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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TWO STUDIOS ***

Frances Peard

"Two Studios"

Chapter One.

Studio Number One.

Art, in London, has many unexpected hiding-places. In the great palace-like houses of her successful followers she makes, it is true, at times an imposing show; but other votaries, less successful or more indifferent to outward glitter, find curious homes in which to plant their easels or model their clay. There is a broad thoroughfare along which the busy prosaic feverish rush of traffic ceaselessly presses; where all the surroundings are sordid and unpicturesque and unlovely; and, in the heart of this, a rusty entrance, with no feature to mark that it forms a division between two worlds, leads you into a strange, long court, where is an avenue of trees—twelve old pollarded trees, breaking into glad greenness of leaf, and gay with the twittering of birds. The sudden change from the noisy racket without to the peace of this quiet spot, the charm of contrast between the dark houses and the black stems and the lovely lightness of green, the oddity of an old figure-head which ends the line of trees, prepare you, in some measure, for that other world of which they form a threshold—a world in which there is hard work and heart-burning and disappointment, but also the joy of beauty and the eager interest of creation. The studios stretch like a long arm away to the right, on one side the painters with their gracious colours and draperies, and the “bits” they have collected around them; on the other the cold pure marble and the busy workmen carrying out the master’s thought; or, alone and self-contained, the bronze worker, modelling the clay or moulding the wax for his nobly severe art.

Charles Everitt, who had set up his tent here among the painters, thought it, after five years’ trial, the most delightful spot in the world.

To be sure he had a right to take a pleasant view of life.

He worked from choice, not from necessity, by which fact he lost a good deal of the charm of success, but also avoided possible temptations to pass his time in producing pot-boilers. He was able, without difficulty or hesitation, to enrich his mind and his sketch-book by travel. He had too large an ambition—perhaps it would be fairer to say, too true a love of his art—to stick at its drudgery, or content himself with half-hearted *dilettante* study, and so far his independence had done him no harm; but it exposed him to some excusable bitterness from those of his fellows who saw prizes fall to him which meant bread to them. Perhaps in consequence of this barrier he had formed few—very few—intimate friendships, and at thirty had learned a reserve and caution which at twenty had seemed foreign to his character. It may be said, indeed, that there were times when they still appeared foreign; for he had been known to commit odd freaks which looked as if the original nature were not quite flattened out of shape. So far as near relations were concerned, he had none; but he was a man of good family, and art is fashionable, so that he was in great demand for dinner-parties. Moreover, on Saturday afternoons it was understood that he received visitors, and, though he was careful not to make his hospitalities too expansive, people came, wandering about the great studio, asking the same questions, and making the same unintelligent remarks, until his patience threatened to fail. Sometimes he got in another painter to help him—a young fellow who, unlike Everitt, was only kept at work by the sheer necessity of living, but who had genius and the very lightest of hearts, and, being the most troublesome, was also the dearest to Everitt of all his comrades. He repaid some of this trouble by being always ready to take visitors off his hands, though Everitt more than suspected that in his mischievous moods he was quite reckless in the assertions with which he amazed them. All sorts of extraordinary remarks floated towards him in half-caught words.

“Yes. Nice picturesque interior, isn’t it? There were three children ill of scarlet fever in the room when Everitt painted it. He was only admitted on condition that he sat on the edge of the bed, and gave them their medicine at the proper hour. Long ago? Oh dear, no—not long. Everitt never sticks at anything which—”

Somebody began to speak to Everitt, and he lost the remainder. Presently Jack Hibbert drifted again into hearing—

"That? Oh yes, there's a very remarkable story connected with that picture. A great deal in the girl's face, as you say. Well, Everitt happened to have painted it from a model; he doesn't always, you know. No, you're quite right; we do our best things entirely out of our own heads; it secures originality. Just so. However, sometimes Everitt has to fall back on a model, and we heard afterwards that this one was in disguise; there's was a hint that she was a duke's daughter—"

"Oh, Mr Hibbert, how delightfully romantic! Do you mean to say you did not guess?"

"Well, there was a something, there certainly was a something—you can see it in the face, can't you?—something so—so—"

"So distinguished. Exactly!"

"Hibbert?" growled at his elbow.

"Ah, here's Everitt himself; I'll make you over to him," said the unabashed young man, with a laugh. "I give you warning, though, that he hates romance. If you listen to him he'll deny that there's a word of truth in any of my stories."

Later on Everitt fell upon him.

"You unprincipled young dog, what do you mean by uttering such a farrago of nonsense? You'll be bringing all the scandal-mongers of London down on my head. A duke's daughter disguised as a model! I should like to know where your impudence will lead you!"

"Oh, it was the duke's daughter which made it all right. Mr Smith will want to buy that picture, you'll see. Hallo!"

Everitt's brow relaxed; he burst into a laugh, as the parrot, which Jack had been teasing, made a successful dive at his finger and seized it. Just at this moment the studio bell rang.

"Another! I'm off!" cried Jack, jumping up from his chair. Everitt himself looked anything but pleased; he flung his cigarette down with an exclamation of annoyance, and went to the door, while Jack made his escape by another exit behind an elaborate Japanese screen. It was past the time for visitors, and the foremost of the two new-comers made haste to apologise. She was a pretty woman, and a favourite cousin of Everitt's, so that there was some excuse for her intrusion.

"Yes, I know exactly what you said when you heard the bell," she said smiling. "Was Mr Hibbert with you as usual, and did he run away? I am sorry for that, because I like Mr Hibbert."

"Did you come here to tell me so? And now that you are here, won't you sit down?" questioned Everitt in his turn, putting forward a couple of chairs, and clearing away a few motley bits of drapery.

"No," said Mrs Marchmont; "I had two much better reasons. One was that I might bring Miss Aitcheson here. She has come up to London with an ingenuous mind which takes the most reverential attitude in the world towards art. I am trotting out all my lions for her benefit, and you are the biggest. Please show her something, and roar nicely."

"I had better," he said, "since there is nothing else I can do. Don't you know that this is the empty time at all the studios?"

"Oh, never mind. Your unconsidered trifles will be gratefully appreciated. Look, Bell; don't you like that face?"

"That's my duke's daughter," said Everitt with a laugh. And he told them the story of Jack's romance.

Miss Aitcheson did not say much. Everitt privately thought her rather uninteresting. She was tall and fair and slender, with light brown hair, a small head, and a very quiet manner, whether due to shyness or reserve or dulness he could not tell; nor, indeed, did he give himself the trouble to investigate very closely. He directed his attention to his cousin, Mrs Marchmont; and she was a sufficiently lively little person to have no objection to its monopoly. Meanwhile Miss Aitcheson wandered about, looking as she liked—at faded hangings, and ancient Indian rugs of fabulously fine needlework, and pictures in frames and out of them, and the parrot in his cage, and odd bits of a painter's property. In this fashion she enjoyed the studio a hundred times more than if she had been called upon at every moment to remark on its contents; and certainly the painter and Mrs Marchmont were doing very well without her. But presently their conversation touched on some subject which evidently interested her: for she drew nearer to hear it discussed, although still examining a Roman sketch which she held in her hands.

"Don't look so miserable, Charlie, but promise that you'll do it for her. In fact, I *have* promised. Why, of course you know all the models in London."

"I don't. I hate London models."

"Well," said Mrs Marchmont with swift inconsequence, "I don't suppose you expect a young girl to prowl about those places where they live?"

Everitt shrugged his shoulders. "What is it to me?"

"Charlie," repeated his cousin, with a kind of shocked disappointment in her voice, "if you will not take such an absurd fraction of trouble when I ask you—"

"My dear Mary," he said, turning quickly, "if you ask me on your own account—"

"Of course I do. I ask it as a very personal favour. If you knew Kitty Lascelles, it would be unnecessary to put it on that ground," returned Mrs Marchmont, still keeping up a little air of dignity.

"I apologise a hundred times. What is it that Miss Lascelles wants?"

"A model—an Italian model."

"Man or woman?"

"Man."

"*Contadino*, broad hat, long cloak—the stock production, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," she said, looking at him doubtfully.

"All young ladies like that style of thing."

"Don't be overbearing. Miss Lascelles is an excellent artist. Her father is one of the staff at the Military Hospital, and has fitted up a studio for her, where she works with—a friend," she added, with an imperceptible glance at Miss Aitcheson. "It is the most delightful old-world place you can imagine. Shall I drive you there some day?"

"Thank you; you are very good," he said hastily, "but you must remember that I am not an idle man. Besides, it is quite unnecessary; I am doing this for you."

"And you can find just what she wants? I knew you would," said his cousin triumphantly. Everitt reflected.

"I can put my hand at once on the best man in London for that sort of thing," he said slowly. "When does she want him—on Monday, I suppose?"

"Yes. Why, however, do you suppose it?"

"Because ladies are impatient in art as in everything else, and while I should spend a fortnight in selecting a good model, you would expect him to grow out of the ground at your feet."

"If I had told you that I wanted him."

"I make my bow," Everitt returned. "Well, as it happens, the best man in London for her purpose is coming here on Monday morning."

"That," said Mrs Marchmont, "is what I should have expected."

"He's a first-rate model, and an awful ruffian."

"He can't do any harm."

"Then, in spite of my character of him, you think Miss Lascelles would wish him to be sent on to her?"

Mrs Marchmont smiled.

"I am sure she would—*coûte que coûte*."

"In that case, unless he is hopelessly drunk, I will forward him."

"That is really good of you," she said, getting up; "and to prove that we are not ungrateful, we will go away this minute, and allow you to begin another cigarette in peace. I shall tell Kitty that you have made a solemn vow to provide the man she wants on Monday morning."

"I'll do my best," said Everitt.

"Oh, no limitations, please. If you can't get him, you will have to find another. I have no doubt they run about quite tamely in this long corridor of yours. Don't come any farther. I'm immensely obliged to you, and so Miss Lascelles will be when she hears of the ruffian—won't she, Bell?"

In spite of her request, Everitt walked with them to the carriage, which waited in the street. When it had driven off, he turned back, lit his cigarette, and paced up and down under the quaint little avenue. It had never seemed more peaceful, or offered a tenderer contrast to the hot exhausted-looking street outside. May had just begun; the delicate green had burst out, and was clothing the dark boughs with delicious and dainty lightness. A late sun was shining down on the little court, and the feeling of spring was abroad. Everitt stopped and looked round impatiently upon the houses.

"I can't stand this much longer, if the weather keeps fine," he said. "It's waste—sheer waste. And those shoals of old women on Saturday afternoons are becoming intolerable. I must break it off somehow. The best I could do would be to shut up and be off to Pont-aven, or somewhere where one hasn't a hundred and fifty interruptions. It would be a good thing for Jack, who might find fewer excuses to be idle, and it would stop having to provide models for young women who set up studios when they ought to be drawing straight strokes. I know the sort of thing—exactly. And unless I look out, Mary Marchmont will be making elaborate arrangements that I should go and correct her drawings. May the fates avert that! I'll provide this one model, and there my engagements begin and end."

Chapter Two.

Studio Number Two.

That was a rash boast, with which Everitt concluded his meditations under the trees, but no misgivings disturbed him as he went back to the studio, set a few things in order, gave some directions to the porter, and departed. He dined out and went to the play, and passed the next day without a thought of Miss Kitty Lascelles, until towards evening he met Mr and Mrs Marchmont near Albert Gate. As they parted, Mrs Marchmont reminded him of his promise.

"If you are faithless," she said, "I will never forgive you. I saw Kitty this morning, and she told me that a ruffian was exactly what she wanted."

"Well, she'll have him," said Everitt, grimly. "Why hurl threats at me? I am not likely to forget. But you are, apparently, as much interested as she is. May I ask why?"

"Because," she said, "she is my dearest friend, and I don't like my friends to be disappointed. And she is so enthusiastic and eager about her art! I do wish I could bring you two together. Won't you come and dine? George, persuade him."

"When I come back from Pont-aven," said Everitt, escaping with a laugh.

He was an early worker, and it was his custom to be in his studio, painting, a good hour before Jack Hibbert began his studies. He made an effective picture himself as he stood at his easel—a handsome man, rather above the usual height, dark and bright-eyed, with a clear olive skin, and well-cut features. The lofty studio, with its hangings of faded harmonious colours, its pleasant irregularities, and its pictures standing about, formed an excellent setting. A fire burnt on the hearth, and the parrot was engaged in making pertinent inquiries of his master, which Everitt answered absently, for he was at work upon a subject which interested him. At last he looked at his watch with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Where's that fellow? He should have been here half an hour ago." He pulled a bell impatiently, and it was answered by the porter. "Has Giuseppe come?"

"No, sir."

"Hurry him up when he makes his appearance—that's all. Or—stop! Is Greggs engaged this week?"

"Yes, sir."

"Foster—where's Foster?"

"Mr Sydney has him."

"Well—send that fellow in the moment he comes."

"Very good, sir."

Everitt fell to his painting again, but without success. He was a man who had a very strong feeling about a promise, and he hated the idea of failing to fulfil it. It began, indeed, very soon to annoy him seriously. He flung down his brushes, and caught up his hat to go in search of the delinquent, when Hill, the porter, once more appeared at the door, with a significant grin on his face, at sight of which Everitt abruptly stopped and whistled.

"Oh!" he remarked the next moment.

"Yes, sir."

"Bad?"

"Dead drunk, sir."

"Pack off the brute," said Everitt in a disgusted voice.

He came back and stood before his easel with his hands thrust into his pockets; then seized a brush and began filling in a bit of foreground. Presently he left his work again, and resumed his pacing.

"This won't do; I shan't get a decent bit of work done this morning, if I don't settle the matter one way or other. Now, what on earth's to be done? Write a note—present my compliments, model drunk, sorry to disappoint, and so on? Go myself, and apologise? No; that's a little too strong. What a fool I was to get drawn into this business! If Hill weren't wanted, I'd dress him up and send him—that wouldn't be half a bad plan; or if I could hit upon some one as accommodating as the duke's daughter," he added musingly, standing before the canvas. The next minute an odd, almost eager look crept into his eyes. He began to smile, shook his head impatiently, smiled again, overmastered by the fancy, whatever it was—suddenly turned away. "Yes, I'll do it!" he exclaimed aloud.

Whatever it was to which Everitt had made up his mind—and, as has been already hinted, he was at times the victim of freaks which laid his character open to the charge of inconsistency—he lost no time in carrying it out. His first act was to lock his doors, his second to go to a sort of cupboard where some half a dozen costumes were hanging, and to proceed to attire himself in one which belonged to the typical Italian at whom he had mocked; for it was one of his fancies to have a very complete set of these costumes, and his brother artists were not slow to avail themselves of his stores and his good-nature. Having fallen in with the fancy which suggested his present action, he was not the

man to hesitate in the doing. He dressed himself rapidly, but with a care which descended to the smallest details, took down an old faded blue-green cloak, which had sunned itself often on the Trinita steps, and inspected himself closely in a looking-glass. On the whole, he thought it satisfactory. In an Italian dress his face appeared Italian; a weak point, of course, lay in his hair, which was short, but he pulled his broad hat over his forehead, and corked his eyebrows to a more generous breadth. He had no fear whatever of being recognised in the street, and as for Miss Lascelles, he assured himself that by exchanging him for Giuseppe, she had, unquestionably, no cause for complaint. His chief danger lay from meeting Jack Hibbert in the court, for Jack, with his investigating mind, was tolerably sure to overhaul an unknown model, and though in that case Everitt had resolved to take him into his confidence, it must be owned he shrank a little from the fun Jack was sure to get out of the affair.

However, he was not going to retreat; he was beginning to feel a keen interest in his own adventures. Opening the second door, which served for models and intimate friends, he took a glance round the court, and, finding it empty, hastily locked his door, and stepped out into the shadow of the trees. He was in luck, for no one was hanging about, and the next minute he was in the street. The plunge gave him, it must be owned, an odd sensation, the more so when he saw that he was only just in time, for Jack was on the other side of the street in the act of crossing, Everitt strode on quickly. He fancied himself the centre of all eyes, but after a time this feeling wore off. The people who glanced at him only saw a model on his way to a studio, a picturesque figure in the midst of unlovely things; the children stared as they would have stared at a man with a monkey, or any other show; there was nothing in him to attract unusual notice. But he felt so unusual himself, that it took him some time to make sure of this. Then, the awkwardness wearing off, his spirits rose. He found the situation amusing. He rather wished to meet some one whom he knew that he might test his disguises to the utmost. It was a beautiful morning, and there was a novelty in the impossibility of shocking probabilities by calling a hansom, which in itself was absolutely exhilarating.

When he reached the Hospital his pleasure increased. It was too early in the day for many of the old men to be out sunning themselves, but he became immediately aware of the peaceful and old-world atmosphere which hung about the place. A morning breeze was blowing up the river, and delicate white clouds sailed across the sky. In the midst of its trees lay the Hospital, warm red brick, with white pointings and grey stone pillars, on which the sunshine rested softly mellow; with its broad frontage of green turf, and its iron gates, and its little graveyard, where lie the old heroes waiting for the "last trumpet's sounding." Everitt had not been there for years; it seemed to him almost as if he had never been before—as if all those years he had lost something. When one or two old men, in long blue coats and brass buttons, and broad three-cornered hats, strolled out of the side gates and stared at him, he felt as if the picture were complete, except that he began to hate himself for being the incongruous feature.

He was directed to one of the brick houses which cluster near the Hospital itself, and closely resemble it in their details; his guide hobbling before him, and now and then throwing at him a suspicious glance. Everything was exquisitely trim and clean; the warm colours, the tender shadows on the old brick, the sunshine, the sober cheerfulness, the lilacs just breaking out in the gardens, the filmy green which daintily touched the trees, were full of delightful charm; and, though the river was not visible, a sort of feeling of its neighbourhood—a freshness in the air, an opening in the distance—added to this charm.

They were not long in reaching the Lascelles' house, built, like the others, of substantial, warm red brick, square and solid, with well-grown trees about it, and gay flowering shrubs, in which blackbirds were singing, as if London were miles away. It must be owned that, as Everitt walked up the back staircase—which was, however, of oak—he began to feel unusually embarrassed.

The little room into which he was ushered was as different from his own lofty and convenient studio as could be imagined, yet it was all in keeping with the rest. A rough sandy English terrier, with prick ears and bright dark eyes, made an immediate dash at him, and was seized by his mistress. This gave Everitt time to glance round him, and to observe that the room was panelled with old oak, and painted above a dull green; that the light was excellent, and the furniture of a somewhat scanty description; that a good many vigorous studies were stuck about; and that the whole aspect of the place looked like business.

Then he surveyed Miss Lascelles, who was pacifying her dog.

She was not at all the sort of person he had expected to see, though it must be owned he had built his ideas without a vestige of foundation. She was small and very girlish-looking, with a bright, happy face and pretty, graceful movements. Her dress was of some soft brown material, with velvet of a darker shade about the neck which matched the brown hair lying smoothly on her little head.

"Sandy, be quiet!" she said; then looking at Everitt, "You are sent by Mr Everitt?"

"Signorina, yes." He felt that on this score, at any rate, there could be no question.

"I have been expecting you for some time," she went on; "I should like you to be more punctual another morning. But now I will show you where you are to stand."

To stand! Everitt's heart sank; he had hoped he might sit.

"I want," said Miss Lascelles, calmly—"I want you to stand with your hand above your eyes, shading them—so. You are to be one of a group of peasants who are coming into Rome with all their goods, escaping from an inundation—you must have seen them, I'm sure? You are leading the string, and looking before you eagerly, perhaps to see whether some one who is missing is in front. You understand?"

"Signorina, yes. But—"

"What?"

"The sun with an inundation?"

"It has broken out, and is shining on the pools of water in the road."

Everitt felt much more capable of criticising and suggesting than of posing as she desired, but there was no help for it. She had even looked a little astonished at receiving his last remark. He exerted himself now to stand in such a position that he could see her at work at her easel, and he was sufficiently experienced to be able to judge from her manner of handling her brush that she worked with vigour and freedom. He was conscious at the same time that he was not himself a good model; he even suspected that he now and then read a little disappointment in her face. Keeping his arm raised was fatiguing; he knew that he swayed, then began to feel as if pins and needles were all about him, then as though he were turned to stone. The ordinary hour had seemed to double itself before Miss Lascelles inquired gently whether he wished to rest. Rest! Never had the word a sweeter sound.

He sat down by the window. Outside and below there was a little old-fashioned garden with a brick wall and gravel paths. Two or three children ran out into these paths, and began a joyful onslaught upon square little plots where mustard and cress were sprouting into different combinations of the letter L. Further on a swing was fastened between two fine elm trees which grew out of the turf. There was a great deal of sunshine, and as yet little shade: only a finely outlined delicate network of shadows cast by the branches on the grass. Everitt had never in his life been more glad to sit down, and he thought the look-out delightful.

Presently the door opened, and another young lady came in.

He looked round idly, but the next moment a very disagreeable sensation shot through him. He recognised her at once—the girl who had come to his studio with Mrs Marchmont. Supposing she also remembered him? What a fool he had been not to take such a possibility into account! Good Heavens! what was to prevent Mrs Marchmont herself from arriving?

He took refuge in the garden, and in a corner of his cloak, horribly conscious that in a few minutes he would have to stand up before her with the full light striking upon him. But if she did not know him at the first glance, she might become more hesitating and confused the longer she thought of it; and he trusted a good deal to his hat. Meanwhile the two girls were talking, too low for him to hear.

"Well, Kitty, are you satisfied?"

"I'm not sure. It's a good dress—isn't it? But, Bell, he's not—I assure you, he's not—a good model."

"Not?" repeated Bell. "Mr Everitt seemed to think him splendid. He said he was the best possible, but,"—lowering her voice—"a dreadful ruffian."

"He is a very mild-looking ruffian, then."

"Oh, Kitty, there's a horrid expression in his eye!"

"Put it in, then; I can't see it. But he can't stand—he fidgets. He wanted to rest long before the hour."

"That," said Bell, severely, "was laziness."

"Perhaps. I don't know," said the other, doubtfully. "There are all your things; what shall you do?"

"Only his head. But I wish his hat wasn't a necessity for you. It is, I suppose?"

"Yes, my dear, an absolute necessity. You needn't mind so much, though, for his hair is quite short."

"Short? How very odd! How—"

Kitty interposed with a pretty little motion of her hand.

"I really think he has rested long enough. Will you please stand again?" she said in her young, clear voice.

Everitt rose with decided unwillingness. He was reluctant to face Miss Aitcheson, and began to think that what he had undertaken so lightly might turn out a serious matter. A hundred possibilities flashed through his mind: and then, it annoyed him that Miss Aitcheson placed herself where he could not judge whether she made any discoveries or not.

Still, he got through this hour better than the last.

There can be no doubt that silence is a power of which we underrate the force. Hours of ordinary small talk would not have affected Everitt so strongly as these quiet moments in the old oak-panelled room, with the sunlight, the birds, and the children outside; and inside, this girl—for he could not see her companion—working steadily, and, he was sure, well, with quiet, simple intentness. Sometimes she stepped back a foot or two, and stood looking from her picture at him, throwing back her head, and showing clearly the soft whiteness of her throat and the pretty shape of her head. Instead of looking before him at his unseen comrades, he more than once found himself watching her with steady interest, and thinking in what fashion he would paint her if he got the chance. Standing as she was standing now, he determined, for it was difficult to conceive anything prettier.

Suddenly Sandy, who had given himself over to sleep to avoid looking at Everitt, jumped up, pricked his ears, trotted to the door, and stood with his head on one side. Then a step was heard coming heavily along the passage.

"That's my father," said Bell. "He has come here to talk over something or other, and he said he'd look in. Don't mind

him, Kitty; go on."

"I don't know if I can," Kitty answered a little nervously.

The answer surprised Everitt for a moment; the next he understood. The new-comer was an upright, square, red-faced man, and when he came in he seemed to bring with him a dozen elements of disturbance. His boots creaked, his voice was loud.

"Here you are, here you are, eh?" he began. "Well, Kitty, how are you getting on with this fad of yours? I've just been telling your father I don't thank him—I don't indeed. If it weren't for you, Bell would be at home, working at her needle, or doing something with a little sense in it. Painting! What's the good of it when you've done it, eh? that's what I want to know. Who have you got here? Italian? No more Italian than I am, I'll be bound. Here, you Smith, Jones, whatever you're called, I should very much like to know whether you've ever seen any country but England, eh?"

Bell interposed.

"Father, you mustn't interfere with Kitty's models."

"Models, nonsense! If you want models, why don't you draw one another, eh? Save your money, and not have these fellows hanging about. I wouldn't allow it if I were Lascelles, not I! Well, I'll take myself off, Kitty; I don't want to disturb you, but take my advice, don't you believe he's an Italian, and don't let yourself be taken in. If you're ready in half an hour, Bell, I'll take you home.—Hallo! what have I knocked over now? If you will have these bothering things on three legs standing about— Never mind? But I do mind; I mind uncommonly. Don't talk to me, Bell; if you had decent furniture, a man needn't knock his shins against it."

He went away grumbling. The girls looked at each other and laughed.

"It *is* a little like an earthquake," remarked Bell, calmly.

"He is delightful everywhere but in a studio," said Kitty. "He knows nothing about pictures, but he makes me feel I know less. Bell, *is* it all a waste of time?"

"I don't know," said Bell. "Make as good a waste of it as you can, at all events, and go on with your picture." To Everitt—"Keep up your hand, please; it drops more and more. *Are* you used to standing for artists?"

Everitt felt that he reddened.

"I have not been standing lately, signorina," he stammered.

"So I thought," returned Bell, inexorably. Silence followed for a time; then Kitty put her easel on one side.

"That will do for to-day," she said. "I don't think you can go on longer. Perhaps to-morrow you will be better able to stand, and pray be more punctual."

"To-morrow, signorina?" faltered Everitt. This was too much.

"Yes, to-morrow. Are you engaged?"

"I am engaged every day this week."

"Every day? Oh, how tiresome! how very tiresome! What can we do?"

"Is it to Mr Everitt?" inquired Bell, applying a little turpentine to a spot of paint on her dress.

"Signorina, yes."

"Do you know, I think he will let you off?" she said, raising her head and regarding him calmly. "I am almost sure of it."

"Do you think so?" cried Kitty, joyfully. "Then,"—to Everitt—"will you ask him? Ask him to let you come, at any rate, to-morrow; and we will leave it in this way, that if he cannot spare you he will let us know."

"But I think you will be here," repeated Bell, in the same assured tone.

Chapter Three.

A Second Venture.

As Everitt walked home he was a prey to many conflicting feelings. It must be owned that he had entered upon this freak of his in a very inconsequent manner; he had not so much as reflected what results might not grow out of the necessity for repeating it. Moreover, he had lost the first sense of amusement in his masquerade, and hated the business. Why on earth had he not accepted Mrs Marchmont's proposal, gone with her to see Miss Lascelles, and avoided this extremely false position in which he had planted himself?

Why, indeed!

As it was, it was with a feeling of rage that he thought of the next day, when he would be expected to stand up again

before her—like a fool, as he said bitterly. Besides, it was a great deal more uncomfortable than he had expected—he was still cramped and stiff from the position. He made a swift resolution to have nothing more to do with it. It was easy enough to write a letter, as coming from him—Everitt—to say that the model could not be spared, but that he would do his best to send her another in a day or two. That was certainly what he would do.

The relief of the decision did not, however, last long.

It was all very well to throw up the engagement, but was it fair upon Miss Lascelles? Everitt knew by experience that one model was by no means the same as another, and, as artist, he found his solution questionable. Also, he now felt an insurmountable objection to introducing the real Giuseppe to that little studio—it had an air of desecration repugnant to his good taste, if to nothing more. And thirdly, in spite of fooling, in spite of cramps, it must be owned he had a lurking desire to find himself there again; the homeliness of the place, its old-fashioned solidity, its mellow brick, its sunshine, its trees, its birds, its associations—one and all had, as he was obliged to acknowledge, taken a certain hold on his imagination. The girls were merely an accident—a pleasant and harmonious accident, it is true—but their surroundings had an extraordinary fascination; he could not reconcile himself to have no second peep at them. Mrs Marchmont might no doubt take him there if he announced himself as penitent for rejection of her good offices; stupidly enough, however, he had effectually shut himself out, since the risk of discovery in going to call upon the lady who has been painting you in an assumed character was rather more than even his audacity could face.

It appeared, under all these circumstances, as if the best thing he could do was to figure as a ruffian once more.

“It will be a lesson to me,” he said, with a half laugh, “even if fate lets me off this time without playing me a scurvy trick.”

Fate spared him. He got into his studio unseen of Hill or Jack. Jack came thundering at his door not three minutes after he had changed his clothes.

“A pretty fellow you are!” he began indignantly, when Everitt let him in. “Out larking all this morning, while we poor wretches toil and slave! And down upon me for taking an hour now and then! Where have you been?”

“Find out,” said Everitt, grimly.

“A polite way of suggesting that I should mind my own business. Well, it’s my turn now. I’m off. But as I am more civil than you, I will inform you that I am going to study effects on the Thames. Silvery reaches, sweeping clouds—all that style of thing. Excellent practice, isn’t it?”

“Oh, excellent,” Everitt said in the same tone; “especially studied as you will study them. What a fool you are, Jack, to fling away your chances!”

“Turn and turn about,” said Jack. “It’s a heavenly day, and you’ve had your go at it. I’m off.”

He marched away, stopped at the door, scrawled a spirited charcoal caricature of Everitt on a spare board, ducked to avoid a mahl-stick which was promptly flung at his head, and whistled himself out of hearing.

“Pont-aven,” reflected Everitt. But somehow the notion of the little fishing-village, with its colony of artists, its wealth of models, its picturesque points, its wind-tossed seas, had lost a charm which the day before had seemed, irresistible. It might be good for Jack, it might not. He had that talent for idleness which can extract it under almost any pressure of circumstances. It was exceedingly likely that he would succeed in amusing himself very well at Pont-aven—probably learn to handle a boat like a native, and all the while avoid steady work with all his present ingenuity. In that case, there was not much use in going. Of his yesterday’s wish to be off on his own account, of his sickening over his Saturdays, of his general impatience with London—Everitt remembered nothing. It seemed to him, on the contrary, that few places were so good to live in, and he hoped that Mary Marchmont might come again on Saturday. Then he looked round upon his walls with dissatisfaction. There were beautiful and costly things hanging about in finely harmonised colours, rich curtains, ancient rugs, and Arabic lamps; there were choice pictures, and two or three admirable bronzes from a neighbouring studio; but it seemed to him that, in spite of the value of these things and their artistic beauty, the place had no touch of the charm which belonged to the little room in which he had found himself that morning—a room which was so simple, so unassuming, and so cheerful!

In short, it was evident that he had received an impression.

This was all very well, but it was equally evident that he could not have produced one, except in the character of a ruffian; and that, moreover, he had himself cut away the ground from under his feet. It is true he did not get so far as to admit that this gave him more than a general reason for annoyance, but he did feel that a good-natured impulse had placed him in a hateful position from which he could not even now retire.

Then his model arrived, and he flung himself into his painting, and kept the other subject out of his head, except that he had never been so merciful in the matter of rests.

He dined out, and the first person he saw on entering the room was Mrs Marchmont. She came towards him very cordially.

“You were as good as your word, and sent the dreadful man.”

“Did Miss Lascelles say that he was dreadful?” asked Everitt, flattering himself that he spoke indifferently.

“Bell told me he had a very fierce expression. I have not seen Kitty. But it was nice of you to take the trouble.”

“Oh,” said he, a little spitefully, “I had promised a ruffian.”

"You had," she said. "Do you find people always carry out their promises? I don't."

"I sometimes wish they wouldn't," he retorted. "But this Miss Lascelles—what has attracted you so much towards her?"

"No one could help it," she said. "I should like you to meet her, and then you would understand what I mean."

"Evidently she would be dangerous," he said, shaking his head. "I daren't risk it. Has she a father, or any one belonging to her?"

"Of course she has a father," she replied, "Women don't hold military appointments yet. A very nice, particular father—Oh, here is Bell!"

She hurried across the room. Everitt remaining behind with very unenviable feelings. It seemed a particularly bad piece of luck that Miss Aitcheson and her father should appear at this party; for already he was not free from the suspicion that she had recognised him. There was nothing for it but to brazen it out. He strolled across the room towards her; but at this moment dinner was announced, and his course was diverted. At dinner they were on the same side, out of sight of each other; then he began to reflect that with a large party in a double drawing-room a little management might prevent any actual contact.

When the ladies had gone. Colonel Aitcheson came over to speak to Marchmont, who was near Everitt. Everitt would have drawn off, but that Marchmont made some remark to him, and Colonel Aitcheson faced round, shoulders and all.

"You must excuse me, sir, but your face is extraordinarily familiar to me."

Everitt bowed.

Marchmont hastened to introduce him. "Perhaps you know the name?"

"Not at all, not at all. I've no head for names—forget my own some days; but a face is another sort of thing—never forget a face." He threw his head back and looked frowningly at Everitt. "I could have sworn I'd seen you somewhere lately, eh? Well, it's odd, it's odd. I must ask Bell."

"I dare say you're right," Everitt said coolly. "I'm about a good deal."

Upstairs he took some pains to barricade himself in a subdued corner, as remote as possible from Miss Aitcheson, and made such unusual efforts for the entertainment of the young ladies who were round him, and whom he earnestly desired might stay, that he gained quite a new character for agreeability. Unfortunately, his hostess routed him from his retreat—some lady was anxious to make his acquaintance. When this was over he found his cousin at his elbow, and close to her was Bell.

"You haven't been very nice to me tonight," said Mrs Marchmont; "and it is too late now, for we are going. But you may talk a little to Bell about pictures. You can be very intelligent, can't you, Bell? Good night."

Everitt felt desperate.

"You paint, I suppose?" he inquired, "A little," she said demurely. "Figures." He looked keenly at her, but she was engaged in examining a gold bangle on her arm.

"That," he said, "is ambitious."

"And often disheartening," she returned carelessly. "My experience of London models has not been very satisfactory."

"No?" he said in the same tone. "Well, I suspect the experience of a good many artists goes along with yours. Where is your studio?"

"I have none. You see I am not ambitious, after all. When I paint it is with my friend, Miss Lascelles, whom, I think, you know?"

Was it a chance thrust, or a well-directed blow?

"I have seen Miss Lascelles," said Everitt coolly.

She glanced at him as he spoke, then, as it seemed to him, rather forcibly changed the subject. She left him, however, in a state of perplexity; he found it impossible to decide whether she were utterly unsuspecting or very well informed. Under these circumstances it might have been supposed that Everitt would have again gone through the pros and cons which had already assailed him, and have found a few more prudential reasons for abandoning to-morrow's scheme. This was not the case. He had rather an obstinate trick of sticking to the thing to which he had once committed himself: it had its merits and its dangers, but it might be called a characteristic.

When the morning came, matters did not go so smoothly as on the preceding day. Jack Hibbert was seized with the fit of remorseful industry which afflicted him on the rarest possible occasions. He came at an unheard-of hour to the studio, and Everitt had all the difficulty in the world to get rid of him. He must ask no end of inconvenient questions—what had become of the Italian, and how bad Everitt filled his place with Miss Lascelles? Then, seized with unusual meekness, he begged advice, and wanted his last picture looked over; next, he was scandalised at hearing that Everitt was going out again for the morning; finally, he besought that he might work in his friend's studio upon a bit

of tapestry which took his fancy. All these attacks had to be parried, the indignant Jack had with immense difficulty to be got out of the way; then Everitt dressed himself as rapidly as he could. He took pains about his lace; a few adroit touches he trusted modified the risk of detection, and might baffle Miss Aitcheson. As cautiously as before he reconnoitred the court, but with Jack about there was more difficulty in escaping, and he had not reached the entrance when he heard a cheerful hail, which was evidently intended for his ears. There was no help for it, Everitt took to his heels and fled, bolting across the road and down a side-street, to the great astonishment of the beholders.

All this had taken time—he was late again, and Miss Lascelles greeted him with a little reproach, which it must be owned did not affect him; for he was merely conscious of an extreme pleasure in finding himself again alone with her. He had been curious enough to know whether his first day's impressions were altogether correct, whether they depended upon their unexpectedness, or on some merely subtle atmospheric charm. This second day they were stronger. The room seemed to be more delightful, its simple grace more apparent; it improved with familiarity, as the best things improve. And for Miss Lascelles herself, there was a delicate sweet freshness about her, which he did not attempt to analyse or put into words, only he was dimly conscious that it gave him a dreamy pleasure, and that he liked to watch the deft movements of her hand as she painted. He lost himself sufficiently in their contemplation to forget fatigue, and to stand more steadily than on the previous day; but there was something he had to say, and he seized the opportunity of the first rest.

“Signorina!”

She was softly singing to herself, and looked up with a start.

“I am too much engaged to come again. Mr Everitt says, will the signorina kindly finish what is necessary, and he will send another model in the same costume.”

She did not immediately answer; when she did it was to ask—

“Is not the costume yours?”

“Signorina, yes.”

“I did not know you lent your clothes to one another.”

Everitt muttered something about not wanting that particular costume this week, and she went on to inquire in what character he was sitting for Mr Everitt, to which he had to reply that he did not know. She followed this up by asking a good many questions about himself, to which he responded in a deprecatory manner, though he was conscious of dangerously dropping the stupid vacancy behind which he had at first entrenched himself. Everitt, indeed, who had gone through a succession of London seasons without a heartache, had fallen a helpless victim in a few hours. There was an extraordinary fascination for him in this girl and her surroundings; he watched her furtively, called himself a fool for being there, and would not have been anywhere else for the world.

Once she flung up the window and leaned out, resting on her finger-tips, to call to the children, who this time had Sandy with them in the garden. She was greeted by a shout.

“Come out, Kitty! Leave that stupid old painting. It's lovely out-of-doors.”

She laughed and shook her head.

“Kitty, I want something out of your garden.”

“What?”

“That pink flower.”

“Oh, you robber! Well, you may have it, but move it *very* carefully, and give it plenty of water. Where's mother?”

“Gone to the infirmary to see old Dickson. Kitty!” in a pleading voice.

“No; I can't spare any more. My poor garden will be bare.”

“Only a clump of forget-me-nots. Yours are such beauties!”

She drew back laughing, and shut the window. For the first time Everitt regretted the absence of Miss Aitcheson. Had she been here Kitty, might have gone on talking, and he thought her voice the prettiest that he had ever heard; but, after all, though he was unconscious of it, it was her silent presence, and the opportunity for imagination which it afforded him, which momentarily strengthened the spell. As for not seeing her again, that idea had vanished for ever. See her he would, at whatever risk; and even the waiting a few days—to which prudence, driven from all her strongholds, fell back upon at the last—seemed a miserable concession, to which it was more than doubtful if he would yield. Why, in those few days some other man might come to the front!

It will be seen that Everitt was very far gone indeed.

He was trying to forget the stiffness of his arm, and he had quite succeeded in forgetting Miss Aitcheson when she came in.

“Oh, Bell!” reproachfully from Kitty.

“Yes, my dear, it's too tiresome! But father has taken this fancy for coming with me, and he has kept me waiting for

ages. I made Hugh walk with me, after all, and it is too late for any painting, and I am *very* much disappointed.”

“Yes,” said Kitty regretfully, “it is too late. The time is up.” To Everitt—“You can go now, and please tell Mr Everitt that I am sorry you cannot come again. Oh, and I will pay you.”

Pay! Horrible humiliation, of which he had never thought, and yet which he dared not refuse! He murmured something about waiting, but Kitty had already her little purse in her hand, and was counting out the shillings. It seemed to him as if he hardly knew where he was, as he went out of the room with reluctant feet, and down the oak staircase into the ground between the house and the Hospital, where the old men stood about or sat in the warmly sheltered corners.

Chapter Four.

Discovery.

Kitty Lascelles watched her model out of the room with some intentness. When she turned away at last, she gave a little troubled sigh, and looked at Bell, standing before her picture. Bell answered the look by an extremely brief question. “Well?”

“Bell,” said the other girl, in a very low voice, “does it strike you that there is anything odd about that—Italian?”

“Odd?” repeated Bell.

“I can’t make him out,” said Kitty, uneasily. “It must be fancy, of course, but still I don’t really think he is quite what he seems.”

“In what way?”

“You’ll laugh, Bell, but—do you think he looks like a common man? He doesn’t talk like one, at any rate. I think it is just as well he is not coming again. I—”

“Well,” interrupted her friend, “what do you say to his hands?”

“Then, that struck you too?” exclaimed Kitty eagerly. “Why what is it?”

For Bell had flung herself into a chair in a sudden paroxysm of laughter, so long and so unchecked that for a time she could not speak.

“So you suspect at last?” she cried. “Oh, Kitty, Kitty!”

“What do you mean?” cried the girl. “Bell, I shall shake you if you are so dreadfully silly. What do you mean? What do you know? Oh, Bell, don’t be provoking!”

“But I want you to guess. I shan’t tell you until you have had at least six guesses. Who do you suppose—only you never will suppose, that’s the worst of it!—still, who, of all unlikely persons, has been your model?”

Kitty drew herself up.

“I don’t know; and if you knew and did not tell me, I am not sure that I shall ever forgive you.”

This terrible threat appeared in no way to disconcert her friend.

“Guess.”

Kitty shook her head, and walked to the window.

“Come back, or I won’t tell you.”

Kitty hesitated; then marched back.

“Tell me directly.”

“It was Mr Everitt himself.”

“Bell!”

The hot colour surged up all over the girl’s face and throat; after that one word, she stood speechless. Her model Mr Everitt, the painter—the great painter, as she called him! It was impossible, impossible! But Bell’s amusement was intense, “I don’t know that I should have told you yet, if you had not suspected something in that innocent little way of yours. Still, it was almost more than I could keep to myself; and oh, Kitty, imagine the situation when last night I met him at a dinner-party!”

But Kitty did not laugh.

“Bell,” she said gravely, “I can’t believe it. I am sure you must be making some extraordinary mistake.”

“My dear, I am quite, quite certain. Why, even my father, who only saw him here yesterday, fidgeted all last night

about some likeness. I didn't say a word. It wouldn't do with papa."

"It will not do with any of us," said Kitty, with spirit.

"You won't tell your father?"

"I shall tell mother, and she can act as she likes."

"Take care," said Bell, more seriously. "You don't want a regular fuss to grow out of a bit of absurdity. What has he done?"

"He has come here in a false position and under false pretences. I think it dreadful. What could make him behave so?"

"Shall I tell you what I believe? That it was laziness or good-nature. I dare say he forgot all about the model, and then was afraid you would be awfully disappointed. Mrs Marchmont said so much about it. It is all over now, and remember, he did his utmost to get out of coming to-day."

"Mother must judge."

"Well, I think you are extremely hard on the poor man. You would not have liked it at all if you had waited through yesterday morning and had no model. I am sure he was very uncomfortable himself."

"And that was the reason he stood so badly!" cried Kitty. "I hope he *was* uncomfortable."

"Kitty," said Bell earnestly, "if I were you I would say nothing about it. You don't know what mischief you may set going. It is over and done with; he is not coming again, and if you appear to remain in ignorance, you will be in a far more dignified position than if our fathers bring a clatter about his ears. If he really took the character in order to do you a kindly turn, it will be very ungrateful of you to damage his reputation."

"Then, you allow," said Kitty, with her head thrown back, "that it is damaging?"

"I think he has done a thing which might tell against him immensely; but I don't think a scrap the worse of him myself. There!" said Bell.

Kitty was silent, but there was that in her face which did not satisfy the other girl.

"I believe you are dreadfully unforgiving," she said. As she spoke, she walked to the window and knelt on the low window-seat. Kitty followed her, looking pale.

"Bell, I really am vexed. I think it is particularly unfortunate," she said. "You know that it has cost father a great deal to let me have my way, and make a profession of my painting; there have been a dozen lions in the way at least. But such a lion as this never entered our heads. Don't you see that if he hears of a gentleman dressing up and coming here as a model, there will be an end of everything? Supposing, even, that it is as you say, a mere good-natured freak, do you think that he is likely to understand it in that light?"

There was a pause; then Bell said slowly—

"And yet you would tell him?"

The girl's colour rose.

"Yes," she said very proudly; "whatever comes of it, he shall never say that I have deceived him. I shall tell mother, and she will do what is best."

"Whenever," murmured her companion—"whenever you sweet-tempered people take the bit between your teeth, I have noticed that it is absolutely hopeless to attempt to turn you. Well, Kitty, since you are determined to set a torch to the gunpowder, I hope we shan't all go up with the explosion. My father is good for a magnificent fizz. I hear him now in the passage."

Another moment saw him in the room, and with him came Mrs Lascelles, a large, kindly-faced woman, in whose brown eyes gleamed the same clear brightness which met you in her daughter's. The old colonel was as stormily benevolent as usual.

"So you gave me the slip after all, eh, Miss Bell? I've just been telling your godmother that she hasn't brought you up well; little Kitty here would never dare to be so undutiful. Eh? I met your precious rascal of an Italian close by here; can't think how you admit such a fellow within the gates. I stopped him, but he was as sulky as a bear. I have it, though, I have it!" he cried, slapping his thigh; "to be sure! That's the man the painter-fellow last night was like. What was he called?—Egerton—Elliott—friend of Marchmont's, you know, Bell. 'Pon my word, the most extraordinary likeness, eh, Bell, eh?"

"There was a likeness, certainly," said his daughter calmly.

"A likeness! This man is his double. It's been annoying me all the night. I never will be beaten by a likeness."

"But I hope the model is not such a disreputable being as you describe," said Mrs Lascelles, a shade of anxiety in her voice. "If he is, it cannot be very pleasant for you, Kitty."

"He behaved well enough," said the girl, in a low voice.

"And he is not coming again; he has not the time to spare," Bell said cheerfully. "Kitty has been very successful with him, and ought to be exceedingly obliged. Look, Mrs Lascelles!"

"Obliged!" grumbled her father. "The fellow gets paid, eh? Well, upon my word, that's not at all bad, Kitty. I tell you what I'll give you your first order, and I'll sit for you myself. Then you needn't have those fellows sneaking about the place. They'll be bringing dynamite one of these days. If I were Lascelles I wouldn't stand it—I wouldn't stand it."

"Father," said Bell promptly, "I'm ashamed of you! You're only saying this to tease Kitty, and she's just as white as a ghost already. Come home with me at once; and, Kitty, don't you think about anything that he has said."

Then she flung herself upon her friend, and kissed her with the warmth which marks a certain phase in young ladies' friendships.

When they were gone, Mrs Lascelles went to the window, where her daughter was standing.

"There's something the matter, Kitty," she said, putting her hand on her shoulder.

"Yes, mother, there is," returned the girl gravely.

Neither of them spoke for a little while, for Mrs Lascelles never extracted confidences. Kitty sighed.

"To tell you the truth," she said, "I can't be sure whether I had better say it out or not."

"And I can't help you," said Mrs Lascelles, with a laugh.

"You see, mother, so far as I am concerned, it would be the greatest relief; but Bell thinks that by repeating it will be made of more importance, and I don't know that she isn't right."

"Well," said her mother, after a pause, "I trust you entirely, Kitty."

"I believe I must tell you," said the girl, "and then you must decide whether it should go any farther." For in her heart of hearts, Kitty knew that her father was not the safest person in the world for such a confidence, and knew that her mother was aware of it, too. "It is about the model."

Mrs Lascelles looked uneasy.

"Mother, Bell thinks that Mr Everitt could not get the man he promised to send, and that—he came himself."

"Kitty!"

"Yes. It's dreadful," Kitty said despairingly.

"It's absurd! It must be Bell's imagination. Came himself?"

"Do you think she can have imagined it?"—more hopefully. "She declares she is quite sure. And you heard what Colonel Aitcheson said?"

"There may be a likeness—of course there must be a likeness—but it is far more probable that this likeness misled them, than that such an extraordinarily unlikely thing should be done by any one. Still, the very idea would distress your father more than I can say."

"That's what I thought,"—despairingly again. "Mother, ought he to know?"

Mrs Lascelles hesitated, "No. I think, while it is all so uncertain, and may be only Bell's fancy, that Bell is right in saying it should be kept quiet. Of course, if he were coming here again, it would be necessary to ascertain one way or the other; but you say there is no fear of that?"

Kitty shook her head. "He didn't want to come to-day."

"Kitty," said her mother suddenly, "did you suspect anything?"

"Not yesterday," said the girl, lifting her clear true eyes to her mother's. "But to-day I did feel uncomfortable. I noticed his hands and his voice seemed different—not like that of a common man."

"What did he say?" Mrs Lascelles tried to speak indifferently.

"Oh, he spoke—why, if it were Mr Everitt, he spoke about himself. I asked him, you know."

"Oh!" Mrs Lascelles might be forgiven for looking anxiously at her daughter's sweet unconscious lace, and thinking that a man might peril a good deal for a second sight of it.

But Kitty read a certain reproach in the look.

"Mother,"—earnestly—"I hadn't the smallest suspicion. Of course, I treated him like any other model."

"Of course," said her mother, kissing her. "My dear, I am not blaming you in the least. It is only an unfortunate beginning to have this idea troubling one, even if, as I believe, Bell's imagination has run away with her. I shan't like to leave you here alone. At any rate, did I understand anything about another model coming in his place?"

“Yes; another man in the same costume.”

“We will stop that, at any rate. We will certainly have no more models of Mr Everitt’s providing, be they who they may. But I don’t want to enter into communication with him; if, *if* there is anything actual in this absurd idea, he might make it an excuse for forcing an acquaintance upon us. Still, we must stop the model somehow.”

“Yes,” said Kitty sadly, standing before her easel and regarding the unfinished painting with the yearnings of an artist.

“Yes, indeed,” said her mother, not quite entering into this; “and I’ll tell you what we will do. It was Mrs Marchmont who settled it for you?”

“Yes.”

“I will write and ask her to let Mr Everitt know that we do not require another model. That will avoid any direct communication.”

“I suppose it is the best plan.”

“My poor Kitty! Unless you can arrange always to have some one to paint with you, you had better keep to women. Now you must come, or those ravenous children will be unmanageable.”

All the rest of that day little Kitty was in a subdued mood. The more she thought over slight incidents of each sitting, the more she became convinced that Bell was right in her surmise. She had caught a glimpse of a shirt-cuff which was spotlessly clean; she remembered that the short trimness of his hair had struck her as inappropriate from the first. Then his voice. On this second day, a certain gruffness, which he had kept up on the first, quite disappeared; she had been surprised to find him expressing himself like an English gentleman. Moreover, she now recalled a momentary drawing back when she offered the money.

“I am glad I paid him; I am glad he had that to go through!” cried Kitty, with burning cheeks, and a longing to heap some humiliation on his head. “He must have hated it. I wonder what he did with the money?”

If Kitty had known, her cheeks would certainly have burnt more fiercely still; for Everitt had, with painful efforts, himself *sewn* up the money in a little case, and painted outside it the initials “K.L.” and a date.

This little case he will carry with him always—till his death.

Chapter Five.

Consequences.

Everitt made his way home in happy unconsciousness of the discovery that followed his departure. To tell the truth, he troubled himself less than he might have done—for he was not without suspicions that Miss Aitcheson had penetrated his disguise further than he liked—because his thoughts were running persistently on one subject: how to see Miss Lascelles again, and quickly.

The most direct way was to get hold of Mrs Marchmont, and induce her to take him; but he had the grace to determine that, in telling her his wishes, he would tell her all, and be guided by her advice. If she were in favour of a frank confession, he was quite ready to undertake it. It must be owned that he did not imagine that in personating the disreputable Italian he had committed a very unpardonable fault; he did not, at any rate, so imagine it now, when it appeared to him he had been far more inexcusable in suggesting that such a model as Giuseppe should sit for Kitty Lascelles.

He would go to Mrs Marchmont that afternoon.

So full was he of these thoughts that he neglected precautions, and very nearly blundered into the arms of the irrepressible Jack, who was diverting himself by strolling up and down the passage, and imparting a more truculent expression to the countenance of a grimy marble lion which stood on guard. He came into Everitt’s studio by-and-by with his curiosity very much alive.

“Hill swears no one has been here, but I can swear—harder—that twice to-day I’ve seen Giuseppe, or his double, and I believe he ran to earth in here.”

“I’ve not seen the fellow,” said Everitt, coolly.

“Well, you may take my word for it he’s been here. Do you mean to tell me I don’t know that old sun-burnt cloak of yours?”

“I mean to tell you nothing, except that I’ve not seen Giuseppe.”

“Where’s the cloak?”

“Where it always is, I presume. Look for yourself.”

Jack investigated the cupboard. There was the cloak certainly, also the red waistcoat, also the brown hat with the crossed ribbons, also the sandals, with—and this was strange—a stain or two of fresh mud. He brought them to Everitt triumphantly.

"They've been worn this morning; how do you account for that?"

The other man looked black.

"For pity's sake, Jack, leave the thing alone! You want to know if Giuseppe's been here, and I tell you no. That's enough. You're so abominably inquisitive!"

Jack stared at him meditatively for a few moments; then he flung himself into an armchair, stretched out his legs, and burst into a vociferous peal of laughter. It lasted long enough for Everitt to get red, try to look stern, and finally to break into an accompanying laugh himself.

"What a fool you are!" he said presently, by way of compensation.

"Oh, I say!" cried Jack, when he could speak; "if this doesn't beat everything! I knew there was something up, but I never thought of anything so rich as this. My very reverend, grave, and sober Mentor!"

"Shut up!"

"I'd have given all I have in the world to have been there," Jack continued, springing up in the ecstasy of his feelings. "A precious bad bargain she must have had! *You* stand for a model! You couldn't, my dear fellow, to save your life. I say, aren't you stiff? Everitt?"

"Well?"

"I believe it was the duke's daughter put it into your head?"

"It's true enough I get my folly from you," said the elder man, not ill-humouredly.

"Oh, no more speeches of that sort! I've the whip-hand of you for a good while," said Jack, triumphantly. "You can't say I ever dressed up as a model to get into a house."

"To get into a house!" Everitt frowned. "Certainly that was not my motive."

"What then?" demanded the imperturbable Jack.

"Merely that that brute came drunk, and I had promised to send some one."

"Oh!"

"What do you mean by your 'oh'? it was, I tell you—hotly. I dare say. But it won't look like it to them when they find it out."

"What do you mean?"

"Only what I say. You'll be run in, somehow, of course; you're not the sort of fellow to do it under the rose. Well, when it comes out they won't believe but that you had some object in view."

"Go on, Jack; you're a marvel of precocious wisdom! I tell you, I'd never seen or heard of them before."

"Not Miss Aitcheson?"

"Oh, Miss Aitcheson! I'm sure I never want to see Miss Aitcheson again."

"Was she there?"

"Yes."

"And don't you suppose she recognised you?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Well, you have put your foot in it."

"What's the harm? I promised a model; he failed, and I went myself."

"Oh, no particular harm," said Jack, coolly; "no harm at all, I dare say; only if I had happened to do such a thing—"

"You!" repeated Everitt, looking at Jack. Put in this manner, the idea certainly appeared intolerable. "You! Oh, you're different."

"I should say I was. I shall never pull up to your heights of audacity, that's certain. What's your next move? Are you going again?"

"No," curtly. "To-morrow I shall send Jackson."

Jack had a good many more jests to cut, which the other endured with what meekness he could muster. It was annoying that the young fellow should have made the discovery, for it would inevitably serve as a means for plaguing Everitt whenever the artist tried to get Master Jack into steady work. Moreover, the way in which he looked at it made Everitt a little uneasy; it had not before struck him that others might regard it in that attitude, which had, indeed, been far enough from his own point of view.

In the afternoon he went to his cousin's in Hans Place. She welcomed him with excessive cordiality and some surprise.

"For a wonder I find you alone," he said.

"That sounds," she said, "as if you were in the habit of trying to find me. Shall we go into dates, or would you rather throw yourself on my mercy?"

"Much rather. Indeed, I am afraid this is going to be an afternoon of confessions."

She glanced at him and then at a letter which the servant had given her when Everitt came in.

"Will you excuse me," she said, "if I read my letter?"

It contained no more than a few lines, but Mrs Marchmont took an unusual time in reading them. When she had finished, she refolded the note and laid it by her side.

"Confessions!" she said. "They will have a great air of novelty from you. What have you been about, Charlie? Forgetting your engagements?"

"No. Only carrying them out too faithfully. You remember that I undertook to supply a model for your friend, Miss Lascelles?"

Mrs Marchmont took the letter she had laid down again into her hand.

"Yes," she answered. "And you carried out your undertaking. Has anything happened?"

"Why?" he asked quickly.

"Because you told me you had a confession to make, and because this note may have something to do with it. It is from Mrs Lascelles."

"What does she say?" Everitt demanded, with interest.

"Well, she begs me to let you know that they do not want the model again. There is something odd in that, because Kitty was so very keen for him. What is the mystery? Has the man turned out too much of a ruffian, or too little?"

"Judge for yourself," he said. "I was the ruffian."

"You!" she exclaimed. "You!"

"The man failed me, and I couldn't think of any way of escaping your displeasure but by taking the character myself."

"You went to the Lascelles' as a model!"

"I did. I begin to believe now that it was a blunder."

"It was a blunder," she said, gravely. "It certainly was a blunder."

He looked at her.

"At least," he said, eagerly, "you will understand that my motives were very simple."

"Yes, I can understand; I am afraid other people may not credit them with such simplicity. It was dreadfully imprudent, Charlie! It was more what I should have expected from your friend Mr Hibbert." Then she began to laugh. "But it must have been very comic. And did they find you out?"

"I don't know. I don't know that they did. But, Mary—"

"Well?"

"I want you to tell them, and to square things."

She shook her head.

"They won't be at all easy to square, as you call it. You had better leave them alone, and trust to the fates not to bring you across any of the Lascelles family again."

An odd expression crossed Everitt's face.

"That won't do," he said, getting up and standing with his back to the fireplace. "I want to see them again; at least, I want to see your friend."

"Kitty? Oh!" exclaimed Mrs Marchmont, in blank amazement. "This is too exciting! Do you really mean it?"

"I mean that I should like to see her again," repeated Everitt. "You may take that for what it's worth."

"Oh, I am delighted!" she cried; "delighted! Charlie, I would do anything in the world if I thought. But there, we needn't say anything. You just want to be introduced?"

"Yes; and they'd better know. I won't have that hanging over my head."

"I'll manage everything. They have a garden-party on Monday; I shall propose to bring you, and I will go and see them meanwhile. One couldn't write all that about the model."

Everitt left her, not ill-satisfied. He had said rather more than he had intended, but it had been necessary to enlist his cousin, and he knew she would act in the friendliest fashion.

He waited impatiently.

On Thursday, Jack Hibbert, who tormented him unmercifully, informed him that he had an invitation for the Lascelles'.

"Hope they'll never find out I've any connection with you," he remarked, audaciously.

"Hope not, for my sake," growled Everitt.

Finding that nothing came from Mrs Marchmont, on Friday morning he started for the Park, and strolled along the Row till he caught sight of his cousin riding a bay mare, and surrounded by friends. The first time of passing, she did not see him; but as she came down again she caught sight of Everitt, and rode up to the railings.

"Well?" he said, eagerly.

She shook her head.

"I'm dreadfully disappointed. I've done my very best, but they won't hear of it. I've been there, and I've seen Mrs Lascelles and Kitty, and said everything I could think of."

"Has it annoyed them so much?" said Everitt, flushing.

"I don't know about annoyed. They are not angry, and I think they understand how it was done; but—perhaps it's natural, Charlie—they don't fancy an acquaintance begun in that fashion. It *would* be awkward, you must allow, just at first. Kitty wouldn't know whether she was talking to her model or to you yourself. I think by-and-by we might get over it quietly; but just at present I really don't see what to do."

Everitt stared gloomily at a group beyond him.

"You understand how it is, don't you?" said his cousin, anxiously.

"Oh, it's clear enough, you needn't fear. I made a fool of myself, and yet I can't regret it." He looked at Mrs Marchmont, and suddenly burst out laughing. "Do you think any one was ever in such a ridiculous position?"

"I am partly responsible," she said. "What will you do?"

"Get right again somehow," he replied, briefly. "Do you mean you will give it up?"

"I mean that if I can I shall marry Miss Kitty Lascelles."

"Oh, Charlie," said Mrs Marchmont, drawing a deep breath, "I like you ever so much! Tell me how I can help."

"Here are the others," said Everitt, standing upright. "I'll let you know, Mary, when I've thought it out."

The day was grey and showery; the changing silvery lights bringing out the colours of the great banks of rhododendrons massed together in the Park. Everitt walked for some time up and down under the trees, trying to see his way out of his absurd difficulties. They were absurd, but they were not pleasant. To have your acquaintance declined is to receive something very like a slap in the face; the next step forward does not present itself very naturally. However, he was not the man to flinch at an obstacle.

He made his next move on Sunday. The chapel of the old Hospital is open to strangers, and Everitt went off in good time to secure his vantage post. It was a wet, gusty day, full of growth and softness, a southerly wind blowing across the river, the trees washed into lovely tender greens, the red of the building beautiful against the grey clouds. The birds were singing as usual; the old men encourage them, and they take full advantage of the safe shelter they find. Just a few people were turning in at the gates, and lingering on their way to the clock-tower to look up at the solid walls, when Everitt made his way into the circular hall facing the fine quadrangle. The old soldier who acted as verger was not disinclined for a little chat. That was the governor's stall, the second in command there, and the other officers round, as he saw. Captain Lascelles? Yes, just before him. If he were a friend of the family, he might like to go into their pew, or next to them? No? Well, where would the gentleman like? Everitt indicated a spot opposite, where he would be fully in sight, and the old man promptly conducted and shut him in.

It was early, and Everitt looked round him with a good deal of interest. The chapel, with its plaster ceiling and its high panelling of oak, was ugly enough, but there was enough in its details to be suggestive. The old soldiers came dropping in, with fine furrowed faces, and an air of pride over their medals and their clasps, which stand out in brave relief against their blue coats. Here is one quite blind, carefully *led* in by a comrade; there is another with an old, gentle face and snow-white hair, with four medals and quite a procession of clasps on his hollow chest. They file in soon in larger numbers, filling up by hundreds the body of the church. And overhead hang the old tattered remnants of flags taken in glorious battle, older many of them than the oldest men, held together by network, colours faded, substance gone—not a shred left on the Blenheim poles. There are the Waterloo eagles, there the republican cap of liberty still flaunts itself; but nowhere in the whole proud array is anything more pathetic than on one of the Indian

flags, where, looking closely, you may see on the dull surface the print of a hand, the dead man's hand whose faithful clasp is marked upon his trust for ever.

By the time Everitt had been there for a quarter of an hour, he was watching the door very carefully. Already a lady and two or three children had gone into the Lascelles' pew, but it was only a minute or two before the service began that Kitty and her mother presented themselves. She noticed him before long. Perhaps some consciousness of the intentness of his gaze touched her and drew her eyes to his; at any rate, he saw an immediate and troubled look of recognition cross her sweet face. Nor did she glance at him again. He had no encouragement of this sort; but as his former means of studying her had been of an unusual kind, so now it appeared to him as if she gained a fresh charm from the simplicity and gravity of her surroundings—the old men sitting upright, attentive, the old flags slowly waving backwards and forwards over their heads, the solemn words of the familiar service.

When it was finished, Everitt remained in his seat until the Lascelles had left the church. He looked eagerly round when he got out, but the whole family had disappeared; the pensioners chatted in groups, the sun shone out between the clouds on the grass of the quadrangle, and on a few white sea-birds which had come up the river.

Everitt went home dissatisfied.

Chapter Six.

Allies.

If a tormenting, Jack Hibbert was a faithful, friend. He saw that Everitt was out of sorts, and he went to the Lascelles with the intention of doing him a good turn—somehow. His first business was to get hold of Mrs Marchmont, and ask for an introduction to Miss Lascelles. She looked at him, and shook her head.

"No," she said. "I see what that means. You have come as an emissary, and I can't trust your prudence."

It was in vain for Jack to protest that he was not an emissary, and that his prudence was beyond comprehension; she was certain that his masculine movements would be too lumbering and aggressive for the situation, which needed the most delicate advances.

"You would rush impetuously into the breach, and treat it all as a fine joke; and that would just finish everything quite hopelessly. No; be good and don't meddle."

"I know I could put things straight," said Jack, ruefully.

"I thought that was in your head," she answered. "Now. I'll tell you what I'll do. You shall be introduced to Miss Aitcheson, and that will be almost as good as if I took you to Miss Lascelles, only not so dangerous."

"You are very kind," he said, brightening up.

"And you must promise to be cautious."

He promised; he was ready to promise everything. But when he was left face to face with Miss Aitcheson, she was quickly aware what subject was burning on the tip of his tongue. He dragged in art, artists, and Everitt, in less than no time.

"The best of fellows!" he said, heartily.

"I suppose a little eccentric?" Bell remarked, looking on the ground.

"He isn't so cut and dried as other people, if that's what you mean," Jack replied, with warmth. "If there's a kind thing to be done, or a helping hand to be held out, he's the man to do it. I wish there were a few more as eccentric as he." Jack felt as if he had made rather a good point here. The worst of it was, as he rapidly reflected, that it all had to be run out so quickly. With a lot of people walking about, they were liable at any moment to be interrupted; even now he looked with disgust at a young lady in a creamy white dress, who smiled at Miss Aitcheson as she passed. He was more disgusted when Bell stopped her.

"We are talking about art and artists," she said, slipping her arm into the other girl's.

"And we don't want you," Jack said to himself, unmollified by the answering smile. "However, here goes! So long as Miss Aitcheson hears and repeats in the right quarter, it doesn't matter who listens." Aloud, he said, "People who only know Everitt as an artist can't judge of his kindness of heart. You see, in our line there are a lot of poor wretches who find it awfully hard to pick up a living. Some are never good for anything, but there are a few who just want to be set on their legs, and then they stick there. I'm not sure I wasn't one of them myself," added Jack, with an ingenuous laugh.

"Did Mr Everitt set you on your legs?" inquired Bell, innocently.

"Yes, he did, and I'm not ashamed to own it," said the young fellow, manfully. "If I do anything it will be thanks to him." He was so much taken up with his cause that he did not notice that when Everitt's name was first mentioned the girl who was standing close to Miss Aitcheson made a movement to leave them, and was held fast by Bell. Finding herself a prisoner, she did not again attempt to escape, but stood silently by, her face almost concealed by the drooping lace of her parasol.

"There was a man," Jack went on, warming yet more to his subject, "who got a picture hung at one of last year's exhibitions—it wasn't at all a bad picture—and sold it. It was his first bit of luck, and almost sent him off his head; he married, for one thing, on the strength of it. Well, it wasn't sold, after all."

"Not sold?" repeated Bell, in wonder.

"The purchaser never turned up. That sort of thing does happen now and then, but it came awfully rough on this poor fellow. You see, it had kept off other buyers, and then, I expect, he had traded a bit on the money; and the end of it was, he worked himself into a sort of brain fever, and was about as bad as could be, and the poor little wife was at her wits' end, without friends or money or anything. Anybody would have helped them who'd known, but nobody took the trouble to find out except Everitt. He got a doctor and a nurse, and I know he went there every day, and he bought the picture—though, of course, that isn't much good to *him*."

"Oh, yes," said Bell, softly. "I think it will be of good to him." And she looked at Jack very kindly. The young fellow was too much taken up with his object to notice it.

"He's always doing that sort of thing," he went on. And now, if he had been a diplomatist, had even possessed the caution which Mrs Marchmont had urged upon him, he would have paused here, or strengthened his good impression by another tale of the same description. But unluckily Jack felt that more was incumbent upon him. He was for a bold assault which should carry the position by storm; and when might another opportunity present itself? "People don't know Everitt," he repeated; "he does out-of-the-way things. Miss Aitcheson,"—suddenly—"I'm afraid he's offended your friends here awfully."

Unfortunate Jack! The parasol came a little lower down.

"Has he?" coldly from Bell.

But once started, he blundered into deeper mire, in spite of warning signs.

"It did sound an odd thing to do; but, don't you see, he'd promised to send somebody, and Mrs Marchmont wasn't to be put off. There wasn't a bit of real harm, you know, and Everitt did it out of sheer good-nature."

"Well, it's over and done with," said Bell, with an air of finality; "and I think it would be best to say no more about it."

"But they've taken it in a way which makes him feel very uncomfortable," urged Jack.

Bell lifted her head and looked him full in the face.

"You're a very good friend, Mr Hibbert, but Mr Everitt is sufficiently a man of the world to have thought of consequences beforehand. Now, will you kindly go and tell Mrs Marchmont from me that she will find ices in the drawing-room."

There was no help for it, Jack had to go. And then Bell turned to the girl by her side.

"You didn't mind, did you, Kitty?" she demanded, with a little anxiety. "You know, I think you're disposed to be hard upon poor Mr Everitt, and I wanted you to hear what his friends have to say for him. That's a very nice boy." Then, as Kitty did not speak, she looked in her face: "Don't you think so?"

"I dare say," said the other girl, impatiently. "Oh yes, I dare say he's a very good friend; but oh, Bell, don't you see?"

"What?"

"How dreadful it all is! The idea of this man knowing, and another man knowing, and all London knowing what he did! I am ashamed when I see people only looking at me. And just suppose if some one goes and alludes to it to father!"

"Now, Kitty! All London! Why, this Mr Hibbert works in the same studio!"

"He shouldn't have told him, all the same."

"I do think you're dreadfully hard. Didn't it touch you to hear of what he'd done for that poor artist?"

"Not when I thought of what he'd done to me. What have I to do with his kindness? He may be the kindest man in the world."

"If I had been you," said Bell, "I believe I should have taken it as a compliment; and I'm quite sure I should have sent him a card for to-day, and thought no more about it."

"And if you had been I and I had been you," returned Kitty, with spirit, "I am quite sure that I should have dropped the subject, and have done my best to help you to forget that such a disagreeable thing had happened."

"Oh, well," said the other girl, looking at her oddly, "I never knew until now that I was the more unselfish of the two."

Afterwards, she told Mrs Marchmont what had happened. It will be seen that by this time Bell had become a partisan of Everitt's, and it will be guessed that Mrs Marchmont had admitted her into her confidence. It was, indeed, the wisest thing that she could do, for Bell was a girl who resented being shut out, and would certainly take an active part on one side or the other. Perhaps she had a mischievous delight in beholding Kitty—whom she considered to be a little straight-laced—the victim of such an adventure; but the romance of it all, and some knowledge of Everitt's real character, touched a deeper spring of love for her friend, and she was genuinely anxious to set this unfortunately crooked beginning straight.

Jack's attempt, she owned, had not done much good.

Was it likely it would?—from Mrs Marchmont.

Well, Bell thought that he spoke out manfully. He said a great deal about Mr Everitt which certainly made her like him better, and she thought it must have produced the same effect upon Kitty, if she had not been unreasonable.

Mrs Marchmont, on her part, maintained that men always bungled that sort of thing. Their touch was so heavy, they blundered in, and knocked over right and left. "But it is really dreadfully stupid of Kitty," she said, "and I shall have to take her in hand myself."

Jack, who had something of the same feeling about his own attempts, wandered about disconsolately, until he fell in with Miss Aitcheson again; and, as he stayed by her side for the remainder of the afternoon, it is to be supposed that she was able to administer consolation. But she found it impossible to induce him to understand Kitty's view. He was dreadfully frivolous and inclined to laugh; he got Bell to describe poor Everitt's shortcomings as a model, and the evident anguish which he endured, and then the two laughed together in a manner which, considering the aims which they professed, was, to say the least, heartless. Mrs Marchmont gave Bell a hint of this when she drove her away, and Bell resented the imputation.

"It was a jest from beginning to end—in one sense," she said; "and Kitty's mistake has been in treating it so seriously. If you encourage her in it, she will take on herself the airs of a tragic heroine."

"Kitty never gave herself airs of any kind," cried her friend indignantly. "No; I understand her feelings perfectly."

"Shall you give up Mr Everitt?" inquired Bell.

"Give him up—no! But I shall take care that she is smoothed down. I have got a little plan in my head."

What it was she would not reveal, though the girl did her best to find out. But that evening Mrs Marchmont informed her husband that she wished places to be taken at a favourite theatre.

"Five?" he repeated, lifting his eyebrows.

"Well, can't you go yourself?"

"Impossible. I must be at the House."

"Then, four. Charlie Everitt will take care of me; and I shall ask old General Sinclair besides, and a girl."

She wrote to Everitt, "Keep yourself at liberty for Thursday evening;" and Kitty, who came to see her that afternoon, heard only of the play and of General Sinclair. Not that Mrs Marchmont intended to take her by surprise in such a manner as to allow of no retreat. They would all dine together beforehand, and Kitty should come half an hour before the others. Then would her friend gently and diplomatically unfold to her who was to be of the party, and use all her persuasions to induce her to meet him, and get over the first awkwardness. Should Kitty be hopelessly obstinate, there would still be time for her to retire, and there would be no difficulty in finding some one close at hand to replace her at short notice. To tell the truth, she did not dare to entrap Kitty in any closer mesh. She trusted to her own persuasions, to the girl's dislike to making a fuss, to the chapter of accidents, the hundred and one things which play unexpected parts. She was a little nervous, but her spirits rose when she thought how smoothly everything might run. "If only," she reflected—"if only it all turns out well, and I can get them together—not just at first, perhaps, but after one or two acts! There is nothing more effective than a play for putting people on a pleasant footing." It was only of Kitty's possible perverseness that she thought. Then on the morning of Thursday she wrote to Everitt; and, in the fulness of her expectations, perhaps let drop more of a hint of these intentions than she imagined. To her amazement he answered her letter in person.

"Are you come to dinner?" she demanded. "You are even earlier than I expected; but I need not say I am very glad to see you."

"Thank you," said Everitt, gravely; "in fact, however, I am come to say that I am not coming."

His cousin stared blankly at him.

"Not coming!" she repeated, faintly. "But, Charlie, that is absurd! You don't know."

"I fancy," he said, "that I do know. Unless I'm much mistaken, I could read between the lines of your letter. Is Miss Lascelles to be one of the party?"

"Yes," she said, "she is."

"And does she expect to see me?"

"Not yet. But,"—eagerly—"I was not going to spring a mine upon her."

He listened very carefully while she explained her intentions, and when she had finished was silent for a few moments. There was that in his face which caused her misgivings.

"Charlie," she said impressively, "you will not be so odious as to upset my little arrangements!"

"It seems to me," he said, "that I am doomed to be odious in everything connected with this affair. It's not a pleasant

rôle."

"Well," she said in a vexed tone, "I was prepared to have a little difficulty with Kitty, but you, I certainly expected to take the good I had provided for you, and to have been thankful. You must really understand that there is nothing else that I can do."

"I give you my word I'm thankful," said Everitt, with a laugh.

"Then, why are you so provoking? Have you given up the idea?"

"Have I come to my senses? No."

"In that case," she said, "I can't understand."

"Oh yes, you can," he replied. "Just reflect for a moment in what an uncomfortable position Miss Lascelles would be placed, if I accepted your kindness. She comes here unsuspecting, and she finds she must either stay and face what is unfortunately disagreeable to her, or do, as I am doing, go away and offend a kind friend. I don't feel that I have the right to force the dilemma upon her."

"It would not offend me if she preferred to go."

"It would disappoint and vex you. When we make benevolent plans, we hate the people who thwart us. You have been splendidly benevolent."

"Well, I think you are taking to scruples at a particularly inconvenient moment. And pray, if each of you flies off at a tangent directly the other is known to be near, how on earth are you ever to meet?"

"Ah," said he, smiling, "but I am not going off at a tangent. Give me the chance, and see if I don't use it."

"What was this but a chance?"

"There shall be nothing more that she can complain of. Everything must be absolutely open and above-board. Come, Mary, you know in your heart of hearts that I am right."

"That," she said, with a laugh, "is more than you can expect a woman to own. The utmost you will extract is that I may possibly allow that you are politic. And there is one thing that I shall do."

"What?"

"Ah, that is my affair. Leave me alone."

"I am not sure that you are to be trusted," he said, looking at her, and shaking his head. But he made no further effort to learn her intentions, and in a few minutes took his leave.

What Mrs Marchmont meant to do, and did, was to confess to Kitty what had taken place. The girl became a little pale as she listened.

"I thought I could trust you, Mary," she said at last.

"If you would both trust to me, I should put an end to this foolish slate of things," retorted her friend.

"There is nothing to end," Kitty answered quietly, though there was a tremor in her voice.

"One would suppose that Mr Everitt and I had once been acquainted, and that something had made us fall out! The truth, however, is simply that we have never known each other, and that circumstances have made it pleasanter that we should remain unknown."

"That is all very well for you, but you might consider poor Mr Everitt. He thinks you are hopelessly displeased with him, and naturally that places him in a most uncomfortable position."

"Then, just because he is disagreeable to me, I am to consent!" cried the girl impatiently.

Mrs Marchmont rapidly shifted her ground.

"You can't deny," she asserted, "that he behaved with the utmost delicacy in refusing to come here to-day."

"I don't know what I should have thought of him or of you, if he *had* been here," replied Kitty.

She carried things, indeed, with so high a hand, that Mrs Marchmont was quite disconcerted. Her attempt had failed at least as completely as Jack's, and she began to experience a sensation of defeat to which she was altogether unaccustomed. It seemed really probable that these two provoking young persons, in whom, in spite of vexation, she daily took a deeper interest, would so obstinately persist in nullifying her good offices as entirely to prevent her from achieving their happiness. Nothing, it must be owned, could be more tiresome than such conduct. And yet she could not feel as angry with them as they deserved. She was even conscious of a little compunction as she noticed the graver lines on Kitty's sweet face.

And Kitty herself?

She had answered Mrs Marchmont with a becoming spirit, and so far she looked back upon their talk with

satisfaction. But, to tell the truth, she could not quite forgive herself for thinking so much about the matter as she had to acknowledge she was thinking, and though she had professed a lofty indifference to Everitt's conduct, her mind dwelt upon it with a good deal of approval. Perhaps, in spite of her words, she was beginning to think less of that unfortunate business with the model, and to remember Everitt's face in the chapel on Sunday, and the manner in which he had refused to avail himself of his cousin's proposal, Jack's story made a kindly background for his hero.

After all, and notwithstanding Mrs Marchmont's despair, it is possible that her arrangement had not been so complete a failure as it appeared to herself.

Chapter Seven.

Flight.

With regard to Everitt and Jack Hibbert, a change had taken place which could not but be considered remarkable. Everitt, who had hitherto been noted for the energy and industry of his work, now was frequently absent from his studio, and when there painted in a half-hearted fashion, which was not likely to do him much good. He was conscious of it, annoyed, and was always expecting a return of his old enthusiasm; as it did not arrive, he became depressed, and told Jack that he believed he had lost the trick of it. The change in Jack himself fortunately lay in quite another direction; Everitt could not tell what had come over the lad, who was early and late in his studio, and worked with a purpose and intensity which he had never known before. He used at intervals to rush into Everitt's studio to ask his advice and assistance. Smitten with compunction one morning when the artist had spent a good deal of time over a question of colour, he expressed himself to that effect.

"My dear fellow," said Everitt, "don't disturb yourself. I don't know that I am of much good to you, but I'm very sure I'm of less to myself. If it wasn't for you, I suspect I should drop it all for a month or two."

"Oh, you've been overworking yourself; that will pass," said Jack, sagely.

Everitt walked over to his own canvas and stood regarding it with his hands thrust into his pockets. It was a forge, where two horsemen, escaping from pursuit, had pulled up to get a thrown shoe replaced; one had dismounted; the other, turned sideways on his horse, was anxiously looking back along the road by which they had ridden; a girl pressed forward to see the riders.

"There's my morning's work," said Everitt, pointing to her figure; "and it's wood—no life, no go in it."

"Well, you know I don't think much of that model."

"The model's good enough," said the other man impatiently. "She never stood better. The fault lies somewhere else. I wish it didn't."

Jack glanced at him with an honest expression of dismay.

"Oh, I say, Everitt," he exclaimed, "it's absurd to talk like that. Everybody's got their slack times. To-morrow you'll paint better than ever you did in your life. You've run down—that's all."

"I've half a mind to go away," Everitt said.

"Well," Jack replied, heroically, "perhaps that would set you up. Where shall we go?"

"We?"

"You didn't suppose you were going to get rid of me?"

"If I go, I go by myself," Everitt answered, with decision. "You've got into the swing of work at last; stick to it, my boy, and you'll do something good. As to where I shall go, I'm not in the mood for any place in particular. Toss up, if you choose, and settle for me."

Jack made a further endeavour to persuade him to let him be his companion, but the elder man was quite resolute in his determination to be alone. He did not care where he went, and no place offered any particular attraction; he had only a restless desire to shake off an influence which seemed to be in some strange way paralysing his work. The fact that it was so paralysing it no doubt alarmed him; he had not been prepared for such a result, and all his instincts revolted against it. He argued that an infatuation springing from so slight a foundation should be under reasonable control. He would not have parted from it for worlds, but was it to be suffered to wreck his life? He tried another day with his model; at the end of it he painted out her figure and turned his canvas with its face to the wall. When Jack came in, he found Hill at work under Everitt's directions.

"I'm off," the latter said, briefly.

"Where?"

"To the other side of the channel. Perhaps by that time my ideas will have taken shape. At present they only consist of hazy notions of the coast of Brittany—unoriginal, but that's what I suffer from being just at present."

When Mrs Marchmont heard of this move, she was greatly disconcerted.

"I did *not* expect," she remarked, severely, "that you would have left the field in this fashion."

"I don't find myself in the field at all, that's the truth," Everitt said, with a laugh.

"Well, you might have been there," she said. "Pray, do you expect me to keep off other people?"

"I expect nothing," he replied. "Seeing what a mess I have made of the thing myself, it would be unjust to suppose that others are to set it right."

"Where are you going?" she demanded, suddenly. "At any rate, keep me informed of your movements, so that if there should be anything to write—"

"Would you be so kind!" he said, eagerly. "But, of course, there can't."

Still he told her what there was to tell, and gave her a list of places where he would apply for letters. With these in her mind, Mrs Marchmont went off the next day to the Lascelles', at a time when she knew that Kitty was out. She saw Mrs Lascelles.

"How is Kitty?" she inquired. "It strikes me that she is looking pale and thin."

"She is not very well," the mother admitted. "The weather has been hot lately. I'm not sure that so much painting is good for her, and, to tell you the truth, I think Kitty has worried over this foolish affair. I wish she would forget it."

"So do I," said Mrs Marchmont, candidly.

"What shall we do to her?"

"She has plenty of sense," said Mrs Lascelles, "and if no more is said about it, and she finds there is no danger of meeting Mr Everitt, I hope she will cease to think about it all."

"Poor man!"—with a sigh.

"Oh, come, Mary," Mrs Lascelles said, with a laugh, "I am not going to have him pitied. He has caused us a great deal of annoyance, and if Kitty gets ill, I shan't forgive him in a hurry."

"Why don't you take her away for a change? The inestimable Miss Potter would look after the children, and Captain Lascelles could dine with us whenever he pleased."

Mrs Lascelles looked doubtful.

"Where could we go?"

"Oh, to the Channel Islands, or Brittany, or Normandy. Have you ever done Brittany? Kitty could draw, and would be very happy."

"It has been a sort of dream between us," Mrs Lascelles admitted; "and to tell you the truth, my husband has to go down to Yorkshire next week. Still—for me to go away!"

She protested a little in fact, but when Mrs Marchmont left her she was well on the way to yielding. Her visitor departed in high spirits, and her next point was to see Bell.

"Bell," she said, confidentially, "I've something to tell you. Mr Everitt is going abroad."

"I know," remarked Bell, calmly. "I heard that yesterday."

Now, this somewhat astonished Mary Marchmont. She began to think that Bell's means of information were remarkably efficient, and to wonder what they were. Meanwhile she begged her to say nothing about it to the Lascelles'.

"Mrs Lascelles talks of taking Kitty to Brittany, and if by any happy chance they were to meet, everything might come right. But, you know, if a hint reached them—"

"I know," repeated Bell. "Well, but you will not set him on their track?"

"He would not go if I did. I shall not tell him that they are even leaving England. Everything must be quite accidental and unpremeditated. Indeed, Bell, I have done nothing beyond suggesting that Kitty wanted change of air, and that Brittany was a nice near place."

"Oh!" said the girl, with a laugh. However, in spite of her mockery she was very ready to promise, and when Jack arrived later in the day, he was admitted into the new conspiracy, which he was to aid by keeping Everitt to the starting-point.

It was not difficult. Everitt had too little inclination for any place but London to be disposed to resist even the gentlest pushes in a given direction. Once, indeed, he gave Jack a shock by declaring positively that he was going to Russia, where it was very certain there would be no Kitty for him to meet. The bare idea necessitated Jack's seeking advice from Miss Aitcheson, but by the time he came back, armed with invincible suggestions, Everitt had forgotten his fancy, and announced that he should go to Havre that night.

Jack went to the station with him, and had the satisfaction of seeing him take his ticket, and of extracting all the certainty he could from that fact. It was not absolute, because Everitt announced that, once on the other side, chance or the fancy of the moment were likely enough to direct his steps, but, setting this aside, his plan, so far as he had

one, was to go leisurely through some of the old Normandy towns, and to work along the coast to the neighbouring province. As for work, he meant, to see on what terms with it he found himself. If the spring came back, well and good. If not, he would not force himself, but turn to anything which presented itself. He was fully aware of the unreasonableness of his present mood; it seemed nothing short of ludicrous that the experiences of a day or two—and such experiences—should be sufficient to change his life. But the very unreasonableness prevented argument from producing its effect. He had seen Kitty, and he loved her—that was the long and short of it, which nothing could alter.

Mrs Marchmont, meanwhile, had been triumphantly successful with the Lascelles. Kitty, it is true, had not taken to the idea so keenly as her mother anticipated, but this, if it proved anything, proved that she was not quite herself, and when she saw that her mother was disappointed at her want of enthusiasm, she promptly set to work to present an outward show at least equal to what was required. She only begged that a definite time might be fixed for their return.

So they, too, went off, with Paris for their first resting-place, and it was quite astonishing how many consultations became necessary between Bell and Jack, before it could be at all decided whether there was a chance of the three drifting together in some odd corner. Considering how often, with all the pains in the world taken to bring it about, some meeting towards which hearts are straining fails, it had to be owned that this chance was slight. Bell and Jack, however, were young enough to think very well of a slight chance. Bell argued that in small country places, where only one tolerable inn existed, there was a far greater likelihood of meeting than in a great city where there were fifty, and Jack was certain, from no grounds at all, that something would throw Everitt into Kitty's path. But they were doomed to receive a blow. Bell one day found a distracted letter from Mrs Marchmont.

"It has all come to *nothing!* I have just heard from Charlie that he is already sick of Normandy cider and cart horses, that he has met with a horrid man—*he* likes him—who has persuaded him to try Auvergne, and that they will go off there at once. Auvergne! Did you ever know anything so stupid? My one consolation is that it is the very plainest country I ever beheld, and I hope he will be bored to death by it. Of course, there is not the smallest chance of the Lascelles going to Auvergne; I should not have the face even to suggest it to them. So there's an end of it all, and I think men are the most tiresome creatures in the world—except women."

It was too true.

Led away by this tempter in the person of another artist, Everitt had broken off from the path of duty so carefully marked out for him by his cousin, and made his way towards Paris. He reached it on the day the Lascelles left.

With Kitty the experiment had apparently been very successful. It was the first time that she had crossed the Channel, and the lightness of the air, the freshness of the colouring, and the general picturesqueness of things, delighted her from the moment of landing. She and her mother were excellent companions, and, indeed, to Mrs Lascelles the sense of holiday-making was even stronger than with her daughter. She was like a girl again, enjoying everything with a keen sense of reprieve from the duties of ordering dinner and thinking of dishes which should please, at any rate, the majority. She liked Paris better than Kitty liked it, and would have been well enough content to have stayed there, and made excursions to the old towns; but Brittany had an attraction for the girl, so they kept to their first plan, and left Paris for Dinan *on* the day, as has been said, that Everitt arrived there.

At Dinan, Kitty was seized with a severe attack of industry. She painted the clock-tower, and the market, and the old steep smelly streets, the walls, and the Rance, and every picturesque thing that came before her. Her mother laughed at her, but in her heart fancied the girl was trying to shut out intrusive thoughts, and felt the more glad that she had taken her away from London. It was early in the season for the rush of travellers, but Dinan carries on small social distractions throughout the year, and they knew one family, half English and half French, who lived in a charming old black and white château, with avenues and a stone dovecot, and a walled garden with a gateway to which you ascended by steps, and where it was not difficult to believe that you were in another world.

Kitty would have been well content to have stayed here for the rest of their time, but Mrs Lascelles was not going to be defrauded of her holiday. She had planned a very comprehensive ten-days' round, having been carefully drawn on to this by Mrs Marchmont. They were to go to Vannes and Auray, see Carnac, take Quimper and Morlaix, and any other tempting places that lay *en route*, and return to Dinan and Saint Malo, going home by the Channel Islands. She wrote to Mary Marchmont that after all the trouble she had taken in finding out the most interesting places and the best inns, she could not venture to diverge a mile from the lines laid down. Mrs Marchmont showed the letter to Bell, almost crying.

"Isn't it too provoking!" she exclaimed. "If only that stupid Charlie had been half so conscientious!"

Quite unconscious, meanwhile, that they were provoking their friends at home by the implicit obedience with which they had kept within the lines ruled for them by these kindly despots, Kitty and her mother went on their cheerful way by slow and dawdling trains, leaving behind them pretty Dinan, with its river and its rich and fertile country, exploring Vannes, sitting down to sketch in the centre of uneven streets, where some little bit—some rich colouring on the stone, some dark cavern of a doorway, framing a white-capped group, some delicate wreath of greenery flinging itself out joyously to meet the sun—attracted Kitty. The people came round to watch and to suggest themselves as pictures; they were all on the most friendly yet independent terms with the girl, who smiled and nodded at them and sketched bravely on, undismayed by her increasing crowd of admirers. Auray did not offer so much of the picturesque; but Mrs Lascelles would not let Kitty escape her duties, so she carried her off to Carnac.

But it was Kitty herself who proposed the next excursion. She was already tired of menhirs and dolmens; but she had a longing for a little boating on this wild and windy coast. They would drive to Locmariaker, and go across to the little Gavr Innis, where there are some carvings in a cave which give people an excuse for visiting the island. The morning was very rainy, and gusts of wind rushed up from the south-west. Her mother would have begged off, but Kitty was

resolute, "They will not take us if there is any danger," said Mrs Lascelles, at last surrendering.

Kitty mocked at the idea of danger; and, indeed, when they readied Locmariaker and walked down to the little landing-place, the boatmen showed no unwillingness to convey them across. For though the rain still fell, there were rifts in the grey fast-driven clouds which looked as if brighter weather might be near, and the freshness of it all—the grey-green of the water, the saltiness of the wind, the swoop of the white gulls—made Kitty the more eager to be out on the dancing waves. She pulled the hood of her waterproof over her hat, her cheeks glowed under the strong wet wind; and her mother, already seated in the boat, looked at her as she stood lightly-poised on the slippery stones, with a smile of satisfaction. Certainly the experiment had been quite successful; and, as they were well out of the reach of hearing anything which might keep up the remembrance of an unifying incident, she might hope to take the girl home with the shadow all gone.

Meanwhile, all seemed ready, and yet they did not start. The old boatman—Stevan—his brown face deeply seamed with lines, made some excuse about his sail, which was not in order, and the boy was sent up to one of the small cottages which straggle down towards the water.

"Kitty, do make him understand that we wish to start," said Mrs Lascelles. "If I am to be drowned, I don't want to be all day about it."

But now the boy reappeared followed by a dark figure in a shabby soutane.

"It is *M. le curé*," said old Stevan, addressing himself politely to Kitty. "He has to cross to the island to see a sick person. These ladies will not object."

The *curé* came deliberately down with firm, quick steps; he lifted his hat, stepped into the boat, and sat down. Kitty stepped after him; the boy took the oar to push off, but the old sailor still looked towards the land and lingered.

"I believe this is a ferry boat," cried Mrs Lascelles, impatiently. "Look, Kitty, there is some one else!"

Some one else was in a big ulster; a woman—probably Stevan's wife—a woman in a white *coiffe* and blue dress was hastening before him, and pointing eagerly to the boat. It was evident that she had an eye for business, and would not lose a passenger who might add a franc or two to her husband's gains. Mrs Lascelles was vexed.

"We shall wait here all day at this rate," she said.

Kitty was gathering up her dress, for the boat was wet. The boatman turned to her.

"We start this moment, immediately," he assured her, apologetically. "There is not a better boat at Locmariaker. We shall soon be across."

The *curé* looked round at the green waves and slightly shrugged his shoulders. Kitty herself turned to see the coming passenger. The woman had stopped; she stood with her arms folded under her apron, watching him. He had not run, but had come quickly down, and was close to the boat before Kitty had time to do more than turn a startled face to her mother; he lifted his hat and sprang in, the boy hurriedly shoved off from the weed-covered stones, and the next moment they were out in the tossing bay, with Charles Everitt for their companion.

Chapter Eight.

After All.

Mrs Lascelles would not perhaps have recognised Everitt, whom she had only seen in the chapel, if the disturbance in Kitty's looks had not at once caused her to leap to a conclusion which absolutely took away her breath. She was quick-sighted enough to see that he was himself as yet unconscious, for Kitty's face was turned from him, and he was engaged in tucking his ulster round his legs; and even this momentary reprieve was welcome, as it gave her a few instants in which to collect her thoughts. She did not credit him with all the innocence which was rightfully his, for she imagined that he had heard of their travels, and had followed them; and though she was enough of a woman to be conscious of a sneaking kindness for such a daring act, she felt that its audacity would have to be met with displeasure. There would be no help from Kitty. Kitty was actually trembling, and the best mode of treatment would be to ignore the presence of anything at all out of the commonplace, and when the moment of recognition came, refuse to see in it more than a chance and quite uneventful coincidence.

The old sailor was in the stern of the boat, steering, while the boy managed the brown sail. Kitty was next to Stevan, her mother next to her, opposite to her the *curé*, who had taken out a small breviary, and next to him Everitt. Everitt, having arranged himself and turned up the collar of his ulster, began to look about him at his companions. Mrs Lascelles saw a perception that she was English begin to dawn in his mind, then he glanced at Kitty, and she fancied a sudden suspicion crossed it. She took her resolution in a moment; the flash of knowledge would have to come sooner or later; and for the girl to stare persistently in an opposite direction would only give him an impression of consciousness on her part, which, of all things, had better be avoided. She touched her to emphasise her words, pointed directly opposite, and said—

"Kitty, do you suppose that to be Gavr Innis?"

For an instant the girl hesitated, but she felt and understood her mother's momentary pressure on her arm, and turned her glowing face in Everitt's direction. He was looking full at her, and Mrs Lascelles, who watched him closely, saw his sudden start and that he became pale. Kitty, when she caught his eye, bowed slightly, and he immediately lifted his hat and looked at Mrs Lascelles, who leaned forward.

"I think," she said, and there was no cordiality in her manner, "that it is Mr Everitt." She was angry, but was quite at her ease; he was delighted, and yet felt extremely awkward. He murmured something about the unexpectedness of the meeting. Mrs Lascelles bowed again, and made a remark to her daughter as if the other slight conversation were at an end. But Everitt was not the man to be put on one side in this easy fashion. He moved to the cross-seat, where he was next to Mrs Lascelles.

"This is a strange meeting, and a strange place for an explanation," he began rapidly; "yet I can't afford to let any opportunity slip."

"There is no need of an explanation," said Mrs Lascelles, hastily.

"Oh, there is!" he said, shaking his head and smiling. "Even at the risk of once more seeming to force myself upon you, I must ask you to let me apologise in the fullest manner possible for a most thoughtless act."

He did not look at Kitty; the girl leant back, with her eyes fixed on her hands, which lay loosely in her lap. The old brown-faced *patron* was stooping forward, one arm on the tiller, the other on his knee, his whole attention absorbed by the still freshening wind, and the long roll of breakers farther out in the bay, the thunder of which came in above the rush of wind and rain. As for the *curé*, apparently absorbed in his breviary, he was not unconscious of the little drama which was being played before him. He now and then glanced from Everitt to Kitty with an air of interest. Mrs Lascelles, however, was not to be melted into cordiality.

"After an apology," she returned, "there is nothing to be said. I hoped that Mrs Marchmont would have expressed this to you. And, permit me to say, that since it was, as you describe it, a thoughtless act, it will be as well now for us to allude to it no more."

"That is easier for you than for me," he said, looking at her appealingly.

But she made no answer. To begin with, she was in difficulties with her umbrella, which threatened to be blown inside out, unless she held it in front of her, and this meant putting it like a barricade between herself and Everitt. Then she was beyond measure provoked with him for coming and reviving the annoying memories which she intended these three weeks to sweep away out of her Kitty's heart. And added to this was the offence of his having followed and forced himself upon them in such a fashion. Everitt, who was not accustomed to have his advances snubbed, drew back to his seat by the *curé*. The rain drove in wilder gusts; Kitty, under her hooded waterproof, safe miserable. She would have liked to have said something that might soften her mother's coldness, but what could she say across wet planks, a boatman, and a *curé*? She felt utterly helpless, and the last thing that would have occurred to her was that she was looking so pretty, so fresh, and so glowing, that Everitt's resentment, though he tried to fan it, could not stand against the charm of her beauty.

Yet he would not allow Mrs Lascelles to imagine that she would have him thrust upon them. When the boat reached the little island, Everitt sprang out, and stood with as much dignity as a somewhat humiliating wind would allow, to help Mrs Lascelles and Kitty over the slippery rocks. When they had arrived at a safe footing, he lifted his hat and went back to the boat to speak to the *patron*, who was making it fast. The boy ran on to show the two ladies the way to the house where a guide for the cave was to be found, the *curé*, strode past them.

"Oh, mother!" cried Kitty, the instant they were out of hearing.

Mrs Lascelles laughed without real enjoyment of the situation.

"Yes, it's an odd coincidence, and annoying. But, as he could not have known who was in the boat, I hope he will see the propriety of not forcing himself upon us. He didn't behave so badly, Kitty."

"You were so dreadfully stiff."

The mother looked at her with a little surprise.

"Is that what's troubling you? Oh, never mind that! I was only afraid of not being stiff enough. Do open your umbrella; no waterproof can stand this rain. The whole thing is very ludicrous," she added, laughing again in a vexed way. "What do you suppose he has gone to the boat for?"

"To arrange to go back without us," said the girl, walking quickly on.

"Well—if he can," said Mrs Lascelles, lightly. "Is this the place?"

It was a sombre granite house, built strongly to resist the sweep of the great winds which roared across the bay and the barren islands. When they went into it, welcomed by a wizened old woman, so deep was the gloom that they paused on the threshold, uncertain where their next step might land them, until their eyes became accustomed to the half-light, and they could make out the old oak benches and table, and the cupboard bed high in the wall. A guide for the cavern? Oh yes! her husband would be there in a moment. He had seen the boat, and was getting lights; but it was a wild day for ladies to cross. Would they please write their names while they were waiting? The *curé* had come before them; her daughter was ill—very ill. Wouldn't they please to dry their wet clothes? Her husband was ready, but there was plenty of time.

No, Mrs Lascelles said; they would go at once. Like other energetic people, she was impatient to finish what she had begun, and she told herself that if Everitt had the grace to keep out of the way, they had better take advantage of his absence. Kitty was silent; she made no remonstrance, but when the boy prepared to follow, she informed him rather authoritatively that he had better go back to the boat.

The famous cavern is a long narrow passage, traversed with lights, like the Roman catacombs, and worked with

strange and ancient carvings, in which the serpent plays a prominent part. There is not much to be told of them, and Kitty and her mother knew less; they finished their investigations without much sense of gain. Kitty was restless, and yet silent; her mother was restless and talkative. Once or twice their guide lifted his hand and listened.

"There was another monsieur," he said, "in the boat. My wife said she would send him on."

"Perhaps he is not coming," Mrs Lascelles suggested.

The man stared at her.

"There is nothing else to cross to the island for," he said stolidly.

"We will get back as quickly as we can, Kitty," said her mother. "The wind is certainly higher."

When they came out, indeed, it was evident that the storm had increased. The clouds were darker and more menacing; the water, even under the lee of the island, was surging forward in long heavings which looked like iron; the wind rushed against them with a fierce persistence, different from the wet squalls which had faced them as they came. The women hurried on, refusing to take shelter again in the grey house, from the doorway of which the boatman and the *curé* were watching for them. Old Stevan was brief in his remarks.

Yes, he said, they should start at once. The wind was freshening to a gale, and if they delayed—

Where was the other gentleman? Kitty inquired.

He was not coming, it appeared. He intended to wait on the island until a boat could cross for him; and that would not be to-day, Stevan answered, with a shrug. The people who lived there had a boat, of course, but the young son-in-law had taken it to fetch something for the sick wife.

Then Kitty stopped resolutely, and demanded that the boy should be sent back to the house to tell the gentleman that they would not start until he came.

"Kitty!" exclaimed her mother, in amazement.

But Kitty's eyes were shining with resolute determination. The *curé*, who perhaps understood more than they thought, smiled resignedly, and sheltered himself as best he could from the driving rain.

"We have been unjust, mother," said the girl, in a low voice.

Mrs Lascelles said nothing. Kitty was going her own way, and she was unwilling to interfere. She was uneasy, but interested, and perhaps a little amused; besides, it must be owned the sea looked so fierce that she was not sorry to have another man in the boat. Presently she saw Everitt coming towards them, quickening his pace when he perceived they were waiting on the shore. Kitty did not draw back, as her mother expected; she made a few steps to meet him, and said quietly—

"It would have been a great pity if you had stayed at that place all night because you were afraid of overcrowding the boat. We hope you will cross with us."

"Thank you," said Everitt, briefly. He wasted no more words, but occupied himself in doing what he could to shelter them from rain: in a few moments the driving foam would be dashing over the boat. The old boatman looked up and down uneasily; Everitt said certain words to him, and his face cleared. "We are going to wrap the heavy brown sail round you," Everitt added to Mrs Lascelles; "it can't be used in any other way."

"The old man will never be able to row us across," she said, anxiously.

"I am going to help him," he said; "and, if necessary, I have no doubt the *curé* could bear a hand. All these Bretons are born sailors. Don't be alarmed. I hope a wetting will be your worst misfortune."

In spite of his cheery words, when they got out into the more open sea the waves ran so high, and the fierce pressure of the wind was so strong, that Mrs Lascelles looked round her in terror. Their boat seemed as if it could be nothing but a plaything between these mighty powers. Now and then the priest murmured words which they could not distinguish; the boy crouched, a brown heap, on a pile of brown nets in the stern; the two men—the old and the young—with strong, set faces, worked steadily at their oars. Hard rowing was not necessary, for the wind swept them along; but there were cross currents, and these were dangerous seas; and the threatening gloom of the sky, touched here and there with a lurid light, and the strong rush of the waves with their scud of flying foam, made Mrs Lascelles glance at her daughter with a tightening of her heart. As for Kitty herself, the girl sat leaning a little forward. Her mother's hand had sought hers, and Kitty had clasped it with both her own. Her hood had been blown a little back from her face, and her sweet eyes were fixed upon the shore towards which they were driving. Not a shadow of fear had touched them, as the mother saw with a little sigh; nay, the next moment the girl turned and looked at her with a smile.



HARD ROWING WAS NOT NECESSARY, FOR THE WIND SWEPT THEM ALONG.

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Meanwhile, as they rapidly neared the shore, it became evident that some anxiety was aroused in the little village, for half a dozen men and women had collected near the landing-place, their figures blurred and dimmed by the rain and mist. Old Stevan, too, seemed uneasy. He stopped rowing at last, just keeping the boat's course with his oar, and exchanged a few words with Everitt. The *curé* bent forward and put a question; Mrs Lascelles tightened her clasp on Kitty's hand.

It was easy to see that the danger lay in attempting to land. The landing-place was merely a little run between rocks at the best of times, and at present, owing to the gale coming from rather an unusual point of the compass, such a surf was running as was rarely seen. The men on shore yelled directions, which could not be distinguished in the boat. Old Stevan turned and for an instant surveyed the wild, tumbling mass before him; then he spoke to Everitt, who nodded, and the next moment the two men bent once more to their work, and it seemed to Mrs Lascelles that they were in such a whirl of tossing, raging waters that the boat must be swamped or stove in beyond hope of help. She clutched Kitty's hand, and even cried out, though she could not hear her own voice. The flying foam was over her head, beating at her face; she was stunned, bewildered, almost senseless, when the boat was caught by strong hands and drawn up into safety.

"Mother!" cried Kitty, looking at her with, for the first time, terror in her eyes.

But it did not take Mrs Lascelles long to recover. Half a dozen hands were stretched to help her out of the boat, half full of water from the attack of the last wave, and she stumbled out, still grasping Kitty's hand. For the first time, the *curé* addressed them.

"It has been a hazardous voyage," he remarked, "and,"—bowing to Kitty—"mademoiselle has a great courage." Then he lifted his wet hat from his head, and marched away in his dripping clothes to the *presbytère*.

And now it was Everitt who, as it seemed to the girl, made everything smooth before them. The little village had little enough to boast of, but he had got them—in a shorter time than seemed possible—up to the small inn, where a good fire was lit in a room where they could dry their clothes, and where the landlady provided them with stout full skirts and warm stockings. Arrayed in these, and sitting over the fire until the carriage which was to take them to Auray was ready, Mrs Lascelles soon forgot the battering and drenching she had gone through—even began to smile at the recollection. And then she touched on another subject.

"Kitty," she said, solemnly, "Mr Everitt must be forgiven."

"Forgiven!" The girl looked up with a proud glance in her eyes. "Mother, I am ashamed to have thought so much about such a little thing. It was all kindness and good-nature on his part to save me from disappointment, and see how I returned it! When he wanted to explain, we would not even listen, or allow him the opportunity of setting himself right. And now," she added passionately, "he comes and saves our lives, and so he is to be forgiven! Mother,

you don't mean that!"

Mrs Lascelles felt more surprise than she showed. In the vehemence of her speaking, Kitty had started up, and her mother laid her hand on her arm and drew her down again to her side. She spoke very quietly; no one knew what a sharp pang preceded her words.

"My dear," she said, smiling—"my dear, how long have you felt this?"

Kitty looked at her.

"Ever since I knew that we had been unjust," she said, simply. "I think, almost from the first."

"Ah!" said Mrs Lascelles, slowly, and still smiling; "and that seems a long while ago, doesn't it?" Then she stooped and kissed her. "God bless you, my Kitty," she said, softly and earnestly.

The girl's eyes brightened.

"Then, mother, you will thank him, and not talk any more about forgiving?"

"No; that is certainly past," said Mrs Lascelles, still slowly; "and, as you say, I must thank him—as well as I can. I suppose," she added, following a little irresistible impulse, "that the *curé* could have taken his place?"

"No," said Kitty, earnestly, "no. Stevan told me himself that the *curé* had not the strength. 'If it had not been for the English gentleman, mademoiselle, the boat might not have weathered it.' Those were his very words."

Oh, Stevan, Stevan, had he too fathomed that wonderful secret!

"Ah!" Mrs Lascelles said again; "that of course decides it."

"Mother, you are sure you are not ill?" said the girl, anxiously.

There was a hesitation in her mother's words which made her uneasy, so unlike was it to her usual prompt and brisk decision. But she shook off the question with more of her ordinary manner.

"Ill? Not in the least. It has been a little bewildering, that is all. The waves of the Atlantic do hit rather hard. I don't see any bell; shall we go down and find out if the carriage is ready?"

But at this moment there arrived two massive white cups full of steaming coffee, and news that they might start whenever they wished. Everitt was waiting for them when they went down, and Mrs Lascelles went up to him at once.

"Kitty," she said, cordially, "tells me I have been very ungrateful—indeed, that we have been ungrateful all through, at any rate now, when it appears we owe you our lives."

He coloured.

"Your lives!" he repeated, in amazement.

"Yes, indeed," she said, smiling; "and you mustn't say it's nothing, because at this moment it seems to me a very great deal."

"But there is a great mistake. Who could have told you anything so preposterous? I am much obliged to you for finding myself on the right side of the water."

"Well," she said, "we will each keep our private views on the matter. Now, tell me, what are you going to do?"

He hesitated.

"I am going to walk to Auray, and—take the train back to Paris."

"No," she replied, shaking her head; "we will drive you to Auray. You must sleep there, and to-morrow you can decide whether to go to Paris or to come with us to Quimper."

"Do you mean that?" he asked, eagerly, speaking to her, but looking at Kitty.

"Yes," said Mrs Lascelles, quietly. Nobody heard the little sigh which fell from her lips, and if she looked pale, they thought it was the result of the storm.

There is a charming, picturesque cheerfulness about Quimper. The storm of the preceding day had left the air clear and delicious; the sunset colouring fell very softly on the delicate cathedral spires, on the shallow brawling river, on the trees which bordered the broad promenade by its side. Numbers of people were standing or sitting about, but there were two for whom, all their lives long, the beauty of that sunset will never be equalled.

"We," one of them was saying—"we will certainly live at Quimper,"—and then he wisely tempered his rashness—"for part of every year."

"And you shall paint," said she.

"And you shall be my model this time. It's my turn," he added, looking at her with a laugh. For Mrs Lascelles had

heard his explanation, learnt how what began in thoughtless good-nature ended in sober earnest, and how Everitt had known nothing of their coming abroad, but, growing weary of Auvergne, had hurried down to the coast of Brittany, hoping to find an incitement to work. Instead of which he found—something else!

“How shall I explain to Bell and Mary?” cried Kitty.

“You need not. I wrote to Jack to-day, and that will do it all.”

“Already!” she said, with a blush.

He held her from him, and for a moment stood looking down into her sweet eyes.

“My darling,” he said, “I should like the whole world to know to-day how much I love you?”

The End.

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