disappointment, relieved but by the more acute stings of mortification and wounded feeling, setting in, the same instant, in their stead. "Really, Eugenia, you choose very odd times for your fits of—I really don't know what to call it—exaggerated sentiment, as you object to 'gushingness.' We haven't been quarrelling that I know of, and I have no intention of doing so. What you mean by talking of 'not regretting' anything, I don't know in the least. I hate maudlin sentiment, and that poetry you are so fond of stuffs your head with it. For goodness' sake, try to be comfortable, and let me be so. No one expects impossibilities of you—you talk as if I were an unreasonable tyrant. If anything could 'drive us apart,' as you call it, it would be this sort of nonsense, and these everlasting tears."

He had paused once or twice in this speech, but Eugenia remained perfectly silent, and this irritated him into saying more than he intended, more than he actually felt, and the consciousness of the harshness of his own words irritated him still further. Still Eugenia did not speak. He let down the carriage window on his side impatiently, thrust his head out into the darkness, then drew it in, and jerked up the glass again. Eugenia did not move—he glanced at her. The tears he had complained of had disappeared as if by magic; her face, in the uncertain light of the carriage lamps, looked unnaturally white and set, the mouth compressed, the eyes gazing straight before them. It was really too bad of her to behave so absurdly, thought Beauchamp, feeling himself not a little aggrieved. Still, he wished he had not spoken quite so strongly.

"Eugenia," he began again, "do try to be reasonable. You take up everything so exaggeratedly. You know perfectly well I have no wish to hurt you. But really it is not easy to avoid doing so. Living with you is like treading on eggshells."

Then she turned towards him with a look in her eyes which he had never seen in them before—a look which the sweet wistful eyes of Eugenia Laurence had never known, a look which should have made her husband consider what he was doing, what he had done.

"It is a terrible pity you did not find out my real character before," she said, "before it was too late. As it is too late, however, no doubt the best thing you can do is to tell me plainly how I can make myself the least disagreeable to you. You shall be troubled by no more 'maudlin sentiment,' or tears. So much I can promise you." Then she became perfectly silent again. Captain Chancellor gave a little laugh.

"I am glad to hear it," he said, with a slight sneer. "And, by Jove! what a temper she has after all," he thought to himself. "They are all alike, I suppose, all the world over. They all want a tight hand. But I flatter myself I know how to break them in." Then he hummed a tune, drew out his watch and looked what o'clock it was, fidgeted with the window again, all with an air of perfect indifference, which he imagined to be his actual state of mind. But far down in his heart there was a little ache of self-reproach and uneasiness. Had Eugenia turned to him now with tearful eyes and broken words, little as he might have understood her feelings, he would certainly not have repulsed her.

Just at this moment the carriage turned in at the Halswood lodge. There was an instant's stoppage, while the heavy

iron gates were opened, then they went on again, even more swiftly and smoothly than before.

"We are only a quarter of a mile from the house now," said Captain Chancellor. "You should see the lights from your side."

"Oh, indeed," said Eugenia, indifferently, turning her eyes listlessly in the direction in which he pointed, thinking that she would not care if an earthquake were suddenly to swallow up Halswood and everything connected with it, herself included; yet determined to hide all feeling—to appear as unconcerned as Beauchamp himself. "Ah, yes, I see them over there. I hope they will have fires," with a little shiver.

"Fires?" repeated Beauchamp. "After such a hot day. Why, it is oppressive still. You can't be cold, surely?"

"Yes, I am," she said, "very;" and as she spoke, the carriage drew up under the pillared portico, which Captain Chancellor had pronounced so desperately ugly the first time he came to Halswood, and in another moment Eugenia's feet had crossed the threshold of what was now her home.

Three or four servants were waiting in the hall. At first sight Mrs Chancellor imagined them to be all strangers to her, but in another moment, to her delight, she recognised in the face of a young girl standing modestly somewhat in the rear of the others, the familiar features of Barbara's niece. Mrs Eyrecourt had not succeeded in her design of substituting a more experienced lady's maid in the place of Eugenia's protégée. Something had been said about it, but in the pressure of more important arrangements Captain Chancellor had allowed the matter to stand over for the present, and it had been arranged that Rachel should be sent to Halswood the day before her mistress's arrival, but in the absorption of her own thoughts Eugenia had for the time forgotten this, and the pleasure of the surprise was great.

"Oh, Rachel!" she exclaimed with effusion, darting forward and shaking hands eagerly with the young girl—"I am so pleased to see you. Did you come yesterday, and how did you leave them all? How is papa? And Miss Sydney—Mrs Thurston, I mean?"

"They are both very well, indeed, ma'am," said the girl, flushing with pleasure at the friendly greeting—her spirits had been somewhat depressed since her arrival; the great, empty house, the few servants, all middle-aged or old, had seemed strange and cold to Barbara's niece; "I went to see Mrs Thurston the last thing the night before I left—there is a letter waiting for you from her upstairs that she told me to put in your room—and Mr Laurence, ma'am, he wished me to—"

"Eugenia," said Captain Chancellor's voice from behind his wife, "Eugenia, if you are not *very* particularly occupied, will you spare me a moment?"

She had vexed him again, but in the softening influence of the home news, the sound of the dear home names, Eugenia's better self was again uppermost. There was no resentment or haughtiness in her tone or manner as she turned quickly towards her husband.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she exclaimed; "I was so pleased to see Rachel and hear about them all at home, that!" But she said no more, for glancing at Beauchamp, she saw that her words had deepened rather than lightened the look of annoyance on his face.

"Mrs Grier," he said, addressing an elderly person in black silk, tall, thin, stiff, and yet depressed-looking, who came forward as she heard her name. "Eugenia, this is Mrs Grier. Mrs Grier has been at Halswood for I don't know how many years. How many is it?" turning to the housekeeper with the pleasant smile that so lighted up his somewhat impassive face.

"Thirty-three, sir," replied Mrs Grier, thawing a little, "and more changes in the three than in all the thirty."

"Yes, indeed," said Eugenia, kindly, shaking hands with the melancholy housekeeper. "You must have had a great deal to go through lately."

"I have, indeed, ma'am. Three funerals in a year, and all three the masters of the house," answered Mrs Grier, shaking her head solemnly. "It isn't often things happen so in a family. But all the same, ma'am, I wish you joy, you and my master, ma'am."

"Thank you," said the two thus cheerfully addressed.

Eugenia felt almost inclined to laugh; but Captain Chancellor hardly relished the peculiar style of Mrs Grier's congratulation.

"It's time the luck should turn again now," he said lightly. "Three is the correct number for that sort of thing, isn't it?" Mrs Grier seemed struck by the remark.

"There may be something in that, sir," she allowed.

Then one or two others of the head servants, who, having endured the twenty-five years of semi-starvation of the old Squire's rule, had come to be looked upon as fixtures in the place, were in turn introduced by name to Mrs Chancellor.

"Some of the new servants are to be here to-morrow," said Mrs Grier, to Captain Chancellor. "I hope you will find everything comfortable in the meantime, sir."

Dinner—or, more properly speaking, supper—was prepared for the travellers in the dining-room—a huge, dark cavern

of a room it looked to Eugenia, who shivered as the fireless grate met her view. She was too tired to eat; but, afraid of annoying her husband, she made a pretence of doing so, feeling eager for Sydney's letter, and a chat with Rachel about "home," in her own room.

These pleasures were deferred for a little by the appearance of Mrs Grier to do the honour of showing her lady her rooms. The housekeeper had rather taken a fancy to Mrs Chancellor. Eugenia's allusion to what she "must have had to go through," had been a most lucky one, for Mrs Grier was one of those curiously constituted beings to whom condolence never comes amiss. The most delicate flattery was less acceptable to her than a sympathising remark that she was "looking far from well," and no one could pay her a higher compliment than by telling her she bore traces of having known a great deal of trouble. She was not, for her class, an uneducated person; but she was constitutionally superstitious. Omens, dreams, deathbeds, funerals, all things ghastly and ghostly, were dear to her soul; and her thirty-three years' life in a gloomy, half-deserted house, such as Halswood had been under the old *régime*, had not conduced to a healthier tone of mind.

"Along this way, if you please, ma'am," she said to Eugenia, pointing to the long corridor which ran to the right of the great staircase they had come up by. "The rooms to the left have not been occupied for many years. We thought—that is, Mr Blinkhorn and I—that you would prefer to use the rooms which have been the best family-rooms for some generations. It would feel less strange-like—more at home, if I may say so. Here, ma'am," opening the first door she came to, "is what was the late Mrs Chancellor's boudoir. It is eight-and-twenty years next month since she was taken ill suddenly, sitting over there by the window in that very chair. It was heart-disease, I believe. She had had a good deal of trouble in her time, poor lady, for the old Squire was always peculiar. They carried her—we did (I was her maid then)—into her bedroom—the next room, ma'am—this," again opening a door, with an air of peculiar gratification in what she was going to say, "and she died the same night in the bed you see, standing as it does now."

The present Mrs Chancellor gave a little shiver.

"The next room again, ma'am," proceeded Mrs Grier, "is quite as pleasant a one as this, and about the same size. It is the room in which old Mr Chancellor breathed his last, last December. He was eighty-nine, ma'am; but he died very hard, for all that. We prepared both these rooms that you might take your choice."

"Thank you," replied Eugenia. "I certainly do not feel as if I preferred either. What rooms did the last Mr and Mrs Chancellor use when they were here?" she went on to ask, in a desperate hope that she might light upon some more inviting habitation than these great, dark, musty apartments, with their funereal four-post bedsteads and gloomy associations.

"They had rooms on the other side of the passage," said Mrs Grier. "Mrs Chancellor had a prejudice against those *beautiful* mahogany bedsteads," with indignant emphasis. Evidently Herbert Chancellor's wife had found small favour in the eyes of Mrs Grier. "But Mr Chancellor *died*," with satisfaction, "in his grandfather's room—the next door, as I told you, ma'am, to this."

"I don't wonder at it," thought Eugenia to herself. She wished she could find courage to ask if it would not be possible for her at once to take up her quarters in one of the rooms in which, so far at least, no Chancellor had lain in state, and was just meditating a request to be shown the one in which Herbert had *not* died, when Mrs Grier nipped her hopes in the bud.

"To-morrow, of course, any room can be prepared that you like, ma'am," said the housekeeper; "but for to-night, these two beds are the only ones with sheets on."

There was a slightly aggrieved tone in her voice. Eugenia instantly took alarm that she might have hurt the old lady's feelings.

"Oh, thank you, Mrs Grier!" she exclaimed. "I am quite satisfied with this room, and I am sure it will be very comfortable. To-morrow I should like you to show me all over the house. Of course I don't yet know how we shall settle about any of the rooms permanently. It depends on Captain Chancellor. He intends to refurnish several. But now I think I will go to bed, if you will send Rachel. I am so tired!"

"You *do* look tired, ma'am. It quite gave me a turn to see you so white when you came first, ma'am," said Mrs Grier, more cheerfully than she had yet spoken.

And at supper in her own room, when she went downstairs, she confided to Mr Blinkhorn certain agreeable presentiments with regard to their new mistress.

"A nice-spoken young lady. None of your dressed-up fine ladies like the last Mrs Chancellor and her daughter, who must have French beds to sleep in, and could never so much as remember one's name. Oh, no, *this* Mrs Chancellor is a different kind altogether. But, mark my words, Mr Blinkhorn, she isn't long for this world. The Captain may talk of luck turning—ah, indeed!—was it for nothing I dreamt I saw our new lady with black hair instead of brown? Was it for nothing the looking-glass dipped out of my hands when I was dusting her room again this afternoon?"

"But it didn't break," objected Mr Blinkhorn.

"Break, what has that to do with it?" exclaimed Mrs Grier, indignantly. "But I know of old it's no use wasting words on some subjects on you, Mr Blinkhorn. Those that won't see won't see, but some day you may remember my words."

But, notwithstanding Mrs Grier's forebodings, notwithstanding her own wounded and troubled spirit, Eugenia Chancellor soon fell asleep, and slept soundly. She fell asleep with Sydney's letter under her pillow, and its loving words in her heart; and the next morning, when the sun shone again, and her husband spoke kindly and seemed to have forgotten yesterday's cloud, she began again to think that after all life might be bright for her, and their home a

happy one.

“Comme on pense à vingt ans.”

Volume Three—Chapter Three.

Visitors, Expected and Unexpected.

Eins ist was besänftigt; die Liebe.—Börne.

Yes, things certainly looked brighter next morning, but the brightness was somewhat fitful and tremulous. Encouraged by it, nevertheless, Eugenia made many new resolutions—too many perhaps—and cherished again new hopes. She set herself with palpitating earnestness to please her husband, and repeated to herself, whenever she had reason to think she had done so, that her former failures had been entirely attributable to her own bad management, want of tact, or exaggerated sensitiveness. Her desire to bring herself, and not Captain Chancellor, in guilty; her determination to see him, and everything about him, by the light of her former hopes and beliefs would have been piteous to any one well acquainted with both characters. She was fighting, not merely for happiness, but for faith—her terror, fast maturing, though as yet resolutely ignored, was not so much that her married life should prove a disappointment as that she should be forced into acknowledging the unworthiness of her idol—that the day should come when, in unutterable bitterness of spirit, she should be driven to confess, “behold it was a dream;” when, the glamour gone for ever, the prize she had won should be seen by her for but “a poor thing” after all. For should that day ever come, Eugenia, little as she knew herself, yet felt instinctively it would go sorely with her—ever prone to extremes, her judgment would then be warped by disappointment, as formerly by unreasonable expectation.

“If I ever come to believe Beauchamp selfish, small-minded, or in any sense less noble than my ideal husband,” she had once said to herself, “I cannot imagine that I could endure to remain with him—I cannot imagine that I could live. Only,” she added, and this reflection many a time stood her in good stead, giving her a sense of security—of firm ground in one direction, “there is one thing I can *never* be disappointed in—the certainty of his love. Even should it die out altogether—should he live to regret his marriage, and think it a mistake, I shall know that it *was* mine—that to win me he threw every other consideration aside.”

But just at this time—their first coming to Halswood—Mrs Chancellor instinctively shunned meditation, and for a while the plan seemed to answer. There was a good deal to do—a good many arrangements to make as to which it was almost a matter of necessity that her husband should consult her. There was all the new furniture to select, the choice of rooms to make, and into these interests Eugenia threw herself with a good deal of her old energy, tempered however by her determination in all things great and small to submit to Beauchamp’s wishes—to accept his opinion as incontestably best. And up to a certain point this plan succeeded, and, difficult as it was for Eugenia to live in a state of semi-suppression, of incessant watchfulness over each word, and tone, and even look for fear that in any way she should offend, yet she fancied she believed she was doing no more than her wifely duty—that she was happy in acting thus, and that by-and-by, “when we get to understand each other,” life would be all she had dreamed of.

But to an essentially honest nature this self-delusion could not be kept up for ever. Nor, notwithstanding all the goodwill in the world, was it possible for Eugenia—impulsive, vehement, yearning for sympathy, and eager to confide to the friend nearest to her every thought, doubt, hope which sprang to life in her busy brain—for long to adhere to the rule of conduct she had laid down for herself. Her very conscientiousness, her very humility ranged themselves against her; how could she judge or interpret the conduct or opinions of the man she would have gladly died rather than lose her lofty faith in, by a standard lower than that by which she tested herself? She never yet had allowed to herself the existence of the creeping, encroaching, serpent-like fear she dared not face; but, nevertheless, it was making its way to the very centre of her fortress. Day by day she propped up its tottering foundations with some feeble, inefficient attempt at a bulwark—some plausible excuse or suggestion of misapprehension or undeserved self-blame—refusing to see how the whole once beautiful fabric was doomed, how the best remaining chance for her was bravely to make an end of it, to set to work again with the materials yet left to her to uprear a less imposing but more firmly-built tower of defence, better fitted than her fairy palace to stand, not only the great storms, but the smaller trials—the daily damps, and mists, and chills of life.

But this, Eugenia would not do. She clung with desperate infatuation to her dream, and in her heart of hearts she said

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“If it is to end in ruin, let it be so, and great will be the fall thereof. But I will not hasten my own misery by thinking about it beforehand.”

They had been now between two and three months at Halswood; the weeks had at the very first passed quickly enough, for Eugenia had succeeded in filling them with a succession of petty interests. Captain Chancellor was very well pleased with her, on the whole. She had proved more submissive than he had anticipated, though a great part of the credit of this satisfactory state of things was doubtless due to his own judicious management. He had always had his own theories as to the proper way of controlling and training the opposite sex, and had often been contemptuous on the subject of unhappy marriages.

“Unhappy fiddlesticks,” he would declare, “it’s all his own fault. He should have given her to understand once for all at the start who was to be master, and he would have had no more trouble.”

The trouble that had fallen to his own share he owned to himself had certainly not been great, and the proof of the pudding being generally allowed to be in the eating, he felt pleasantly conscious of his own success. There was only

one thing about his wife that ever seriously annoyed him—her spirits were not of late what they had been; certainly, some amount of repose and reserve of manner had been wanting in her at first, and he was pleased to see how quickly she had, at a hint or two from him, set herself to acquire it; but then, again, there had been a great charm in her girlish gaiety and graceful merriment.

“I never heard any woman laugh better than Eugenia,” he thought. “Most women laugh so atrociously, that I wish it was made penal, but she laughs charmingly.”

Then he wondered why of late he had so seldom heard that sweet, soft, bright sound. “She can’t be dull,” he said to himself, “we have had a fair amount of variety since we came here. Besides, catch a woman being dull and not complaining of it! And if there is anything she wants, she would have been sure to ask for it.”

He firmly believed himself the most indulgent of husbands, and so, in a certain practical sense, perhaps he was. He “grudged her nothing,” though, indeed, her tastes continued so simple, that her own allowance from her father promised more than to cover her whole personal expenses; he never went away from home without bringing her some costly present when he came back—the first time, it had been a bracelet of great value. Eugenia had thanked him for it warmly, but then, eyeing it with some misgiving, had said something about its being too good for her.

“I don’t feel as if I liked wearing such splendid things, Beauchamp,” had been her words. “It hardly seems consistent with—”

“With what?” he had asked, irritated already.

“With my former quiet life, with present things, even, my sister being the wife of a poor curate, for one thing. But oh, don’t be vexed, Beauchamp, I am very silly, I know. Forgive me. For the *thought* of me, the wish to please me, I cannot thank you enough. That would have delighted me had the bracelet been the plainest in the world.”

Upon which, Beauchamp had turned from her angrily, with some muttered words about “sentimental nonsense and affectation,” and Eugenia had had a sore fit of penitence for the inexcusable ingratitude which had thus wounded his sensitive spirit. And, after all, she did deserve some blame for unnecessarily irritating him in this instance.

And thus, whether really the case or not, it always seemed to him in any of the discussions or disagreements which still, notwithstanding Eugenia’s scrupulous care, occasionally arose between them. And no wonder that he thought so. It was always the same story. Eugenia annoyed him, probably in some very trivial matter, as to which, nevertheless, he felt bound to act up to his principle of “keeping a tight hand on her, letting her feel the reins.”

And invariably it ended in her taking all the blame on herself, exerting all her powers of logic (or sophistry) to convince herself that the fault lay with her alone. It was but rarely, very, very rarely, that she allowed her strong true sense of justice, of self-respect and womanly right, to break out from the restraint in which she had condemned it to dwell. And on such occasions, according to the invariable law of reaction, the unnatural repression avenged itself, and as had been the case in the carriage the night they came to Halswood, Eugenia’s bitterness of indignation and fiery temper horrified herself, and did her infinite injustice with her husband. It was a bad state of things altogether—bad for Eugenia, worse, perhaps, for her husband, fostering his selfishness, increasing his narrow-minded self-opinionativeness.

The day after the one on which it had occurred to Beauchamp that Eugenia’s spirits were not what they had been, it happened that she got a letter from Sydney. It came in the morning, and as Captain Chancellor handed it to her, a joyful exclamation escaped her.

“From Sydney! Oh, I am so glad! I have not heard from her for such a time.”

“What do you call ‘such a time,’ I wonder?” said Captain Chancellor, good-humouredly. “A week, I suppose?”

“No, longer than that,” replied Eugenia. And then, encouraged by his tone, she added, “You know Sydney and I had hardly ever been separated before, and lately I have been particularly anxious to hear from home—from Wareborough—on account of my father not having been well.”

“Your father ill! I never heard of it. I wonder you did not tell me,” said her husband.

“It was when you were away—the week before last—I heard it. I think I mentioned it when I wrote,” said Eugenia, timidly, reluctant to own to herself that Beauchamp could so soon have forgotten a matter of such interest to her.

“Ah, well, perhaps you did. It is nothing serious, I suppose?” And without waiting for an answer, Captain Chancellor proceeded to read his own letters.

One among them was from an old brother officer, a friend of several years’ standing, recently returned from abroad, whom he had invited to come down for a few days’ shooting, intending to arrange a suitable party to meet him.

“Eugenia,” he said, looking up quickly, after reading this letter, “Colonel Masterton cannot come till the 29th. That leaves us all the week after next free. Of course I shall not ask the others till he comes. How would you like to have your people for a few days then—the Thurstons and your father. The change might do him good, and you seem dying to see your sister.”

Eugenia’s face glowed all over with delight. The old bright look came into her eyes, the old eager ring thrilled again through her voice.

“Oh, Beauchamp, thank you, thank you so much for thinking of it. It would be delightful. I cannot tell you how I should enjoy it.”

"Why have you never spoken of it before if you wish it so much?" asked Beauchamp, not unkindly, but with the slight irritation of incipient self-reproach. "I can't *guess* your wishes always, you know."

"I did mention it once," she said, timidly again. "Don't you remember, the first time you had to go away I asked if Sydney might come to me."

"But that was an absurd proposal. It would have looked so ridiculous to bring Mrs Thurston all the way here because I was to be away, and naturally when your friends do come I should wish to be at home to receive them; so you had better write about their coming, to-day."

He rose as he spoke, and gathering his letters and newspapers together, left the room, feeling very well pleased with himself, and not sorry to see the bright flush of happiness his proposal had brought to his wife's pale cheeks.

She was indeed feeling very happy. Never since her marriage, since at least the first few days of unalloyed enjoyment in Paris—had she felt so eagerly delighted about anything. And the bright gleam had not come before it was wanted. Notwithstanding Beauchamp's comfortable belief that they had had a fair amount of variety since coming to Halswood, Eugenia's life had latterly been very dull. The most pleasurable part of the variety had fallen to his own share—two or three "runs up to town" to see about the new furniture, or new carriages, or something of the kind; one or two short visits to bachelor shooting-boxes, to which ladies were not invited; plenty of the exhilarating out-door life, which he thoroughly enjoyed, to which as yet Eugenia, not over strong, and completely unaccustomed to horses, was not sufficiently acclimatised to find it enjoyable. No wonder Captain Chancellor considered that the last three months had been far from dull. They would not have seemed so to Eugenia, had her inner life been a more natural and healthy one; but as it was, the outside distractions that had come in her way had been few and by no means powerful.

Most of the "families of position" in the neighbourhood had called on them, but the very biggest people of all—a family residing at a considerable distance from Halswood—had not yet done so; and Beauchamp's evident anxiety on this point had not been unobserved by Eugenia, though resolutely put aside by her as one of the things into which she would not look. Some of their neighbours had already invited them to dinner, and they had gone; but Eugenia had not enjoyed the experience, and felt little wish to renew it. "Long ago," as now in her own mind she had learnt to call her girlhood, even the dullest of dinner-parties would have furnished her quick observation, her lively imagination, her fresh, eager nature with material for interest and entertainment. But now-a-days it was different. She was self-conscious and self-absorbed, and, as a matter of course, less attractive in herself, less ready to find others so. Her one engrossing sensation in company was anxiety to please, or at least to avoid displeasing her husband, which left her none of the leisure of mind or self-forgetfulness essential to her enjoyment of the people or scenes about her. And these had not been sufficiently striking or interesting to force her out of herself. There were not many young people in the neighbourhood; those of her own sex nearest in age to Eugenia happening at this time to be either young girls not yet out of the schoolroom, or youthful matrons, with whom Mrs Chancellor could not feel that she had much in common. They all seemed happy and busy, perfectly at ease, satisfied with their lives and themselves. "Or else," thought Eugenia, "they are more clever at hiding their anxieties and disappointments than I am." In many cases doubtless true. She had not yet learnt, as most women of deep feeling sooner or later must learn, to smile when the heart feels all but breaking, to force interest in the trivialities around one, when one's own life, or what may be dearer than life, seems hanging in the balance. At this stage of her history, such seeming she would probably have stigmatised as mere hypocrisy, not taking into account that unselfishness and worthy self-respect, as often as pride, furnish the motive for the wearing of that most tragic "des masques tragiques—celui qui avoit un sourire."

So, though her beauty and gentleness prepossessed many in her favour—many even of those whose prejudices as well as curiosity had been aroused by the fact that the wife of the new master of Halswood was not exactly of their world, belonging, indeed, to one of "those dreadful manufacturing places, where the sun never shines for the smoke, and all the people drop their h's, you know"—Eugenia Chancellor did not make much way among her new acquaintances. The women allowed she was "pretty" and unassuming, but stupid or shy, they were not sure which. The men hooted at "pretty"—"lovely" or "beautiful" was nearer the mark—and hesitated about the "shy or stupid" suggestion, coming, however, in almost every case to allow that she was difficult to get on with—either "Chancellor bullied her at home," or she had married him without caring for him; that she was not happy was evident. At which proof of masculine discrimination, the wives and mothers held up their hands in scornful incredulity. It was "just like Fred, or Arthur, or 'your papa,' to make a romantic mystery about her, because she is pretty. There is nothing plainer to see than that she is silent and stiff because she feels rather out of her element as yet. It is all strange to her, of course, having been brought up as she has been, and really she is to be felt for."

But the "feeling for her," giving itself vent in one or two instances in the direction of a disposition to patronise, was not responded to; and after a while the temporary sensation on the subject of Mrs Chancellor died away, especially when it oozed out that Lady Hereward had not yet called at Halswood.

Little cared Eugenia, as she ran upstairs to consult her lugubrious friend Mrs Grier on the subject of the prettiest and pleasantest rooms to be forthwith—fifteen days beforehand—prepared for her expected guests.

"My sister, Mrs Thurston, and my father, are coming the week after next," she announced to the housekeeper, ignoring the possibility of the yet un-posted letter of invitation receiving any but a favourable reply. "You must let me know if you think of *anything* wanting for these rooms." And the bright expectation in the young face touched even Mrs Grier's unready sympathy in joy. She forgave Eugenia's presumptuous rejection of the gloomy chambers, long since deserted in favour of more cheerful quarters, by the master and mistress of the house, where the funereal four-posters still reigned, and was inspired to suggest ever so many tiny wants and improvements which sent her young mistress off to Chilworth in the brougham, in a pleasant excitement of novel housewifely importance. It was but seldom that interests of the kind offered themselves to Eugenia—another of the unfortunate blanks in her new life—for Mrs Grier, notwithstanding her dreams and visions, was, practically, an excellent head of affairs. Everything about

the house was always in perfect order. If the under-servants proved inefficient or otherwise undesirable they were sent away, and Mrs Grier or Blinkhorn procured others; if the dinner was not thoroughly to Captain Chancellor's liking, one or other of this responsible pair was informed of the fact, and desired to see it remedied, or, in a case of unusual gravity, the "chef" himself would be summoned to receive personal instruction from his master, who considered himself, and very probably justly, no mean authority on gastronomical problems.

"There is really very little for me to do," wrote Eugenia once to her sister. "Beauchamp does not care for me to meddle in the housekeeping, and I can see it is far better done than it would be by me. All the new furniture has come, and of course it is beautiful. I took a good deal of interest in choosing it, but it isn't half such fun as when one has to think how one can make one's money get all one wants. And I think the rooms are too big to enjoy the prettiness of the things. Do you remember the choosing of your drawing-room carpet? I am afraid, Sydney dear, I am quite out of my element as a fine lady. There are no poor people, even, that I can hear of. They all seem dreadfully well off, and well looked after by the clergyman and the agent and their wives. I wish I could study more, but I think I have got lazy, or else it is the difference of having to do everything alone. There are lots of books in the library—many whose names even I never heard. I wish I had papa's direction! We get all our new books from town once a month, but they very seldom send the ones I want, and when they do I want you to talk them over with."

Sydney sighed as she read this letter. It was not often Eugenia wrote so despondently, but Sydney's perceptions were acute.

"Poor Eugenia," she thought. "It isn't only these outside things which are wrong, I fear. If other things had equalled her hopes, these would have been all right. The want lies deeper, I fear—the blank is one hard to fill. How I wish I could see her!"

The next week brought Eugenia's invitation. It would have been difficult to decline it. "You *must* come," she wrote. "I am living in the thoughts of it, Sydney; it will be absolute cruelty to refuse. I cannot tell you how I long to see you all again."

So, though leaving home even for a few days, was now no small effort to Mr Laurence, and though Frank Thurston groaned a good deal in anticipation, he "hated fine houses and grand people," and all *his* people, the East-enders of Wareborough, would go to the bad in double-quick time if he let them out of his sight for the best part of a week; who would take the night schools? who would see to the confirmation classes? etc, etc, etc—it ended, as Sydney had quietly determined it should, in a letter of acceptance being sent to Halswood by return of post. And Mrs Thurston took the opportunity of chaffing her husband a little on what she termed his growing self-conceit.

"'Un bon prêtre,'" she said, "'c'est bien bon.' I quite agree with Jean Valjean. But still, Frank, of the very best of things it is possible to have too much."

Whereupon Frank told her she was very impertinent. There was little fear of these two misunderstanding each other.

There is a mischievous French proverb which tells us that "le malheur n'est jamais si près de nous qu'alors que tout nous sourit." Things were certainly *more* smiling than usual with Eugenia Chancellor the morning that she received Sydney's cheerful acceptance of the invitation to Halswood, and was graciously told by Beauchamp in answer to her announcement of the news "that he was glad they were coming, and he hoped the weather would be fine." But misfortune—disappointment, at least, was near at hand; misfortune in the shape of a plain-looking little old lady in a shabby pony carriage, who about an hour after luncheon this same day made her appearance under the ugly portico, and learning that Mrs Chancellor was at home, alighted, and was shown into the morning-room, giving a name for announcement to the footman newly imported from town, which, taken in conjunction with her unimposing appearance, somewhat excited that gentleman's surprise.

She had not driven in by the grand entrance, but by the second best lodge, that on the road leading to the village of Stebbing-le-Bray. Captain Chancellor, setting off on a long ride, passed the old lady in the funny little carriage, and, wondering who she could be, asked for information on the subject from the man at the lodge, a venerable person thoroughly up in local celebrities. The answer he received caused him to open his handsome blue eyes, and to change his programme for the afternoon. He rode out at the Stebbing lodge, made a cut across the country which brought him on to the Chilworth Road, and re-entering his own domain, dismounted at home twenty minutes after he had set off, to find his wife and the little old lady in evidently friendly converse in the morning-room.

Somewhat startled by her husband's unlooked-for reappearance, uncertain if he and her visitor were already acquainted, Eugenia hesitated a moment in introducing her companions. But the stranger was quite equal to the occasion.

"How do you do, Captain Chancellor?" she said, cordially. "I am so pleased to meet you at last. By *hearsay*, do you know, you are already an old friend of mine?"

Beauchamp bowed with a slight air of inquiry.

"A nephew of mine, or, to be exact, which they say women never are, a grand-nephew of my husband's, has so often spoken of you to me. You will remember him—George Vandeleur; he was in your regiment in the Crimea, though you have seldom met each other since?"

Captain Chancellor's face lightened up, and what Eugenia called his nicest look came over it. He had been very kind to young Vandeleur, at the time little more than a boy, and it was pleasant to find himself remembered.

Lady Hereward had the happiest knack of saying agreeable things, of pleasing when she wished to please. Those who liked her liked her thoroughly, and trusted her implicitly; but, on the other hand, those who disliked her were quite as much in earnest about it. And both parties, I suspect, coalesced in being more or less afraid of her, for, insignificant

as she appeared, she could hit hard in certain directions, though her heart was true, her sympathies wide. Coming, perhaps, within Roma Eyrecourt's category of "those to whom it was easy to be good," there had certainly been nothing in the circumstances of her life to develop meanness in any form, and on this, in whatever guise she came across it—humbug, petty ambition, class prejudice—she was therefore, as is the tendency of poor humanity towards the foibles oneself "is not inclined to," apt to be rather too hard. Since birth she had been placed in a perfectly assured and universally recognised position. She had had nothing to be ambitious about; even her want of beauty had not amounted to a trial, for her powers of fascination, as is sometimes the case with plain women, had been more than compensatingly great; and before she was twenty she had had every unexceptionable *parti* of the day at her feet. How it came to pass she was not "spoilt" those who knew her best often marvelled, but even they did not know all about her. For she had had her sorrows, had passed through a fiery furnace—how it all happened matters little, the love-story of a plain-looking old woman of sixty would hardly be interesting begun at the wrong end—and the gold of her nature had emerged, therefrom, unwasted and pure. In the end she had married, at twenty-two, Lord Hereward, a peer of great wealth and position, a man whom she liked and respected, and with whom she had bravely made the best of her life. Trouble was not over for her yet, however. She had two children, a son who grew up satisfactorily to man's estate, behaving himself creditably at school, and college, and everywhere, who in time married, as was to be expected, and became the centre of another family; and a daughter, who was as the apple of her mother's eye, whom she loved as strong natures only can love. And one day—one awful day—the little daughter died suddenly and painfully, and Margaret Hereward's heart broke.

And all the outside world said: "How sad for the poor Herewards; but what a blessing it was not the boy," and then forgot all about it, for the chief sufferer never reminded any one of her woe.

It was forty years ago now, and few remembered that a little Lady Alice Godwin had ever existed. In time, of course, her mother came to learn that even with a broken heart one can go on living, and her healthy nature reasserted itself in an increased power of sympathy—an active energy in lightening or, at least, sharing other women's sorrows. But still, as she grew older, she hardened in her special dislikes, her pet intolerances.

She went on talking about her nephew for a while, explaining, by the way, how it was she had come to make her first call at Halswood in so informal a fashion.

"I am staying at Stebbing Rectory for a day or two," she said. "A young cousin of mine is the wife of Mr Mervyn, the clergyman there. She has just got her first baby—a little girl;" she paused for an instant; "such a nice baby, and I came over to look after her a little. She has no mother. Hearing how very near I was to you, I thought I would not miss the opportunity of seeing you so easily. It is a long drive from Marshlands here. When you come to see me it must not be only for a call."

She did not tell that the calling on the new Mrs Chancellor, which had been a vague and indefinite intention in her mind before coming to Stebbing, had taken active form, from hearing from her cousin some of the local gossip about the stranger—that she was pretty, but so stiff and reserved that no one could get on with her; that some people called her awkward and underbred, others suspected that she was not happy (Mrs Mervyn's own opinion), but that from one cause or another her life bid fair to become a lonely and isolated one. And the sight of Eugenia's face rewarded the old lady for the kindly effort she had made. It was not so much her beauty, though Lady Hereward loved to see a pretty face; it was her sweet, bright, yet wistful expression, that straightway touched the maternal chord in her visitor's heart. Possibly, too, contradiction had something to do with the interest Eugenia at once awakened.

"Underbred, indeed!" she said to herself, contemptuously. "I wish I could teach some people I know, what good breeding really is. As to her being unhappy, I can't say. I must see more of her."

She acted at once on this determination, for, before she left, she invited her new young friends to spend three days of the next week but one at Marshlands. There was a particular reason for fixing this time; "George" was coming, and would be delighted to meet Captain Chancellor again.

"I would give you a choice if I could," she went on, fancying that she perceived a slight hesitation in Mrs Chancellor's manner, "for I really do want you to come. But I fear I cannot. We are going away the end of the same week to Hereward, for some time. We old people need a breath of sea air now and then."

"It is exceedingly kind of you. I should have liked *very* much to go to you the week after next," began Eugenia, looking as if she meant what she said. "It is so unlucky—but I am afraid we must decline. We are engaged for the whole of that week at home. You remember, Beauchamp? I heard this morning that—"

"I think you have made a confusion between the week after next and the week after *that*," said Captain Chancellor, blandly. "I don't know of anything to prevent our accepting Lady Hereward's invitation. We did expect some friends; but, don't you remember, Eugenia, that Colonel Masterton put off his visit for a week?"

"Yes," said Eugenia, quietly; "I remember."

"Then may I hope to see you," asked Lady Hereward, feeling a little puzzled, "on Tuesday?—that will be the 22nd. George comes the same day."

"Certainly," said Beauchamp. "We shall be delighted to join you."

And "Thank you—you are very, very kind," said Eugenia again.

The tone in which the simple words were uttered was almost girlishly cordial, yet, somehow, Lady Hereward did not feel satisfied. "Her manner *is* a little peculiar," she thought to herself, as she drove back again to Stebbing-le-Bray, "though at first she seemed so frank. I hope my invitation did not really interfere with anything. Could it be shyness

that made her not want to come? How very lovely her eyes are! I wonder if my Alice's eyes would have looked like that—they were brown. Alice would not have been so pretty. And, dear me, by this time she might have had a daughter as old as that child! Ah, my little Alice!"

When Lady Hereward had gone, Eugenia sat still for a moment or two, then rose and left the room. In the hall she met her husband.

"Where are you going?" he said. "Come in here for a minute," opening the door of his study, beside which they were standing. She followed him, but did not sit down. "Tell me," he went on, "how do you like the old lady?"

"Very much," replied Eugenia; then turned again, as if eager to go.

"What are you in such a hurry about? Can't you wait a minute?" he said, impatiently. "Where are you going?"

"To write to Sydney, of course, to put off their visit," she answered, her lips quivering. "I must do it at once."

"Confound Sydney!" he broke out, rudely. "Your temper, Eugenia, is enough to provoke a saint. Wait an instant—do be reasonable—why can't you propose to Sydney to—"

But he had gone too far. Eugenia turned and looked at him for a moment with the unlovely light of angry indignation in her eyes; then left the room quietly.

"By Jove!" said Beauchamp, when left to himself, "I begin to suspect I have been a great fool, after all!"

But reflection and a cigar soothed him a little; half an hour later he followed his wife to her boudoir. She was writing busily.

"Eugenia," he began, "I am sorry for my rudeness just now, but you are very unreasonable. Why can't you write to your people, and ask them to come on the Friday? We return then. Any one but you would understand my reasons for wishing to go to Marshlands."

"I do understand them, rather too well," replied his wife, coldly. "As for asking my people to come on Friday, it is out of the question. My brother-in-law cannot be away on Sunday; and besides, I cannot ask my father and Sydney—neither of them strong—to come so long a journey for only two days."

"Why for only two days?"

"Because on Monday all *your* friends are coming, and you do not wish mine to be here at the same time."

"I never said anything of the kind," exclaimed Beauchamp, angrily, aware nevertheless that he had *thought* something very much of the kind. It was not that he was ashamed of Mr Laurence or Sydney; he liked them both very well; but there had been a good deal of "chaff" about his Wareborough marriage, and he had imagined more. He could ill bear chaff, and his constitutional and avowed arrogance laid him peculiarly open to it in certain directions. How he had sneered and made fun of other men in the old days for being "caught" by a pretty face or a pair of bright eyes! He was not ashamed of his marriage—he was proud of his wife in herself—but on the whole, he preferred that his old friends, on their first visit, should not find the house full of his Wareborough relations-in-law. But he had not imagined that Eugenia suspected this.

"I never said anything of the kind," he repeated, working himself into a rage. "But I warn you, Eugenia, if you don't take care what you are about, you will drive me into thinking, and saying too, many things I never wish to think or say."

She got up from her seat, and stood facing him.

"I know what you mean," she said, huskily, a white despair creeping over her face. "You mean that you regret your marriage. Why did you do it at all then?—tell me. Why did you make me think you everything great and noble, to open my eyes now like this? Why did you not leave me where I was, happy and loved, instead of making me care for you? Why did you ask me to be your wife?"

"Why, indeed? You may well ask," replied Captain Chancellor, in a bitter, contemptuous tone.

Then he turned and left the room. He put down all she had said to "temper," of course; but some of her words had wounded and mortified him not a little.

Eugenia stood there where he had left her, in blank, bewildered misery. Only one thought glanced with any brightness through the black cloud of wretchedness which seemed to choke her.

"He did love me once," she said to herself. "If all the rest was a dream, still he did love me once."

And but for this, she thought she *must* have died.

Volume Three—Chapter Four.

"By the Spring."

Life, that dares send
A challenge to his end,

And when it comes, say, "Welcome, friend."

Crashaw.

Tuesday the 22nd came, but Captain Chancellor set off on his visit to Marshlands alone. Eugenia was ill—too ill to leave her room, though better than she had been. The restrained suffering of the last few weeks, the unhealthily reserved and isolated life she had begun to live—she to whom sympathy was as the air she breathed—all had told upon her; and the excitement of the painful discussion with her husband the day of Lady Hereward's unfortunate visit, had been the finishing stroke. After that she gave way altogether.

She was not sorry to be ill. On the whole, she felt it the best thing that could have happened to her. She was glad to be alone. She was very glad now that Sydney's visit had been deferred. With all her haste and impulsiveness, there was in her a curious mixture of clear-headedness and reasoning power. She liked to understand things—to get to the bottom of them. Now that she had left off pretending to deceive herself with false representations—now that she had ceased to try to cheat herself into imagining she was happy—she found a strange, half-morbid satisfaction in dissecting and analysing the whole—her own character and her husband's; the past lives of both, and the influences that had made them what they were; the special, definite causes of their discordancy.

"He is not—I see it plainly now," she said to herself, with a curious, hopeless sort of calm, "he is not in the very least the man I imagined. *That* Beauchamp has never existed. Is it just, therefore, that I should blame the real one for not being what he never was?" Here she got a little puzzled, and tried to look at it from a fresh point of view. "And being what he is, and no more, why should I not make the best of it? It seems to me there is something repulsive and unworthy in the thought. I would almost rather go on being miserable. Yet I suppose many women have had to do it. I could fancy Sydney, for instance, doing it, and never letting any one suspect she had had it to do. In time, perhaps, I may find it easier, or grow callous."

Then she would set to work to think out a new rôle for herself—that of an utterly lonely, impossibly self-reliant woman, living a life of self-abnegation, of lofty devotion to duty—unappreciated devotion, unsuspected abnegation—such as no woman has ever yet lived since women were. Seen through the softening medium of physical weakness, not amounting to actual suffering, this new way of looking at things came to have a certain attraction for her. The idea of total and lasting sacrifice of all hopes of personal happiness, all yearning for sympathy, was grand enough and impossible enough to recommend itself greatly to this ardent, extreme nature, to which anything was better than second bests, nothing so antagonistic as compromise in any form.

"I have staked my all and lost," she said to herself with a sort of piteous grandiloquence; "there is nothing left me but duty and endurance; for though he *did* love me, I doubt if he does so now. I am not necessary to his happiness. He does not and cannot understand me."

Only unfortunately there were two or three little difficulties in the way of settling down comfortably to this conclusion. In the first place, notwithstanding her love of theorising, and of idealising even the woes of her lot, Eugenia was essentially honest, and being so she could not allow to herself that her conduct had been blameless, especially in this last and most serious disagreement. She had said things which she knew would gall and irritate her husband. In the morbid excitement of the moment she owned to herself that she had even wished them to have this effect, that his behaviour might excuse the violence of her indignation. And her conduct in general—her conduct ever since their marriage—ever since, at least, the first few weeks of careless happiness—how did that now appear to her from her new point of view? She knew she had been gentle, and in a superficial sense unselfish; with but very rare exceptions she had entirely merged her own wishes in those of her husband, had opposed nothing that he had suggested. Such submission, such sinking of her own individuality, had been unnatural and forced, completely foreign to her character. And, what had been its motive? Not the highest—far from it. It had not been that she really believed that in so doing she was acting her wifely part to perfection; it had not been earnest endeavour after the best within her reach that had prompted her, but rather, a cowardly, a selfish determination to close her eyes to the facts of her life—a weak refusal to see anything she did not want to see—the old wilful cry, "All or nothing; give me all or I die"—the shrinking from owning, even to herself, the self-willed impetuosity with which she had acted—the terror of acknowledging that she had been deceived, or rather, had deceived herself.

"Yes," she said, "I have been all wrong together. How selfish I have been too! Months ago how indignant I used to get with poor Sydney if she ever attempted, as she used to call it, to 'clip my wings for me.' How angry I was with papa when he suggested that we should defer our marriage till we knew a little more of each other! How selfish I was in Paris, too—selfish and unsympathising in Beauchamp's change of fortune! Perhaps, after all, it is no more than I have deserved that he should feel as he does now."

The reflection was a wholesome one, and its influence softening, and Beauchamp had been very kind since her illness. He might not understand her, but at times she felt it was certainly going too far to say that he no longer cared for her. He seemed to have already quite forgotten all about this last discussion, and in truth the impression it had made upon him had been by no means a deep one. "It was all a fit of temper of Eugenia's," he said to himself, and as one of his fixed ideas was that such a thing as a woman without a temper had never existed, he resigned himself to his fate, with the hope that his share of this unavoidable drawback to the charms of married life might be small.

Up to the last Captain Chancellor hoped that his wife would be able to accompany him to Marshlands. To do him justice, he was very reluctant to go without her.

"It is such a pity," he said. "It would be just what I should like, for you to see a good deal of Lady Hereward. It isn't every one that she takes to, I can tell you."

"I like her in herself," said Eugenia; "the only thing I dislike her for is that she is Lady Hereward. I got tired of her name before I had ever seen her."

The moment she had said this she regretted it. Beauchamp's brow clouded over.

"Of course," he replied, coldly, "if you set yourself against her I can't help it. Perhaps the best plan would be for me to write making an excuse for us both, and have done with the acquaintance. I am sick of discussions about everything I propose."

It was hard upon her; it was so seldom, so very seldom she had opposed him in anything, or even expressed an opinion.

"I am very sorry I cannot go," she said, "but your giving up going is not to be thought of. There is no reason for it. I am not seriously ill. There is nothing wrong with me but what a few days' rest will set right."

This was true. So Captain Chancellor set off for Marshlands alone, and Eugenia, solitary and suffering, spent in her own room the week she had so eagerly anticipated.

Time went on. November past, midwinter is soon at hand, and Christmas had come and gone before, contrary to the Chilworth doctor's sanguine opinion, Mrs Chancellor was at all like herself again. It was a dreary winter to her. Had she been in good health, some reaction from the hopeless depression which had gradually taken hold of her would have been pretty sure to set in—a reaction, perhaps, of a sound and healthy nature; possibly, nevertheless, of the reverse. This, however, was not the case. At the beginning of her illness, things had looked more promising: her husband's kindness had touched and softened her, her own reflections had pointed the right way. But as the days went on and Eugenia felt herself growing weaker instead of stronger, her clearer view of things clouded over again. It takes a great reserve of mutual trust and sympathy to stand the wearing effects of a trying though not acute illness. Beauchamp got tired of his wife's never being well—so at least she fancied—tired of it, and then indifferent, or if not indifferent, accustomed to it. And whether this was really the case or not, there was some excuse for her believing it to be so, for the habitual small selfishness of his nature was thrown out in strong relief by circumstances undoubtedly trying.

"If people looked forward to realities, they would choose their husbands and wives differently. It is only about a year ago since I first met Beauchamp. Oh, how silly and ignorant I must have been! How perfect life—life with him—looked to me," thought Eugenia, bitterly.

She was more than usually depressed that day. Captain Chancellor had left home to spend a week at Winsley, where a merry Christmas party was expected, and though Eugenia had no wish to accompany him, even had she been able to do so, though she had not put the slightest difficulty in the way of his going, yet his readiness to do so wounded and embittered her. For he had got into the habit of often leaving home now—never for very long at a time, certainly—never without making every arrangement for her comfort; but yet the fact of his liking to go, increased her unhappy state of mind. Everything seemed against her. During all these months she had never succeeded in seeing her own people. Another invitation had been sent to them and accepted. For Eugenia had had the unselfishness to place the deferring of their first visit in a natural and favourable light, making it appear to be quite as much her own doing as her husband's, and a subject of great regret to both.

"Better that they should think I have grown cold and indifferent even," she thought, "than that they should suspect the truth." But no one except Frank had at this time thought anything of the kind.

"I won't go, another time," he growled. "I never heard anything so cool in my life. If it is Eugenia's own doing, I don't want to have anything more to say to her. If not, I pity her, but she chose her husband herself."

And Sydney had some difficulty to smooth him down again, and to gain his consent to the acceptance of the second invitation when in course of time it made its appearance.

It was accepted, but the visit did not take place. Before the date fixed for it arrived, Mr Laurence had another attack of illness, from which he only recovered sufficiently to be moved to a milder place, where for a few weeks, Sydney, though at no small personal inconvenience, accompanied him. Something was said by her in one of her letters to Eugenia, suggestive of her joining them and taking her share in the nursing and cheering of their father; but the proposal met with no response. Loyal and true-hearted as she was, Sydney felt chilled and disappointed, and said no more. But all through the winter, in reality passed by Eugenia in loneliness, and suffering, and yearning for sympathy, which only a mistaken desire to spare her sister sorrow prevented her expressing—all these months Sydney pictured her as happy and prosperous, so free from cares herself as to be in danger of forgetting their existence in the lives of others. For the more steadily hopeless Eugenia grew, the more cheerfully she wrote. And forced cheerfulness often bears a strong resemblance to heartlessness.

"I am glad and thankful she is happy," thought Sydney, "and she certainly must be so, for it is not in her to conceal it if she were not; but I did not think prosperity would have changed Eugenia."

Nor would she, for any conceivable consideration, have owned to any one, least of all perhaps to her husband, that she *did* think so.

Mr Laurence had fortunately no misgivings on the subject of his elder daughter. She was happy, she wrote regularly and affectionately—she had twice fixed a time for him to visit her, but circumstances had come in the way. It was all quite right. He loved her as fondly as ever, with perhaps a shade *more* fondness than the child "who was ever with him," whose new ties had in no wise been allowed to interfere with her daughterly devotion; it never occurred to him that Eugenia's affection could be dimmed.

"I should like to see her," he said sometimes—"I should like to see her very much—in her own home too. But by the spring we shall be able to arrange for it; by the spring, no doubt, I shall be more like myself again, and able to manage a little going about. We must go together, Sydney, my dear, as Eugenia wished."

And Sydney said, "Yes, by the spring they must arrange it." But a shadowy misgiving, that had visited her not unfrequently of late—a little, painful, choking feeling in her throat, a sudden moisture in her eyes, made themselves felt, when she looked at her father's thin, worn face, and heard him talk about "the spring;" and she wondered, as so many loving watchers wonder, "if the doctors had told her the whole truth."

There had always been a certain unworldliness about Mr Laurence—a gentle philosophy, an unexacting unselfishness, and of late all these had increased. Practical as he had proved himself in his far-seeing philanthropy, he was a man to whom it came naturally to live much in the unseen, to whom the thought that "to this life there is a to-morrow," was full of encouragement and consolation—a to-morrow in more senses than the one of individual blessedness—a to-morrow when the work begun here, however poor and imperfect in itself, shall be carried on, purified, strengthened, rendered a thousand times more powerful for good—a to-morrow even for the races yet unborn in this world. All this he believed, and his life had shown that he did so. Yet many people shook their heads over his "want of religious principle," his "dangerously lax notions," and prophesied that no blessing could follow the labours of such a man. But such sayings little troubled Sydney's father. He smiled with kindly tolerance, and thought to himself that some time or other such things would come to be viewed differently.

About the middle of February, Mr Laurence and his daughter returned home to Wareborough. On the last day of March, Sydney's boy was born—a strong, handsome, satisfactory baby—with whom the young parents were greatly delighted. Sydney recovered her strength quickly, and before April was over, Mr Laurence, who had seemed much better of late, and who had taken wonderfully to his grandson, began to talk again of the often-deferred visit to Eugenia.

"It would be a nice little change for you, Sydney, and Eugenia would be so pleased to see her little nephew. Her letters are full of questions about him. I have a great mind to write to her myself, and ask what time next month would be convenient for her to receive us. I think my doing so would please her. I should be sorry for her to think we had not taken the first opportunity of going to see her. They are sure to be at home next month?"

"Yes," said Sydney, "I remember Eugenia's saying in one of her letters, that they were not going to town this year. I don't know why, for not long ago she said something about their probably buying a house in town. Well, father dear, baby and I—and Frank too, I dare say—will be ready whenever you arrange for it with Eugenia."

But Mr Laurence never wrote. The very next day—it was early in May now—the Thurstons got a message, asking Sydney to go to see him as soon as she could. There was "nothing very much the matter," said the note, which he had written himself—"a slight return of the old symptoms," that was all; but it was enough to send his daughter to him without loss of time. Enough, too, to make the doctors look grave, and warn Mrs Thurston that there was every appearance of a long and trying illness before them, unless the next day or two brought a decidedly favourable change. No such change came. Divided between anxiety for her father and for her little infant, Sydney had almost more upon her hands than she could overtake. A few days after the commencement of Mr Laurence's illness, the Thurston household took up its quarters temporarily in Sydney's old home, that she might be the better able to give to her father the constant care and attention he required. At first he seemed to improve again, and Sydney was able to send a better report to Eugenia. But another week saw a change for the worse. Nothing *very* serious, said the doctors—nothing to cause immediate anxiety—but sufficiently discouraging, nevertheless. And then there came the usual injunction, "At all costs, the patient's spirits were to be kept up, his every wish complied with."

One morning Mr Laurence woke out of an uneasy sleep in a state of feverish agitation unusual to him.

"Sydney," he said, excitedly, when his daughter entered the room, "I have had a painful dream about Eugenia. It seemed to me that she was unhappy. I must see her at once. If I were well I would go to her. As it is, you must send for her. Do you think she can come to-day? I cannot rest till I have seen her."

Sydney was greatly startled, but she retained her presence of mind.

"I will see about it at once," she replied, soothingly, "and no doubt she will come immediately. I wish I had thought of it before, dear father; but we fancied you would enjoy seeing her more when you were a little stronger."

"Never mind," he said: "it will be all right if you will send at once now."

Two hours later Sydney came back to tell him it was done. A messenger had already started for Halswood. "I thought it better than telegraphing," she said; "they are so far from the station;" but Mr Laurence did not seem to care to hear any details. He was quite satisfied with knowing that the thing was done, and before long he fell asleep again and slept calmly.

About three o'clock that afternoon a Chilworth fly drove up to the front entrance of Halswood; a gentleman alighted, rang the bell, and inquired if Captain Chancellor were at home. He was answered in the negative, the master of the house was out, would not be in till between four and five.

"Mrs Chancellor, then?"

Disappointment again. She was not well enough to see visitors. Could the gentleman send in his message?

The gentleman hesitated. The position was an awkward one. "Is there no one I can see? No friend, perhaps, staying in the house?" he inquired at last.

A gleam of light—the footman, murmuring an unintelligible name, turns appealingly to Mr Blinkhorn in the background, who comes forward.

"Miss Heyrecourt is staying here at present, sir—a relation of my master's," Mr Blinkhorn condescended to explain,

going on to express his readiness to convey the stranger's card to the young lady if he would favour him with the same.

A look of relief overspread the countenance of Gerald Thurston, for he it was who had undertaken to carry the sick man's message to his daughter, Frank being hopelessly engaged in clerical duties.

"Miss Eyrecourt?" exclaimed Mr Thurston, hunting for a calling-card; "I am very glad to hear it. She will see me, I am sure."

Mr Blinkhorn and his satellites thought this looked suspicious, and afterwards retailed the stranger's delight at the mention of Miss Eyrecourt's name for the benefit of the servant's hall. In another minute Gerald was shaking hands with Roma, and explaining to her the reason of his sudden appearance. At first her expression was bright and cheerful; she was evidently pleased to see him again and interested in what he had to tell. But as he went on, her face grew grave—graver even than there seemed cause for.

"There is nothing immediate to be feared," Gerald said, in conclusion; "Mr Laurence may linger for months as he is, or he *may*, it's just possible, he may recover. I saw the doctor after I had seen Sydney this morning. I thought it would be more satisfactory for Eu—for Mrs Chancellor to hear I had done so."

"Yes," said Roma, "it was a good thought;" but she spoke a little absently, and still looked very grave. "I hope Eugenia will be able to go at once," she went on. "She is not very strong, but I think she is quite well enough to go, and I am sure she will think so. Only you know," with a smile, "she must consult her husband too, and I don't know what he will say. You see, she has been more or less an invalid for so long."

"I did not know it," said Gerald, with concern and surprise. "Indeed, I don't think Sydney does."

"Does she not?" exclaimed Roma. "Eugenia must have concealed it then. A mistake, I think. Those things always lead to misapprehension. But she is really much better now. Shall I go and tell her? She had a headache to-day, that was why she didn't want to see any one. There is not much time to spare. When did you say you must leave?"

"The best train leaves Chilworth at six; the next at 7:30," he replied.

"Well, I must tell her at once, then," said Roma. "I am leaving here myself at five. I have only been here two days, on my way, or rather out of my way, north. I spend to-night at Stebbing with some friends who happen to be going north too, to-morrow."

"You should have come by Wareborough again," suggested Gerald. "I am sure Mrs Dalrymple would have been delighted to see you."

"Next time, perhaps," answered Roma. Then she added, with a smile, "I am quite getting to like Wareborough—or, at least, some of the people in it—though I used to think it such a dreadful place."

Suddenly something in her own words made her blush and feel ashamed of herself. "I must go to Eugenia," she said, hastily, leaving the room rather abruptly as she spoke.

"I wonder what there is about that Mr Thurston that always makes me behave in his presence like an underbred schoolgirl?" she thought to herself, as she went upstairs.

Barely five minutes—certainly not ten—had passed when the door of the room where Gerald was waiting opened, and Eugenia herself appeared. He had turned, expecting to see Roma again; a slight constraint was immediately perceptible in his manner when he saw who the new-comer was. The last time he had seen her had been on her marriage day. At first sight he hardly thought her much altered. She did not look ill, for the excitement of Roma's news, the eagerness to hear more, had brought a bright colour to her cheeks. When it faded again he saw how pale she really was.

"Oh, Gerald!" she exclaimed, with all her old winning impulsiveness, "how good of you to come! How very good of you! Of course I shall go back with you at once. And Roma tells me there is no actual cause for more anxiety? You are sure of that, are you not, Gerald?"

He repeated to her word for word what the doctor had said to him that morning. She felt he was speaking the truth, and seemed satisfied.

"I expect Beauchamp in directly," she said, looking at her watch. "He will probably want to take me home himself, but I shall try to persuade him not. He is going out to dinner to-night. It will be quite unnecessary for him to come. I shall tell him he may come to fetch me if he likes."

She spoke confidently, but with a certain nervous hurry of manner new to her, and that did not escape Gerald's observation. Just then Roma joined them. A sudden thought struck Eugenia.

"You have had nothing to eat, Gerald," she exclaimed. "Roma, dear, would you ring and order some luncheon in the dining-room? I think I must run upstairs again and hasten Rachel. She is not accustomed to sudden moves."

Captain Chancellor came home from his ride about the time he was expected. He was a very punctual man. He came in at a side door, without ringing. The first sign of life that met him as he crossed the hall, was the sight, through the half-open dining-room door, of an entertainment of some kind going on within. An impromptu repast at which the only guest was a stranger, a man, that was all Beauchamp could see, for the unknown was sitting with his back to him, but as he looked, a still more astonishing sight met his eyes, Roma, no less a person than Roma, was keeping the stranger company!

Who on earth could it be? Beauchamp hated unexpected visitors, and irregular meals and “upsets” of every kind; above all he hated that anything should take place in his own house without his knowing all the ins and outs of it. Vaguely annoyed, he was turning to make inquiry, when an eager voice arrested him. It was the voice of Rachel, a very flushed and excited Rachel. Captain Chancellor objected to the lower orders displaying their feelings in his presence, and at the best of times there was a latent antagonism between Eugenia’s husband and her maid.

“Oh, sir,” exclaimed the agitated damsel. “Oh, sir, you have come in. I am so glad.” (“What business is it of yours?” thought her master.) “My mistress is so anxious to see you at once, sir, please.”

“What is the matter? Where is your mistress?” he asked impatiently.

“Upstairs, sir, in her own room, packing,” she replied, rashly.

“Packing? What in all the world do you mean? Packing, where to go to? Are you all going out of your senses?” he demanded, with increasing irritation.

But Rachel, seeing which way the wind blew, had prudently fled. There was nothing for it but to go up to Eugenia’s room, and find out for himself the reason of all this disturbance.

Ten minutes later, the bell of Mrs Chancellor’s dressing-room rang sharply, and a message came down to Miss Eyrecourt, requesting her to go upstairs at once.

When Roma entered the room, there stood the husband and wife, the former looking out of the window, tapping his boots impatiently with the riding whip still in his hand; the latter by the side of a half-filled trunk, her face white and miserable, but with a gleam in her eyes which Roma had never seen there before.

“Roma,” she cried, as Miss Eyrecourt came in, with a passionate, appealing despair in her voice, “Roma, he won’t let me go! And my father longing so for me. Roma, speak to him.”

“Roma knows better,” said Beauchamp, with a hard little laugh. “Let you go? I should think not. You must be completely insane to think of such a thing. You who have been making yourself out too much of an invalid to go anywhere—why, you refused Lady Vaughan for this very evening!—to think of setting off on a three or four hours’ journey with a perfect stranger—a stranger to *me* at least, whom your father sends off in this helter-skelter fashion to fetch you, because he is not very well and nervous and fanciful. I never heard such a thing in my life! I can’t understand your complete indifference to appearances in the first place.”

Eugenia said not a word. Roma, knowing of old the mood which Beauchamp was in, controlled her indignation, though it was not very easy to do so.

“Perhaps you will come downstairs, and hear the whole particulars from Mr Thurston himself,” she said to Captain Chancellor, coldly. He took the hint, and followed her out of the room. Outside, on the landing, she turned upon him. “Do not think I am going to interfere,” she said quickly. “I know it would be useless. I don’t take upon myself to say that she should go, that she is well enough—though, to my thinking, the distress and disappointment will be worse for her than the journey—but in the thing itself you may be right. But this I do say, that the *way* you have done it, your manner to her, is simply,” she hesitated a moment, “brutal,” she added, with contemptuous distinctness. “Bringing in the vulgar question of ‘appearances’ at such a time!”

This was her parting shot. She turned and left him, and Beauchamp, without having replied to her by word or glance, stalked away downstairs to Mr Thurston.

He was very civil to Gerald, so civil as to make the new-comer feel that he was looked upon as a total stranger; so full of acknowledgments of the great trouble Mr Thurston had given himself, as to suggest that the qualification “unnecessary” was in his thoughts all the time. But Gerald did not care enough for the man to be annoyed or in any way affected by his opinion; he only cared for the errand he had come upon, and his disappointment was great when he found it was to be a fruitless one. He did not attempt to hide it.

“I am exceedingly sorry that Mrs Chancellor cannot return with me,” he said; “it is very unfortunate.”

“But, from what you tell me, there is no cause for pressing anxiety,” said Captain Chancellor. “Mr Laurence is not in a critical state?”

“There is no immediate danger, so at least the doctor assured me,” Gerald admitted. “But my own opinion is less favourable. I do not like this sudden feverish eagerness to see his daughter: it is quite unlike Mr Laurence. I confess, it made me very uneasy, and I dread the effects of the disappointment.”

Beauchamp smiled. There was a slight superiority in his smile. At another time it might have irritated Gerald as it did Roma, who had re-entered the room.

“I can’t say that I see any grounds for uneasiness in what you mention,” Beauchamp said. “Every one knows how fanciful sick people are. And as for the disappointment, there need be none, I hope. I shall see my wife’s medical man to-morrow, and, if he approves, I shall bring her over to Wareborough myself in a few days. A very different thing from acting without his approval.”

And with this, Gerald had to be content. There was reason in what Captain Chancellor said, but his evident consciousness of being the only reasonable one of the party made it all the more irritating to have to abide by his decision.

“Mr Thurston,” said Roma, when, for a moment, they were alone, just as he was leaving, “Eugenia asked me to beg

you to forgive her not coming down again, and she told me too, to thank you 'very, very much.' And will you add to your kindness by writing to her to-morrow, and saying exactly how Mr Laurence is, and how he bore the disappointment."

"Certainly I will," said Gerald. "I will write to-night, if the post is not gone. Our post is late."

"And," added Roma, hesitatingly, "you will prevent their thinking it her fault. I mean, you will prevent their thinking her indifferent or careless, without, of course, blaming any one else, if you can help it." She grew a little confused. "It is not a case in which any one can interfere, but oh, I am so sorry for her!" she broke out.

Mr Thurston's eyes looked the sympathy he felt, but he did not say much.

"I think you may trust me," he said at last. "I will try to explain it as she—and you—would like. And after all," he added, by way of consolation, as he shook hands, "perhaps we are rather fanciful and exaggerated. I could not help thinking so when Captain Chancellor was speaking."

It was nearly time for Roma herself to go. She went up again to Eugenia. She found her standing by the window, which overlooked the drive, watching Gerald's fly as it disappeared.

"Did he promise to write?" she asked as Roma came in.

"Yes, to-morrow, certainly—possibly to-night."

"Did you say anything more to him, Roma? Did you ask him to tell them how I *longed* to go—how it was not my fault?"

"Yes—at least, I told him how earnestly you wished to go, but that it could not be helped. It would not have done to have let them think there had been any discussion about it, would it? And perhaps Beauchamp is wisest. I blame myself for having seemed to take your going for granted, at first."

"You need not. You have been very good to me," said Eugenia. And then the two kissed each other, a rare demonstration of affection for Roma.

She offered to defer her journey to Deepthorne, to stay at Halswood as long as Eugenia liked. Beauchamp's wife thanked her, but said, "No, any 'to-do' would run the risk of annoying him," and Roma, knowing this to be true, and not a little uncertain besides what place she at present held in the good graces of the master of the house, did not persist.

So she drove away to Stebbing, and Captain Chancellor in due time departed to his dinner-party at Sir Bernard Vaughan's, and Eugenia was left alone.

Afterwards, Roma wished that she had stayed.

Volume Three—Chapter Five.

The Last Straw.

Oh Lord, what is thys worldys blysse,
That changeth as the mone!
My somer's day in lusty May
Is derked before the none.

The Not-Browne Mayd.

There was no letter the next morning. "Gerald must have been too late," thought Eugenia, trying to think she did not feel anxious. But the morning after that there was none either—none, at least, that she caught sight of at first. There was one with the Wareborough postmark, but it had a black seal and was addressed to her husband, and he prevented her seeing it till he knew its contents. Then he had to tell her. It was from Frank. Eugenia never knew or remembered distinctly anything more of that day, nor of several others that succeeded it. And Captain Chancellor never cared to repeat to any one the wild words of reproach which, in the first moment of agony, had escaped her. But, satisfied though he was that he had acted for the best, there were moments during those days when Beauchamp was thankful to recall the assurance which Sydney's husband had had the generous thoughtfulness to give in this letter. "Even if Eugenia had returned with my brother it would have been too late;" an assurance which Eugenia's stunned senses had failed to convey to her brain.

This was the history of that day at Wareborough—the day, that is to say, of Gerald's unsuccessful errand.

As soon as he was satisfied that Eugenia had been sent for, Mr Laurence became calmer. He slept at intervals during the day, and when awake seemed so much better that Sydney almost regretted the precipitancy with which she had acted on what was, perhaps, after all, only an invalid's passing fancy. But by evening she came to think differently. The nervous restlessness returned in an aggravated form. Every few minutes he asked her what o'clock it was, and she, understanding the real motive of the question, replied each time with a little addition of volunteered information.

"Seven o'clock, dear papa; they *may* be here by nine, you know;" or, "a quarter to eight; they will be about half-way if they started by the later train."

Between eight and nine, to Sydney's great relief, her father fell asleep again. She dared not leave him, but sat beside him, watching his restless slumber; wearied herself, she had all but fallen asleep; too, when she was startled by his suddenly addressing her.

"Sydney," he said, "tell me—Eugenia?" His voice was clear, and stronger than it had been of late, yet he seemed to find difficulty in expressing himself. A strange fear seized Sydney.

"Not yet, dear father," she said, consolingly. "She has not come yet. But very soon she must be here."

He looked at her earnestly, as if striving to take in the sense of her words. "No," he said, at last, "no, it will be too late." Then a smile broke over his face. "Good-bye, dear Sydney, dear child. Tell Eugenia not to grieve. It is not for long."

Sydney had seen death, but never a death-bed. Death, when all the life-like surroundings are removed, when the last tender offices have been performed, and the soulless form lies before us in solemn calm; in this guise death is easier to believe in—to realise. But *dying*, the actual embrace of the grim phantom—a phantom only, thank God—she had never seen, and it came upon her with an awful shock. For some minutes—how many she never knew—she stood there beside the bed, in agonised bewilderment, almost amounting to unconsciousness. The first thing that brought her to herself was the sound of wheels rapidly driving along the street, suddenly stopping at their door.

"Eugenia!" cried Sydney, "oh, poor Eugenia! She has come, and it is too late." Then a mocking hope sprang up in her heart. "Perhaps he has only fainted," it whispered. She knew it was not so, yet somehow the idea gave her momentary strength. She rang the bell violently. In another moment her husband and the servants were beside her. But in an instant they saw how it was—the good, kind father, the gentle-spirited scholar, the earnest philanthropist had passed through the awful doorway—had entered into "the better country." And Eugenia had not come!

Sydney did not see her brother-in-law that night, but the next day he told her all—not quite all, but enough to prevent her blaming Eugenia—to fill her with unspeakable pity for her sister. To Frank, Gerald was somewhat less communicative.

"Fine lady airs and nonsense," exclaimed the curate. "Not well enough, indeed! Think how Sydney has been travelling about with her father and wearing herself out, poor child. Still I am very sorry for Eugenia. It will be an awful blow to her."

And the letter he wrote to Beauchamp, deputing him, as was natural, to "break the sad tidings" to his wife, was kind and considerate in the extreme.

Return of post brought no answer, considerably to their surprise, for Frank's letter had contained particulars of the arrangements they proposed, among which Captain Chancellor's presence at the funeral had of course been mentioned. Sydney felt anxious and uneasy; her husband tried to reassure her by reminding her that her nerves had been shaken, and she was inclined to be fanciful in consequence.

"It must be some accidental delay," he said. "Letters seldom go wrong, but when they do, it is sure to happen awkwardly. Besides, I think it just possible Chancellor may be bringing Eugenia over. She will probably wish it."

As he spoke there came a loud ringing at the bell. Sydney started. In the sad days of death's actual presence in a house such sounds are rare. There were grounds for her apprehension. In another moment a telegram was in Frank's hands.

"From Captain Chancellor to Rev. F. Thurston.

"Is it possible for Sydney to come at once? E— is very ill."

The husband and wife looked at each other.

"My poor Sydney," said Frank, "it is very hard upon you."

Within an hour, Sydney was on her way to Halswood. It was a strange, melancholy journey. Arrived at Chilworth, she found the Halswood carriage in waiting, on the chance of her early arrival, and drove off at once. How pretty and fresh, how mockingly bright, the country looked, in its as yet unsullied spring dress! How beautiful the park was, when the carriage turned in at the lodge, and there stretched out before her view, on each side, the broad, undulating sweep of grassy land, fringed round with noble trees! Sydney was town-bred; she loved the country with the yearning, enthusiastic, half-reverent love of one who seldom breathes the fresh, pure air, to whom the country sights and sounds are fascinatingly unfamiliar. In a moment's forgetfulness she glanced at the baby by her side, asleep in the nurse's arms: "How fortunate Eugenia is," she thought, "to have her home here—to be able to look forward to bringing up her children in this lovely place." Then she remembered all, leant back in her seat, and was conscious of no other feeling save the gnawing anxiety that had accompanied her all the way.

When she reached the house, she learnt, somewhat to her surprise, that her brother-in-law was not in. He had only gone out for a stroll in the park, by the doctor's advice, having been up for two nights and being much fatigued—of course, not thinking it would be possible for Mrs Thurston to arrive so early—was what Blinkhorn informed her, adding, in answer to her eager inquiry, as he condescendingly showed her into the morning-room, that his mistress was "Better—decidedly better. Good hopes were now entertained of her recovery."

Then Sydney had an interview with Mrs Grier, in her element of lugubrious excitement. In somewhat less sanguine terms, she confirmed the favourable report. "But the baby," she went on to say, "was in a very sad way, poor lamb!—only just alive, and no more."

"The baby!" repeated Sydney, in amazement. "I had no idea—I had no thought of a baby for a long time to come."

"I or any one else, ma'am. It is very hard upon it, poor innocent! to have been hurried into this sad world, this valley of tears, so long before it should have been. But it cannot live, ma'am—they say it is quite impossible; and I am sure there are many of us—myself for one—that will feel it is to be envied."

"Has my sister seen it? A boy, is it?" asked Sydney.

"No, ma'am—a girl, fortunately," replied Mrs Grier, with a curious mingling of conventional sentiment with her unworldly aspirations. "My mistress has seen it, for a moment,—this morning early, when for the first time she seemed quite conscious. It was then she asked for you, and my master sent at once. Poor dear lady! how pleased we were, to be sure."

Real tears shone in the housekeeper's eyes, and Sydney began to like her better.

"I wonder how soon I may see my sister?" she was just saying, when a step in the hall caught her ear. It was Beauchamp. The door opened and he came in—came in, looking well and fresh and handsome—offensively well, thought Sydney; heartlessly cool and comfortable.

"This *is* kind, truly kind," he exclaimed, really meaning what he said, but unable to throw off the "amiable" manner and sweet tone habitual to him when addressing any woman, especially a young one. "I had no idea you could have come so quickly. You have heard, I hope, how much better Eugenia is. All will now, I trust, go on well. She must have had a narrow escape, though," and his voice grew graver.

"Yes," said Sydney; "I am inexpressibly thankful. But," she added, "the poor little baby?"

"Ah, yes," replied Beauchamp, indifferently, "poor little thing! It's a good thing it's a girl, is it not? You would like to see Eugenia soon, would you not? The doctor said there would be no objection; she wishes it so much. I can't tell you," he added, as he led the way upstairs, "I can't tell you how thankful I have felt that I prevented her going to Wareborough that day. The shock of finding it too late on getting there would have been even worse, and after a fatiguing journey too. Yes, I am very thankful I put a stop to that." Sydney said nothing. She did not wish to yield to prejudice or dislike, but half a dozen times in the course of this five minutes' conversation, her brother-in-law had grated on her feelings. It was very inconsiderate of him to speak so of the journey to Wareborough, which he must know had been her dear dead father's proposal. She almost wished Frank had not told him Eugenia would have been "too late." She had expected to find Beauchamp full of sympathy, and possibly of self-reproach; here he was, on the contrary, priding himself on what he had done! At least he might have had the grace to refrain from any allusion to so painful a subject. But she said nothing. And soon, very soon, she forgot all about it for the time, in the sorrowful delight of seeing Eugenia again, of listening to her murmured words of intense, unaltered affection, of gratitude and piteous grief.

"It was not the shock that did me harm," she whispered to Sydney, later in the day; "it was *remorse*. Oh, to think of what he must have thought of me! My kind, good father!"

Then Sydney, who had hitherto dreaded the subject, saw that the time had come for delivering her father's message. She did so, word for word as it had been given to her.

"And so you see, dear Eugenia," she added, in conclusion, "you need have no remorseful feeling. *He* never thought you indifferent; and had you come, it would have been too late. Frank said so in his letter."

"Thank God!" whispered Eugenia; "and thank you, Sydney. I think now a faint remembrance recurs to me of Beauchamp saying my going would have been no use. But I took it as merely a vague consolation of his own. Had I understood it properly, I might have controlled myself better, and then perhaps I would not have been ill. I don't mind for myself, but the little baby. Oh, Sydney, my poor little baby! They say she cannot live!"

She turned her great sorrowful eyes to her sister, as if praying for a more hopeful verdict; but Sydney dared not give it. She had seen the poor little piteous atom of humanity. The only wonder to her was that it lived at all.

"And it would have been such a pretty baby!" she murmured. Then another thought struck her. "Has it been baptised?" she asked.

"Not yet. We sent to the Rectory, but Mr Dawes is away from home. Then I sent to Stebbing, and Mr Mervyn is coming—he will soon be here. That reminds me—let it be called 'Sydney'—my mother's name and yours."

"Will Captain Chancellor like it?" suggested Sydney, not without hesitation.

"He need not be asked," answered Eugenia, quickly. "He cares nothing about it—it is not a *boy!*" with bitter emphasis. "No, it is all my own—living it is mine—dying, doubly mine. You will do as I ask, Sydney dear?" she added, the almost fierceness of her tone melting again into gentleness.

The little creature's name never became a source of discussion. The feeble life flickered out that very night, leaving, short as had been its span, one sore, desolate heart behind it.

Yet, physically, Eugenia made satisfactory progress towards recovery. Sydney began to think of returning home, where her presence was much needed. She did not feel that after the first she was of much comfort to her sister; for as she grew stronger, a cloud of reserve seemed to envelope Eugenia—she to whom it used to be impossible to conceal the most passing fancy. To Sydney she was most loving and affectionate, never wearied of talking over old days, full of interest in the Thurstons' home-life and prospects. But of her own life and feelings she said hardly a word. It might be right and wise to say nothing, where there was nothing satisfactory to say, thought Sydney; but all

the same, it made her very unhappy. Knowing of old Eugenia's inclination to extremes, she doubted if her grounds for disappointment and dissatisfaction were altogether real and unexaggerated. But she could not urge an unwilling confidence—especially on a subject of which she felt she knew too little to be a wise adviser. For her brother-in-law was almost a complete stranger to her. He was very civil and attentive to her the few times they saw each other during this week, and more than once repeated his thanks for her prompt, response to his summons; but when she said she must fix the day of her return home, he did not press her to stay.

"You must come again before long," he said, "and by that time Eugenia will be all right again. I expect my sister here in a week or two, which will cheer us up a little. It will never do for Eugenia to yield to depression. The doctors assure me she will be all right if she will keep up her spirits, and Mrs Eyrecourt is just the person to discourage that sort of thing—low spirits and hypochondria."

Sydney sighed. She knew very little of Mrs Eyrecourt, but she felt an instinctive doubt of her sister's "grief being med'cinable" by such doctoring.

The day before she left, a little incident occurred which broke down temporarily one side of the barrier of reserve with which Eugenia had surrounded herself. Sydney was sitting by her sister's bedside; the invalid lying so quietly, that the watcher thought she must be asleep. Suddenly an unexpected sound broke the stillness—an infant's cry, once or twice repeated, then the sort of sobbing "refrain" with which a very sleepy little baby soothes itself to peace again.

Much annoyed, Sydney rose quickly but softly from her seat, and was hastening across the room, when Eugenia's voice recalled her.

"What was that, Sydney?" she inquired. "I was not asleep."

"I am so sorry, dear," said Sydney, looking very guilty, the colour mounting to her forehead, "I am afraid it is my little boy. You know I was obliged to bring him; but I hoped this would not have happened. Mrs Grier gave us rooms at the other end of the house on purpose; but I suppose nurse, thinking him safely asleep, ventured along the passage."

For a minute Eugenia did not speak. Then she said, gently, "Never mind, Sydney. Perhaps it is best. Kiss me, Sydney." And when her sister's face was closely pressed to her own, she whispered, "Even to you, dear, I can hardly tell *how* terrible is my feeling of loss—loss of what I never had, you might almost say. But oh, if you knew how I looked forward to what that little life would be to me! Sydney, if you are ever inclined to blame me, pity me too. I need it sorely."

The sisters seemed almost to have changed places. Sydney could hardly answer for the tears that choked her. Eugenia was perfectly calm.

"Poor Eugenia, dear Eugenia!" said Sydney at last; "I do know a little at least of what you must be feeling. There have even been times in the last few days when I have not wanted to see my baby—when I have felt almost angry with him for looking *so* strong and healthy. Oh, poor Eugenia!" Eugenia drew her sister's face down and kissed her again.

"Do you remember, Sydney," she said, suddenly, "a day, long ago, when we were putting camelias in our hair? Mine fell off the stalk, and you said you would not wear yours either, because I had none."

"Yes," said Sydney, "I remember." Then they were both silent.

"I should like to see your boy," said Eugenia, in a little—"not to-day, perhaps, but before you go. Bring him to me the last thing, that I may kiss him."

Sydney did so, "the last thing" before leaving the next morning. And thus the sisters parted again.

Three more weeks found Eugenia, comparatively speaking, almost well again, and beginning to resume her usual habits. It was the end of May by now; surely the loveliest season of the year, when the colours are brilliant yet tender with the dewy freshness wanting to them later in the year; when there is sunshine without glare, life in abundance with no attendant shadow of already encroaching decay. A season when happy people feel doubly so from nature's apparent sympathy with their rejoicing, but a season of increased suffering to the sorrowful. Oh, but the sunshine can mock cruelly sometimes! And oh, the agony in the carols of the soulless little birds! And the flowers, even! How heartless the daffodils are, and the primroses, and worst of all, perhaps, the violets! How can you show your heads again, you terrible little blossoms, and in the self-same spots too, where last year my darling's voice cried out in rapture that she had found you, hidden in the very lane where, day by day, in childish faith, she unweariedly sought you? Does she gather spring flowers now? Are there primroses and violets in the better land? There is "no need of the sun, neither of the moon" in that country, we are told; "there is no night there," "neither death, nor sorrow, nor crying." Should not this satisfy us? But it does not. We long, ah! how we long sometimes to know a little, however little more, to see if but for an instant the faces of the children playing in the golden street, by the banks of the crystal river.

Eugenia's little baby's death had been a bitter disappointment, but in its momentary life there had been no time for the gathering of hereafter bitter associations. Yet the bright spring days added to her sadness and exaggerated her tendency to dwell upon her losses. They had been many and severe, she said to herself: the father whose affection had been tried and true; the infant in whose existence she had bound up many hopes for the future—and besides these, what more had she not lost? "Trust, hope, heart, and energy," she sadly answered.

One day, nearly a month after Sydney's visit, Beauchamp told her with evident satisfaction, that he had heard from his sister; "she hopes to be here to-morrow," he added.

"To-morrow," repeated Eugenia, aghast. She had heard something of an impending visit from Mrs Eyrecourt, but she

had heard it vaguely. Absorbed in her own thoughts, it had never occurred to her that it was likely to take place so soon, or that the actual date would be fixed without her being further consulted.

"Yes, certainly, to-morrow. Why not?" said Beauchamp, coolly. "And I am exceedingly glad she is coming. It is quite time you tried to rouse yourself a little, my dear Eugenia, and some fresh society will do you good."

"Society, Beauchamp?" answered Eugenia, reproachfully, "You cannot expect me to go into society yet!"

"I wasn't speaking of going out, or anything of that kind. I dare say you are hardly up to that; but Dr Benyon says you would be ever so much better if you had some variety. When Gertrude comes, I want to arrange for going away somewhere."

"I did not mean with regard to my health," said Eugenia. "I am well enough. I meant, considering other things; how recently—" she broke off, abruptly. "I would rather have been left alone a little longer; but, of course, a visit from your sister is different from any strangers coming."

Captain Chancellor looked slightly uneasy; an intuitive feeling had warned Eugenia that something more was to come. "Gertrude is coming alone," he said; "but she asks me if we can have the Chancellor girls here a fortnight hence. They are going to stay with her at Winsley, and she would like them to be here part of the time. And of course, there is no possible objection to it? They know we are not going out just now. One or two small dinner-parties and a little croquet, or that sort of thing, will be all they will expect."

Eugenia made no reply. Beauchamp began to get vexed. "You surely are not going to make a new trouble out of such a simple thing as this?" he exclaimed.

"I don't want to make any trouble," she answered, drearily. "I must do what you tell me; but I do think it cruel of you to put this upon me. I don't expect you to sympathise in my greatest loss, but I *cannot* understand your not caring about our poor little baby."

Captain Chancellor gave vent to a muttered exclamation of impatience.

"You are infatuated, Eugenia!" he exclaimed. "Do you never look at home as the cause of half the things you complain of? It is not true that I did not care about the poor little thing. I cared as much as was natural considering the circumstances, and that it was not a boy. But I detest exaggerated sentiment. And really, you have no right to reproach me. You must know you have no one to thank for this particular trouble but yourself; your own want of self-control and wild behaviour because I had prevented your going off to Wareborough in that insane way, were the cause of it all. I did not intend ever to have alluded to it; but you provoke me, I do believe, intentionally. I cannot express the least wish of late but you set yourself against it. It never seems to occur to you that I have my share of disagreeables to put up with. Do you think the sort of life I have had the last few months was what I looked forward to, or that any man would envy me a wife everlastingly in low spirits like you?"

He left the room as he spoke, having, as usual, when he lost his temper, said more than he meant or really felt, regretting already that he had said so much, and at the same time mortified by the consciousness of his rudeness and unkindness. Eugenia remained where he had left her, some degrees more miserable than she had been before this conversation, though such painful scenes were not, unfortunately, so rare as to give any fresh direction to the current of her unhappiness. "Yes," she thought to herself, "it is all true—it has been a wretched mistake for him too. It is all true, but ah! how terrible for him to be the one to say it."

The next day brought Mrs Eyrecourt—Mrs Eyrecourt, in brilliant spirits and beautiful attire. For the correct number of months of mourning for her cousins having expired some time ago, she had deserted the trailing crape in which her sister-in-law had last seen her, for less lugubrious plumage. And on Eugenia's present mood, unfortunately, the bright though well assorted colours struck as discordantly as last year's sable on the feelings of the bride. But there was an unexpected pleasure in store for Beauchamp's wife. Out of the fly containing the luggage and the maids a small figure appeared. It was Floss—Floss, smaller, queerer, greener-eyed, and more defiant than ever; but internally, nevertheless, in a state of intense excitement and delight at the thought of seeing Aunty 'Genia again, hearing more dolls' stories, possibly—who could say?—seeing those venerable ladies themselves.

"Floss wouldn't come in the carriage with her uncle and me," said Gertrude, turning to Eugenia. "She is more of a little savage than ever, I fear."

"Poor Floss!" thought her aunt, as she kissed her.

Gertrude was in a very amiable mood. She congratulated Eugenia on looking so well—"Ever so much better than she had expected to see her," while wondering in her secret heart at the sad change in her sister-in-law's looks. "It must be partly her clothes," she decided, and marvelled more that her brother allowed her to wear such "atrociously made mourning." She sighed as she reflected what a different wife she would have liked to see at the head of her brother's table, and sighed again as she remembered her own short-sightedness in another direction. But her sighs were upstairs in her own room. Downstairs, she was amiability and liveliness itself. She talked, and laughed, and asked questions about the neighbours and neighbourhood, to which nearly all the answers came from Beauchamp—for in most instances Eugenia's information was at fault, her interest palpably languid. Yet when Gertrude turned from her with a patronising "Oh, no, of course, you have not met them—it was when you were ill;" or "Ah, yes, I remember you were not there," Eugenia felt unreasonably indignant. Altogether, this first evening left her with a mortifying sensation of being an outsider in her own home; she felt again the same sensation of loneliness and isolation, of being in no wise essential to her husband's well-being, which had so depressed her the first evening at Winsley. And more bitterly than ever her thoughts went back over and over again to the irreparable past.

"Aunty," inquired Floss, a day or two after this, when she was alone with Eugenia, "are you as pwetty as you used to

be?"

The stare of the blue-green eyes was rather disconcerting.

"I don't know, Moss," said Eugenia. "I daresay not, but it doesn't matter. What makes you ask?"

"What does 'failed off' mean?" continued Floss, pursuing her own train of thought.

"I won't answer silly questions, Floss," replied her aunt, her face flushing, nevertheless.

"'Tisn't silly," said Floss, indignantly. "Big people said it. Mamma said you had failed off *tewibly*, and Uncle Beachey looked cross and said it was your own fault. I don't think Uncle Beachey is nice at all. He spoke so crosso. I thought falling off meant tumbling and hurting yourself, but it doesn't. It's something about being pwetty and ugly. And mamma said she wished she hadn't interfered once, and then somebody else who wouldn't have failed off would have been here. Does it mean about widing? Everybody says Aunty Woma looks pwetty widing, and I *know* mamma meant her."

So far, in a sort of stupor of bewildered amazement, Eugenia had listened in silence to the child's curiously jumbled revelation. Suddenly she recollected herself.

"Floss," she said, sternly, "you must not repeat what you were not meant to hear, and I will not listen to you."

"It wasn't not meant for me not to hear. I was just playing with my new doll. I never listened behind the curtains. I never did," said Floss, "not since the day I cut the worm up, and Uncle Beachey scolded me. The day Aunty Woma said she'd go away, and Uncle Beachey was angwy. And I never told that mamma scolded Aunty Woma till she cwied. Aunty Woma didn't go away, but Uncle Beachey did, and when he comed back he bwought you, Aunty 'Genia, and I wish you wouldn't look so gwave. Please don't be angwy with me." There was an "et tu, Brute," inflection in the child's tone which, through all her tumultuous feelings, touched Eugenia. She stooped to kiss Floss, promising her not to be angry if she would never again talk about what she heard big people say. Then she sent her away to her dolls, and sat by herself trying to think over what she had heard, calmly; trying to persuade herself the inference to be drawn from Floss's garbled communication was not what her first instinct had told her it was; trying to believe it *could* not be true that her husband had never really cared for her—that he had married her merely in a fit of mortified vanity, "out of pique."

Beauchamp was away that day. He had left home on a two days' visit in the neighbourhood, in which, greatly to her disgust, Mrs Eyrecourt had not been invited to accompany him. Had he been at home, doubtless Eugenia, in her first impetuous excitement, would have rushed to him for confirmation or refutation of what her morbid imagination had already worked up into a plausible history of deception and concealment on his part—of cruel advantage taken of her inexperience and confiding trust—an explanation, she told herself, of his having so quickly grown weary of her, to which it now seemed to her innumerable, little-considered trifles pointed as the true one.

"Not that I blame him for loving Roma," she thought. "Oh no—not that. But he knew I was giving him my all, and he took it, sought it, knowing he had nothing to give me in return. Ah, it was cruel!"

She pressed her hands to her throbbing temples and burning eyes. It was too late in the day for any relief by tears; she felt as if she could never cry again. For a long time she sat there motionless. Then a sudden thought struck her. "I will hear the whole truth," she said, with a sudden fierce determination. "I will make his sister tell it all. There is nothing dishonourable in forcing her to tell me what he has wilfully concealed, if, as the child says, they talk together of the past, and wish now—now that I am his wife, the mother of his child," (this thought, alas! bringing no softening influence with it) "that it could be undone. Yes, I will make her tell it all, and she shall see what she has done—ruined two lives, if not three."

But through her tremendous excitement she remembered one trifling consideration. She would not betray poor baby Floss. Mrs Eyrecourt should never know how she had learnt the truth.

Volume Three—Chapter Six.

Friends in Need.

Did I speak once angrily...
...You woman I loved so well,
Who married the other?

R. Browning.

The days were almost at their longest, but it was late enough to be nearly dark one evening, when a fly rattled along the street in Wareborough where the Thurstons lived, and drew up at the curate's door. Frank was out: he had been sent for by a dying parishioner, and had warned his wife he might be detained till late—she had better not sit up for him. Sydney had just made up her mind to act upon this injunction, and was gathering her feminine odds-and-ends about her, previous to going to bed, when the unexpected sound of an arrival startled her in the midst of her housewifely "redding up."

She was standing in the middle of her pretty little drawing-room, her work-basket in one hand, the book she had been reading in the other, the lamplight falling softly on her fair, quiet face and deep mourning dress—a peaceful, home-like picture, it seemed to the stranger, who suddenly came in upon the scene. A tall, black figure, with veiled face

and shrouding drapery, stood in the doorway. Sydney was not hysterical, so she did not scream, but for a moment or two her heart beat fast, and her breathing seemed short and irregular. Who could it be?

"Sydney," said the veiled woman, "don't be startled, dear. It is only I."

"Eugenia!" exclaimed the sister, scarcely less startled than before. "Can it be you, Eugenia? Oh, what is wrong? What is the matter?"

Before answering, the new-comer turned to the door, said a word to the servant waiting just outside—a word of directions as to paying the driver, for which purpose she handed her purse to Sydney's mystified handmaiden—then, re-entering the room, she carefully closed the door.

"Can you take me in for a night, Sydney?" she asked. "You see, I have made sure of your doing so. I had nowhere else to go to." She sat down, as she spoke, on the nearest chair: her attitude told of extreme dejection, her voice sounded faint and weary.

"Take you in, dearest? Of course we can, and with the greatest pleasure," said Sydney, warmly. "Only—only—I fear—is there something wrong?"

"Yes," replied Eugenia. "At least, I suppose you will call it something wrong. It is just that I have left him—left my husband—for ever."

"Oh, Eugenia, oh, dearest sister, do not say so. It is too dreadful to be true. It cannot be so bad as that," exclaimed Sydney, in horrified amazement. "Surely, dear, you don't mean what you say—you cannot!"

"I do, though," said Eugenia. "I left Halswood secretly this afternoon, and I never shall return there. It is done now; there is no turning back."

"And why?" asked Sydney, striving to speak calmly, half inclined to think her sister's brain was affected, yet, on the other hand, shrinking from the thought of what miserable story she might not be going to hear of terrible delinquency on Captain Chancellor's part which had driven his outraged wife to this fatally decisive step. "I don't like to ask you, Eugenia," she went on, "but I suppose I must."

"I will tell you all. I have been longing to do so," returned Eugenia. "But, if you don't mind, I should like to go upstairs and go to bed. I am *so* tired. Then I will tell you everything. May I have a cup of tea or a glass of wine? I have eaten nothing since the morning. I am so sorry to trouble you, dear," as Sydney hastened away in search of the sorely-needed refreshment. "Frank is out, I suppose?"

Half an hour later, somewhat refreshed and revived by Sydney's care, Eugenia told her story—told Sydney "all," from the first faint misgiving as to the prospects of her married life—the first shadowy suspicion of her estimate of Beauchamp's character having been a mistaken and illusory one; down through the long, painful struggle to blind herself to the truth, through the sad history of disunion and disagreement, of ever-increasing alienation, to the discovery of to-day—the discovery that, as she expressed it, "the one thing I clung to through all—the belief in his love for me, in his having loved me at least, was but a dream too—a part of the whole illusion—of the whole terrible mistake. For he never really cared for me, Sydney. When he left Wareborough that Christmas he had no thought of ever seeing me again; he had only been amusing himself. What happened at Nunswell was a mere chance—a mere impulse. He was in a mortified, wounded state from Roma's rejection, and my evident devotion offered itself opportunely. I dare say he was *sorry* for me, too—pleasant to think of, is it not? I see it all as plainly as possible; the only thing that puzzles me now is, how I could ever have been so infatuated as to see it differently."

"And did Mrs Eyrecourt really tell you all this?" inquired Sydney, for Eugenia had made no secret of the sources of her information. "When you taxed her, I mean, with the inferences to be drawn from the little girl's chatter? I can hardly understand how your sister-in-law *dared* to say such things. Surely she might have tried to soften the facts!" She spoke indignantly, nevertheless she was conscious of a strong suspicion that her sister's excited imagination had had to do with the filling in of some of the details which gave colour and consistency to the whole story.

"I *made* her tell me all," answered Eugenia. "Not that she wanted to soften it, but at first she was a little frightened. Afterwards I do believe she enjoyed telling me, though all the while affecting to do it so reluctantly. She cannot understand where I learnt what I already knew, and she shall never know. Oh, Sydney, she said hateful things! When I asked her how she could have interfered between her brother and Roma, when I told her that by so doing she had ruined *three* lives, she said something about my romantic ideas, and hinted that if Beauchamp had known that he was to succeed his cousin, when he met me again at Nunswell, he would never have thrown himself away as he did. But I don't think I minded that; it seemed too coarse to touch me. Then, at the end, she seemed to get frightened again, and tried to soothe me down. She reminded me that no wife should expect her husband's full confidence as to the past, and she said that no girl could be so foolish as to imagine that a man like Beauchamp could have lived twenty-eight years in the world without love affairs of some kind. If it had not been Roma, it would have been some one else; I should think myself fortunate I had nothing worse to complain of. I dare say there is a sort of coarse truth in it—the world is a dreadful, miserable place; and, oh, Sydney, I wish I were dead!"

There was nothing for it but to soothe and caress her into temporary calm. She was too utterly worn out to be capable of being reasoned with; it would have been cruel to attempt it. Much as Sydney felt for her—intensely as she pitied her—she could not for a moment deceive herself into thinking that Eugenia had acted well or wisely. It had been a wild impulse that had urged her to this foolish, undignified step—so her best friends would say, and the world would say yet harsher things—yet, oh, poor Eugenia, how well Sydney understood the tumult of her feelings—the peculiar agony to her nature and disposition of the wounds she had received, the bitter anguish of the disappointments she had had to endure! It was with a very sore heart Sydney left her for the night; it was with no small uneasiness she reflected on what she had to tell her husband, and tried to imagine what course he would

determine on pursuing. For in certain directions Frank could see but one road; rough and thorny though it might be, he sometimes showed but scant tenderness for those who, he decided, must walk therein. He was a good man—a good and true-hearted man, but of some kinds of trial and temptation he knew as little as his own baby son.

Sydney's misgivings proved to be not unfounded. Eugenia slept till late the next morning, for the first part of the night sleep had deserted her altogether. It was so late when she woke that Frank had already left the house, Sydney told her.

"He has gone again to that sick man, and there is a meeting of some kind at one, so he will not be back till the afternoon; but he hopes to see you then," she added.

"And was that the only message he left for me? Could you explain things to him at all—do you think he enters into my feelings?" asked Eugenia, anxiously.

"He was exceedingly surprised, and of course distressed," answered Sydney, a little evasively. "We talked a great deal. Frank is very anxious about you, and very desirous of advising you for the best. Indeed he is, Eugenia; you must try to believe this, whether you agree with him or not."

"That means, he blames me, and me alone, for my misery," exclaimed Eugenia, impetuously. "You need not try to soften it to me, Sydney. Tell me all he said, plainly; though, truly, I think he might have had the manliness to say it to me himself, and not give you the pain of doing so."

"You are mistaking him, indeed you are, dear Eugenia," said Sydney, eagerly. "He is far, very far from blaming you only, and he is *very* sorry for you. All he says is, that this step that you have taken so impulsively is a sadly unwise one, and can do no good; and he says, your husband must be told where you are, immediately."

"Has he gone, to tell him?" inquired Eugenia, bitterly. "He won't find him at home. Beauchamp does not return till to-morrow."

"Of course he has not gone. He would not do anything of the kind without telling you," answered Sydney, with a little wifely indignation. "What Frank has made up his mind to is this—I was just going on to tell you,—either you or he, he says, must write to your husband to-night, telling him where you are, and asking him to come here to-morrow, or whenever he can, and then things must be talked over."

"And I shall be taken home again—that is to say, if Beauchamp condescends to forgive me, like a naughty child?"

"Eugenia, don't," said Sydney, imploringly. "Frank will tell you what he thinks himself. He hopes indeed to show you that returning home is the only right course, but he does not think of you as you fancy. He is only so very anxious to show you what terrible harm may be done if this goes further, if—if it were to be talked about. For you know you have no *real* grounds of complaint."

"I have not been beaten or starved, certainly," said Eugenia. Then, with a sudden change of tone, "Sydney, I did not think *you* would have been persuaded to see things so. But suppose I refuse to be guided by Frank's advice?"

"I won't suppose it," said Sydney; "Eugenia, you will think differently after a while. You don't realise how terrible a thing you propose; you would be the last person to bear philosophically the sort of odium that always attaches itself to a woman in the position that yours would be. I do feel for you intensely; still I cannot but think there was exaggeration in this last trouble—I mean in what Mrs Eyrecourt told you. Things may yet be happier with you. But you *must* believe that both Frank and I are earnest in our anxiety about you. Of course Frank's being a clergyman makes him express himself very decidedly, and he may seem hard to you. He has to be so very careful, too, to avoid the least appearance of—of anything that people could say ill-natured things about." This last was an unfortunate admission. "I quite understand Frank's feelings," observed Eugenia. "I shall act with consideration for them."

Her tone of voice was peculiar. Sydney could not understand it. "Then you *will* write?" she said, timidly, "or shall Frank?"

"He can do so if he likes," answered Eugenia. "But there is no mystery about what I have done. I left a note for Beauchamp, and one for Mrs Eyrecourt. I made no attempt to conceal where I was going. I only came away quietly because I did not want any discussion. I should have brought Rachel with me, but she was here already. She came to Wareborough for a holiday last week. I must let her know I am here."

It all sounded as if Eugenia meant to be reasonable, but Sydney felt far from satisfied. She thought it wiser, however, to say no more at present; not to irritate her sister by attempting to extort any promises. She was rewarded by Eugenia's increased gentleness of manner. The rest of the morning passed peacefully; Eugenia seemed interested in seeing over Sydney's house, and of her own accord proposed a visit to the nursery, where it went to her sister's heart to see how she fondled and caressed her little nephew.

"And she used to hate babies so," thought Sydney. "I wish Frank could see her now. Poor Eugenia!"

After luncheon Sydney was obliged to go out for an hour. She was distressed at having to leave her sister, but the engagement was one which could not be deferred, and Eugenia assured her she "did not mind being left alone."

"I shall not be long," said Sydney; "very likely I shall meet Frank, and we shall come back together."

Eugenia kissed her as she was setting off, kissed her affectionately, and thanked her "for being so good to her." So Sydney departed in much better spirits.

She did not meet Frank; her business detained her somewhat longer than she expected, an hour and a half had

passed before she found herself at her own door again.

"Is Mrs Chancellor in the drawing-room?" she inquired of the servant, as she went in.

The girl's wits were not of the brightest at any time. Now she looked confused and frightened. "I thought you knew, ma'am," she exclaimed, "I fetched a fly immediately you had gone out, for the lady. She has gone."

"Gone!" cried Sydney, in dismay, forgetful of everything except the shock of distress and disappointment.

"She left this note for you, ma'am," added the servant.

"Perhaps she has gone home," thought Sydney, with sudden hope. She tore open the envelope.

"Thank you, dearest Sydney," said the note, "for your love and kindness. After what you have told me, however, of your husband's feelings, I cannot stay longer with you. But do not be uneasy about me. I will write to you in a day or two. I cannot tell you where I am going, for I do not know myself. I am very miserable and very desolate; but I am not so selfish as to wish, to make you unhappy too.
"Your affectionate Eugenia."

"What else is she doing than making me miserable too?" thought Sydney. "Oh, Eugenia, this is very cruel of you."

Frank came in almost immediately. He too was greatly distressed, and at first a little alarmed, and in consequence of these feelings, after the manner of men, he relieved himself by scolding his wife.

"You must have irritated her," he exclaimed. "I really thought you were more judicious, Sydney. It would have been far better to have said nothing till I came in, and then I would have put the whole before her clearly, but not so as to hurt her." Sydney took the undeserved blame meekly, nor did she remind her husband that, in saying what she had, she had acted by his express injunctions.

"I blame myself for leaving her," she said, sadly.

Then they set to work to think what was best to do. Frank's first impulse was to trace his sister-in-law at once. There would be little difficulty in finding her, he said. It would be easy to discover the driver of the fly, and learn from him to what station he had taken her—for Wareborough boasted no less than three—and, once certain of the railway by which she had travelled, the rest would be easy.

"For it is not," he said, "as if she had any particular reason for mystery. She is sure in any case to write to us in a day or two."

In this Sydney agreed, so after talking it over a little more, they decided it would be best to take no such steps as Frank had at first proposed.

"The publicity of making any inquiries about her," he said, "is one of the things most to be avoided. Besides I hardly feel that I have a right to take any such steps. I will write to Chancellor at once; I shall write very carefully, you may be sure. But don't be uneasy, Sydney. We shall hear from her in a day or two, you'll see." Sydney sighed. There was nothing for it but patience.

"I wish Gerald were at home," she thought. But he was not, and the next day or two passed very anxiously with Eugenia's sister.

The elder Mr Thurston was at this time away on a fishing expedition, having allowed himself the rare luxury of a fortnight's holiday. He had been fishing up, or down, the stream from which Nunswell takes its name, and for the last few days had made this little watering-place his headquarters. It was a Friday when Eugenia left Wareborough, and late on the following day, Gerald, having returned to Nunswell, there to spend Sunday in decorous fashion, was strolling in the public gardens—the very gardens where he had sat and talked with Eugenia, some fifteen or sixteen months ago—the same gardens where, the very next day, "time and chance combining," Beauchamp Chancellor and she had met again—when something familiar, something indefinably suggestive in the gait and bearing of a lady walking slowly a little way in front of him, caught Mr Thurston's attention. He was thinking of Eugenia at the moment. The resemblance of the figure before him to the object of his thoughts struck him suddenly as the explanation of his vague sensation.

"If Eugenia were dead," he said to himself, "I should shrink from dispelling the illusion, as no doubt many a ghost could be dispelled; but believing her to be alive and well, I think I should like to see the face of that tall, black-robed lady. Very likely she is old and ugly." And half smiling at his own fancies, he quietly quickened his steps so as to overtake her. It was not difficult to do so. The part of the garden where the two were walking was retired and unfrequented. There was hardly another person within sight. As Gerald's increased pace brought him quickly on a line with the solitary lady, the sounds of his footsteps caught her ear. Just as he passed her, she mechanically turned her face in his direction. Mr Thurston's nerves were under good control, but the start of almost incredulous surprise at seeing his own wild fancy realised, betrayed him into a sudden exclamation.

"Eugenia!" he said, impetuously, "Eugenia, is it really you?" And even while he spoke, he looked at her again more closely, with a new fear of being the victim of some extraordinarily strong accidental resemblance. But it was not so. Eugenia's surprise, though considerable, was less overpowering than Gerald's, and she answered him composedly enough.

"Yes," she said, with a little smile—a smile that somehow, however, failed to lighten up her face as of old—a poor, pitiful, unsatisfactory attempt at a smile only. "Yes, it is certainly I. Are you very much astonished to see me? Where have you sprung from?"

"I have been fishing down the Nun," he replied. "Are you staying here? Is Captain Chancellor here?"

"Yes and no," she answered, with a very forced attempt at playfulness. "I am staying here, but alone."

"Alone!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, alone," she repeated. "Why do you cross-question me so, Gerald? Why do you look at me so? I am not a baby. You are as bad as Frank. I wish I hadn't met you. I didn't want you to speak to me. I don't want any one to speak to me. I have no friends, and I don't want any."

Then suddenly, to his utter amazement, she finished up this petulant, incoherent speech by bursting into tears. They were the first she had shed since she left Halswood; and once released from the unnatural restraint in which they had been pent up, they took revenge on it by the violence with which they poured forth. The position was by no means a pleasant one for Mr Thurston, though he did not share Captain Chancellor's exaggerated horror of tears, or believe with him that they were invariably the precursors of hysterics. "Something must be wrong, very wrong, I fear," he thought, and his unselfish anxiety and genuine pity for the suffering woman by his side quickened his instincts on her behalf. For a minute or two he walked on beside her in silence. Then, as they were approaching the more frequented part of the gardens, and her sobs gave no sign of subsiding, he spoke to her—quietly and kindly, but with a slight inference of authority in his tone, which, excited as she was, she instinctively obeyed.

"Suppose we turn and walk back again a little way," he said. "You have over-tired yourself, I am afraid."

She did not speak at once, but turned as he directed. He could see now that she was making strong efforts to control herself. When she thought that she could trust her voice, she spoke.

"I am ashamed of myself, Gerald, utterly ashamed of myself," she said at last. "What must you think of me? I suppose I have over-tired myself. I have been walking about here nearly all day. I had nothing else to do."

"And you are really alone here?" he inquired.

"Yes, except my maid, Rachel Brand; you remember her?—I am quite alone."

"And how—how is it so?" he was going to ask, but stopped. "No," he went on, "I will not presume on our old friendship to ask questions you may not care to answer; only tell me, Eugenia, can I be of any service to you?"

"None, thank you," she answered sadly. "No one can help me. Even Sydney no longer feels with me—that is why I am here alone."

"Your doubting Sydney makes me doubt if things are so bad as they seem to you," he said, with a little smile.

"Don't doubt it," she said quickly. "They could not be worse, Gerald," she added, after a little pause. "You have known a good deal about me—more perhaps almost than any one else. I will tell you the worst sting of my misery—I have come to know that my husband does not care for me—that he never has done so—that never a woman made a more fatal mistake than I when I married."

Mr Thurston started violently; a sort of spasm of pain contracted his forehead—pain of the past, not of the present, so far as he himself was concerned.

"Eugenia," he said, gravely, "from you, these are terrible words."

"I know they are," she said bitterly, "but I believe they are true. I married under a double delusion. But I believe I could have endured the one great disappointment of finding how I had overestimated my—my—never mind. I say, I think I could have learnt to bear my many disappointments, and make the best of my materials, had my other belief, my sheet anchor, not failed me as it has done. By the light of what I now know, I can see that for some time its hold has been growing feeble and uncertain on me, and in consequence my strength has decreased, my good resolutions have faded, till now I have nothing to hold to. I hardly care where I drift—what does it matter?"

"What does it matter?" broke out Gerald, indignantly. "Eugenia, do you know what you are saying? Oh, you foolish, presumptuous child! Does duty depend on inclination, do obligations cease to bind us when they become difficult or painful? Allowing that you have been deceived, allowing that you have found your life essentially other than you expected, does that set you free from responsibility? The world is bad enough already, but what it would be if we all regulated our conduct by your principles, I should shudder to think. And the cowardliness of it too! Eugenia, I thought you a woman incapable of thus deserting your post!"

The colour had mounted to Eugenia's pale face, but the tears had ceased to flow. "You are very hard, Gerald," she said at last. "You cannot possibly estimate my position correctly. I left my husband because I felt I should grow worse if I stayed, grow worse myself, and make him grow so too. For my belief in him once shattered, *no* link remained between us, no common ground on which we could meet. What could be the end of such a life?"

"What will be the end of the one you have chosen for yourself, and forced upon him?" asked Gerald. "Duties once discarded, we are not immediately allowed to console ourselves with others of our own choosing, as you will find to your cost. What are you intending to do—why did you come here?"

"I don't know. It just came into my mind. I meant to wait here till something could be settled for the future. My husband is not the sort of man to force me to return: he is too proud. I don't want any money from him. I have enough of my own. I suppose some sort of separation could be agreed upon. I have heard of such things."

She spoke with a sort of dreary indifference.

“And, in the meantime, why come here alone? Why not go to Sydney.”

“I did,” she said. Then she went on to tell him why she had left his brother’s house. “Frank evidently disapproved of me altogether,” she remarked, “and even Sydney seemed to think I greatly exaggerated things.”

“As to that I can’t judge. I don’t wish to judge,” said Gerald, quickly. “Of course, I should suppose you have reason to trust implicitly the sources of the information on which you acted?” he looked at her keenly as he spoke. Eugenia slightly changed colour.

“My own instincts are not likely to deceive me,” she said, hotly. But her honesty pushed itself in, with some misgiving. “There is one person I should like to see—a person I trust thoroughly. Of course she can only confirm what I discovered, but still, strictly speaking, I suppose I should have her confirmation before I can say I am *quite* sure of what I acted upon.”

“Do you mean Miss Eyrecourt?” said Gerald.

“Yes,” answered Eugenia, looking up with some surprise at his correct guess.

“I am glad you trust her,” he said, briefly. They had turned again by now, and from time to time other strollers passed them, glancing at them in one or two cases, with the slight, indolent curiosity with which watering-place loungers inspect each other. Eugenia’s veil was drawn down, but her tall figure in its deep mourning garments could not but be somewhat conspicuous. Gerald chose the quietest paths, but still he grew uneasy. He did not like to leave his companion till he had seen her safely to her own door; his terror lest she should suspect him of suggesting the expediency of their separating, made it impossible for him to find any plausible excuse for saying good-bye: yet at every step he realised more painfully the awkwardness that might attend their recognition. “Ever so many Wareborough people come here,” he reflected, “and who knows but what by this time there is full hue and cry after the missing Mrs Chancellor. It is frightful to think what she is exposing herself to,” and, glancing at her as the thought crossed his mind, some irritation mingled with his pity. “She is too absorbed to understand it, but something *must* be done at once.”

“Does Sydney know where you are now?” he asked.

“No,” she replied, “not yet. But I am going to write to her to-night.”

When they had reached the house where she had taken rooms, Mr Thurston held out his hand in farewell.

“Won’t you come in, Gerald?” Eugenia asked.

“No, thank you. I have letters to write, and the post leaves early. You must take care your letter is in time.”

“Yes,” she answered, absently, adding, “If you won’t come in to-night, will you come and see me to-morrow? I—I will try to think of what you have said, if it is not too late.”

“Then you don’t think me hard and cruel?” he said, gently.

“No, oh no. I only thought you *could* not understand.”

“This much I understand,” he replied. “You have suffered a great deal, where many women would have suffered little. It is your nature to, do so. Therefore, I dread for you, with unspeakable intensity, the deeper suffering you would bring upon yourself—most of all the knowledge, which, sooner or later must come to you that you had done wrong, grievously wrong—for it is not a case where duty is difficult of recognition.”

She did not answer, but sometimes silence is better than words. She went upstairs to the neat, bare, unhomelike lodging-house drawing-room, and sat down to think. She thought and thought so long and so deeply, that poor Rachel knocked several times before she was heard, and, unfortunately, it was past post-time! So no letter reached Wareborough the next morning.

Volume Three—Chapter Seven.

Roma to the Rescue.

That he has his faults cannot be doubtful; for we believe it was ascertained long ago, that there is no man free from them.

Carlyle.

It is dreary work—perhaps no one who has not had personal experience of it can imagine how dreary—to find oneself really alone in a strange place, with no customary daily duties to compel one’s attention, however unwilling; no chance of a friendly face looking in to break the monotony of the empty day; no anticipation even of the post bringing distraction in the shape of news, good or bad. Such had been Eugenia’s life for two days at Nunswell, and already in these two days she had many times been on the point of saying to herself she could not stand it much longer.

“And is this to be my life?” she thought with a shiver, for, in the excitement of flying from her home, she had taken no account of the loneliness and dreariness that lay beyond. Now, the unconcealed disapproval of her nearest friends, the realisation of her anomalous position alone in lodgings in a strange place, were already bringing home, even to her uncalculating inexperience, something of the personal suffering, the bitter deprivations, the indefinite

suspicion which must attach themselves to even the purest and noblest of women, once she voluntarily abandons her home. There may be cases, doubtless there are such, where a wife has no choice, where duty itself, deaf to all suggestions of expediency, relentlessly points out the way to abandonment of the post bravely battled for to the last—but such cases are rare, and the women to whose bitter experience they fall must have suffered too terribly to be sensitive to loneliness, or monotony, or half-averted looks. Not so was it with Eugenia Chancellor. What she had learnt from her sister of Frank's opinion of her conduct had wounded her to the quick; her only idea had been at once to relieve her friends of her unwelcome presence, but she had altogether failed to realise the desolation and hopeless depression which seized upon her before she had been many hours in the Nunswell lodgings.

The morning after she had met Gerald, she woke with a slight sensation of expectation. She hoped she should see him again; she wanted to talk to him, and tell him how she had thought over his words; she did not feel indignant at his plain-speaking, for it was not contemptuous and unsympathising like Frank's, but sprang, she could not but feel, from genuine anxiety for her good, from single-minded incapability of advising her to act otherwise than as he believed to be right. "Still it is often impossible," she thought, "for one person to judge of right and wrong for another," and, more out of a feminine determination to prove herself justified in what she had done than from any vehement desire to persevere in her present course, she prepared herself mentally with a whole string of unanswerable arguments, of well-sounding sophistries with which to compel her old friend to acknowledge how exceptional was her position, how principle and self-respect, and unselfishness even, had driven her to this apparently undutiful step.

It was still early when Rachel tapped at her mistress's door. "A letter, ma'am," she announced, as she came in.

"A letter!" exclaimed Eugenia, not without excitement, "it must be a mistake. No one knows where—I mean, I have not sent my exact address yet." But notwithstanding her words, her heart beat with vague, unreasonable hope—what could it be?—could Sydney have found her out, and be coming to her at once?—could Beauchamp himself be on the way to beseech her to return to him, to entreat her forgiveness for all he had made her suffer, to assure her that this last misery, this worst trouble of all, had somehow or other been a mistake, a mischievous exaggeration of his sister's? As one possibility after another suggested itself to her imagination, Eugenia's heart beat faster and faster. "Give it me quickly, Rachel," she said impatiently. But as the girl brought it to her, she remarked, "It is not a letter by the post, ma'am. It is only a note—from the Spa Hotel, I believe," and Eugenia's hopes died within her. It was only a note—a few hurried words from Mr Thurston—beginning "My dear Mrs Chancellor," to inform her of his being suddenly obliged to leave Nunswell on business, and to express his regret that he should not see her again. It was dated the previous evening. "As if he could have got any business letters after he saw me last night, and as if he would be likely to travel home about business on a Sunday," thought Eugenia, with a bitter incredulity; "no, he has just thought it over, and agrees with Frank. They don't want to have anything more to say to me." And this day was even more miserable than its predecessors. She would not go to church, she dreaded now even the thought of a stroll in the gardens; she sat alone in the dull drawing-room all day with no books to read, no letters to write, nothing to do, nothing to hope for. And when bedtime came and she knelt, more from the force of old habit than from any expectation of comfort, guidance, or peace of mind, to pray to the Father who understands us all so much better than we understand ourselves, she started back from the appealing attitude in horror. For the only prayer which rose with any spontaneity to her lips was that she might sleep and never wake again.

Hours passed and still she lay awake, feverish, restless, and yet exhausted. When at last she fell asleep it seemed to her afterwards that it must have been close to morning. And the longed-for unconsciousness brought her but little repose, for it was broken by anxious distressing dreams, of which the only one she could recall with any distinctness was the last before she awoke. She dreamt that it was again the night of her father's death, she herself was hastening to him with Gerald Thurston; they were driving furiously along a road of which some features seemed familiar to her, though at the same time she felt perfectly certain she had never traversed it before; and from time to time her companion added to her feeling of indescribable bewilderment by asking her if it would not be better to turn now and go the other way. She never seemed to answer him, but every time he made the suggestion, the invisible driver appeared to respond by turning sharply, and driving away faster than ever in an apparently opposite direction. Suddenly the scene changed, and Eugenia found herself by her father's bedside, in the room she knew so well; and she became conscious of the strange dual existence familiar to us all in dreams, for while there in her father's presence, waiting for her own arrival, she was yet driving on with Gerald; again she heard his curious monotonous inquiry, "Don't you think we had better turn now and go the other way?" Another change; she was now in the old state bedroom at Halswood, where she had spent the night of her arrival there; she was still watching by a bedside, still waiting for her own appearance. Then the sound of the carriage wheels, of which all this time she had been conscious, grew louder and louder; she heard them rattling up the smooth carriage drive at Halswood as if it were a paved Wareborough street. A clock began to toll, the figure in the bed by which she was watching seemed to move, and a sudden horror seized her. In her dream-agony she rushed to the door of the room, and found it locked; in despair, it seemed to her, she screamed aloud with frantic vehemence, "Let me out, let me out;" and a voice, which she recognised as her husband's, answered from the other side—"Too late, too late. Better turn now and go the other way." And at this crisis she awoke.

It was broad daylight. Rachel was standing by her bedside, a cup of tea in her hand.

"What is the matter?" asked Eugenia, confusedly. Then, coming a little to herself, she sat up and looked at the girl. "My head is aching dreadfully," she said, laying it back among the pillows as she spoke; "is that why you have brought me some tea, Rachel? Oh, no; of course you could not know. But there is something the matter, Rachel; you look as if there were."

"No, indeed, ma'am, there isn't; nothing, that is to say, except your head being bad. I was awake very early this morning, and I had my breakfast sooner than usual, and I thought you might like a cup of tea."

"I am very glad of it," said Eugenia, languidly. "But what made you get up so early. Had you a bad night too?"

"Oh, no, ma'am, thank you. I was wakened, by some visitors arriving unexpectedly about five o'clock. One visitor, at least. A young lady."

"What an odd time to arrive," observed Eugenia, carelessly. But, glancing at Rachel as she spoke, something in the girl's manner again caught her attention. "*Who* is the young lady?" she asked, quickly. "Is it some one to see me—is it my sister?"

"No, ma'am, it is not Mrs Thurston," replied Rachel, evidently afraid lest her words should cause disappointment. "It could not be Mrs Thurston, for she will only get your address this morning, you remember, ma'am. But it *is* some one for you. It is—"

"It is I," interrupted a voice at the door. "May I come in, Eugenia?" and in a moment Roma Eyrecourt stood by the bedside. "You poor child," she went on, hurriedly, as if to cover some embarrassment, and without giving Eugenia time to speak; "how burning your hands are, and your head too! I am not going to tease you, dear. I have come to do exactly what you tell me, except go away. You won't send me away, Eugenia, will you?"

There was some anxiety in her tone; she leant over towards Eugenia as she spoke, and looked earnestly into her face with her beautiful, bright dark eyes—not keen or contemptuous now, but tender and loving, and almost entreating in their expression. The struggle, if there were one, was quickly over with Eugenia. She threw her arms round her friend's neck and kissed her warmly. "It is very, very good of you to have come," she whispered. "I know it is pure goodness that has brought you. I have tried to fancy I hated you, but I don't. I love you and trust you. But, oh, Roma, I have been so miserable!"

"Too miserable, a great deal too miserable. I can fancy it all," said Roma, sympathisingly. "But, Eugenia, you do look so tired. I am sure you have not slept well. Do try to go to sleep again, and try to believe you are not going to be so miserable as you think. I will talk to you as much as ever you like when I see you looking better. I will tell you everything—what made me come here, and *anything* more you like to ask me, if you will do what I tell you now. I have one or two letters to write for the early post. I will come back in a little, I promise you."

Soothed in spite of herself by Roma's kindness, comforted by the feeling that she was no longer alone, that one person, at least, in the world, still loved and cared for her, Eugenia fell asleep, and slept peacefully for two or three hours. Miss Eyrecourt, meantime, wrote her letters: one was addressed to Captain Chancellor at Halswood, another to Gerald Thurston, at Wareborough, a third to old Lady Dervock, whom she had quitted at rather short notice. Once or twice in writing she seemed somewhat at a loss.

"I don't want to exaggerate things," she said to herself, "but I really should not be surprised if Eugenia had a bad illness—brain fever, or something of the kind. However, I can judge better when I see her again."

Roma's fears were not fulfilled. Eugenia was much better when she saw her again. By the middle of the day she was up and dressed, and eager for the promised conversation. The mystery of the new-comer's sudden appearance was easily explained.

The "business" which had necessitated Gerald's leaving on Saturday night had taken him all the way up to Deepthorne, whence he had returned accompanied by Roma herself. It had seemed to him the best thing to do, he felt certain that he might rely on Miss Eyrecourt's friendship, and he felt certain too that in the end Eugenia would not blame him for his interference. By dint of hard travelling they had managed to reach Nunswell early on Monday morning, thence by the very next train, Gerald, already due at his post, had returned to Wareborough. This was all, so far, that Roma had to tell. Of what had taken place at Halswood she was in utter ignorance. "I have not heard from Gertrude for more than a week," she told Eugenia. "I half thought of writing to her just now while you were asleep, but I decided not to do so till I had spoken to you. I have written to your husband though, Eugenia," she added, with a little hesitation.

"To Beauchamp," exclaimed Beauchamp's wife, her cheeks flushing; "oh, Roma, why did you? Could you not have waited for that till you had spoken to me?"

"No, Eugenia," said Roma, gently but decidedly, "I purposely wanted to write *before* seeing more of you. It was not betraying your secret, for Mr Thurston told me you had let your sister know where you were, and of course Beauchamp would go to her to inquire about you. I merely wrote to tell him that I was with you, ready to stay as long as you want me."

"I don't mind Beauchamp's knowing where I am," said Eugenia. "It will make no difference. He is not likely to seek me, for even if he cared about me, he will be too angry to take any such step."

Roma thought differently. Beauchamp's regard for appearances was likely to be a powerful motive with him, but she was wise enough to keep this consideration to herself, and to direct her attention to the root of the matter.

"How do you mean, 'if he cared about you?'" she asked, quietly. "Do you doubt his caring for you?"

"Roma!" exclaimed Eugenia, reproachfully, the tears rushing to her eyes, "how can, you ask me? You, of all people!"

"You must tell me exactly what you mean, Eugenia," said Roma, anxiously. "Half confidences are no use in such a case, and I, in return, promise to tell you what I believe to be the exact truth."

So Eugenia told her all; more fully even than to Sydney she related the whole history of her hopes and disappointments, her golden anticipations, and the bitter realities in which they had ended. And Roma listened with a gravely attentive face, striving to the best of her power to distinguish between fact and fancy, between Eugenia's actual grounds for unhappiness, and her morbid inclination to exaggerate them. It was not for Roma so impossible as

it might have been for many to arrive at a just comprehension of the state of matters, for the character of the one of the two persons chiefly concerned had been long ago gauged by her, that of the other had interested her greatly, and now every word and look and tone assisted her to a fuller understanding of its lights and shades, its beauties and defects. When Eugenia at last left off speaking, Miss Eyrecourt sat silent for a minute or two. Eugenia's heart was beating fast with anxiety. "Roma," she said at last, imploringly, "speak to me, do."

"I was only thinking how best to put in words what I want to say," said Roma. "Listen, Eugenia. I would say it was very wicked of Gertrude to tell you what she did, if I supposed that she at all realised what she was doing, or how you would take it. However, don't let us speak of her. I would rather not. She has been very kind to me, and she is more silly and small than malevolent. As to what she told you, it was a mixture of truth and falsehood, but the part that you cared about so deeply was untrue. It is quite untrue that Gertrude's interference separated Beauchamp and me. It was not required. I refused to marry him because I did not care for him in that way in the least, and also because I did not believe, and never shall, that he cared for me either. Even if I had cared for him, I don't know but what my dread of vexing Gertrude, of seeming to repay her kindness by ingratitude, would have been strong enough to stop me; but that was *not* the reason. I simply did not care for him, except in a sisterly sort of way. And he—he fancied he cared for me, but he never did. It was greatly out of contradiction, and also because my indifference piqued him—he was so spoilt wherever he went, so sought after and petted! But I think I know the worst of him, and you may believe me, Eugenia, that he never cared as earnestly, as *truly*, for any woman as for you. I regretted your marriage, because, matter-of-fact as I am myself, I saw how different you were—I feared there would be sorrow in store for you—I feared Beauchamp would not understand you—but all the same, I never liked him so much as when I found how he *did* care for you. He is not a grand character, Eugenia; I dare say what you tell me you suspect may have been true—that he thought it was very grand of him to marry for love, notwithstanding his great prospects, and I have no doubt Gertrude helped him to think so. But, all the same, he did marry for love, and he loves you still; and, dear Eugenia, you will come to see, I do believe, that there is still a fair share of happiness waiting for you. No one will ever have the same power for good over Beauchamp as you, and even if you begin again with little hope or heart, encouragement will come; all the more quickly, perhaps, because of your faint expectations. Now I have told you exactly what I think. I have gone against the old advice never to meddle between husband and wife. I allow that you have had a great deal to bear, not a little to complain of. But, knowing Beauchamp as I do, I must say he has had something to bear too. In the first place, he is innocent of your having imagined him a different character from what he really is; he could not possibly understand it if it was told him. There has been a sort of playing at cross-purposes; for you have not made the best of him from your mistaken notion of the material you had to work upon. *Now*, you can face things. Leave the past, and decide bravely to do the best with the present."

The tears were running down Eugenia's pale cheeks: "You forget, Roma," she said, sadly. "I have no present. I have cut myself away from it. I believe all you say, every word of it. I mean, I believe *you*. But if, as you allow, Beauchamp has not understood me hitherto, how could he ever understand the feelings which made me leave him? He must be a different man from what I now believe him to be if what I have done does not estrange us more than ever. For no mere surface peace would satisfy me, Roma. I mean, I could not agree to go back and begin again, merely for the sake of appearances, knowing that in reality there was no possibility of happiness for us."

"We shall see," said Roma. "Sometimes things turn out quite the other way from what we expect. But I do think, Eugenia, you should make up your mind to do what ever you come to see is right for you to do, and never mind about Beauchamp's motives for being willing, if he prove so, to meet you half-way."

Eugenia did not answer, and Roma thought it as well to leave her now to think things over in her own way. In her heart Miss Eyrecourt was not without a hope that this crisis might prove a turning-point; that the shock of finding Eugenia gone might open her husband's eyes to some part of the unhappiness she had endured, and that the way in which Gertrude had acted might lead him to a clearer understanding of the danger of her influence in his household. "Gertrude is sure to clear herself if she possibly can," thought Roma; "still Beauchamp must see she at least did not try to do any good. Besides, he must be conscious of how he has allowed her to speak of Eugenia, and how he has spoken himself. I wonder what happened when he came home and found his wife gone."

This was what had happened. It was on Thursday that Mrs Chancellor had left Halswood, where her husband was expected to return the next day. But the next day came and went, and it was not till pretty late on Saturday afternoon that he made his appearance. Mrs Eyrecourt in the meantime was suffering from no more painful feeling than annoyance, and some amount of indignation at her sister-in-law's unceremonious behaviour. Anxiety she felt none, for Eugenia had by no means allowed the whole depth of her feelings to appear during her conversation with her husband's sister, and the note which was given to Gertrude on her return home from a drive that Thursday afternoon, in explanation of her hostess's absence, had been carefully worded by Eugenia, and only left on her sister-in-law's mind the impression that she herself must be held of small account by her brother's wife if some unexplained summons from her Wareborough friends was considered of sufficient importance to justify so unheard-of a breach of hospitality.

Beauchamp's non-appearance the next day irritated her still further. She was by no means in the sweetest of tempers when Captain Chancellor came home. He came back in a more than usually kindly frame of mind towards his wife. He had enjoyed his visit very much. Everybody had been very civil to him, and several people had inquired pointedly for Eugenia, whose troubles and serious illness had awakened the sympathy and interest—sincere and genuine so far as they go—which, after all, selfish and conventional as we nineteenth-century people are supposed to have become, are not yet difficult to awaken in the hearts of many of those among whom we live. Lady Hereward had been of the party, and her peculiar interest in the young mother's bereavement had caused her to single out Beauchamp in a gratifying manner.

"I cannot tell you," she had said to him, drawing him aside for a moment—"I cannot tell you how much I have been thinking lately of that beautiful young wife of yours, Captain Chancellor. I was very nearly writing to her when I heard of her—her disappointment, but I feared it might seem intrusive. Will you tell her so? And whenever she feels equal to it, I do hope you will bring her to spend a few quiet days with me. You must be very good to her—you will forgive

an old woman's impertinence?—you must be *very* good to her. No doubt you are, but I doubt if even the best of husbands can *quite* enter into her sorrow. It is not to be expected they should, perhaps. And following so quickly on her father's death too! Ah, yes, it was very sad! And she has no mother! Give her my messages, and tell her of my sympathy, and be very patient with her, even if her grief seems exaggerated. There, now, I have kept up my character as a meddling old woman, have I not?"

But Beauchamp felt by no means offended. The interest was too evidently genuine, the sympathy too womanly for the words to annoy. And then the speaker was Lady Hereward! Captain Chancellor thought over what she had said, and was all the better for it.

No one was to be seen in Eugenia's sitting-room when he reached home on Saturday afternoon. "She must be out," he thought; and the sound of Mrs Eyrecourt's voice as he passed an open window confirmed his supposition. He was hastening out to join them by the door opening from his own "den" on to the sort of terrace below, when a letter, addressed to him in Eugenia's handwriting, placed conspicuously on the mantelpiece, caught his eye. In another moment he had opened and read it. His bright complexion turned to a grey pallor; a look of wild distress replaced the expression of smiling indifference habitual to him; all the nerve and spring seemed to melt out of his bearing; for "she has gone out of her mind," was the first thought that occurred to him—"grief has driven her insane," as Lady Hereward's words returned to his mind. "Good heavens! and this note is dated Thursday! What may not have happened by now?" Then his sister's voice, gay and careless as usual, again reached his ear. "Gertrude must know it. What is she thinking of? What is the meaning of it all?"

A sort of giddiness came over him. He had to sit down for a moment to prevent himself falling. Then he went forward to the window from which steps led to the walk below, and called to Mrs Eyrecourt.

"Gertrude," he said, "come here at once. I want you."

Full of her own grievances, which the sight of her brother recalled freshly to her mind, Mrs Eyrecourt hardly relished the authoritative summons. She came up the steps slowly, calling to her dog, whose company she much preferred to that of her daughter.

"So you have come back at last, Beauchamp!" she said, as she drew near him. "I was very nearly setting off home this morning, I can tell you. I wonder what you asked me to come to see you for!"

Her pettishness was quite lost on her brother.

"Gertrude," he said, excitedly, as if he had not heard her words, "do you not know, or *do* you know about Eugenia? What has happened?"

"What has happened?" she repeated, looking a little startled; "nothing that I know of, except that she has gone to her friends at Wareborough—her sister, or aunt, or somebody—for a day or two. I suppose she often goes there, does she not? though I certainly thought she might have waited till my visit was over."

"Is *that* all you know?" said Beauchamp, impatiently. "Do you not know with what intention she left this—that she went, never to return?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs Eyrecourt, now for the first time taking alarm. "You don't mean to say she has run away—run away *with* some one? How frightful! What a scandal! Oh, Beauchamp, how terribly you have been deceived!"

"Take care what you say, Gertrude," said Captain Chancellor, sternly. "Run away *with* any one—my wife—Eugenia! What are you thinking of? Read that!"

He thrust into her hand the letter he had found on his mantelpiece, and while watching her read it, he almost laughed, not with standing his distress, at the utter incompatibility of his sister's coarsely commonplace supposition with the perfect guilelessness, the transparency and innocence, he had often been half inclined to look upon as but a part of his wife's childishness and inexperience.

Eugenia's note to her husband was as follows:—

"I am going away because I am too hopeless and miserable to bear my life longer. Hitherto I have clung to hope and to you through all my suffering, believing that at least you *had* loved me. Now I know the whole bitter truth. I am going to my own friends. I will agree to any arrangements you like to make, but I do not want any money, except what I have of my own. I cannot think that you will in any way miss me, but I trust you will be happier without me than you have been with me.
"Eugenia."

Mrs Eyrecourt did not speak when she had finished reading this. Beauchamp, observing her closely, fancied she looked pale and frightened.

"Can you explain any of this to me?" he asked, impatiently. "Has anything happened in my absence, to explain it? Or must I think she has gone out of her mind?"

Gertrude hesitated a little. "There was—we had a rather disagreeable conversation the day you left," she began. "I don't know who in the world could have put it in her head—*truly* I don't, Beauchamp—but all of a sudden Eugenia challenged me with having been the cause of your *not* marrying Roma, and by some peculiar reasoning of her own, from that she went on to argue that I was the cause of your hasty proposal to her, which she seems to look upon as the misfortune of her life."

“And what did you tell her?”

“What could I tell her but the truth? She seemed to have a very fair notion of it to begin with. I could not have deceived her. Certainly she is the most hot-headed exaggerated person I ever knew. She talked of having been deceived and all sorts of things. She must have been infatuated to think that you, with your prospects—and altogether—could have *deliberately* chosen her, or that your friends could have approved of your doing so, though of course both you and they were too honourable to try to draw back once the thing was actually done.”

Captain Chancellor laughed. There was a slight incredulousness in his laugh which made Gertrude very irate. “Then what you have told me is about the general substance of what you told her?” he said.

“I suppose so,” said Mrs Eyrecourt, sulkily. “I did not begin it. I do not consider myself in any way responsible for what she has done. She seemed all right again at luncheon, and as you must have seen, I never even associated this foolish fit of jealousy of hers with her sudden visit to her friends.”

But Beauchamp was not yet satisfied. For almost the first time in his life, he felt that he had his sister in his power, and he used it to the utmost. Little by little he extracted from her a full account of what had passed between her and his wife, including what she had told Eugenia of her really mistaken impression of the true relations that had existed between himself and Roma Eyrecourt, and when he had learnt all that she had to tell, he turned from her with a bitter “Thank you, Gertrude. You have certainly done your best to ruin any chances of happiness I had. I never before had a conception how spiteful a spiteful woman could be. You disliked Eugenia from the first, because she was my choice and not yours, and in the pleasure of making her miserable you have cared little what became of me.”

Mrs Eyrecourt was so offended that she first burst into tears, and then decided upon setting off to join Addie and her mother that very afternoon, leaving Floss behind her till she sent directions for her journey home. Captain Chancellor did not care. Before his sister had fixed her train, he was half-way to Wareborough, where, however, disappointment awaited him in the shape of the Thurstons’ complete ignorance of Eugenia’s whereabouts. The interview with his wife’s relations threatened at first to be a stormy one, for, in his increasing anxiety and perplexity, he was more than half inclined to blame them for this new complication. But they were patient and judicious; the sight of his unfeigned distress inclined Sydney to judge him more leniently than she had ever done, and new hopes began to spring in her heart, that if only Eugenia were with them again, all might yet be well. In the end, Beauchamp went home again to Halswood, by Frank’s advice, to wait there quietly till they heard from their sister.

“I am certain we shall have a letter from her to-morrow or Monday,” said Frank, “for even if she were ill, her maid Rachel, who, we were glad to find, is with her, would write. And it is better for you to go home, and look as if nothing were wrong. Your staying here would only make a talk, and I shall telegraph instantly we hear.”

So Beauchamp went home—home to the desolate house where Eugenia had felt so sure he would never miss her; and the loneliness and anxiety and wretchedness of the next two days brought him face to face with some truths hitherto but little recognised or considered in his pleasure-loving, self-regarding life.

And after all it was Roma’s letter, reaching him on Tuesday morning only, which first brought relief to the fears growing almost more than he could endure, for, by some mischance, Eugenia’s unlucky note to her sister, too late for Saturday’s post from Nunswell, was not received at its destination till this same Tuesday morning.

At first sight of Miss Eyrecourt’s letter, Captain Chancellor could hardly believe his eyes. “*Roma* with her,” he exclaimed; “Roma, of all people! How can I reconcile that with Gertrude’s story?”

Incomprehensible as it was, however, the news was marvellously welcome. Half-an-hour later came Frank Thurston’s promised telegram, and that very afternoon, hardly to her surprise, Rachel brought word privately to Miss Eyrecourt, that Captain Chancellor wished to know how he could see her.

“He does not want my mistress to be told of his arrival till he has seen you, ma’am,” said Rachel; adding discreetly, “of course with her not being very strong it might startle her, not expecting my master so soon.”

Volume Three—Chapter Eight.

O si sic Omnia!

“Und dennoch wohl uns, wenn die Asche treu Der Fûnken hegt, wenn dan getäuschte Herz Nicht müde wird, von Neuem zû erglüh ’n!”
Uhland.

“Eugenia,” said Roma, when they were sitting together later in the day, “I have something to tell you.”

“What?” asked Eugenia.

“Some one is coming to see you—this evening or to-morrow morning, if you would like that better.”

“Who is it, Roma?” asked Eugenia, the colour rushing to her pale cheeks. “Not—not Beauchamp?”

“Yes, it is Beauchamp,” answered Roma. She had risen from her seat and now stood beside Eugenia, looking down at her with an expression of mingled anxiety and sympathy.

“Oh, Roma, you must have asked him to come, your letter must have brought him,” exclaimed Beauchamp’s wife in great distress. “I know you meant it well, dear Roma, but you should not have done it. I don’t want to see him just

yet. I have been trying to make up my mind to do what I suppose must be right—to offer to go back to him, and do my duty as his wife. But you don't know how difficult it will be. Oh, so difficult! He will never in the least understand the feelings that made me so miserable; he will think it was all bad temper; or low common jealousy of his having ever cared for *you*; oh, I see it all so plainly! Of course I will ask him to forgive me—ah, how gladly I would do so if I thought he could understand what he really has to forgive—it is not that I shrink from. But I see that during the rest of our life together I shall stand at such a hopeless disadvantage: he will not be able to believe in my real wish and determination to do my best; it is my own fault, I have brought it on myself, but that does not make it less bitter. This that I have done—this leaving him and my home, will be constantly rising up in judgment against me in his mind—it will never seem to him that anything was wanting on *his* side. I do mean to try, Roma, I do indeed, but all the spring has gone out of everything. Oh, how lonely it will be!”

Roma let her finish speaking without interrupting her. Then she said gently—“I think you see things at their very worst, Eugenia. I think there are feelings and motives in Beauchamp which will make your life easier than you now imagine. But I don't think my saying so will do much good. About his coming, however, I must explain that it was entirely his own doing. My letter did not bring him. I did not say a word in it but what I told you. And even if I had not written, Beauchamp would have been here by now, for your brother-in-law had sent him your address.”

“*He* need not have interfered,” said Eugenia, haughtily.

Roma smiled. “He meant it for the best, I have no doubt,” she said. “You are sore and uneasy just now, Eugenia, and no wonder, but after awhile you will see things more brightly, I feel sure. But now, what about your seeing Beauchamp? He will be calling this evening to ask; he said he would. Would you rather wait till to-morrow morning?”

“I don't know,” said Eugenia, irresolutely. Then, as a new thought struck her, “Have you seen him then, Roma?” she asked.

“Yes,” answered Miss Eyrecourt. “I have seen him, and had a very long talk with him—the longest talk, I think, I ever had with any gentleman! But I don't think his wife will be jealous,” she added, with a bright smile, which, in spite of herself, extracted a faint, shadowy reflection of itself from Eugenia.

Just then there came a ring at the bell.

“There he is,” said Roma; “well, Eugenia?”

“I will see him now,” said Eugenia, suddenly. “It is better—my putting it off might only irritate him more.”

Roma kissed her without speaking, and left the room.

In the few minutes that passed before Captain Chancellor came upstairs how many painful anticipations had time to rush through Eugenia's brain! She was determined to go through with what she had promised to Roma and to herself to attempt: she would humble herself to the utmost that she could truthfully do so; she would ask her husband's forgiveness; she would own that she had taken up, with exaggeration and bitterness, Mrs Eyrecourt's version of the past. All this she would say: she owed it to her own self-respect to do so, hopeless as she felt of any good effect it might have on her future, little as she anticipated that it would awaken any generous or tender feelings towards her in her husband's heart. She pictured to herself the cold air of superiority with which he would receive her confession; she recalled the unsympathising contempt with which on several occasions her impulsive endeavours to draw nearer to him, to understand him better, had been thrown back on herself with a recoil of indignant mortification—and she said to herself that her fate was a very hard one.

There came a sort of tap at the door, and in answer to her tremulous “come in,” Captain Chancellor appeared. She was standing by the table, in the same attitude as that in which Roma left her. She looked up as Beauchamp closed the door, and came forward. To her surprise, she perceived at once that he was looking ill and careworn, and that his bearing was by no means free from agitation. She was so surprised that she forgot what she had meant to say first of all; she opened her lips mechanically, but no sound was heard: then a sort of giddiness came over her for a moment, and half unconsciously she closed her eyes. He was beside her in an instant. “Eugenia,” he exclaimed, “Eugenia, how ill you are looking! My poor darling, I may not have understood you—I have been a blind, selfish, careless husband, but oh, my dear, you should not have fancied I was so bad as not to care for your suffering! I did care—I do care. Your leaving me has half broken my heart. Will you not come back and try me again? Will you not believe in my love for you? Truly, it has always been there, though you doubted it.” Where were all Eugenia's carefully considered words of confession? “Thus far have I done wrong, but no farther; to this extent have I been wanting in my wifely duty, but not beyond.” She threw her arms round her husband's neck, and careless of possible repulse she burst into tears. “Beauchamp,” she said, simply, “I am very sorry for what I have done wrong. I will try to please you better in the future if you will forgive the past.”

“We will *both* try again,” he said, kindly, “Not that you did *not* please me, my dear child. Your only fault was—was—well, perhaps, as I have sometimes told you, you expected a little too much; your ideas were a little bit too romantic for every-day life. The best of husbands and wives knock against each other's fancies now and then, you know, and it can't be always like a honeymoon,”—Eugenia winced at this a little, a very little,—“but, all the same, I don't see why our chances of being happy together are not quite as good as other people's. You will gain experience, and I, I hope, will learn to understand you better. And I think that's about all we can say. I am very thankful to have you again safe and well, and the next time you make yourself miserable about anything, come and ask *me*; don't go to other people, who see nothing except through their own prejudices. Gertrude didn't mean to make mischief; all the same she did so, as I told her. But Roma has put all that right?”

“Yes,” said Eugenia, “I—*we*—can never thank her enough for what she has done.”

“She says,” pursued Beauchamp, with unwonted humility, “I should have told you all about that old affair with her. I

was very nearly doing so once, I remember, but—I don't know how it was—I was bothered at that time, and I liked to keep you distinct from it all. I was bitter about Roma for a good while, and I disliked the subject. But, Eugenia, no suffering I have ever had to bear in my life has equalled that of the last few days."

They were silent for a minute or two. "I must say," Captain Chancellor went on, speaking more in his usual tone, "the Thurstons behaved very sensibly in not making any fuss. Nothing would have been so odious as any absurd story getting about." But, happening to observe the pained expression of Eugenia's face, he changed the subject, and went on to talk of some plans he had in his head of going abroad for a time, taking Eugenia to visit many places so far known to her but by name. "It would be the best way of making you strong again," he said. "We might even spend next winter out of England, if we liked." And, notwithstanding the unexpected encouragement she had met with in her new resolutions, it was a relief to Eugenia to be freed from the anticipation of an immediate recommencement of the life at Halswood, hitherto so lonely and uncongenial. She was touched, too, by the evident consideration for her happiness which prompted this new scheme, and Beauchamp, on his side, felt rewarded by her gratification for the amount of self-denial which the proposed plan entailed on him.

So when Roma rejoined them she quickly saw that her hopes had not been groundless; already the expression of Eugenia's face had grown brighter and less despondent than she had seen it for long.

"Was I not a true prophet?" she said, to Eugenia, when they were by themselves again. "Are not things more hopeful than you expected?"

"Yes," said Eugenia, thoughtfully, "they are; and it is you I have to thank for their being so, Roma."

"No, don't say that," interrupted Roma, quickly. "I don't like you to say so, because I want you to do Beauchamp justice. There is more to work upon in him than you were inclined to think, and you, as I told you before, have more power over him to draw out his best than any one else ever had or could have."

"But still it is your doing," persisted Eugenia, affectionately; "for who else but you could ever have opened my eyes to see this, or at least to look for it?"

A new feeling had wakened in her heart to her husband. From the ashes of the old unreasoning, wilfully blind, headstrong devotion had arisen a calmer, more tempered, more enduring sentiment. As yet she was hardly conscious of its existence; its component parts she could certainly not have defined. She only said to herself, "I don't know how it is, but, somehow, what has passed to-day has made me feel *sorry* for Beauchamp. I don't think hitherto any one has taken much pains to draw out what Roma calls 'his best.' And I am so weak and foolish and full of faults, how can I hope to do it? Yet, somehow, I think I *do* hope it."

They all left Nunswell the next day, Roma travelling with them as far as Wareborough only, where she had promised a short visit to her cousins, the Dalrymples; Beauchamp and his wife returning to Halswood, there at once to commence preparations for their visit to foreign parts.

Eugenia trembled a little as they drew near the spot which, but so few days before, she had quitted with something very like despair in her heart. There was a mingling of almost superstitious apprehensiveness in her shrinking from "beginning again"—with new motives, new hopes, new patience—in the very place which had witnessed the woeful failure of her first essays, the cloudy ending to the too brilliant promise of the dawn of her married life. But these half-morbid feelings she was wise enough to keep to herself.

"I only hope," she thought, "that Mrs Grier will not think herself bound to receive me in state after so short an absence. If she does I shall take it as a bad omen. She is a very good creature, but I shall never forget her first reception."

So it was with some little apprehension that Mrs Chancellor looked out of the carriage as the front of the house came in sight. She knew Mrs Eyrecourt had gone; it had never occurred to her that poor little Floss had been temporarily left behind. Her surprise was great, her relief and pleasure extreme, when, almost before the carriage had stopped, she heard her own name shouted in the little girl's peculiar pronunciation: "Aunty 'Genia, Aunty 'Genia, you have comed back! Kiss me quick! You never said good-bye when you wented away, and I cwied so! Please don't never go away any more!"

The tears were not very far away from Eugenia's own eyes, as she lifted the excited little mortal in her arms, and kissed the eager, flushed face.

"Dear little Floss," she said, "I am so glad to come back to you;" and even Beauchamp was struck by the little scene.

"What an eccentric little creature it is," he said to his wife, when, Floss's rhapsodies having subsided, she said good-night and went off to bed "as good as gold."

"Who would have thought that Gertrude's child could have hugged away as vehemently at anyone as Floss did just now."

And the child's demonstrative affection put it into his head to make an unexpected proposal to Eugenia. "How would you like to take Floss with us?" he said. "I have no doubt Gertrude would be enchanted to let her come, and the child's maid is French, which would be an advantage. You see we shall not be moving about at any uncomfortable speed; you are not strong enough for it, and that sort of thing is not my idea of travelling for pleasure. When there is no need for hurry, much better take it leisurely."

Eugenia was delighted; she knew, though she never told it to anyone, the indirect influence for good which Floss's innocent championship had had upon her life, and the idea of the child's happiness was pleasant to her. Mrs

Eyrecourt was delighted; so delighted that she wrote back accepting her brother's offer, as if no shadow of anything disagreeable had ever disturbed the harmony of their intercourse. It suited her particularly well, to have Floss disposed of for the present, as she was anticipating a round of visits in which a child would have been rather an encumbrance, while yet, for the sake of appearances, she could not make up her mind to leave the little girl alone at Winsley for many weeks at a time. It looked well, too, to be able to tell her friends that her brother and his wife, "having no children of their own," had taken such a fancy to her little daughter that they had begged leave to take her abroad with them for the winter; for Gertrude had sense enough to know that "family jars" are, of all things, the most undignified and "vulgar," and she had endured some perturbation of spirit of late as to the probable nature of her future terms with her Halswood relatives.

"I am so glad you are going abroad," she wrote; "it will be the very thing to set up Eugenia's health and spirits. By-the-bye, I must not forget to send all sorts of kind messages from Addie and Victoria and their mother. The girls were sorry not to see you at Halswood as was arranged, but of course they quite understand my explanation about Eugenia's not being well enough to receive them, and they hope to pay their visit some other time" etc, etc.

Some people—for of course in the neighbourhood of Halswood as elsewhere there were to be found human beings with superfluous energy to spare from the management of their own concerns, which they apparently conceived it to be their duty to bestow on those of others—some people thought it very odd and absurd of Captain and Mrs Chancellor to burden themselves with a child on their foreign tour. It was so odd as only to be explicable by the comprehensive assertion of Mrs Chancellor's being, to say the least, "very odd altogether." For notwithstanding all the care that had been taken to guard against outside remark, some amount of gossip had oozed out concerning Eugenia's hasty flight from Halswood. Servants, the very best of them perhaps, will but be servants. It was not in Mrs Grier's nature to refrain from lugubrious head-shakings and mysterious allusions when she found that her young mistress had actually left home without any explanation to herself, the vice-gerent of the establishment, of the reasons for this sudden step; it was not in the unexceptionable Blinkhorn's nature to refrain, at the first table at least, from comment upon his master's state of anxiety and dejection during the days of uncertainty and foreboding which succeeded his return home. And the natures of the various inferior functionaries in the Halswood household, being neither better nor worse than are ordinarily met with in their respective capacities, the rolling stone of gossip, contrary to the adage, grew and gathered as it went, till but few of the great houses in the neighbourhood, none certainly of the tea-tables in the little town of Chilworth or of the less pretentious Sunday afternoon entertainments in the farm houses on the estate, but had their own pet version of the Halswood scandal.

Of this, however, the principals in the little drama were, as is not unfrequently the case, in happy ignorance. As to the Chilworth edition of the story, as to the village chatter, they were of little consequence. They lived their appointed nine days, then died a natural death. But as to the more discreetly veiled, but nevertheless the far more insidious, whisper that went the round of "the county," there is little saying where it would have stopped, how deep might not have been the social injury it would have caused to impulsive, reckless, innocent Eugenia, had it not suddenly received its death-blow from an unexpected but irresistible hand. It came to Lady Hereward's ears, how or whence matters little, that the wife of the master of Halswood, "the girl with the beautiful face" which somehow had recalled the memory of the long years ago dead and buried little Alice, the young mother whose little baby had died, had somehow or other done something which threatened to get her "talked about." And the good old woman rose to the occasion. "I think you are not aware, my dear Lady Vaughan," she said, the first time the subject was publicly alluded to before her, "in fact, I am quite sure you *cannot* be aware that the young lady of whom you are speaking is a valued friend of mine, for I am certain you would not intentionally hurt my feelings or those of any one. Mrs Chancellor has passed through much sorrow, and she has my deepest sympathy. The report to which you allude is an exaggerated version of the simple fact that she was called away rather suddenly in her husband's absence to some of her own friends. When she comes home again strong and well, as I hope she will, it will give me great pleasure to introduce her and any of my friends who have not yet met, to each other, for I hope she will be often at Marshlands." Then she changed the subject; but this was the last that was heard, publicly at least, of "Mrs Chancellor's elopement," for Lady Hereward had queened it to some purpose during her forty years reign in the county.

It was in the latter part of July that Beauchamp and his wife left home. They stayed a little time in town, then proceeded by easy stages to Switzerland, intending there to spend the remainder of the summer and the early autumn, and when the colder weather drew near, to turn their steps to some one of the winter nests in the south of France. Their programme was carried out even more fully than they had intended. Winter came and went, though they learnt it only by the shortening and then lengthening again of the soft, sunny days; spring and summer, chasing travellers and swallows away once more to less sultry regions, followed; autumn returned, and Christmas, in the unfamiliar garb he wears by the shores of the blue Mediterranean, had passed by yet again, with his all-the-world-over greeting of "glad tidings and great joy," before there was any talk of Halswood being again inhabited by its owners. Before that time came, Floss had learnt to chatter French like a magpie, Eugenia had come to doubt if she after all sufficiently appreciated the inestimable privilege of being "English bred and born," and Beauchamp, on his part, was beginning to wonder if he would be equal to keeping his seat across country next season, after his long sojourning in the tents of Kedar, otherwise regions where "le sport" was alluded to with the uncomprehending bewilderment with which we used to discuss the fascination of the feast of Juggernaut—where a day with the Pau foxhounds furnished the only procurable pretence of a run.

At last the time for their return home was fixed. It had been in July they left England; it was not till the April "next but one" that they found themselves again within her shores, their party augmented by the presence of a French *bonne*, with a flapping white cap and a very satisfactory "worldly-looking" baby, a great boy of four months old, a most respectable son and heir to the hitherto ill-fated Chancellor estates. At first Eugenia's disappointment that the little creature was not a daughter was great; but this feeling she expressed to no one, well aware that sympathy therein was hardly to be expected. She had learnt a good deal, she was learning every day more and more of the wisdom, the necessity of making the best of the materials with which she had to work; slowly, painfully was coming home to her the interpretation of the dream, the lesson of the great "life's trial" in which so rashly, so ignorantly she had engaged. "Love" for her had not been "clear gain," viewed by the light of the dim knowledge of to-day; but in the

wiser afterwards “the sun will pierce;” the follies, the failures, the mistakes, the delusions will be lost in the beautiful whole, may indeed prove to have been essential to its perfection.

Not that Beauchamp Chancellor’s wife said or thought all this to herself; she speculated and theorised and philosophised much less than of old; she lived more in the present, taking life, as we all must take it sooner or later, if it is to be enduring at all, in a day-by-day fashion, leaving the “huge mounds of years,” the bewildering mazes of whys and wherefores, past and future, to be considered “by-and-by”—by-and-by, when surely we shall see things somewhat more clearly, more justly, more divinely, but a by-and-by which will never come to us if, dissatisfied with the fair promise of its far-off beauty, we seek to grasp its shadowy substance before the time.

So, in a sense—must it not always be but in a sense?—Eugenia was happy. Happier perhaps possibly, because she thought less about being happy than in the old days. She had seen before her in imagination a dreary road; to her surprise, ever and again as she walked along, fresh flowers began to spring by the wayside—little unobtrusive blossoms, hardly distinguishable till her foot had all but crushed out their tender life; tiny buds of brightness and sweetness, bringing many an unexpected spot of colour or breath of fragrance into her daily life.

She grew to be very thankful that her child was a boy; she learnt to be grateful for every link of sympathy between her husband and herself, she tried her utmost to strengthen and rivet each one of these; and though, apparently, at least, her efforts often failed, sometimes, on the other hand, she was rewarded by success surpassing her most sanguine hopes.

“He is not a grand character,” Roma had said, justly, “but, all the same, there is a great deal of good in him; and of all people, you, Eugenia, have most power to draw out and strengthen this.” And these simple words Beauchamp’s wife henceforth never allowed herself to forget.

They reached Halswood safe and well on a lovely spring evening. There stood Mrs Grier, her black silk dress relieved for once by some cheerful pink ribbons, tears of joy in her eyes at the non-fulfilment of her many gloomy prophecies. It was indeed, as she took care to inform her mistress, “a day she had little expected ever to see.” But Eugenia could smile at her now, as she assured her that “the luck had certainly turned” with the arrival of the great crowing baby who was to bring life and brightness to the old house.

And before long Halswood looked more cheerful than it had done for many a day. Mrs Eyrecourt’s anxiety to resume the guardianship of her little daughter was not so overwhelming as to be allowed to interfere with her plans for the season. She had just taken a house in town for her usual three months, so she contented herself with “a mere glimpse” of the travellers as they passed through, expressed herself delighted with the improvement in the child’s manners and appearance, and yielded without much pressing to the proposal that Floss should accompany her friends home and remain with them till the summer. “The country is much better for children certainly,” said Mrs Eyrecourt. “I shall feel happier for Floss not to be so long in town. I only wish I could go down to Halswood with you myself, but it is impossible. I must be in town as much as I can now, so that dear Quin can spend his Saturdays and Sundays with me.”

But though Gertrude could not spare time to welcome the absentees back to Halswood, Roma could. She joined them there within a week of their arrival, and for a few pleasant days Sydney and her belongings joined them too. Poor Sydney’s holidays were not many, but her busy life seemed to suit her; her fair face was as calm, her voice as sweet and even, as in her girlish days; and when she and Frank went away, back again to smoky Wareborough, they were cheered by the thought that their intercourse with Eugenia promised to be frequent and cordial. Not much private talk had passed between the sisters; Eugenia was charier of confidences, than had once been natural to her, but Sydney was satisfied.

“She is much happier than I ever hoped to see her,” said the younger sister to her husband. “It is not exactly the *sort* of happiness I should long ago have imagined would have contented Eugenia; somehow, even though I feel so thankful and relieved about her, I could hardly prevent the tears coming to my eyes when I looked at her. She must have suffered so much, Frank (though outwardly things have been so prosperous with her) to be so changed.”

“She has had to learn her lessons like other people,” said Frank, oracularly.

“But isn’t it wonderful how she adapts herself to her husband?” said Sydney. “He is improved, I must allow; but there *cannot* be much sympathy between them, and Eugenia must know it.”

“No doubt she does, but better women than Eugenia,” replied Frank, with a spice of his old antagonism, “have had to get on with less. And Chancellor’s by no means a bad fellow after all; many a man would have had less patience with Eugenia’s freaks and fancies than he. I always told you they’d shake into their places some day. By-the-bye, you must remind me to give that invitation to Gerald. I hope he will go, for more reasons than one.”

Sydney smiled. “I hope so too,” she said.

Volume Three—Chapter Nine.

Insuperable Obstacles.

But, Edith dead!

Too Late.

Gerald Thurston did go to Halswood. Whether he did so knowing that there he would again meet Roma Eyrecourt is a

secret that has never been divulged; whether in suggesting to her husband that he should invite Sydney's brother-in-law Eugenia was influenced by malice prepense has never transpired. Be these possibilities as they may the event they would have foreshadowed came to pass; and in this fashion.

Once, during the absence of the Chancellors on the Continent, Mr Thurston and Miss Eyrecourt had met again. It was during one of Roma's flying visits to the Dalrymples. They had seen each other several times, had talked a good deal on a subject interesting to them both—Eugenia—and from that on one or two occasions had drifted into other talk, had found out insensibly a good deal about each other's thoughts and tastes and opinions, had discovered various remarkable points of coincidence in these directions, various no less impressive points of disagreement which both felt conscious it would have been pleasant and satisfactory to discuss further. All this talking no doubt might even then have led to a definite result, but for the prepossession with which each mind was guarded. Roma, unbeliever though she professed herself in the constancy of any man's devotion, yet made one exception to her rule. She believed, or told herself, with perhaps suspicious frequency and decision, that she believed in the unalterable nature of Gerald's feelings towards Eugenia.

"It is the only case, out of a book that is to say," she would repeat to herself, "I have ever even heard of, where a man kept faithful to his first ideal. Not that she even turned out to be his ideal, from what he has told me; but she was and still is herself. I believe he would be content to serve her unthanked all his life, and she will never have the faintest notion of it! Ah, yes, things are queerly arranged. But I am very thankful I was born matter-of-fact and easy-going, not likely to break my heart for even the best of men."

Gerald's prepossession was of quite another nature. He did not think it impossible that, had he dared to show his growing regard for this heartless young lady, he might not have succeeded in winning that which she was so fond of declaring she was not possessed of. But his head was perfectly full of the notion that, though personally she might in time have learnt to care for him, his position would prove an insuperable objection. "As if *she* would ever consent to live at Wareborough," he said to himself. "Ah, no, it is utterly out of the question." And so, with the burnt child's dread of the fire, he refrained from indulging in tantalising speculations on the possibility of overcoming these taken-for-granted prejudices on Miss Eyrecourt's part, and from time to time congratulated himself on the skill with which he had preserved intact his peace of mind and on the strength of self-control which permitted him to enjoy a good and beautiful woman's friendship where a nearer and dearer tie was impossible.

But there came a day when his self-satisfaction received its death-blow, when he was fain to confess that after all he was neither wiser nor stronger than his fellows. He had been more than a week at Halswood. He had come there little intending or expecting to remain so long, but the days had passed very pleasantly; his hosts were so cordial, Miss Eyrecourt so friendly and companionable, that, having no pressing business on hand, he had been persuaded to linger on from day to day. It was not very often that he found himself alone with Roma, but one afternoon, some other visitors having left, it happened that they two were thrown on each other for entertainment.

"Shall you mind, Roma, if we leave you and Mr Thurston alone to-day?" Eugenia had asked her friend after luncheon. "Beauchamp is so anxious to drive me out with the new ponies—he has driven them several times, and says they go so beautifully! And the pony carriage only holds two and little Tim, the groom, behind, and I think perhaps Beauchamp would be disappointed if I did not go."

"Of course you must go," said Roma, brightly. "I don't mind in the least. I will take Mr Thurston a tremendously long walk, and see if he isn't much more tired than I when we come home. Men are so conceited about that sort of thing."

Eugenia laughed. She was leaving the room, but a sudden impulse seemed to come over her. She turned back to the table where Roma was sitting writing, and kissed her gently.

"What is that for?" asked Roma. "Am I particularly good to-day?"

"No, yes. I mean you are always good," answered Eugenia. "I am very happy to-day, and I always feel as if I should thank you when I feel so." Roma looked up with a grateful look in her dark eyes. ("It is nice of you to say so, but I don't deserve it," she interrupted. "Yes you do," said Eugenia, and then went on with what she had been speaking about.) "It was something Beauchamp said this morning that made me happy. I needn't tell you it all, but just a little. He asked me, Roma, if I didn't think we were getting to be very happy together, and he said, 'At least, Eugenia, you make *me* very happy, and I think I am getting to understand you and your ways of thinking about things better. I am learning to see how selfish I was—a while ago, you know. But I trust all that is over.' Then he said something else, I don't know what put it into his head—something about baby and how we should bring him up, and the future. Roma," she broke off, suddenly, "if Beauchamp were to die now I should miss him terribly. I am so *glad* to feel so, for there was a time when I *couldn't*, when my life stretched before me like a long slavery. Don't think me wicked to speak so—you understand me?"

"Understand you, dear Eugenia? Yes, thoroughly," said Roma. "And years and years hence I trust and believe you will feel as you say you do now, yet more strongly. I don't think the sort of happiness you feel is likely to fade or lessen," she sighed, half unconsciously as she spoke.

Eugenia looked at her affectionately. She seemed on the point of saying something more, but changed her mind and, kissing Roma again, left the room.

How it came about they could neither of them in all probability have exactly related. They went the long walk Miss Eyrecourt had determined upon; they talked of every general subject under the skies, avoiding at first, as if by tacit mutual consent, any of closer personal interest. But after a while, somehow, Mr Thurston came to talking of himself, of his life, his hopes, his disappointments and failures. He was not by any means an egotistical man. Roma could not but feel flattered, by his confidence; she listened with undisguised interest. Suddenly, to her surprise, he alluded to the first time they had met.

"It is curious to look back now to that evening, is it not?" he said. "You were the first lady I had spoken to for, I may say, years. Out there I was completely cut off from any intercourse of the kind. And what a fool (I beg your pardon, Miss Eyrecourt) you must have thought me! Do you remember how I bored you with my confidences? I assure you I never remember our conversation without feeling inclined to blush, only you were so very kind—*that* part of it," he added, in a somewhat lower tone, "I don't want to forget."

"You need not want to forget any of it," said Roma, blushing, however, herself as she spoke; "I certainly did not think of you as you imagine. It has always been very pleasant to me to think that—that you thought me, even at first sight, trustworthy—fit to talk to as you did. The only unpleasing part of the remembrance to me is the thought of how it all ended for you, how terribly quickly your dreams faded. Forgive me," she went on, hastily, "I am afraid I have said too much. I have never alluded to it before."

"I like your alluding to it," said Gerald. "I like the feeling that you understand it all. It doesn't hurt me in the least now. It is wonderful how one grows out of things, isn't it?—at least, hardly that; how things grow into one till one is no longer conscious of their existence."

"I am a part of all that I have met."

"You remember? Of course Eugenia had a great influence upon me. But for her I should probably have been quite a different sort of man. But still I can see the good it did me now without any bitterness. I am inexpressibly thankful that she is so much happier, that she seems to be growing into—*her* life, as it were. When she was unhappy I must confess I was bitter—bitter to think I had no right to interfere. But that has all past by. I am rather lonely, that is about all I have any right to complain of. If she had not married it might have been different—there is a sort of doggedness about me—I believe I should have gone on hoping against hope. But as it is, I feel it rather hard sometimes."

"What?" asked Roma, in some bewilderment.

"Why, that I should be doomed to stay outside always, as it were. You don't suppose I have any dislike to the idea of being happy like other people? You don't suppose it is from choice I remain homeless and lonely, do you, Miss Eyrecourt?"

He looked at her half laughingly, yet earnestly too.

Roma's face fell. Then after all, she thought, her one hero was no hero; already his love for Eugenia was replaced by some other apparently equally hopeless attachment. It was disappointing.

"Why do you look so grave?" he inquired. "Have I offended you?"

"Offended *me*! What have I to do with it?" she replied. "Of course not. To tell you the truth I felt just a little disappointed—a nice confession for an unromantic person to make—that—that you *had* 'got over it,' as it is called, so completely. You were my model of constancy. I shall think life more prosaic than ever now. And, to turn to prose, what a pity you a second time made an unlucky venture! Could you not have been more prudent? That is to say, if the obstacles whose existence you infer *are* insuperable. As to that, of course I can't judge."

She quickened her steps a little as she spoke. It seemed to Gerald she was eager to make an end of the conversation. Amused, yet much annoyed at her misapprehension, his wish to right himself in her eyes drove him further than he had intended.

"Miss Eyrecourt," he began, not without a slight irritation in his tone, "I wish you would do me justice. Is it possible you don't understand me? Do not you see that one of the things which *most* attracted me, which drew forth my admiration and gratitude, arose from the very strength of my care for Eugenia? It was that which first drew us together—your goodness to her, I mean—it was that which showed me how generous and noble you are. And yet, unfortunately, your knowledge of my feelings to her is one of the very things that make me hopeless, even if there were no insuperable practical objections. Not that I would have concealed the old state of things from you in any case had you not happened to know them, if I had ventured to try my chance with you. But they were forced upon you so unfortunately. It would be impossible for you ever to think of me in a different light. How could I ever convince you that the heart I offered was worth having? It must seem to you a poor wretched battered-about thing—not that, of course, it was ever worth *your* having."

Roma stopped short. Hitherto she had kept up her rapid pace. She stopped short and turned round so as to face Mr Thurston. He saw that she was very pale.

"Are you in earnest?" she said, very gravely. "Do you mean what you are saying? I do not altogether understand you to-day, Mr Thurston. It would have been more in accordance with my notion of you if, allowing that you *are* in earnest, you had simply and manfully put the question to the test, instead of first imagining 'insuperable obstacles' and then putting them into my mouth. You place me very awkwardly. At this moment I solemnly assure you I do not know if you would like me to say, 'Mr Thurston, I will marry you if you will ask me,' or not."

Notwithstanding her seriousness, with the few last words she had difficulty in repressing a laugh. Gerald's face flushed deeply, angrily almost, as she spoke, and a quick light came into his eyes—a light, however, not altogether of indignation.

"I *would* have asked you months, years ago," he said, "had I not believed that my doing so would have been looked upon as presumption—would have put an end to the friendship I have learnt to value more than anything in my life, and which I could ill afford to lose. So hopeless, till this instant, have I been of ever obtaining more."

"Why?" asked Roma.

"Why?" he repeated. "For the reason I have already told you, and for another. Think of my position! A struggling engineer—an artisan, some of your people would call me, I daresay; for I am not yet at the top of my tree by any means, nor likely to be so for many a long day to come. The only home I can offer my wife is an unattractive one enough—you know what sort of a place Wareborough is—is that the home *you* are suited to? You, beautiful, courted, admired; spoilt by every sort of rule you should be, but I don't think you are. I am not exactly poor, certainly, but I am not rich, and there is hard work before me for years to come. There now, Miss Eyrecourt, you know the whole. I have great reason to be sanguine of success, have I not?"

"And this is all?" she said. "You have told me every one of the 'insuperable obstacles?'"

"Every one," he replied. "Don't torture me, Roma."

She held out both her hands; she lifted up her beautiful face and looked at him with tears in her large soft dark eyes. "Oh, Gerald," she said at last, when the two hands were pressed closely in his, when she felt his gaze of almost incredulous joy fixed upon her with eager questioning; "Oh, Gerald, how could you mistake me so? 'Spoilt,' am I? Ah no, or if so, not by the excess of love that has been lavished on me. I have been very lonely; it is years and years since I have known what it was to have a home—a real home. Even had I not loved you, I confess to you the temptation of *your* love, your strength and protection, would have been great to me. You don't know what to me would have been the mere thought of having some one I could perfectly trust. But as it is, I needn't think of temptation. I love you, Gerald. I would rather have your 'poor battered old heart' than anything in the universe. And if this makes amends for the dilapidated state of yours, I can assure you that mine, such as it is, is quite whole. I give it to you entirely, without the slightest little chip or crack."

She had begun to speak with the tears in her eyes; as she went on, notwithstanding her half-joking tone, they dropped—one, two, three big tears. She pulled away one hand to dash them aside, but Gerald caught it, kissed it tenderly and gratefully, and held it fast again.

"Roma," he said, "you and your heart are far too good for me. My darling, how shall I ever repay the sacrifices you will make for me? Are you sure, quite sure, you will never repent it? Have you considered it all? Think of having to live at Wareborough."

"Gerald, you are too bad! Do you know you have all but driven me into proposing to you? I shall think *you* repent your bargain if you say much more. Living at Wareborough! Nonsense. I should be quite pleased and content to live in a coal mine with *you*. There now, I am not going to spoil you by any more pretty speeches, which, by rights, sir, please to remember, should come from the other side."

With such encouragement, Mr Thurston, considering it was the first time he had actually tried his hand at anything of the kind, acquitted himself very fairly, and the remaining two miles of their walk seemed to them but a small fraction of the real distance. They had time, however, to discuss a good many aspects of their plans. "What would Frank and Sydney think? how astonished they would be!"

"How pleased Eugenia would feel!" etc, etc, before they re-entered the park and came within sight of the house.

They approached it from one side, intending, however, to enter by the front door. What was it, as they drew near, that gave Roma an indescribable feeling that something had happened since they went out? She could not have told. The hall door was half-open for one thing, but it was not that. It was a so-called "instinct"—one of those subtle revelations which science has not yet learnt to define or explain by any thoroughly apprehended law.

There was hardly time for even the realisation of a fear. The wave of vague apprehension had hardly ruffled the girl's happy spirit when it was confirmed. The hall door opened a little wider, a little figure, evidently on the watch, rushed out.

"Aunty Woma," cried Floss, flinging herself into Miss Eyrecourt's arms, forgetful of the certain amount of awe with which Roma still inspired her, regardless of the awful presence of Mr Thurston; "Aunty Woma, something dreadful has happened. The ponies has wunned away, and little Tim has wunned home to tell. Uncle Beachey is killed quite dead on the dot, Tim says, and I don't know where Aunty 'Genia is."

"What does she say?" asked Gerald, hoarsely.

"Tell him; say it again, Floss," said Roma, forcing her pale lips to move; and as well as she could, for her sobs, the child repeated her ghastly tale.

Without another word, Mr Thurston rushed off, and in an instant was lost to Roma's sight among the thick growing shrubs that lay in the direction of the stables. What became of Floss her aunt never knew; probably in her intense anxiety to know more, the child followed the person whom she imagined most likely to obtain further information. However that may have been, Roma found herself alone—alone with this strange dreamlike feeling of horror and grief for Beauchamp's untimely fate, which it never occurred to her to doubt—alone with a yet more terrible companion. What was the meaning of this sudden misery which overwhelmed her? Whence had come this poisonous suggestion which, so marvellously speedy is the growth of thought, had, even while the child was speaking, sprung to life in her brain? Beauchamp dead, Eugenia free, and the words which her newly made lover had spoken not an hour before ringing in her ears:

"If she had not married it would have been different. I believe I should have gone on hoping—"

How would it be now? What should she do? Oh, if only she had not encouraged him to say more, for without

encouragement, now whispered the serpent in her heart, he would certainly not have said so much.

“Good God,” thought poor Roma, in her anguish and self-horror, “what a selfish wretch I am! What shall I do? How shall I bear it?”

The words uttered aloud recalled her somewhat to herself. She was hastening to the house, intent on burying self at least for the present—on seeing in what way she could be of use to others, when Mr Thurston suddenly re-appeared. He came out by the hall door, hastened up to her quickly but without speaking. He was deadly pale, and when close beside her he seemed to move his lips once or twice before any sound was audible. Then at last he spoke.

“Roma,” he said, “wait a moment. There is no hurry. Everything has been done. They have sent for doctors and all. It,” he stopped, and seemed to gasp for breath, “it happened near the Chilworth lodge. I am just going there. I only came out to tell you. Floss’s version was not quite correct. Roma,” he stopped again, “it is even worse—forgive me, I cannot help saying so—it is not Beauchamp. It—it is Eugenia?”

The last words were hardly audible, they came with a sort of a sob. For once in his life Gerald was utterly unmanned. But Roma heard them only too plainly.

“Eugenia!” she cried, her voice rising almost into a scream; “oh no, Mr Thurston, not Eugenia. You do not mean she is *dead*? Say, oh, do say it is a mistake,” she clasped her hands together in wild entreaty; “you *must* say it is a mistake.”

He looked at her with unutterable pity, but shook his head.

“I cannot say so,” he replied; “from what I was told it seems only too certain. But I am going there at once. Will you come? no, perhaps you had better not. I will let you know immediately what I find. It *may* not be so bad. Roma, dearest Roma, do not lose heart so.”

He would have put his arm round her, but she eluded his grasp.

“Don’t touch me,” she said, wildly, “you don’t know how wicked I am. It is true—I feel it is true. Oh, Eugenia! God forgive me. I think my punishment is greater than I can bear,” and before her lover could stop her she had rushed into the house.

For a moment Gerald gazed after her in distress and bewilderment, half doubting if he had heard aright.

“She does not know what she is saying,” he decided. “My poor Roma, the shock has been too much for her; but I cannot stay,” and at a rapid pace he set off across the park in the direction of the scene of the frightful disaster.

Upstairs, meanwhile, Roma, locked into her own room, “matter-of-fact, easy-going” Roma—Roma, “into whose composition entered no tragic elements,” Gerald Thurston’s light-hearted betrothed of one short hour ago, was passing through an agony of remorse, a very fiery furnace of misery, such as falls to the lot of few women of her healthy, happy nature.

Volume Three—Chapter Ten.

From the Gates of the Grave.

“The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand,
Who saith ‘A whole I planed,
Youth shows but half: see all, nor be afraid!’”

Rabbi Ben Ezra.

She was not dead. “Still alive, but perfectly unconscious,” was the report that met Gerald as he reached the lodge. “They have not told Captain Chancellor how bad it is,” added Mr Thurston’s informant, “for he was severely stunned himself, and the hearing it might do him harm. He thinks Mrs Chancellor escaped unhurt.”

A little later Gerald caught a glimpse of the Chilworth surgeon. This gentleman seemed glad to get hold of some responsible person.

“Mrs Chancellor’s brother-in-law, Mr Thurston, I presume,” he began, and Gerald did not think the slight mistake worth correcting. “I have sent to Chilworth to telegraph for Dr Frobisher, of Marley. I suppose I did right?”

“Most certainly,” answered Gerald.

“You see I had no one to consult—we must keep it from Captain Chancellor as long as possible, he has had a narrow escape himself—and I feel the responsibility very great. There is no wonder they thought Mrs Chancellor was killed, at first—I almost thought so myself when I first came.”

“Then what is your opinion now?” Gerald ventured to ask, fancying a shadow of hope was inferred by the surgeon’s manner.

“I think there is a slight hope, a very slight one. It will hang on a thread for some days at the best, but she is young

and very healthy, though not strong. If she escapes, however, it will be little short of a miracle. Can you tell me how it happened? It seems an extraordinary thing altogether; the ponies were not wild, the coachman tells me, and had been driven several times."

Gerald told what he knew. The ponies, it appeared, from the boy Timothy's account, had gone beautifully, "as quiet as quiet," all the way, till on their return home Beauchamp had stopped for a moment at the lodge to get a light for his cigar. There was no man in the house; only the lodge-keeper's wife was at home, and she unfortunately, encumbered with a screaming baby who would scarcely allow her to open the gate. Captain Chancellor, to save her trouble, jumped out of the carriage, giving the reins to his wife, and calling to Tim to stand by the ponies' heads. The boy was on the point of obeying, when his mistress told him to stay where he was; "She could hold them quite well, she said," was the child's account, "and she thought they should learn to stand still of their-selves." It was an unfortunate experiment; the ponies, eager to reach their stable, were irritated by the delay almost within sight of their home. They began to fret and fidget, and Eugenia, by way of soothing them, walked them on slowly a few paces. Then something, what, no one ever knew (possibly only the animals' own unrestrainable impatience), startled them, and with a desperate plunge they dashed forward just as their master came out of the lodge. There was a rush and a scramble, which Tim could not clearly describe. He remembered seeing Captain Chancellor dart forward, catch hold of the reins on the side nearest to him, and for a moment the boy thought they were saved. Only for a moment, however; it seemed to him his master was dragged a few yards, then kicked violently aside, "all of a heap, he lay without moving," said the boy. "I thought he was killed, and so did my mistress. She stood up in the carriage and screamed out 'he is killed, it is my fault,' and then in another minute she were out too. I don't know if she threw herself out or not; the carriage shook so, going so fast and she standing up, she could hardly have kep' in." Apparently Tim thought it his duty to throw himself after her. He confessed to the idea having crossed his mind, but remembered no more till he woke up to find himself shaken and confused, though otherwise unhurt, some twenty yards or so from the spot where the first part of the catastrophe had occurred. The ponies, satisfied, seemingly, with their day's work, pursued their way home, their pace gradually subsiding as they became conscious of being their own masters. They rattled into the courtyard, no one at the first sound of their approach suspecting anything amiss, till the first glance of the empty carriage, and the torn and dragging reins told their own dreadful tale.

Such was the explanation of the accident. Mr Benyon listened in silence, shook his head when Gerald finished speaking, and then went back to his patient again to await the arrival of the greater man from Marley.

Gerald lost no time in sharing with Roma the crumb of comfort he had found.

"It is not quite so bad as I was told at first. She is still alive, but there is very little hope. Will you not come? There is nothing to do. She is perfectly unconscious, but I think it would be less wretched for you than staying up there alone. Tell poor little Floss we hope her aunt will soon be better."

This was the pencilled note—Roma's first letter from her lover, a sad enough one truly—which Mr Thurston sent to the poor girl, waiting in all the anguish of well-nigh hopeless anxiety for his report. Within half-an-hour she had joined him, pale, haggard, careworn, aged even it almost seemed, from the bright Roma of an hour or two ago, but calm, self-possessed now, ready for any service that might be required of her. And the sweet summer afternoon deepened into sweeter evening; the moon shone out in cold indifferent loveliness; here and there through the latticed windows of the cottage a star peeped in with its cheery twinkle, and still the dreary vigil went on; still lay on the pallet bed where they had first carried her, the so lately beautiful form of Eugenia Chancellor, beautiful still, but with a death-like beauty that seemed already to separate her from the living breathing beings about her. Only from time to time she moaned faintly, and moved her head from side to side uneasily on the pillow with the sad restlessness so pitiful to see; telling too surely to the experienced eye of invisible injury to the delicate brain.

It was unspeakably painful to witness, knowing that so little could be done to relieve or mitigate the suffering. And not the least painful part of what Roma and her lover had to go through, was the sight of Beauchamp Chancellor's suffering when the truth as to Eugenia was broken to him. His distress was indescribable; so evidently genuine in its depth that more than once in the course of the next few days Roma found herself asking herself if, after all her many years' knowledge of him, she had done full justice to his capacity for true and earnest feeling, to the latent possibilities for good in his character below the crust of worldliness and selfishness. Or was it that he had altered and improved, that contact with a nature so fresh and genuine and single-minded as Eugenia's, had done its work; that notwithstanding her many faults and mistakes, the essential beauty of her sweetness and simplicity had unconsciously asserted itself, had found a little-suspected vein of sympathy in the lower nature of her husband? It almost seemed as if it were so, and if so, oh how sad, how doubly to be regretted, the premature ending of the fair young life so full of promise, so prized and precious.

"She has been so much happier lately, Roma," poor Beauchamp would say, in his yearning for consolation and sympathy. "She was saying so herself just the other day. I am a coarse selfish creature compared with her. No one but I knows thoroughly how innocent, and true, and unselfish she is, and I took a long time to find it out—I can't forgive myself when I think of that time—but lately I do think I have got to understand her better, and to make her happier. Don't you think so, Roma? *She* said so herself, you know."

And Roma would agree with him, and say whatever she could think of in the way of comfort—a dozen times, a day, for Beauchamp followed her about in a touchingly helpless, dependent sort of manner, as if in her presence alone he found his anxiety endurable. A dozen times a day, too, he would appeal to whichever doctor was on the spot, almost entreating for a word of hope or comfort. "I fancy she is lying more quietly just now," he would say; or, "Don't you think the expression of her face is calmer, more like itself?"

It was very hard to be unable to agree with him, but weary days, and still wearier nights, went by before either doctors or friends thought it would be any but cruel kindness to allow him to hope. At last, however—a long of coming "at last" it was—there crept into sight the first faint flutter of improvement; slowly, very slowly, life and consciousness returned to the all but dying wife, and after a new phase of anxiety, scarcely less trying than the first,

the verdict was pronounced, "There is hope—the greatest danger to be apprehended in the way of recovery has been safely past—there is every reasonable ground for hope." And then, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, Eugenia crept back to her place in the world, to the place which it had seemed all but certain would be vacant for evermore. Her extreme patience, her tranquil gentleness, had much to do with her recovery, said the authorities. And those who knew her best—Gerald and Roma, and Sydney when she came—knew her excitable impetuosity, her impatience of inaction, marvelled somewhat at this new revelation of her character.

"You are so good, Eugenia," said Roma, one day when she was alone with the patient, still forced to lie motionless and unemployed, forbidden even to use her eyes or to talk much. "I cannot think how you have learnt to bear these long weeks of suffering, or at least tedium, so cheerfully."

Eugenia drew her friend's head down close beside her on her pillow. "Don't you see, dear Roma," she whispered, "how easy it is for me to be patient now that I am *so* happy? There has not been any suffering too much for me; I am so selfish that I cannot even regret the anxiety you all went through about me, for think what it has brought me—as nothing else could have done—the full knowledge of Beauchamp's love. Never, since the dreadful day when first I doubted it, have I felt so assured of it as since this accident; never, since the passing away of my unreal, unreasonable dreams, has life looked so sweet to me as now, for though I know now that troubles, and disappointment, and failure *must* come; though I dare say I shall often feel them bitterly and exaggeratedly, still I can never again feel hopeless or heartless—I can never feel that my life has no value or object."

Roma kissed her silently, but did not speak. In a minute or two Eugenia spoke again—

"And if anything was wanting to make me still happier, to make me more grateful for this new return to life, it is what you have told me about yourself and Gerald," she said affectionately. "You are both so wise and good, you have both been so wise and good in what you have done for me, that I cannot tell you how happy I am in your happiness. Happiness actually in your grasp, with real root and foundation. You will not have to travel to it through vanished illusions as I did;" she sighed a little. "But I was hot-headed, and wilful, and selfish, and so I blinded myself. *You* have always thought of others more than of yourself, Roma. You have been reasonable and patient all your life. You deserve to step straight into happiness."

"No I don't, Eugenia. No one but I myself knows how little I deserve it," whispered Roma. But she said no more, and Eugenia accepted her words simply as the expression of her womanly humility.

"Her engagement to Gerald has improved her in the only respect improvement in her—in my eyes at least—was possible," thought Eugenia. "It has softened her so wonderfully. No one could call her too self-confident or decided in manner now." But Roma in her own heart felt herself more changed than others suspected.

"I prided myself on my high principle and superiority to low influences, jealousy and selfishness, and all such unworthy feelings. And I fancied, too, I had so much self-command, even in thought," she said to her lover, sadly, when, after Eugenia was fairly out of danger, she confessed to him the cruel storm of feeling, the anguish of self-reproach through which she had passed the day of the accident; "and see what I am in reality! Imagine the horrible, the repulsive selfishness of my feeling as I did at such a time, even for an instant."

"But it was partly my fault," said Gerald. "I had expressed myself badly. Don't you see how it was? I was so afraid of deceiving you in any way, of in the least concealing from you what I *had* felt for another woman (though indeed you knew it already) that I misrepresented it. I mixed up past and present. Thinking it over since, indeed, I wonder you didn't refuse to have anything to say to me. I don't feel proud of my way of expressing myself that afternoon, I assure you."

"I told you at the time you very nearly made me propose to you," said Roma, half laughing in spite of her seriousness.

"But you misunderstood me, you did indeed," he persisted. "I hardly like to talk about it, but to speak plainly, my love for Eugenia died, completely and for ever, the day I first learnt to think of her as the wife, the promised or actual wife—it all seemed one to me—of another. Had there been no other in the question, had it been a simple question of winning her by long devotion to care for me, I don't say what limits there would have been to my perseverance. But as it was—"

"Don't explain," interrupted Roma. "I don't want you to explain. It can't make me feel myself the least bit less despicable. I that have always despised other women so for being run away with by their feelings, even good ones. Oh, Gerald, are you sure you wouldn't rather give me up now you know how bad I am?"

He smiled.

"Do you remember how I offended you long, long ago," he said, "by persisting that you were no judge of your own character? Even then, at first sight, I doubted your belonging to the easy-going, prosaic order of beings you declared yourself to be one of. There are doubtless in all of us," he went on more gravely, after a little pause, "*possibilities* of evil, of selfishness—the root of it all, I suppose, but I am no metaphysician—which we may well tremble to recognise. And in the lurid light of tempests of feeling, these are apt to show themselves in exaggerated blackness and enormity. But you cannot think, Roma, that I would love you less for seeing more of the depth of your character, the depth, and the strength, and the truth of it?" he added, tenderly.

So Roma was comforted. And Eugenia's prediction that her two friends would "step straight into happiness," was fulfilled as thoroughly as any prophecy of the kind can be fulfilled in a world where so very many things are crooked, more crooked than needs be, because so very few people have faith and patience sufficient to await the slow-coming, far-off, eventual "making straight"—faith and patience enough to work cheerily meanwhile in their own corner of the great vineyard. For though the tools be poor and imperfect, the soil hard, the light dim and fitful,

oftentimes indeed delusive, the results of the labour all but invisible, what then?

“Is not our failure here but a triumph’s evidence
For the fulness of the days?”

The End.

[Volume 1 Chapter 1](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 2](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 3](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 4](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 5](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 6](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 7](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 8](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 9](#) | [Volume 1 Chapter 10](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 1](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 2](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 3](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 4](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 5](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 6](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 7](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 8](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 9](#) | [Volume 2 Chapter 10](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 1](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 2](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 3](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 4](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 5](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 6](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 7](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 8](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 9](#) | [Volume 3 Chapter 10](#)

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